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Summary



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See also these associated documents:

Research Findings

Literature Review

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Introduction

Scotland is marked by a high employment rate, in the top quartile of OECD countries. In recent years, around 75% of the 'core' working age population has been employed. Few countries have a higher proportion of women in work. However, these figures mask significant variations by geography and by household type (e.g. people with disabilities, lone parents and some minority ethnic groups continue to have much lower employment rates). The UK as a whole has lower levels of productivity than other large economies in the OECD, and productivity levels in Scotland lag behind yet further. This has raised questions about management and leadership, deployment of the skills base and the availability of quality work in the UK, as well as growing interest in how to ensure longer and more diverse working lives that are also more sustainable.

The UK has been categorised as a 'passive work setting' where there is a lower degree of control over work than found in the Nordic countries, with longer hours and moderate productivity per hour. Two small EU member states were included in the study to allow some comparative findings to be drawn. These are Denmark, categorised as an 'active work setting' where there is a high degree of control over work with shorter hours and high productivity per hour; and Hungary, considered to be a 'high strain work setting' with a low degree of control over work, long hours and low productivity per hour. Evidence from these countries is discussed in the *Research Findings* report, while this Summary focuses in the main on evidence from Scotland.

In addition to reviewing the published evidence in detail, the study draws upon interviews and surveys of employer representatives and employees in case study organisations. Survey findings are not claimed to be fully representative of the Scottish economy. Case study findings offer a more detailed snapshot of practice in two organisations already committed to being flexible employers. Various strengths and weaknesses in Scottish employment practice are identified in the concluding section.

Availability and experience of flexible work


The findings presented here are drawn from a survey of Scottish employer representatives (completed by 226 senior staff from a mix of private and public sector employers and a small number of voluntary organisations), and smaller surveys of staff at a Further Education College (87 respondents) and a small business organisation (20 respondents) in Scotland.

- Based on survey findings, Scottish organisations fall into two broad categories: around 40% are described by their representatives as having a long-established track record in developing flexible work options and a further 40% have some recent experience of doing so. Relatively small proportions reported little/no experience (13%) or little/no interest (7%) in flexible work. Looking ahead, one in four respondents said there was significant interest in designing flexible work options that fit their organisation's needs.
- However availability of flexible work options was patchy. Measured by availability to all or most staff, part-time work/a shorter week was the most common, in 57% of organisations. Flexi-time was next most available (46%) followed by unpaid career breaks (41%) and job-sharing in one-third of organisations. Working from home was most unequal in availability: 26% of organisations said this was an option for all or most staff, but 57% said this was available only to some. Contracts based on annualised hours were least common, available to all or most staff in 13% of cases.

In the case study organisations, the employee survey asked about current and previous experience of flexible working and whether respondents would consider taking up various options in future.

- In the survey of College employees, fewer academic staff said they would consider **working part-time/shorter week** than would not, whereas non-academic staff would be willing to consider this by a margin of 4:1. Employees did not differ in

having current or previous experience of this option by age, but younger staff were prepared to consider this option by a majority of 9:1 compared with a more even split among older workers (one-third of whom would not consider it).

- The option which employees in the small business organisation had most experience of was **flexi-time**, with over half currently making use of it and a further one in ten saying they had used it in the past.
 - The option of **working from home** attracted a similar response across all categories of College staff. Around one-third had some experience of this option. Among others, at least twice as many in each category would consider this in future as would not, though there are significant limitations faced by some support staff. Working from home was the option which staff in the small business organisation would be most willing to consider if it were available to them.
 - Taking a **career break** is the option College employees had least experience of: one in four older workers and one in five women had taken a career break in the past. Among other employees, a majority of men, academics and younger staff say they would consider a career break in future, in contrast to most women, non-academic and older staff who said they would not. Respondents from the small business organisation had no experience of career breaks and mixed views about them in principle: on balance, most said they would not consider this option.
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Perceptions of control and flexibility in own job

- A majority of College employees in all categories agreed they had some degree of control over their working hours. However, non-academic staff and older workers were most likely to agree, with one-third of academic staff disagreeing. A clear majority of the small business respondents said that they experience some control.
- Academic staff were twice as likely as non-academic staff to say that their working hours were 'fixed with no opportunity to change them'. Again one-third of academics reported a lack of flexibility in this regard. Moreover, male employees were more than twice as likely as women to feel their hours were fixed. Significantly, none of the respondents from the small business organisation felt that their working hours were 'fixed with no opportunity to change them'.
- Looking ahead, one in six College staff said they would like to work flexibly but thought doing so would hinder their career prospects. Academics were more likely than non-academic staff to agree.

Overview of attitudes

Various attitudes to flexible working were tested. Employer representatives were asked to gauge the *prevailing views* in their organisation as an indicator of workplace culture, rather than their own personal views.

- Clear majorities said flexible working is regarded as good for retention (83%), good for productivity (62%) and necessary to attract talented people (59%). Given Scotland's long-term productivity lag, these are striking signs of the potential of flexible work.
- More mixed opinions were offered on flexible working being considered as: mainly for those with young children; an inconvenience for middle managers; mainly for women in the workforce; and not an option for senior managers/leaders. On each of these statements, between one-third and half of respondents agreed with these descriptions of the prevailing view in their organisation.
- In contrast, clear majorities disagreed with the negative descriptions of flexible working offered to respondents. Between 60% and 70% of them disagreed that flexible work is: a sign of weaker commitment among staff; mainly for lower-paid or lower skilled employees; or, of little strategic importance to their organisation.

Among case study employees:

- Staff in the Further Education College were in agreement with employer representatives in regarding views of flexible working in their organisation as mainly positive. Very similar proportions rated flexible working as good for staff retention (80%), good for productivity (63%) and necessary to attract talented people (58%). Most employees from the small business organisation agreed, although the rank order was different: retention benefits were again rated highest, but followed by recruitment then productivity benefits.

- In keeping with employer representatives, flexible working was not regarded as a sign of weaker commitment to the organisation by case study employees: 68% of College staff disagreed with this proposition, as did most of the small business organisation staff.
- More than half of College employees disagreed that flexible working is regarded as mainly for women, although one in four said that it was seen in these terms. Men were split evenly on this issue, whereas women disagreed by a margin of three to one. On balance, College employees disagreed with the broader proposition that flexible work is mainly for those with care responsibilities. Men were twice as likely as women to agree that this description was accurate, although a large minority of men were undecided. In the small business organisation, the majority of staff did not think that flexible working is regarded as mainly for women but did agree that it is considered to be 'mainly for those with caring responsibilities' in their workplace.

Barriers to flexible work

What gets in the way of flexibility? The survey of employer representatives asked about the perceived prevalence of five barriers to flexible working. The barriers we identified were:

- Senior managers unconvinced of benefits
- Costs perceived to outweigh the benefits
- Lack of employee demand
- Long working hours are typical
- Culture is based on full-time/traditional working pattern
- Difficult for managers to implement

In response:

- At least four in ten respondents said none of the barriers were significant in their organisation.
- The two most common barriers were the working culture being based on a full-time/traditional working pattern and long working hours being typical. More than half said these applied a great deal or a fair amount. These are organisational features within the power of employers to influence, even if they require a great deal of sustained effort.
- Smaller proportions felt that other suggested barriers applied to their organisation. Four in ten believed management issues were important, with senior managers being unconvinced of the benefits or middle managers finding it difficult to implement flexible work options. One in three believed the costs were perceived to outweigh the benefits in their organisation.
- Three quarters agreed that flexible working requires new management skills if it is to succeed.

- The least common barrier of all was thought to be a lack of employee demand, applying in less than one in four organisations. Fully three-quarters said this was not much of a barrier in their case.
- Most respondents felt that support should be available to allow organisations to develop flexible working practices. Just one in six respondents felt their organisation did not need any kind of support. Six out of ten felt that training for managers would help and over half felt that information/advice from other employers would be beneficial. Just under half wanted greater help with the costs (e.g. to cover parental leave).

Turning to the case study organisations, two-thirds of College employees and most staff in the small business organisation agreed that new management skills are needed to make flexibility work. So how well are leaders thought to be shaping-up to date?

- Among case study employees, the main barriers were viewed differently. The most significant of these was **affordability**, partly explaining the gap between employee interest in working flexibly and what was considered possible financially. Almost three quarters of College employees thought that employees could not afford to reduce their hours and pay. No significant variations were evident across categories of staff. Nine in ten respondents from the small business organisation agreed.
- The presence of a **full-time/traditional work culture** was as likely to be regarded as a barrier among College employees as in the employer survey, with six in ten respondents saying this applied. Academic staff and men were particularly likely to agree. Half of respondents from the small business organisation agreed that a full-time/ traditional work culture was a barrier. This view tends to contrast with the perception that flexible working is well embedded in the case study organisations. However, more than half of women working

in the small business organisation disagreed. Around four in ten College staff thought a culture of **typically long working hours** was a barrier, with academic staff three times more likely to agree than non-academic staff.

- The same share of College employees (four in ten) **rated implementation difficulties** for managers as a barrier as did employer representatives.
- Do middle managers – those charged with making sense of flexibility in practice – regard flexible work as an inconvenience? College employees were a little more favourable than employer representatives, since only one in four agreed while almost half disagreed. The only significant difference in views appeared between the sexes: women were three times more likely than men to disagree while a large minority of men were undecided. In the small business organisation, similar numbers of men agreed, disagreed or had no view on this issue, while slightly more women disagreed than agreed.
- College staff rated senior managers being **unconvinced of the benefits** of flexible work as the least important barrier, with one in four saying this applied (significantly lower than in the survey of employer representatives). However, one in four said they did not know enough about the views of senior managers to offer a view, rising to one-third of younger employees. Barriers surrounding management were also felt to apply least within the small business organisation.
- Summing up the College's commitment, just over half of staff agreed their employer had demonstrated *'some recent experience of developing flexible working'* with a large minority agreeing there was *'significant interest in designing flexible working options that fit the organisation.'* Around two-thirds of older employees and women said the College had some

recent experience in this area, and women were much more likely than men to recognise a significant interest in doing more. However, one in five academic staff felt the organisation had little or no interest in designing flexible work options for the future, twice the level of scepticism as among non-academic respondents. The majority of staff in the small business organisation agreed that managers had both recent experience and significant interest in designing flexible working options. No-one in the small business said that managers had little or no interest in doing so.

Awareness and likely impact of UK Government reforms

Employer representatives were asked about their own knowledge of UK government reforms to support flexible working and increase employment rates, as well as the impact they expected these reforms to have.

- On five of the eight reforms, a majority felt informed, with paid parental leave for new fathers, age discrimination legislation and extended parental leave/pay for new mothers well known to at least 60% of respondents.
- On a further three developments, only a minority felt informed. These are (in order) government targets to increase the number of older workers, the number of people moving from sickness and disability benefits into work and, least understood of all, targets for the number of lone parents in work.
- When asked about the impact that these Government-led changes had already had or were likely to have upon their organisation, the most common response was neither positive nor negative. However, seven changes were expected to do more good than harm on average. The most positive assessments applied to age discrimination legislation and the target to increase the number of older workers. By a small margin, extended parental leave and pay for new mothers was expected to have a negative impact.


Transitions to Retirement

One significant element of ensuring we experience more sustainable working lives relates to transitions into retirement.

- Four in five respondents to the employer survey believed that employees in their organisation have a great deal/fair amount of choice to continue to work up to the usual retirement age if they wish or need to.
- Opinions were more mixed on taking a more phased approach to retirement. Almost half agreed that employees had a great deal/fair amount of choice over reducing their working hours in the period before retiring, but a large minority said there was not much choice or none at all.
- Just over half thought that employees had a great deal/fair amount of choice to continue working beyond retirement age on a part-time basis if they wished or needed to. One in three said employees had not much choice or none at all in this regard.

Case study employees were asked about the perceived degree of choice around flexible retirement options in their workplace, a less-explored aspect of work-life balance.

- A consistently high degree of choice was reported among College staff over being able to **work up to the usual retirement age**. Fewer than one in ten respondents felt their colleagues had little choice. The era when such employees might feel forced to retire early appears to have passed.
- Two-thirds of older employees at the College felt they had at least a fair amount of choice over **reducing their hours and/or level of responsibility before retiring**, compared with less than half of younger workers (one third of whom did not know how much choice they might have). Just one in five felt they had not much or no choice at all in this respect.

- College employees felt least choice over **working part-time after retiring**. One in three felt employees had not much or no choice at all, although even here four in ten felt employees had a great deal or a fair amount of choice. Non-academic staff reported the greatest degree of choice: half said they had at least a fair amount of choice, compared to just a quarter of academic staff. The most common response among women and younger employees was 'don't know.'
 - Turning to future preferences, academic staff at the College were the only group studied across Scotland, Denmark and Hungary, with more respondents who **would like to work beyond the normal retirement age** in some capacity than would not. Almost four in ten academics supported this option. Older employees were evenly divided with similar proportions in favour and opposed. Non-academic staff were most firmly against this option, followed by younger employees.
 - The least popular option among staff in the small business organisation was to work after the usual retirement age. Most felt that their colleagues had a great deal/a fair amount of choice in working up to the usual retirement age or in continuing to work beyond retirement age if they wished or needed to. However, in contrast to College staff, there was felt to be less choice available to reduce working hours or responsibilities before retiring.
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Future Trends

Employer representatives were asked how likely they felt a number of trends were to occur over the next ten years. The responses show a clear expectation of change.

- There is a strong belief that demand for flexible work will rise not only among employees (almost 90% thought this likely) but also senior managers (around 70% regarded this as likely).
- Almost six in ten respondents expect to see older people (aged 55+) becoming more common in their own organisation.
- The same proportion expects greater emphasis on equality between men and women in terms of pay and progression.
- Over the next five years, just over half of respondents expected to employ more migrants from the new EU Member States while at least one in three expect to employ more migrants from other EU countries and from outside the EU.
- Only one in three considered it likely that work patterns in their own organisation will look more or less the same as today.

How did case study employees expect work trends to unfold over the same period?

- College staff were equally of the view that demand from both employees and senior managers will grow, with a similar 20% gap in likelihood when compared with the employer survey. In the small business organisation, most staff expect employee demand to grow, but less than half believe the same will occur among senior managers.
- Six in ten College employees expect to see older employees forming a larger share of the College workforce. Opinions were more evenly balanced on the likelihood of older workers being more commonplace in the small business organisation.

- However, in contrast to the survey of employer representatives, most College employees do not anticipate major changes in working patterns. Just over half thought it likely that 'working patterns will look more or less the same as today', while almost one third thought this unlikely. Overall, it may be that College staff anticipate growing demand for flexible working and an ageing workforce to have less influence on working patterns than others do. Significant differences of opinion appeared between staff. Most men expect working patterns to change while most women don't; a clear majority of non-academic staff think work will look more or less the same, while academic staff were evenly split between those expecting change and those who did not; and, perhaps reflecting the degree of change they have experienced in their own careers, older employees were much less likely than younger employees to think work patterns will stay more or less the same.
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Findings from Denmark

The most significant feature of Denmark's approach to labour market flexibility is its combination with employment security to produce a so-called 'golden triangle' approach to flexicurity. This combines:

- Flexible labour markets with moderate employment protection legislation: Danish workers have less protection than in Sweden or France but more than in Scotland/UK.
- Generous unemployment benefits: Danish workers have greater income security on becoming jobless, with benefits replacing around 60% of previous earnings compared with 45% in the UK.
- A clear emphasis on the 'rights and duties' of active labour market policies: Denmark spends much more than the UK on helping unemployed people get ready to work again and on training to update skills. Combined with high benefit replacement rates, unemployed Danes are offered a springboard towards their next job.

This generates:

- High levels of numerical flexibility (i.e. a high employment rate coupled with a high rate of turnover and thus relatively low job security);
- High income security;
- High employment security (i.e. ability to secure the next job as distinct from security in a specific job).

In addition, Denmark experiences:

- A lower level of earnings inequality and low pay than Scotland or the UK as a whole;
- One of the lowest levels in the OECD of young people out of education, training or work (compared to one of the highest in Scotland);

And, as noted in the Scottish Government's consultation paper on Tackling Poverty, Inequality and Deprivation (2008), Denmark has:

- A significantly lower level of poverty (although rising);
- A lower rate of medium-term economic growth than Scotland.

By comparison, the Netherlands is pursuing a different route to flexicurity. Dutch reforms have focused on:

- Reduced dismissal protection for core workers but improved social security rights for atypical (flexible) workers;
- Better protected part-time work and a greater role for part-time work in the economy;
- An important role initially for social partners (in common with Denmark and other Nordic countries for example).

Evidence from both countries demonstrates it is possible to increase flexibility and maintain productivity without cutting employment security or unemployment protection overall. This analysis points to the following conclusions for Scotland and the UK as a whole:

- Flexibility has been pursued instead of security at work, rather than seeking a way to combine improvements in both. Thus, we cannot talk of a Scottish or British approach to flexicurity.
- A positive feature of greater flexibility has been a wider choice of working patterns available in more workplaces than in Denmark. Thus, organisations can choose to become flexible employers and offer greater responsibility/autonomy to more of their workforce.
- However, employment protection legislation in the UK is limited by European standards and has barely been extended in the last decade. A high priority should be attached to improving the position of those with least protection, including casual

and contract workers who are unable to qualify for existing employment rights. Moving from a low level to a moderate level of protection could increase productivity, if managed well.

- Unemployment security in Scotland/UK is weaker. Means-testing has outstripped the contributory (insurance) element, and serves as a barrier to moving back into work even if benefit levels are too low to offer income protection.
- Despite the high-profile of New Deal programmes for various groups of unemployed people in the UK, total investment in active labour market policies is 3.5 times lower as a share of GDP than in Denmark. The rate of investment in training the unemployed to update their skills is particularly poor, 5.5 times lower than in Denmark.
- The labour force attachment model in British policy is better than the tattered safety net of the 1980s and early 1990s and has contributed to lower long-term unemployment. It may be significantly cheaper than the flexicurity approaches pursued in Denmark and the Netherlands, but it offers poorer value in terms of sustainable employment. The rate of return to unemployment and risks of getting stuck in low skilled/low-paid jobs are too high. Unless Britain moves towards a 'human capital development' approach and invests more in skills development pre-employment, apprenticeships for unskilled young people and support for training in-work, it is unlikely to achieve the productivity gains seen elsewhere.

Findings from Hungary

- Flexible working in Hungary is often understood to involve an erosion of employee rights and protection, not unlike the British labour movement's position 20 years ago. A smaller proportion of organisations (about one in three) offer any kind of flexible working than in Scotland and Denmark.
- In the Hungarian employer survey, almost twice as many respondents (70%) reported having some degree of control over their working hours as said such control was important to them. Flexi-time, where start and finish times may be varied and some time saved for future use, is the most commonly available option among employer representatives who responded to the survey.
- Three-quarters of respondents said flexible working was regarded in their organisation as 'mainly for women', twice the rate in the Scottish survey.
- In terms of perceived benefits, almost half agreed that flexible working was regarded in their organisation as good for recruiting staff, but fewer thought it was regarded as good for retaining staff. Only one in three thought it was considered good for productivity. Scottish employer representatives were twice as likely to have a positive view of flexible working.
- A large minority of respondents (four in ten) said their employer had little or no experience of flexible working, and the same proportion said there was little or no interest in developing flexible work options in future. On the other hand, one in five rated their organisation as having an established track-record and one in four said there was some recent experience of developing options. One in four also said there was significant interest in developing appropriate options in future.
- Hungarian respondents were more likely to report various barriers as getting in the way of flexible work than Scottish respondents, from affordability for employees to a culture of full-time work/long hours and senior managers being

unconvinced of the benefits. However, only one third felt that implementation difficulties for managers got in the way in their organisation, less than in Scotland.

- More flexible retirement choices were supported by a minority of respondents. Seven in ten felt employees in their organisation had not much choice or none at all over reducing their working hours in the run-up to retirement, even though this was the more popular of the options.
- Looking ahead, three quarters expected employee demand for flexible working to grow in the next ten years, but a similar proportion did not expect work patterns in their organisation to look much different over the same period. This may be because a much smaller number expect senior managers to have a stake in change happening: only four in ten expect demand from senior managers to grow.
- Respondents thought a growing number of older workers in their organisation least likely of the trends proposed. Only one in eight thought an older workforce was likely. Hungarian expectations on this issue differ clearly from responses in Scotland, where around 60% of both employer representatives and case study employees thought it likely that the workforce in their own organisation would become older. This may reflect experiences during the recent transition years in the Hungarian economy, where large numbers of older workers have become long-term unemployed with little prospect of working again.
- It is very likely that the Hungarian economy, as elsewhere in the EU, will need more rather than fewer older workers and that the apparent lag in expectations compared with this emerging reality will lessen in the next decade. One challenge for Hungary will be to design sustainable employment options for an ageing workforce with greater agility than the UK and some other EU members states did in the 1980s and 1990s. However, it is also clear that flexible work options will need to be adapted to the specific conditions of an economy that remains in transition.

Conclusions

The accompanying *Review of the Evidence* paper benchmarks Scottish and British performance on various labour market indicators against other EU and OECD countries. One of the striking findings about the 'hourglass' labour market in Scotland and the UK as a whole is the way in which a large proportion of the workforce gets stuck in relatively low-paid and low-skilled jobs, with few opportunities to improve their earning potential. Related to this, Britain's version of flexibility is marked by relatively large numbers of women, minority ethnic and older employees working below their skill levels because of continuing discrimination and the failure to spread flexible work practices to higher skilled and managerial posts. Those who want or need to achieve a different kind of work-life balance from the standard working pattern too often face trade-offs that waste their experience and damage their long-term earnings.

Denmark's role as an 'active work setting' is associated with higher degree of control over work contributing to higher levels of productivity per employee than in the UK. This is achieved with shorter working hours. The Danish approach appears to be based on raising the quality of work done without the need for significant levels of unpaid overtime as in the UK. It appears to be this active and intensive model of work organisation that explains Danish productivity, rather than having a significantly more flexible labour market than in the UK. However, the Danish approach has not resulted in higher levels of economic growth in the last twenty years. In this respect, Denmark and Scotland are grouped together.

It is far from clear how to achieve consistent growth rates of 4% per year rather than the long-term average of 2% in countries which already have mature economies. Many commentators believe greater investment in research and development (especially in science and technology sectors and the creative industries) is more likely to spur the innovation associated with faster growth. Nonetheless, it seems clear from the Danish evidence that it is possible to achieve much higher job participation rates for young people with low educational attainment, higher overall employment

rates and improved productivity even without an increase in the long-run growth rate. While Denmark spends more than Scotland on public services as a share of GDP, it appears to be more successful in achieving policy goals. For example, on average three and a half times more is spent on active labour market programmes, enabling people to move from unemployment into work with updated skills. Jobs are not necessarily more secure or job tenure any longer than in the UK, but the risks of long-term unemployment are much smaller. In addition, previous research has highlighted the higher quality of service, skills training and earning potential in non-tradeable sectors such as social care for children and disabled and elderly adults.

Flexible working has not been the distinctive hallmark of Danish achievements to date, but there is growing interest in developing more flexible options in order to maintain participation rates. Scotland could develop a higher proportion of 'active' work settings by learning appropriate lessons from other small countries like Denmark. It is unlikely to do so by 'flogging the system' harder through long working hours, excess unpaid overtime and failing to offer flexible work options for those working below their skill levels.

What prospects for Scotland emerge from the research findings of this study? Our analysis leads to the following conclusions:

Strengths

- Flexible work options are not risk-free, cost-free or a right for all employees. However, it appears that **many Scottish employers are becoming persuaded of the case for offering choice to more of the workforce.**
- Based on the views of employer representatives, four in ten organisations say they have an established track-record of developing flexible work options. The same proportion said none of the suggested list of barriers apply much in their organisation. **These can be regarded as the 'leaders' in the survey.** This group is followed by another four in ten organisations reporting at least some recent experience of developing options – the 'followers.' This is a solid foundation on which to develop further practice. About one in seven have little or no experience and one in fourteen little or no interest. These can be regarded as the 'laggards' in terms of flexibility. However, a degree of respondent bias towards larger employers and those with more awareness and interest is likely, meaning the survey evidence presents only a partial view of Scottish workplaces. Not enough is known about the pros and cons of flexible work in the SME sector which accounts for a large proportion of all jobs.
- Well-designed flexible work options appear to improve perceptions of degree of control at work. Although the empirical evidence is patchy, most employer representatives say flexible work is perceived to have productivity benefits in their organisation. The benefits for retaining staff are thought to be clearer, but more think flexibility is good for productivity than for recruitment. Thus, at least among respondents, **there appears to be a business case for developing flexible work options.** In addition, employer representatives take a practical approach to flexible work. They understand that new management skills are required. **Far from taking a laissez faire attitude, the majority support management training and sharing of practical advice among employers.** Almost half want to see financial support with the additional costs borne by employers.

- **Lack of employee demand appears to be the least important barrier to developing flexible work options**, while affordability and the cultural 'norm' of full-time/long working hours were the most important. Survey findings point to significant willingness among employees to consider various options in future. It is widely anticipated that demand is likely to grow and notable that employer representatives and the small sample of employees surveyed see eye-to-eye on this.
- There was also **a consensus on the likelihood that the workforce will become older**. If the Scottish labour market remains tight, it will create more opportunities for older workers. This will reduce the degree of wasted experience and probably act as a further source of demand for flexibility. In contrast to Hungarian survey evidence for example, Scottish organisations expect this trend to occur. How well they prepare for an ageing workforce is a different matter.
- **Employer representatives appear to have a relatively benign view of UK government reforms in this area**. These are most often considered to have neither a good nor harmful effect, although extended maternity leave/pay is expected, on balance, to have a negative impact. Some of the key risks identified by various commentators were considered less important by survey respondents. One in six case study employees said they would like to work more flexibly but feared the consequences for their career, although a higher proportion of College academics agreed that they could without detriment. Most employer representatives did not believe that flexible work is seen as a sign of weaker commitment to the job.

Weaknesses

If flexibility offers one route towards achieving more active work settings, a number of weaknesses are likely to put a brake on progress in Scotland and the UK as a whole unless these are recognised and addressed.

- **The key weakness appears to lie in developing flexible work options for some rather than all of the workforce.** The prevailing view in a significant minority of workplaces still regards flexible work as mainly for those with young children, or for women. Among case study employees, men were more likely to think flexible work is regarded in their organisation as mainly for women or those with care responsibilities. This is likely to reflect experience of the right to request flexible work being extended first to parents of young children rather than opinions on how flexible work ought to develop. Case study employees were clearly of the view that the right to request should be available on the same terms to all staff, rather than a targeted entitlement for colleagues with children or other care commitments. Otherwise, the risk of creating division and resentment within the workplace was considered significant.
- **A large minority of employer representatives said senior managers remain unconvinced of the benefits of flexible work and believe middle managers regard it as inconvenient.** A similar proportion believe senior managers and leaders in their own organisations do not see flexible work as something for senior people like themselves. While there may be limits to how far flexibility is possible in some roles, in such cases managerial indifference is likely to get in the way of organisational policy being put into practice. That, in itself, may undermine productivity.
- **More organisations are persuaded of the case for flexibility than actually make options available.** Working part-time/a shorter working week is most commonly available, but even here four in ten organisations do not offer this option to most of their staff. While demand might vary, it seems clear that this option could be offered more widely. It is encouraging

that employer representatives did not think flexible work is regarded as mainly for lower-paid/skilled staff. However, this still leaves a particular challenge in the Scottish/UK labour market to offer flexible options across all levels of responsibility and thus ease the problem of mothers and older employees working below their skill level because it is the only way to work flexibly.

- There is one further weakness in the Scottish/UK model. **Retirement continues to be marked by a lack of flexibility.** Opportunities to work part-time after retiring appear to have grown in recent years. However, while some employers are willing to offer reduced hours and/or responsibilities in the period leading up to retirement, occupational pension rules impose an affordability barrier. This creates an incentive to work full-time up to retirement even if there is a desire to work more flexibly.



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