



10

TEN2TWO 10 YEARS

**2017 Flexible Working Survey:
Practice & Perception**

Introduction – Practice & Perception

In 2007, we launched Ten2Two to connect businesses that needed skilled and experienced professionals to help them grow and succeed with the thousands of professionals seeking part-time and flexible jobs.

Prospective clients were looking for talented people with exceptional experience that they didn't need full-time - or indeed couldn't necessarily afford - especially as we emerged from the financial crisis of 2008/9.

These people – mostly women seeking to return to the workforce after a career break or moving from full-time to part-time - wanted to meet their family commitments whilst doing a rewarding job and making a meaningful contribution to a business through their skills and expertise.

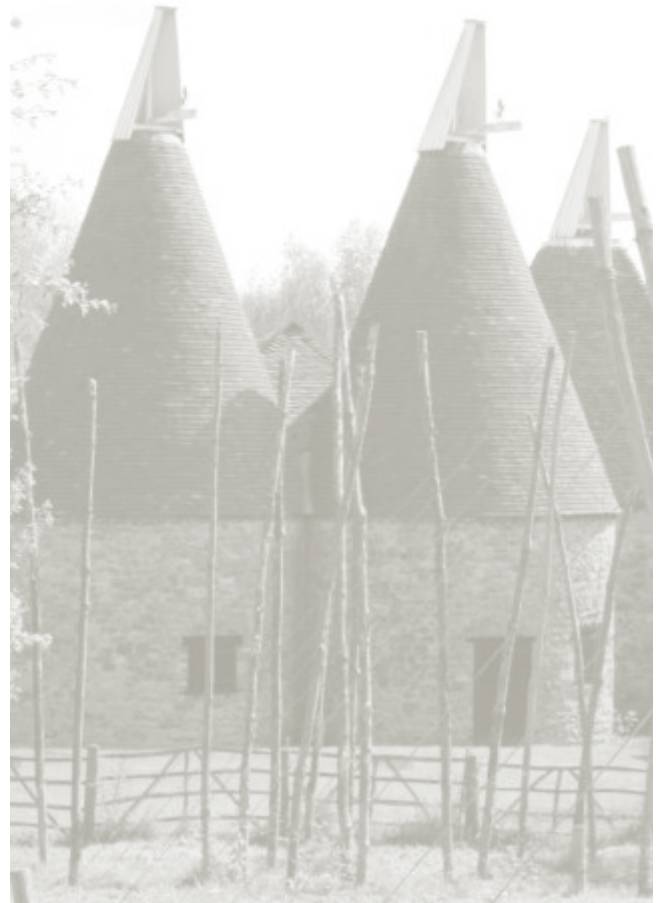
Our journey began in Hertfordshire and along the way we have been joined by teams in Kent, Sussex, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and Gloucester, working with hundreds of clients of all sizes and tens of thousands of candidates – our 'members' – still predominantly women but with increasingly more men seeking flexibility in their working lives.

Ten years on we wanted to get their views of businesses and our members about what works in flexible working and their impression of how flexible working's changed.

We have certainly seen real change happen. Many more companies are open to the possibilities of flexible working within their organisations than were evident in 2007. At that time businesses embracing flexibility were definitely a minority group and we would spend as much time educating as we did recruiting.

We've seen many examples of how it has enhanced organisations and we've seen some great practices in recruitment and management of flexible employees. However, the evidence, including over 2,500 comments, shows there is still a long way to go before flexible working is truly embedded in our working culture.

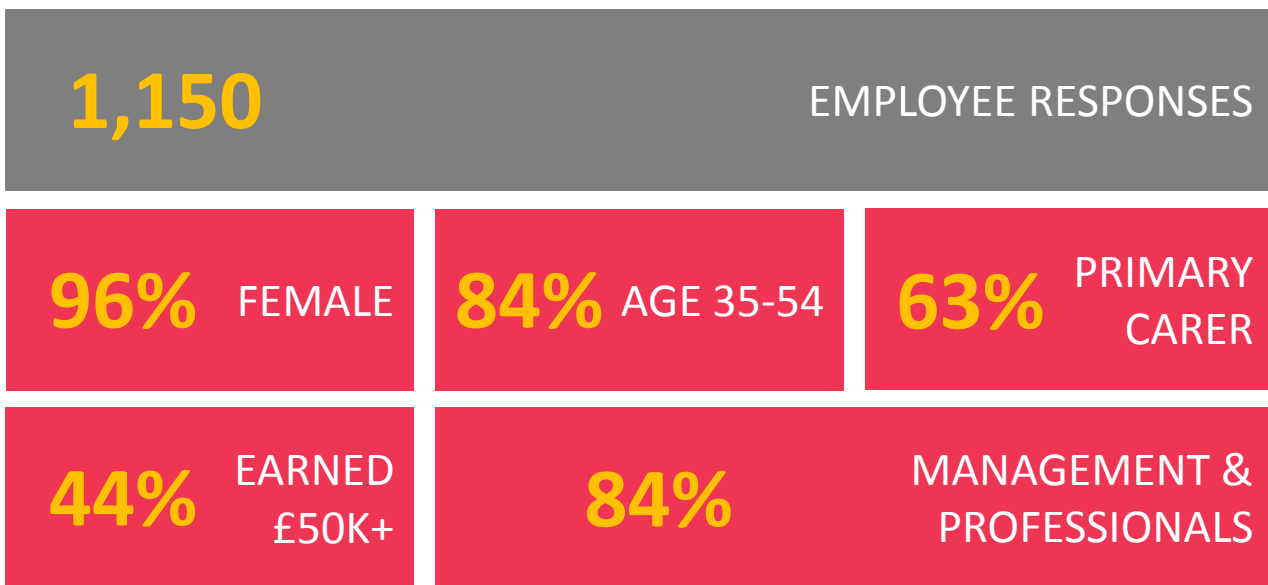
Our research amongst over a thousand Ten2Two members and 250 businesses explores the adoption of flexible working, how attitudes towards it have changed and the reality gap between policy and practice.



Respondent Profiles

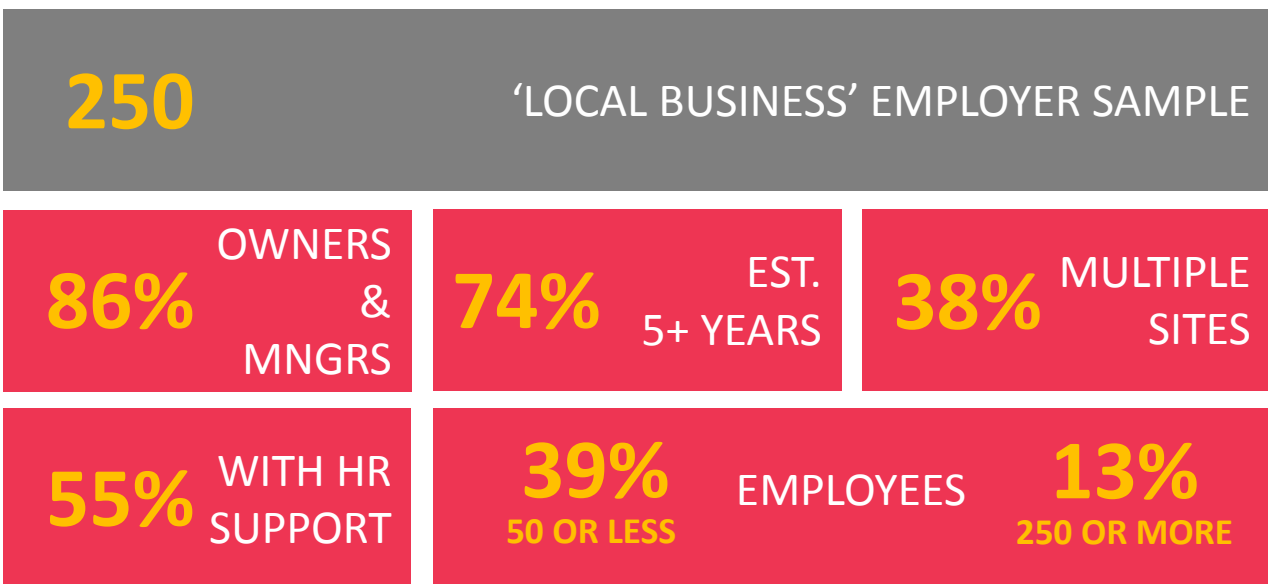
Employees

The 'employee' sample was drawn from the community of Ten2Two members in London and the South of England (called members instead of candidates as we engage with them individually and as a community and in return they are generous with their referral and support). They're largely professionals with **33%** having held Director or Senior/Middle Manager positions and **27%** having professional occupations. With over **50%** being in the 35-44 age group, this is a group of senior professionals at the **peak of their career and salary earning potential:**



Employers

Like our employee sample, the 250 businesses we questioned are also based in London and the South of England and a combination of clients and organisations we know from the local business community. We chose a sample that mixed large and smaller businesses but they're typically established, experienced organisations that, like many local and start-up businesses, have an entrepreneurial edge and a creative but pragmatic approach to managing their business:





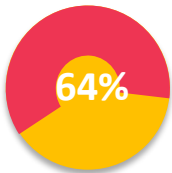
Part-time
professionals.
Rich talent.
Affordable cost.

“By offering flexible hours the company has attracted over-skilled employees to the job roles and employees are happy to accept the role because it’s so flexible. Both sides win.”

Respondent, Ten2Two Flexible Working survey, 2017

Adoption and Satisfaction

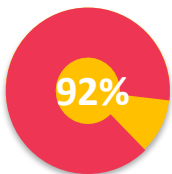
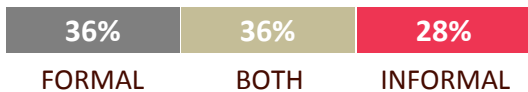
Both employers and employees were asked about their adoption of flexible working and their level of satisfaction it offers to their lives or their businesses:



...of employee respondents working flexibly

...and with a further **23%** of respondents having previously worked flexibly, the survey respondents are not only senior and experienced but also very familiar with flexible working in businesses.

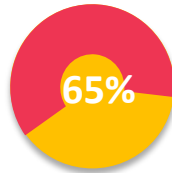
The contractual format amongst the group was:



...have met their flexible needs

51% of employees state flexible working is fully meeting their objectives and **41%** state it somewhat meets their objectives, signifying some level of dissatisfaction with the format or the employer.

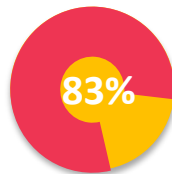
62% feel flexible working will become **more important** to them in the future.



...of employers have recruited flexible workers

...in the last two years, **74%** of which stated they offer flexible working for both professional and non-professional roles.

The contractual formats they offered were:



...agree flexible working has benefitted their business

...and over half (**56%**) of organisations feeling it has **strongly benefitted** their business.

Every business agreed flexible working offers some benefits.

We asked both employees and their employers their views on the benefits flexible working offers to businesses. Their top two benefits were consistent but employers felt that flexibility offered them access to a broader pool of talented candidates: *"When employing working Mums, they are often highly qualified, so you get a much higher calibre of candidate by allowing them to work in school hours."* (Employer, Ten2Two Flexible working Survey) Whereas employees also felt flexible working improved productivity:



EMPLOYEES



EMPLOYERS

- ✓ **Retention of valuable employees**
- ✓ **Employee wellbeing & satisfaction**
- ✓ **Employee productivity**

- ✓ **Retention of valuable employees**
- ✓ **Employee wellbeing & satisfaction**
- ✓ **Access to broader talent pool**

Balance and Behaviours

Employees seek different forms of personal and practical satisfaction from their jobs. Our respondents highlighted **four key benefits** of a flexible role that combined the need to meet their family commitments (especially as **63%** are the primary carers of children) with a job satisfaction-driven desire to do a professional, rewarding job, close to home.



'Meeting family commitments' was chosen as the most important factor by **85%** of respondents with the closest next factor being the 'desire to use their skills and experience' with a **57%** score.



Meets family commitments



Uses skills and expertise



A convenient location



Rewarding & stimulating work

Whilst we asked employees what they looked for from a flexible role, we asked employers to choose the essential mix of skills and capabilities needed by a flexible worker alongside the functional expertise and experience required in a specific role such as HR, Marketing or Finance. They selected skills that would not only support the personal performance of a flexible professional but also enhance the performance of the team, function and management.



Effective time management



Good communications skills



Organising and prioritising work



Setting & managing expectations



We recognise these characteristics as some of the most important traits of effective flexible working. We **recommend** employers explore these with candidates during interview, especially when the working pattern is flexible or home-based.



Few serious issues or concerns were highlighted by employers about flexible working. 'Co-ordinating workload' and 'Managing unforeseen issues' were mentioned as occasionally occurring, requiring some additional management and support.



“The company I currently work for and those I have previously worked for will consider changing a current employees working hours to part time on request but would not recruit or advertise part time positions - so any career promotion or change is impossible.”

Respondent, Ten2Two Flexible Working survey, 2017

Flexible Options and Requests

Employers told us about their preferred flexible working options. Reduced hours across the week, whether fewer hours every day or reduced number of days a week were favoured. Working from home on an occasional basis offers some flexibility, especially around childcare, other domestic requirements, some relief from commuting or the need to focus on specific tasks.

The working patterns most frequently mentioned as utilised by employers were:



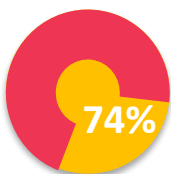
Job share was the least favoured option with less than **8%** of employers choosing this as a valuable option. Our last survey in 2015 registered the same result for a format that, in Ten2Two’s experience can be ideal for an employer who wants to offer flexibility to existing or new employees but for a role that requires full-time hours. However, it is perceived to be harder to set up and manage.



Employees expressed similar preferences to employers. A number commented on the value of occasional working from home: *“Employers continuing to be open and understanding to the fact that there are dedicated, hard working and smart women wanting to return to work without having to hugely compromise family life. Occasional working from home is a good option if possible or looking at the right hours required to “get the job done”* (Employee, Ten2Two Flexible working Survey)

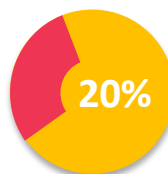
Right to Request Flexible Working

The legal right to request flexible working was introduced in 2009 for carers and extended to all employees in 2014 and we wanted to explore whether this legal obligation and has had an impact on the flexible workplace:



...of 665 ‘formal’ requests for flexible working were accepted by employers

Employees said their flexible working requests – a combination of statutory application processes and formal requests - were increasingly being accepted. With only **26%** of requests being refused in the last couple of years, the level of adoption illustrates the progress that has been made.



...of employees feel the legal right has improved adoption of flexible working

This low score illustrates that although requests are made, the results do not inspire employees: *“Managers are open to it and might agree it (on paper), but are not always great at ensuring it happens in reality without a struggle for the employee.”* (Employee, Ten2Two Flexible working Survey)



week.

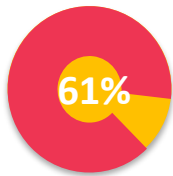
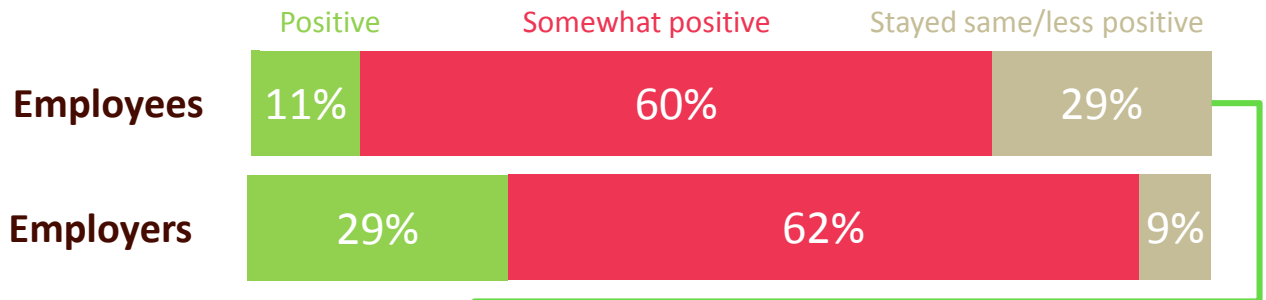
“There is so much potential for it (flexible working) that isn't being embraced yet, especially for organisations and businesses that operate beyond the usual 9-5 hours, five day week.”

“It's the way forward! We employ a man who works flexibly around childcare and I can't understand why this seems such a strange concept. It's win/win”.

Respondents, Ten2Two Flexible Working survey, 2017

Perceptions

As part of our 10 year anniversary survey we asked employers and employees whether they feel attitudes towards flexible working has improved in the last decade. The reaction from employees was lukewarm with only **11%** stating a clear, positive change has occurred with **60%** stating 'somewhat positive'. Employers have a more optimistic view but a similar level (**62%**) only feel change has been 'somewhat positive'.



...of employees feel their current organisation has become more flexible in the last two years

...indicating improvement has accelerated over recent years compared to the poorer attitudes towards positive change in the last 10 years.

Expression

Over 2,500 comments were made by employees and employers during the course of completing the survey. Nearly **80%** were negative or at best ambivalent about the attitudes of employers – organisations and line managers – towards flexible working and the people who want to or are working flexibly. Whilst change is taking place these comments (particularly about larger businesses) show there is still a long journey ahead on the path to a flexible workplace. An illustration of the comments are shown below:

“As a chartered accountant I am earning less now than when I first qualified 10 years ago, just because I can only do part time hours and employers know there are so many people chasing so few part time roles. As such were treated like dirt.”

“I think that my workplace offers flexible working because it legally has to. Given the choice I think that they would have everyone work full time hours.”

“There is such an untapped market of highly professional, highly skilled & experienced individuals (men & women) out there still keen & ambitious! Organisations are still largely blind to this which is a huge shame.”

“I still feel that having children is career suicide for women”

“We have seen three senior women return after maternity leave on a part time basis bringing great value to the business. Without offering this flexibility to them we would have lost a big pool of talent.”

“I think the tide is changing, but massive change is still needed.”

“Managers and business owners realise that as long as the work gets done satisfactorily and on time, with clients being satisfied, staff can operate successfully with flexible hours and part time work.”

Time for Change

We asked 'what would be the one thing that you would do to improve the adoption of and attitudes towards flexible working?' Several interesting themes emerged. Here are just a few:

Improved gender representation:	"Increase in men taking up part-time working. At the moment it's seen as very much a female need and therefore not taken as seriously."
Senior management commitment:	"Senior leaders working flexibly & educating senior management on the quantitative and qualitative benefits of flexible working to businesses."
Legislation/Government:	"Equal pay audits, more women on boards, more representation of women across industries" "Realising the UK will face a labour supply/skills gap in future, requiring multi-generational, flexible work forces to forge ahead."
Performance culture:	"HR performance-based review rather than presenteeism."
Technology:	"Improvements in technology improving ability to collaborate online and remotely."
Working pattern changes:	"Flexi hours in the workplace...allowing me to leave work early to pick up my child...knowing I could make the time up working from home in the evening. "
Changing mindsets:	"So many still have deep ingrained ideas that you have to stick to rigid working hour rules and work unnecessary overtime as some kind of proof they are working hard. Need trust from employers that we can do our jobs more effectively by having flexible arrangements."
Education:	"Workshops to increase understanding of benefits to employees as well as company so that there is less resistance and more acceptance."

"We have several members of staff who probably would either not have joined and/or not still be here if we hadn't been able to offer/agree flexible working patterns."

"I believe that attitudes to flexible working have changed in recent years, however working flexibly tends to mean catching up on work at home in the evenings or weekends, work creeping into family time and home life, and this is an unhealthy trend, which seems hard to avoid."

"We realised that people need that work life balance to exist and if we can be more flexible around their home commitments they are happier in the workplace and less likely to leave which in itself reduces costs."

Conclusion

The research shows there's been visible improvement in the adoption of flexible working amongst UK businesses and a clear majority of respondents feel it benefits their business.

Similarly, our findings indicate a majority of 'white collar' flexible workers are meeting both their personal and work objectives through working flexibly.

Both communities feel attitudes towards flexible working have improved to some degree over the last 10 years although only a small minority feel there has been a clear change for the better.

However, the many expressions of frustration evident in over 2,000 comments from a group of professionals at the peak of their career and salary earning potential shows there's still a long way to go before flexible working can be truly viewed as a widely accepted, valued and embedded working pattern within the UK business communities.

Frustrations were voiced about the discrepancy between the positive corporate policies that should enable flexibility within the workplace and the day to day reluctance by Managers to understand, adopt and manage flexible working.

There were many comments on the struggle to find quality flexible jobs; the struggle to secure some degree of flexibility within their existing jobs and the discrimination that occurs against people working flexibly. There is a common view that once an employee adopts visible flexible or part-time hours, opportunities for progression and development grind to a halt and the research includes many examples of inadequate line management of people and teams.

In an environment where conducting business will become a greater challenge as we prepare to leave the EU and as we broaden our horizons across the global marketplace, the ability to find and retain talented people will increase in importance and become a premium differentiator.

A skilled, stable, diverse and flexible workforce is key to success and we encourage businesses to continue their journey in understanding and embracing flexibility.





10

TEN2TWO 10 YEARS

Contact:

**Andrea Starbuck
Ten2Two Kent & Bromley**

**andrea@ten2two.org
01732 759849**