



Work-life balance and flexibility in New Zealand

▶ A SNAPSHOT OF EMPLOYEE AND EMPLOYER ATTITUDES
AND EXPERIENCES IN 2008



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Foreword

Since 2005 the Department of Labour, and key stakeholders from business and unions, have been working together on a programme of work focused on enhancing workplace cultures and practices. The outcome sought through the work programme was to ensure that New Zealanders have genuine choice about the way they work, enabling better balance between the time and energy they commit to paid work and other life activities such as study, leisure, community activities and caring for others.

An important aspect of the work programme has been the national surveys of employers and employees. The research summarised in this report, and the 2006 survey research, was undertaken to provide a comprehensive national picture of work-life balance and our working arrangements.

Work-life balance is different for everyone. But as this report shows, there is a consistent demand for greater workplace flexibility and employers are responding to the demand by offering a greater range of flexible work options. Employers know that assisting their staff to have a better work-life balance will help their business to increase productivity, address skill shortages, and retain staff.

This report tells us how New Zealanders feel about their work-life balance and identifies trends that are developing over time. This research enables us to track our successes since 2006 and will also provide a benchmark for reviewing the impact of the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007 which came into effect in July this year.

This report sits alongside and complements other research being carried out across government, and by other organisations, including the Department of Labour's Working Long Hours in New Zealand Profile of Data from the 2006 Census (2008), the EEO Trust's Work-Life Balance, Employee Engagement and Discretionary Effort Pilot Research (2007), and the Families Commission report, Flexible Work Arrangements: New Zealand families and their experiences with flexible work (2008).

While the formal Work-Life Balance Programme, led by the Department of Labour, has come to an end, the government's interest in improving workplace flexibility and developing enabling workplace cultures that value work-life balance continues. I am heartened to learn through this report that the great majority of employers also see the value in workplace flexibility and that overall satisfaction with work-life balance appears to be improving.

The foundations for even greater improvements have been laid and I encourage employers and employees to continue to work together to embrace solutions for increasing work-life balance and thereby improving our quality of life and our living standards.



Hon Trevor Mallard,
Minister of Labour

October 2008

Contents

FOREWORD	3
TABLE OF CONTENTS	4
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	5
INTRODUCTION: THE NATIONAL WORK-LIFE BALANCE SURVEYS OF EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES	6
HOW DO WE FARE ON THE WORK-LIFE BALANCE FRONT?	7
Key findings	7
How do employees rate their work-life balance?	7
How easy do employees find it to get work-life balance?	7
AVAILABILITY OF FLEXIBLE WORK	9
Key findings	9
What flexible working arrangements are available?	9
Who is offered these options?	10
Availability as reported by employees	12
Has the availability of flexible work changed since 2005?	13
WHAT FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS ARE EMPLOYEES USING?	16
Key findings	16
What would people like to be available?	17
HOW SUPPORTIVE ARE WORKPLACES OF FLEXIBLE WORK?	19
Key findings	19
How supportive do employers believe their workplaces are towards flexible work?	19
How supportive do employees believe their workplaces are towards flexible work?	20
WHAT IS THE IMPACT OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS?	22
Key findings	22
What impact do flexible working arrangements have on businesses?	22
What impact do flexible working arrangements have on employees' work-life balance?	23
WHO DECIDES WHETHER EMPLOYEES CAN USE FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS?	24
Key findings	24
How are employees advised of flexible work arrangements?	24
How do employees apply for flexible work options?	24
AWARENESS OF THE EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS (FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS) AMENDMENT ACT 2007	26
Key findings	26
How aware are people of the Act?	26
Where do employers go for information?	27
Where do employees go for information?	27
CONCLUSIONS	28

Executive Summary

This report examines the attitudes towards and experiences of work-life balance of New Zealand employees and employers, with a particular focus on the availability and uptake of flexible working arrangements. The study was designed to provide a benchmark for future assessment of the impact of the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007.

The report summarises the key findings of two surveys, one of 1,100 employers and the other of 1,004 employees, undertaken in April – May 2008. The surveys were conducted by Research New Zealand on behalf of the Department of Labour.

The research found that New Zealand workers are reasonably positive about their work-life balance, rating it on average 4.25 out of 6 (with 1 being very poor and 6 being excellent). They are slightly less positive about how easy it is to achieve the right work-life balance, but on both measures it appears there has been some improvement since 2005.

What role do flexible working arrangements play? The findings indicate that employees who have access to flexible work arrangements are likely to rate their work-life balance more highly than those who do not, and find it easier to achieve the balance that is right for them.

Almost all businesses offer some flexible working arrangements to all or some of their staff. The most widely available flexible working arrangements are occasional flexible start and finish times, flexible breaks, part-time work and unpaid leave. The type and range of arrangements varies by sector and size of organisation.

More than two-thirds of employers report they are supportive or very supportive of flexible work in their organisation. Employees rate their employers' level of support similarly. Sixty percent of employers believe that flexible work has a positive or very positive impact on the workplace. Not surprisingly, employers who are supportive and those who report a positive impact are also more likely to offer flexible work.

What flexible working arrangements make the most difference? Employees who have access to part-time work, flexibility in choosing when to work the number of hours they are employed to do, regular flexibility in start and finish times, job sharing and the ability to buy additional leave in exchange for reduced pay are likely to rate their work-life balance more highly than those who do not have access to these options.

Do employers actively promote these options to employees? Fifty percent of businesses advise their employees verbally about the availability of flexible work. Thirty percent include it in their employees' employment agreements. But in 44% of organisations, staff learn of options only when they specifically ask about them.

Employees report that in most cases their manager or supervisor is the person who makes the decision about whether a flexible working arrangement can be used, although employers suggest that the responsibility is spread more widely.

The Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007 has been introduced to increase the availability and take-up of flexible working arrangements (that is, variations to hours of work, days of work or place of work) for all eligible employees with carer responsibilities. At the time of the surveys, 64% of employers were aware of the Act, but only 17% were aware of the eligibility criterion. Awareness among employees was lower, with only 40% of employees aware of the Act.

Introduction: The national Work-life Balance surveys of employers and employees

This report looks at how New Zealanders rate their work-life balance and the role that flexible work plays in this. It examines employers' and employees' attitudes towards flexible working practices, uptake of these practices and awareness of the recently introduced Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007.

It contributes to the Work-Life Balance Programme set up by the Government in August 2003 to develop policies and practices aimed at promoting a better balance between paid work and life outside of work.

The outcome sought from the Work-Life Balance Programme was to ensure that New Zealanders have genuine choice about the way they work, enabling better balance between the time and energy they commit to paid work and to other life activities. The goals of the programme were that:

1. people be enabled to participate more often, or more effectively, in activities that are important to them, and
2. New Zealand organisations prioritise the work-life balance of their employees, leading to more productive, sustainable employment relationships and workplaces.

This report summarises the results of two surveys that were conducted in 2008 by Research New Zealand, one involving employers and the other employees. In recognition of the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007 coming into force on 1 July 2008, the surveys had a particular focus on identifying the availability and use of flexible working arrangements by New Zealand workers.

The survey results will contribute to an impact evaluation of the Work-Life Balance Programme and facilitate a future review of the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007.

The surveys follow up on related work-life balance benchmark surveys of employers and employees carried out in 2005/2006. Where possible, this report compares the results of the current research with the 2005 study. The differences between the 2005 and 2008 findings are indicative only, due to the surveys having a different focus (the earlier surveys focused primarily on workplace productivity issues rather than flexible working arrangements) as well as different response rates, questionnaire structures and survey lengths.

How do we fare on the Work-life Balance front?

KEY FINDINGS

- Most people rate their work-life balance positively on average.
- They are less positive about how easy it is to get the work-life balance they want.
- People's rating of their work-life balance may have improved since 2005. (Indicative finding only due to survey differences.)
- They may also be finding it easier than they did in 2005 to get the work-life balance they want. (Indicative finding only due to survey differences.)

HOW DO EMPLOYEES RATE THEIR WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

The employee survey asked people to rate their current work-life balance and their ability to 'get the balance right' on a scale of 1 to 6 (with 1 being very poor/very difficult and 6 being excellent/very easy).

Overall, the survey findings were positive, in that people rated their work-life balance on average as being $\bar{x}=4.25$ out of 6, which is well above the mid-point of $\bar{x}=3.50$.

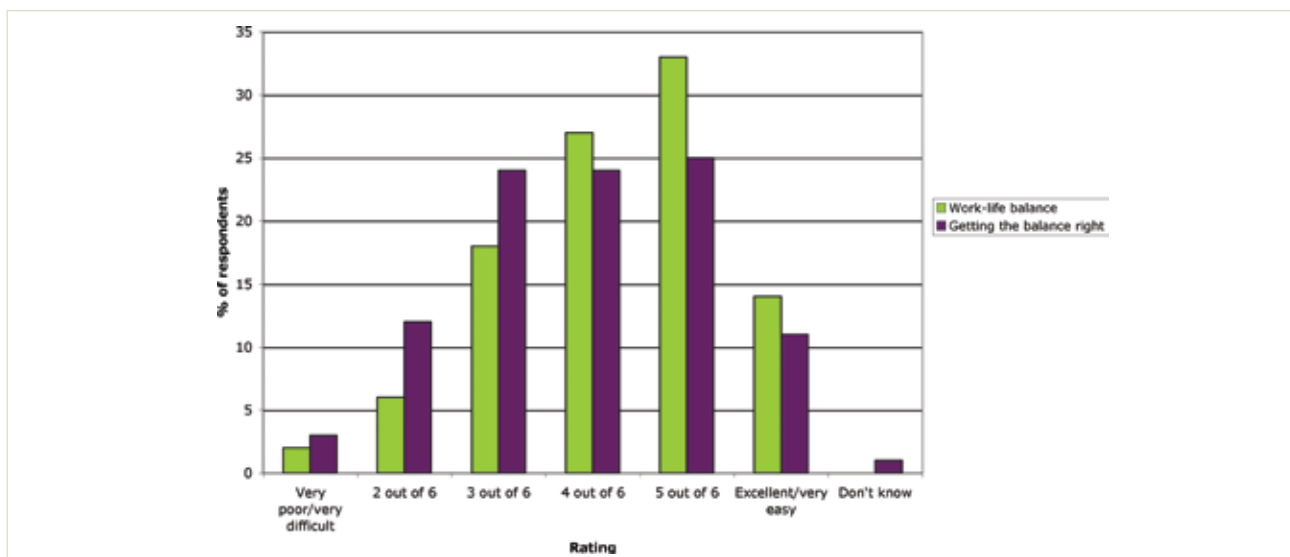
There were no significant gender, age or ethnic differences in the way people rated their current work-life balance.

HOW EASY DO EMPLOYEES FIND IT TO GET WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

Employees were less positive about how easy it was to get the balance they want. At $\bar{x}=3.89$ out of 6, the respondents' ratings for 'getting the balance right', while still being above the mid-point, were significantly lower on average than those given for their work-life balance.

Again there were no significant gender, age or ethnic differences, except that those aged 60 years or older, and those without caring responsibilities, found it easier to get the balance they wanted.

Figure 1: Work-life balance and ease of getting the balance right (n=1004)



Are work-life balance ratings changing?

How does this compare to the findings of the 2005 survey? In 2005, 52% of people had good, very good or excellent work-life balance, with 16% finding their work-life balance poor or very poor. When these descriptors are converted to ratings, the average is $\bar{x}=3.63$ out of 6, compared with the 2008 survey result of $\bar{x}=4.25$. Only indicative conclusions can be drawn given the differences in the surveys, but this suggests that people's satisfaction with their work-life balance has increased since 2005. It is not possible to determine how much these differences can be attributed to methodological differences between the two studies.

In the 2005 survey, unlike the current one, women were more likely to report better work-life balance than men.

In 2005, 40% of respondents had some or a lot of difficulty achieving work-life balance. When the descriptors were converted to ratings, people scored their ease in getting the work-life balance they wanted as $\bar{x}=2.22$, compared with the 2008 survey result of $\bar{x}=3.89$. This suggests that employees are finding work-life balance easier to achieve in 2008 than in 2005.

Availability of flexible work

KEY FINDINGS

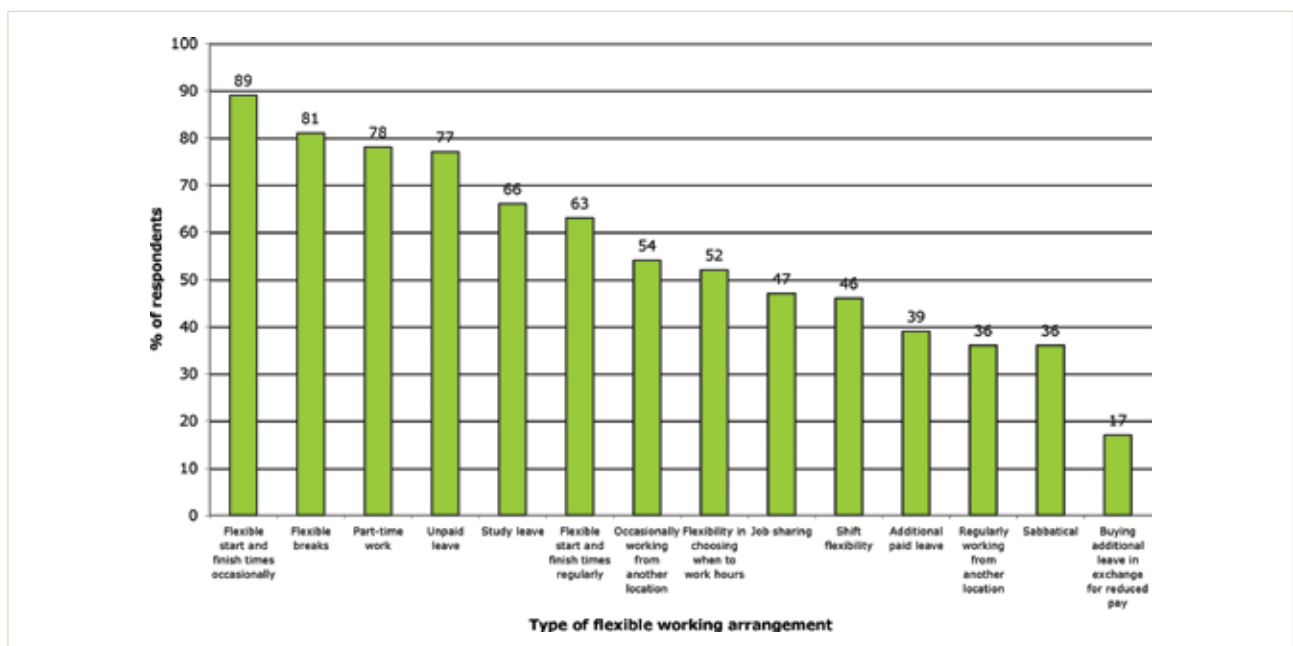
- Almost all businesses offer some flexible working arrangements to all or some of their staff.
- The most widely available flexible working arrangements are flexible start and finish times on an occasional basis, flexible breaks, part-time work and unpaid leave.
- The least available flexible working arrangements are buying additional leave in exchange for reduced pay, taking sabbaticals and regularly working from another location.
- The availability of flexible working arrangements varies by sector, gender and occupation.
- Employers report a slight increase generally in the availability of flexible working arrangements for all or some staff since 2005. Employees report an increase in some arrangements and a decrease in others. (These are indicative conclusions only due to survey differences.)

WHAT FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS ARE AVAILABLE?

Employers were asked about a range of working arrangements, and whether these were available to all or some employees in their workplace. Only six enterprises – one half of 1% of all those surveyed – did not currently offer any flexible working arrangements. As the graph below indicates, the most commonly offered arrangements made available to all or some employees were flexible start and finish times on an occasional basis (89%), flexible breaks, (81%), part-time work (78%) and unpaid leave (77%). Flexible start and finish times on a regular basis was available to some or all staff in 63% of workplaces.

The least commonly offered arrangements were buying additional leave in exchange for reduced pay (17%), taking sabbaticals (36%), regularly working from another location (36%) and taking additional paid leave (39%).

Figure 2: Flexible working arrangements available to all or some New Zealand workers (n=1,094)

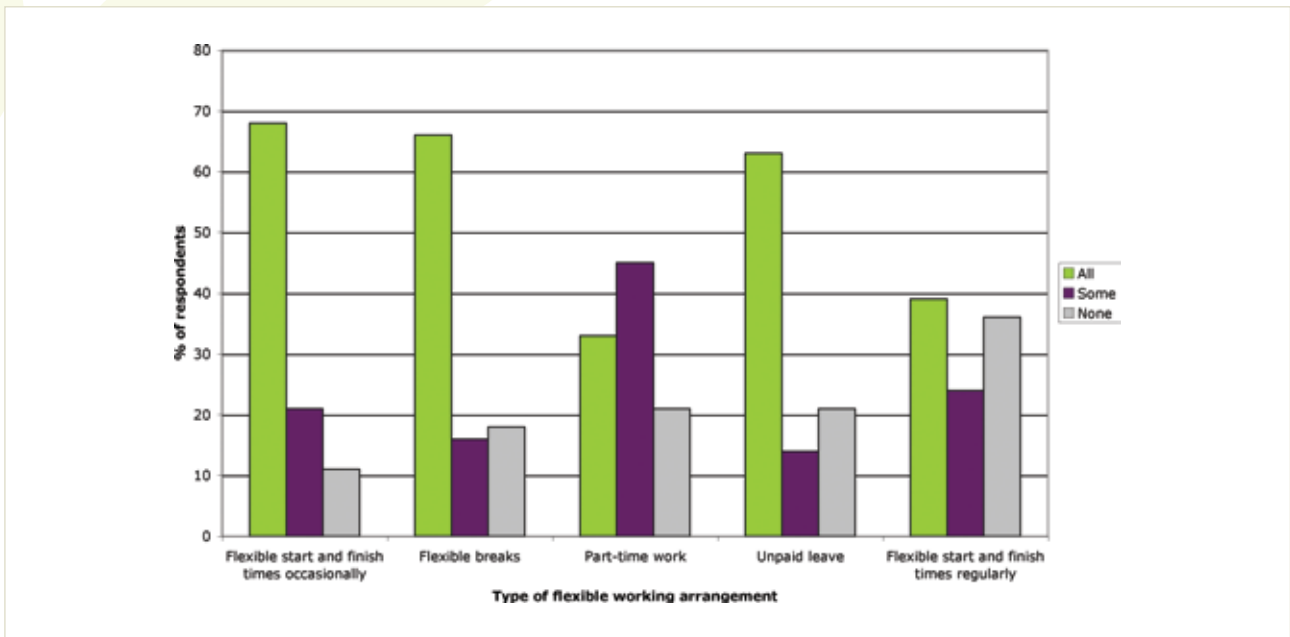


WHO IS OFFERED THESE OPTIONS?

All or some...

The graph below shows whether all, some or no staff are offered the most common arrangements.

Figure 3: Who is offered the most common flexible arrangements



When options are offered to only some staff:

- occasional flexible start and finish times are more likely to be offered to professional or technical staff (34%) and general staff (26%), except in large organisations (more than 100 employees), where they are more likely to be offered to middle management (38%)
- flexible breaks are more likely to be offered to professional or technical staff (35%) and/or general staff (30%)
- part-time work is more likely to be offered to general staff (26%) and/or professional or technical staff (21%)
- unpaid leave is more likely to be offered to general staff (52%).

Variations by industry type and size

As might be expected, the likelihood of certain types of working arrangements being made available depends partly on the industry.

Table 1: Flexible working arrangements by industry

Sector	Less likely to offer	More likely to offer
Retail trade	Occasional flexibility in start and finish times Occasionally or regularly working from another location	
Finance and insurance		Occasionally working from another location Study leave
Transport and storage, communication services	Study leave Sabbaticals	
Education	Regular flexibility in start and finish times Flexible breaks Shift flexibility	Job sharing Part-time work Unpaid leave Sabbaticals Study leave Occasionally working from another location
Health and community services sector		Part-time work Job sharing Shift flexibility Study leave Unpaid leave
Government, administration and defence		Regular flexibility in start and finish times Flexible breaks Occasionally working from another location Study leave Additional paid leave
Property and business services		Regular flexibility in start and finish times Flexible breaks Part-time work Flexibility in choosing when to work hours Unpaid leave Occasionally and regularly working from another location Study leave Sabbaticals
Accommodation, cafés and restaurants	Regularly or occasionally working from another location	Part-time work Flexibility in when to work hours Shift flexibility
Construction	Part-time work Job sharing Shift flexibility	

Types of working arrangements also vary by business size.

Table 2: Flexible working arrangements by business size

Number of employees	Less likely to offer	More likely to offer
Fewer than 5	Part-time work Study leave	Occasional or regular flexibility in start and finish times to all staff Flexible breaks to all staff
Between 5 and 10	Occasionally or regularly working from another location Study leave	Flexible breaks to all staff
Between 51 and 100	Occasional flexibility in start and finish times to all staff	Part-time work Study leave Unpaid leave
More than 100	Occasional flexibility in start and finish times to all staff Flexible breaks to all staff	Part-time work Job sharing Occasionally or regularly working from another location Study leave Unpaid leave

AVAILABILITY AS REPORTED BY EMPLOYEES

What is available?

In the survey of employees, almost all reported that at least one flexible work arrangement was available to them. Most frequently the respondents mentioned they could have:

- occasional flexibility in start and finish times (71%)
- unpaid leave, e.g. career break (69%)
- flexible breaks (67%)
- part-time work (58%)
- study leave (55%)
- regular flexibility in start and finish times (54%).

In contrast, the following options were reported as being available less frequently:

- regularly working from another location, such as home (23%)
- buying additional leave in exchange for reduced pay (20%).

It is not possible to directly compare these percentages with what employers reported as being available, as employers were asked what was available to all or some employees.

How it varies

For the most part, there were no significant differences in the availability of various flexible working arrangements when viewed by respondents' age, ethnicity or carer status, except that carers were significantly more likely to report that shift flexibility (e.g. choosing or having input into rosters or shifts) was available to them (42% compared with 34% of non-carers).

Men and women differed in what they reported as being available to them. Men were more likely to report access to:

- flexible breaks (71% compared with 64% of women)
- regularly working from another location (28% compared with 20% of women).

Women were more likely to report access to:

- part-time work (68% compared with 44% of men)
- job sharing (48% compared with 34% of men).

Availability also varied by occupation. Employees working as a legislator, administrator or corporate manager were more likely to have access to flexible breaks (80%) or occasionally working from another location (49%). Professionals were more likely to have access to taking study leave (77%) or taking a sabbatical (44%).

On the other hand, service and sales workers, and labourers and other service workers were less likely to be allowed to take study leave (42% and 27% respectively) or to occasionally work from another location (22% and 21% respectively).

HAS THE AVAILABILITY OF FLEXIBLE WORK CHANGED SINCE 2005?

What do employers tell us?

The following table provides a comparative snapshot of the flexible working arrangements that were reported by employers as being available in 2008 and 2005. The comparison is indicative only, due to differences in the surveys.

Table 3: Comparisons of flexible working arrangements available to New Zealand as reported by employers – 2005 versus 2008 survey results

	2005 (n=1,100)				2008 (n=795*)			
	All	Some	None	Don't know	All	Some	None	Don't know
Flexible start and finish times regularly	49%	15%	36%	0%	33%	30%	37%	1%
Flexible breaks	65%	7%	26%	1%	60%	19%	20%	0%
Part-time work	33%	44%	22%	0%	31%	53%	16%	0%
Job sharing	28%	19%	50%	2%	23%	25%	50%	2%
Flexibility in choosing when to work hours	25%	18%	55%	1%	23%	28%	47%	1%
Shift flexibility	23%	13%	61%	2%	25%	21%	52%	2%
Buying additional leave	25%	6%	63%	5%	11%	6%	79%	4%
Occasionally working from another location	11%	29%	59%	1%	16%	40%	42%	1%
Regularly working from another location	4%	15%	80%	1%	8%	28%	63%	0%
Taking study leave	52%	16%	29%	3%	47%	25%	26%	3%

Totals may not sum to 100% due to rounding.

*2008 sub-sample excludes the government, administration and defence sector, and workplaces with fewer than five employees, as these were not included in the 2005 survey.

There was a slight increase generally in the availability of flexible work made available to all or some staff as reported by employers. However, in a number of areas there was a decrease in the proportion of organisations offering these arrangements to all staff, with an increase in those offering them to some staff.

The main exception to this pattern was the decrease in the availability of buying additional leave in exchange for reduced pay. This may have been influenced by the introduction of the fourth week of annual leave provided for in the Holidays Act 2003 which came into effect in April 2007.

What do employees tell us?

The indicative comparison between the employee surveys of 2005 and 2008 suggests a decrease in the availability of:

- occasional flexibility in start and finish times
- regular flexibility in start and finish times
- shift flexibility
- buying additional leave in exchange for reduced pay.

It suggests an increase in the availability of:

- occasionally working from another location
- flexibility in choosing when to work your hours
- regularly working from another location.

Table 4: Comparisons of flexible working arrangements reported by employees – 2005 versus 2008 survey results

	Employees 2008 (n=1004)	Employees 2005 (n=2000)
Flexible start and finish times occasionally	71%	87%
Flexible breaks	67%	70%
Flexible start and finish times regularly	54%	62%
Occasionally working from another location	34%	25%
Flexibility in choosing when to work hours	40%	33%
Shift flexibility	38%	51%
Regularly working from another location	23%	15%
Buying additional leave	20%	37%

Total may exceed 100% because of multiple responses.

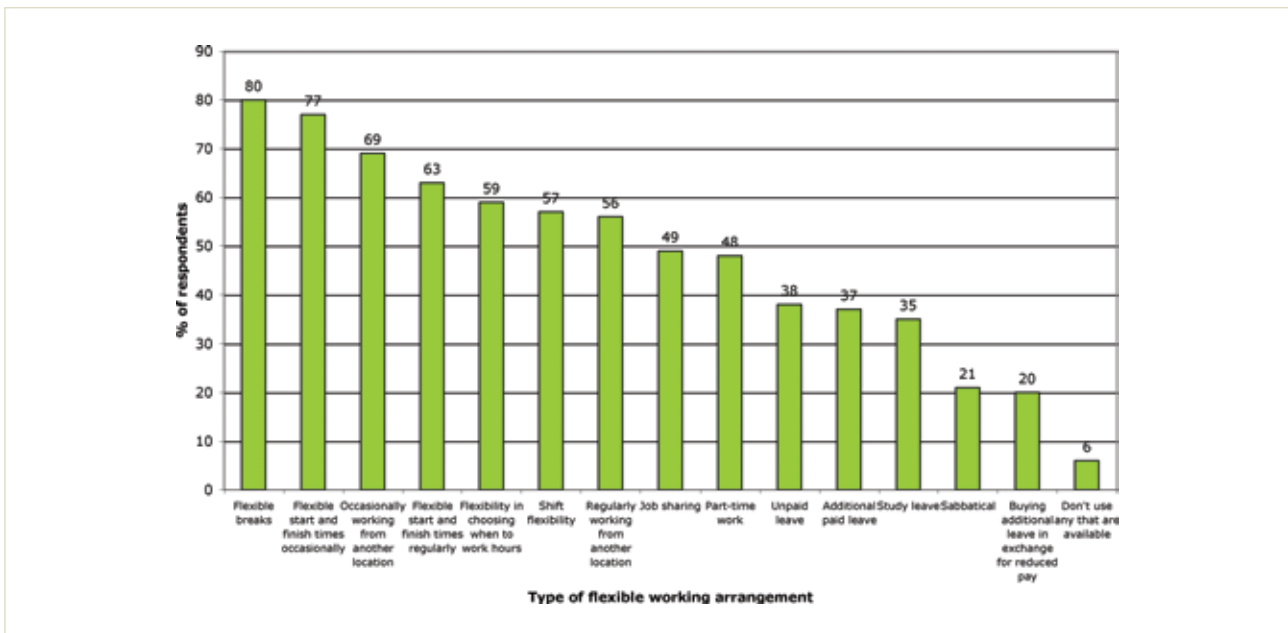
What flexible working arrangements are employees using?

KEY FINDINGS

- Almost all people who have flexible work arrangements available to them will use at least one arrangement.
- The most commonly used arrangements are flexible breaks, occasional flexibility in start and finish times, regular flexibility in start and finish times, and occasionally working from another location.
- Use varies by gender, age and caring responsibilities.
- People who do not have flexible working arrangements available to them would most like to have occasional flexibility in start and finish times, the ability to take additional paid leave, flexible breaks, flexibility in choosing when to work hours, and regular flexibility in start and finish times.

Employees who indicated that a particular flexible work arrangement was available to them were asked if they ever used it. Almost all people who had flexible work arrangements available to them used at least one arrangement. Only 6% reported not using any, most commonly because they did not need it. Very few employees chose not to use flexible arrangements because they were concerned about the impact on career progression.

Figure 4: Take-up of available work arrangements among those for whom they are available (n=988)



Eighty percent of employees who could use flexible breaks (choose their own breaks) at their workplace reported that they did so. Other frequently used arrangements included:

- occasional flexibility in start and finish times (used by 77% of those who reported that the arrangement was available to them)
- occasionally working from another location, such as home (69%)
- regular flexibility in start and finish times (63%).

How it varies

Women were much more likely to report that they used:

- part-time work (49%)
- taking study leave (39%).

Those with carer responsibilities were significantly more likely to report they used part-time work (53% compared with 43% of non-carers).

Those aged 60 years or older were more likely to report that they used flexibility – e.g. compressed weeks, term-time working, annualised hours – in choosing when to work the number of hours they were employed to do (81% compared with 59% of total relevant sub-sample).

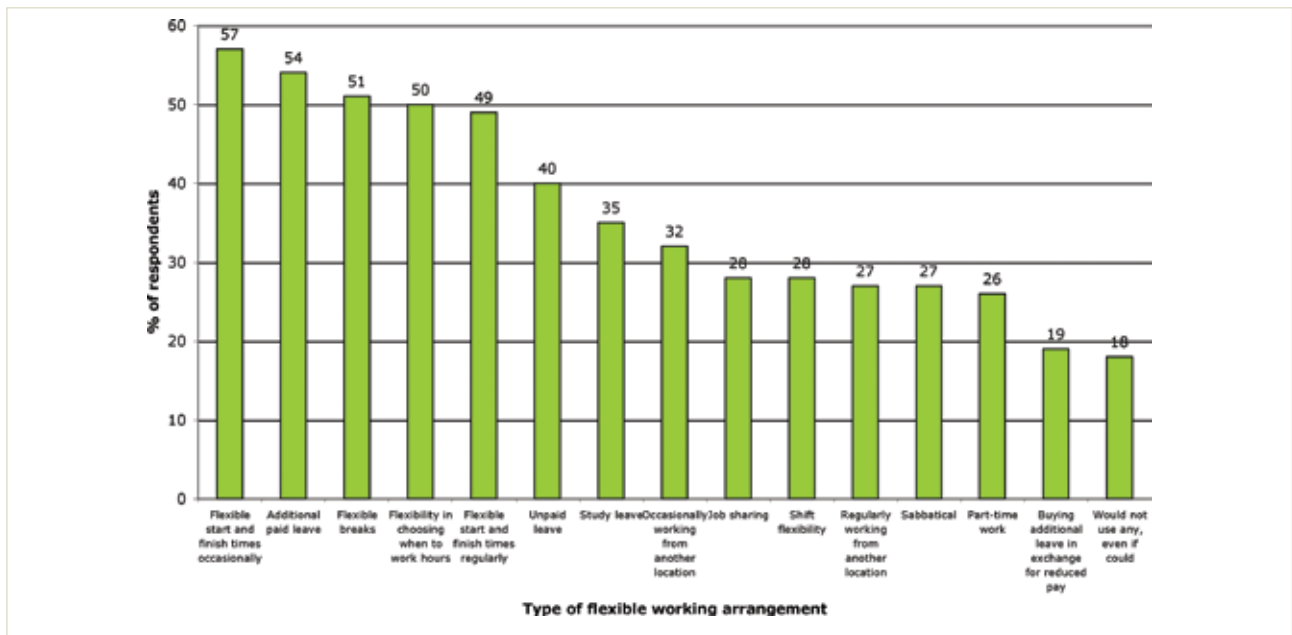
Twenty- to 29-year-olds are more likely to mention taking additional paid leave – e.g. unlimited sick leave (59% compared with 37% of total relevant sub-sample).

Maori were more likely to use flexible start and finish times (88% compared with 77% of total relevant sub-sample).

WHAT WOULD PEOPLE LIKE TO BE AVAILABLE?

People who indicated that a particular flexible work arrangement was not available to them were asked if they would use it if it were available.

Figure 5: Desirable flexible work arrangements among those for whom they are not available (n=999)¹



1. Sub-sample excludes those who report that all of the different types of work arrangements are available to them in their workplace.

Among those who could not use different flexible work arrangements because they were unavailable, women were more likely to want to use:

- part-time work (32% compared with 22% of men)
- job sharing (33% compared with 23% of men)
- sabbaticals (31% compared with 22% of men)
- unpaid leave, e.g. career break (46% compared with 33% of men).

Younger employees (aged 20–29) were more likely to want job sharing if it was available (46% compared with 28%). Professionals were more likely to say they would take study leave (53%) or sabbatical (43%), compared with the total sub-sample (35% and 27% respectively). Those classified as legislator, administrator or corporate manager were more likely to want to work from another location, such as their home, if they could (47% compared with 32% of the total sub-sample).

Not all employees wanted access to flexible working arrangements. Eighteen percent reported they would not use any of the arrangements, even if they were available to them. Most frequently this was because they said they did not need to use such options.

How supportive are workplaces of flexible work?

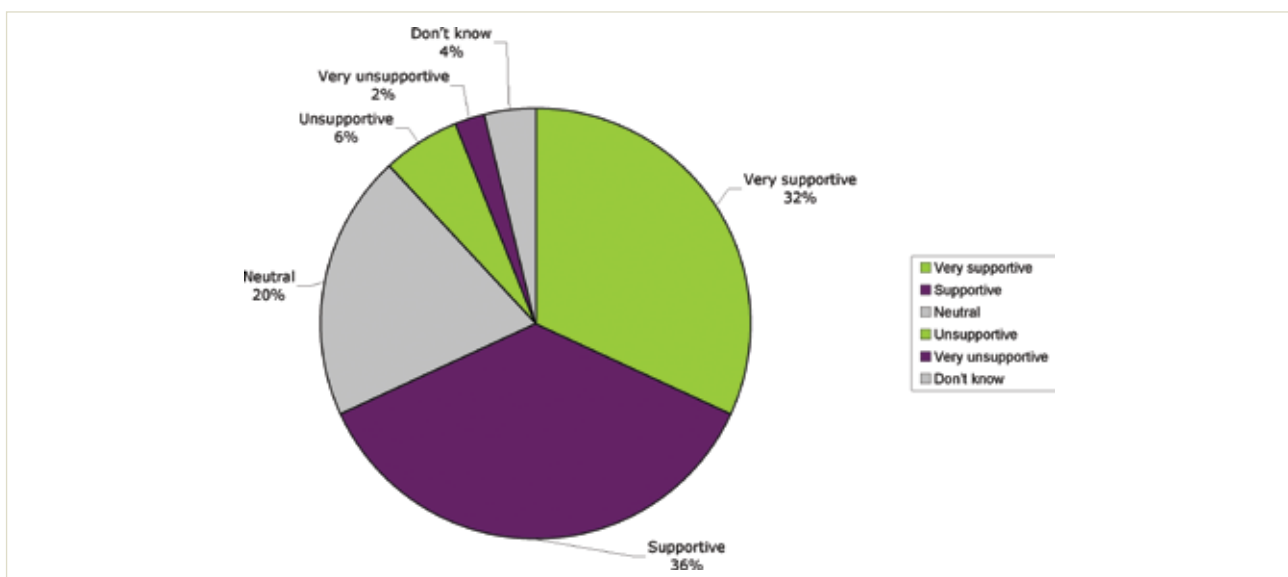
KEY FINDINGS

- More than two-thirds of employers report they are supportive or very supportive of flexible working arrangements in their workplaces.
- Employees' assessment of how supportive their workplace is of flexible working arrangements is very similar to employers'.
- Levels of support vary little by size of the organisation, except that small organisations with fewer than five employees are more likely to be very supportive.
- Levels of support vary little by sector, except that the finance and insurance sector is more likely to be supportive.
- Organisations that are less supportive are less likely to offer flexible working arrangements.
- The level of support for flexible working arrangements impacts on how satisfactory and how easy employees find their work-life balance.

HOW SUPPORTIVE DO EMPLOYERS BELIEVE THEIR WORKPLACES ARE TOWARDS FLEXIBLE WORK?

More than two-thirds of all employers surveyed described the attitude in their workplace towards flexible work as being either supportive or very supportive.

Figure 6: Current attitudes of employers towards flexible working arrangements



This varied little by size of organisation, except that those employing fewer than five were more likely to report being very supportive. It also varied little by industry type, except the finance and insurance sector was more likely to report being supportive of such arrangements.

Impact of attitudes on availability of arrangements

As might be expected, those employers who reported that their workplace was not supportive of flexible work were less likely to report that various flexible working arrangements were available to any staff.

On the other hand, employers who said their workplace was supportive of flexible work were significantly more likely to offer the following options to all staff members:

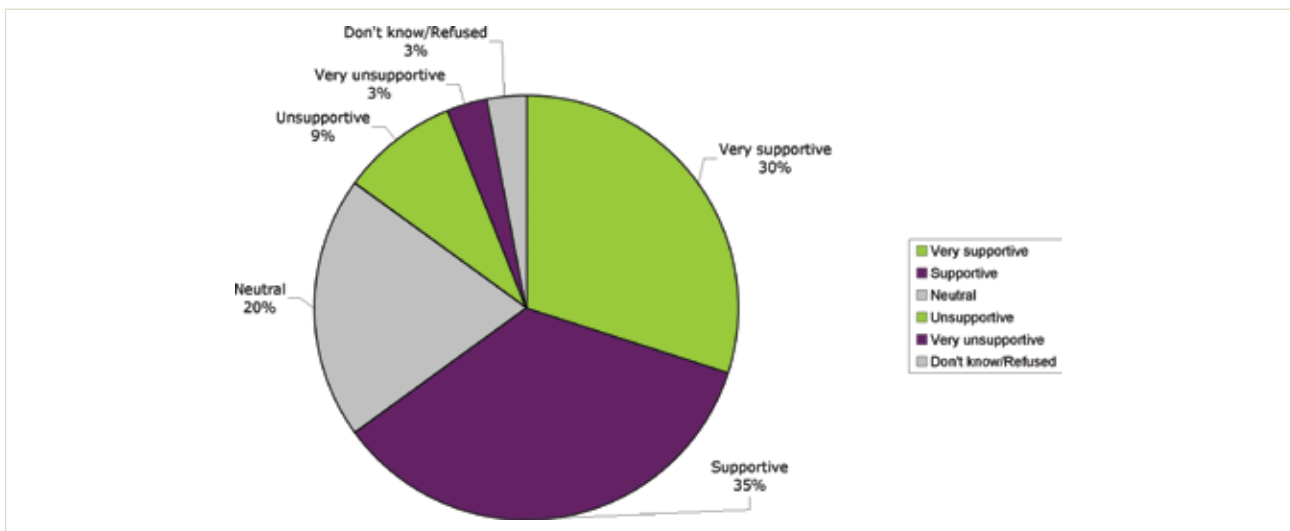
- occasional flexibility in start and finish times
- regular flexibility in start and finish times
- flexibility in choosing when to work the number of hours employed to do.

The cause is not necessarily clear. Is it that employers who have a positive attitude are more likely to instigate flexible working arrangements? Or does the experience of flexible working arrangements make employers more positive?

HOW SUPPORTIVE DO EMPLOYEES BELIEVE THEIR WORKPLACES ARE TOWARDS FLEXIBLE WORK?

Employees' assessment of how supportive their workplace is of flexible work is very similar to that of employers.

Figure 7: Workplace attitude towards flexible working arrangements as reported by employees (n=1,004)



Women were more likely than men to rate their workplace as being supportive. Those in clerical roles were likely to rate their workplace more highly, whilst people working in building, metal, machinery or other craft trades were likely to rate it lower.

Impact of attitudes on work-life balance

How good

Those employees who rated their work-life balance as being very poor gave a significantly lower rating to the attitude of their workplace towards flexible work, while those with an excellent work-life balance gave it significantly higher ratings on average.

How easy

Similarly, those who reported it was very hard to achieve the right work-life balance gave a significantly lower rating to the attitude of their workplace towards flexible work on average, while those for whom it was very easy gave it a significantly higher rating.

What is the impact of flexible working arrangements?

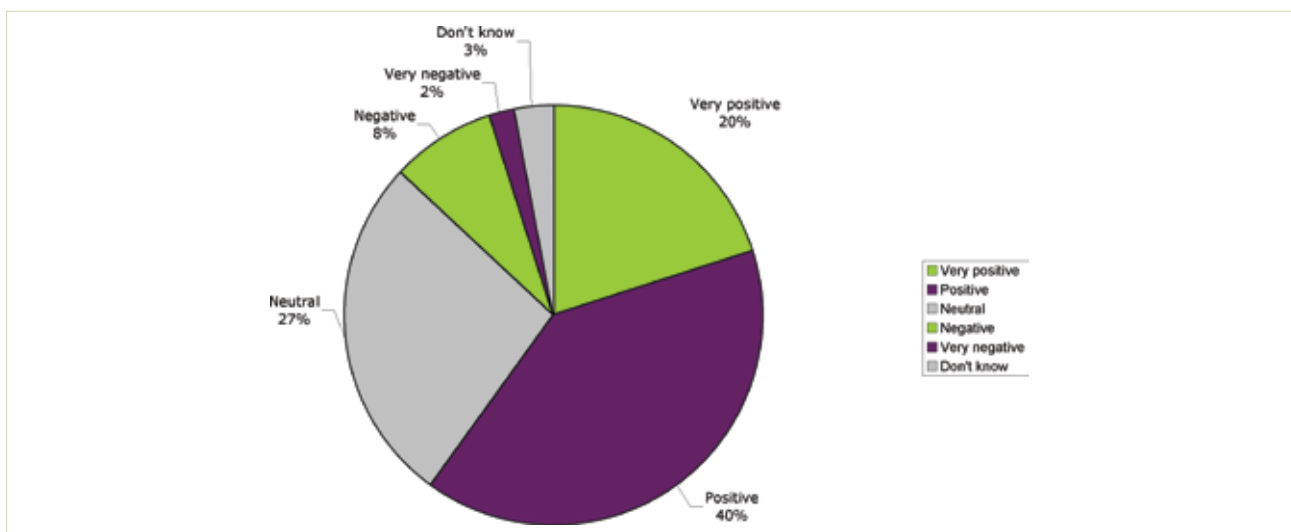
KEY FINDINGS

- 60% of employers are either positive or very positive about the impact of flexible working arrangements on their workplace.
- Small workplaces with fewer than five employees are more likely to be very positive about the impact.
- Workplaces which report positively on the impact of flexible working arrangements are more likely to report the availability of these arrangements. Workplaces which report negatively are less likely to have these arrangements.
- Employees who have access to flexible work arrangements are more likely to rate their work-life balance higher, and find it easier to achieve the work-life balance that is right for them.
- The availability of arrangements most closely linked with people's work-life balance rating are part-time work, flexibility in choosing when to work the number of hours you are employed to do, regular flexibility in start and finish times, buying additional leave in exchange for reduced pay, and job sharing.
- The arrangements most closely linked with how easy people find it to get the right work-life balance are taking unpaid leave (e.g. career breaks), regular flexibility in start and finish times, flexibility in choosing when to work the number of hours employed to do, and part-time work.

WHAT IMPACT DO FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS HAVE ON BUSINESSES?

Employers were asked whether they felt that flexible working arrangements had a positive or negative impact in the workplace. Sixty percent were either very positive or positive.

Figure 8: Impact of flexible working arrangements in the workplace as perceived by employers



Small workplaces with fewer than five employees were significantly more likely to report that flexible work arrangements had a very positive impact (34%).

Perceived impact in relation to availability of arrangements

The impact of flexible working arrangements on the availability of arrangements is similar to the impact of attitudes. Workplaces which reported positively on the impact of flexible working arrangements were more likely to report the availability of these arrangements. Workplaces which reported negatively were less likely to have these arrangements.

WHAT IMPACT DO FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS HAVE ON EMPLOYEES' WORK-LIFE BALANCE?

Employees who reported that a particular flexible work arrangement was available to them were likely to rate their work-life balance more highly, and find it easier to achieve the work-life balance that is right for them.

The availability of the following arrangements is most closely linked with people's work-life balance rating:

- part-time work
- flexibility in choosing when to work the number of hours you are employed to do
- regular flexible start and finish times
- buying additional leave in exchange for reduced pay
- job sharing.

The availability of the following arrangements is most closely linked with how easy people find it to get the right work-life balance:

- taking unpaid leave, e.g. career breaks
- regular flexibility in start and finish times
- flexibility in choosing when to work the number of hours employed to do
- part-time work.

When looking at use of arrangements, rather than availability, the pattern is not as distinct. The exception is the use of part-time work and job sharing, particularly for women.

Women are more likely to be using job sharing and part-time work. For those who do not have access, women are more likely to want to be able to use job sharing and part-time work. Women who use job sharing and part-time work are more likely to have a better work-life balance.

Who decides whether employees can use flexible working arrangements?

KEY FINDINGS

- 50% of businesses advise their employees verbally about the availability of flexible working arrangements. 30% include it in their employees' employment agreements.
- In 44% of organisations offering at least one flexible working arrangement, staff learn of options only when they specifically ask about them.
- Employers report that decision-making about flexible working arrangements is likely to be undertaken by supervisors/managers (37%), business owners (34%) and other management (36%). However, employees report that their supervisor or manager is most often the decision-maker (58%).
- People who rate their work-life balance more highly and as easier to achieve are more likely to identify their supervisor or manager as the decision-maker.

HOW ARE EMPLOYEES ADVISED OF FLEXIBLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS?

Businesses used a range of ways to advise their employees of flexible working arrangements. Half of the businesses which offered flexible work advised their employees verbally (50%) about their availability. Some employers included it in their employees' employment agreement (30%).

Large organisations with more than 100 staff were more likely than smaller organisations to use:

- a notice board/intranet (28%)
- Human Resources department (15%).

Organisations with fewer than five employees were more likely to inform staff verbally.

Almost half of the businesses surveyed, however, reported that staff learned of these options only when they specifically asked about them (44%). This was less likely to occur in the government, administration and defence, and health and community services sectors, which were more likely to inform staff through their employment agreements.

HOW DO EMPLOYEES APPLY FOR FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS?

In most cases, people could ask for flexible working arrangements verbally (84%). Thirty-four percent also reported that staff could (or must) apply in writing, although this was more common in larger organisations with 20 or more staff.

Who makes the decision?

When asked who in the business or organisation most frequently made the decision about whether staff can use flexible working arrangements, employers reported that:

- 37% is done by the supervisor/manager of the staff member
- 36% by other management
- 34% by the owner of the business.

In small organisations of 10 or fewer employees, this was most likely to be the business owner. In larger organisations it was most likely to be the supervisor/manager.

Employees reported a slightly different picture. Fifty-eight percent identified their supervisor or manager as being the decision-maker, followed by 31% who mentioned other management.

Does it matter who makes the decision?

When the results for work-life balance and ease of getting it right were viewed in the light of who makes the decision about whether an employee can use flexible work arrangements, there was only one significant difference. People who rated their work-life balance more highly, and found it easier to get the right work-life balance, were more likely to identify their supervisor or manager as the decision-maker.

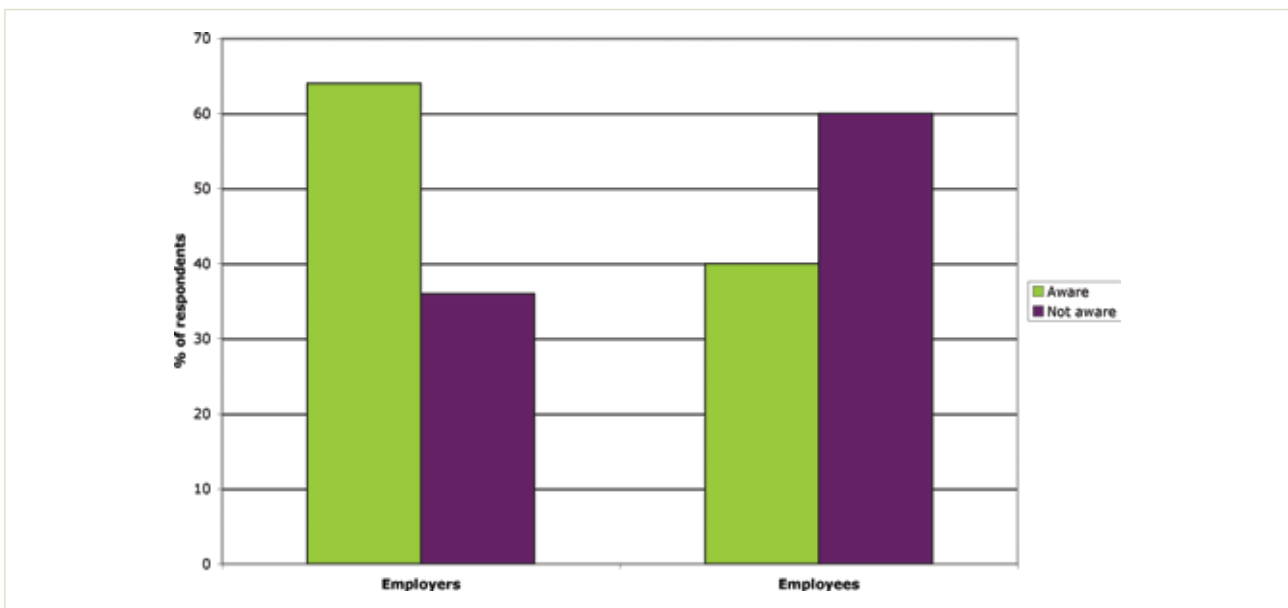
Awareness of the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007

KEY FINDINGS

- 64% of employers are aware of the Act, but only 17% are aware of the eligibility criterion.
- Larger organisations are more likely than small organisations to be aware of the Act.
- 40% of employees are aware of the Act.
- One to two months before the introduction of the Act, only 4% of employers had been approached about the Act by their staff.
- Employers are most likely to go the Department of Labour (67%), the internet (66%) or an employer organisation (58%) for information on flexible working arrangements or the Act.
- Employees are most likely to go to colleagues and friends (74%), the internet (71%) or their employer (70%) for information.

HOW AWARE ARE PEOPLE OF THE ACT?

Figure 9: Awareness of Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007



At the time of surveying (April–May 2008), employers were much more likely to be aware of the Act than employees. Employers in organisations employing more than 50 people were more likely to be aware of the Act than employers in small organisations. Employers in the government, administration and defence sectors were more likely to be aware of the legislation (84%), while those involved in the construction sector had significantly lower levels of awareness (52%).

Among employees, younger employees aged 20–29 were significantly less likely to be aware of the Act (23%), whereas those aged 40 and over were significantly more likely to be aware (52–54%). Maori were also less likely to be aware of the Act (30%).

Eligibility criterion

Employers' awareness of the eligibility criterion was markedly lower than their general awareness of the Act. To be eligible for the 'right to request', an employee must have the care of a person and have been employed by their employer for six months prior to making a request for flexible work. Only 17% of employers stated that they were aware of the criterion. Again, larger organisations were more likely to be aware than smaller.

Organisations in the property and business services sectors were more likely to know of the criterion (25%) than those in the construction sector (9%).

WHERE DO EMPLOYERS GO FOR INFORMATION?

Employers were prompted about what sources of information they were likely to use about flexible work and the Act.

- 67% reported they would go to the Department of Labour
- 66% the internet
- 58% an employer organisation
- 52% colleagues or friends.

Employers with more than 100 staff were more likely to report that they would approach the Department of Labour (80%), an employer organisation (76%) or a lawyer (45%). Businesses with fewer than five employees were more likely to ask their accountant (43%).

WHERE DO EMPLOYEES GO FOR INFORMATION?

When asked where they would go for help or information about the Act or working arrangements that can assist them to achieve a good work-life balance, employees were most likely to go to:

- colleagues and friends (74%)
- internet (71%)
- their employer (70%)
- Department of Labour (61%).

CONCLUSIONS

The results of this research suggest that most New Zealand workers are positive about their work-life balance. The indications are that this has improved since 2005. But there is further to go. One of the most important conditions for achieving this is the availability of flexible working arrangements.

This study found that flexibility is good for business and good for employees. Sixty percent of employers are either positive or very positive about the impact of flexible working arrangements on their workplace. The availability of flexibility is directly linked with people's rating of their work-life balance.

Almost all employers offer some flexibility, although those who believe flexibility is good for business are more likely to be offering flexible working arrangements than those who do not. However, the types of arrangements and the employees to whom they are offered vary.

Apart from in small workplaces with fewer than five employees, flexible working arrangements are often offered only to some employees. In part, this may be influenced by the nature of the work done by different employees, but employers need to be careful that it is not always the same employees who have choices and the same employees who miss out. The critical challenge will be to expand the range of employees who have access to at least some kinds of flexible working arrangements.

The experience of employees suggests that some kinds of flexible working arrangements have more impact than others in assisting with people's work-life balance. This research found that people who have access to part-time work, job sharing, the ability to choose when to work the number of hours they are employed to do, regular flexibility in start and finish times, unpaid leave (e.g. career breaks) and the ability to buy additional leave in exchange for reduced pay rate their work-life balance more highly than those who do not. They find it easier than those who not have access to these arrangements to get the balance that is right for them.

There are constraints on the types of arrangements that can be offered in some sectors. Some sectors appear to have been better at counterbalancing these constraints by implementing the flexibility that is possible. The education and health and community services sectors may find it harder to offer flexibility in start and finish times or breaks, but in compensation are more likely to utilise part-time work, job sharing, unpaid leave, study leave and, in the health and community services, shift flexibility. Other sectors such as construction and the retail trade have been less successful in identifying and implementing flexible working arrangements that suit the nature of their work. However, it is important to note that in every sector there are employers who have found ways to implement each of the flexible working arrangements examined in this report. The lessons they have learnt will be invaluable in assisting others in their sector to introduce similar arrangements.

Availability is not the same as usage. Not everyone wants or needs the same types of flexible working arrangements – these may vary according lifestyle, caring responsibilities, life stage and earning needs. This is illustrated by the range of arrangements used by different employees, as well as by their assessment of the arrangements they would like to use where they are not currently available in their organisation. It is useful for employers to work with their employees to explore what kinds of flexibility are both possible and useful in their situation.

Nor is it enough to have flexible working arrangements just nominally available. To be of use to employers and employees, arrangements need to be known, accepted and well managed. Employees need to know what

is possible in their organisation and to feel encouraged to explore practical arrangements. This study found that although some employers are actively informing their employees about different options, in 44% of organisations people learn about the flexible working arrangements possible in their workplace only if they specifically ask about them.

Both parties need to be equipped to use the arrangements well. Employees should know how to go about requesting them. This research showed that asking for arrangements verbally is far more common than applying in writing. Employers need to check that the process they are using in their organisation is working effectively.

Employees in this research reported that the person most likely to make the decision on their flexible working arrangements is their supervisor or manager, although employers suggest that responsibility is spread more widely. Whoever makes the decisions on flexible working arrangements needs to know how to fairly consider requests and manage the arrangements appropriately.

Employers and employees need to be aware of their legal rights and responsibilities. This study showed that 64% of employers, particularly employers in large organisations, are generally aware of the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act 2007, but only 17% are aware of the eligibility criterion. Further work is needed to raise awareness levels.

Employees also need to be aware of the Act – currently only 40% are. Given that many employees say they would go to the internet or to their employer for information, these appear to be the logical avenues for increasing awareness.

The results of this 2008 research should provide a useful source of information for employers who are thinking about increasing the flexibility of their workplace, and will provide a useful benchmark for measuring future progress in awareness and implementation of flexible working arrangements in New Zealand.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE VISIT WWW.DOL.GOV.T.NZ OR PHONE 0800 20 90 20

