



## Not enough UK firms are reaping the benefits of flexible working

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*Although nine out of ten staff would welcome the ability to work more flexibly, only 21% are currently doing so, despite the fact that a third have some form of caring responsibility.*

A survey among 20,000 office-based employees from 40 large enterprises in 14 industry sectors undertaken by management consultancy Advanced Workplace Associates, revealed that the vast majority of personnel are in favour of working differently.

But according to Andrew Mawson, the firm's managing director, the government's initial "burst of enthusiasm" a decade ago for pushing flexible working now seems to have "fizzled out", which means that the "potential benefits to the UK are not being reaped".

Such benefits include not only ensuring that personnel have a better work-life balance, but also reducing the amount of expensive office space used by organisations by up to 30%.

"Businesses are running offices with a typical occupancy of only 50%, providing facilities, heating and lighting for unused office capacity. In environmental terms alone, the government should be encouraging the uptake of working practices, which cut this waste," Mawson said.

He added that the government should not only widen its net to enable a larger proportion of the workforce to request flexible working, but should also actively promote the adoption of such practices directly to business.

His views appeared to be backed up by a second study undertaken by the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) among 2,000 staff. The study entitled 'Focus on Caring at Work' found that, while a huge 34% of workers had some form of caring responsibility, a mere 20% were solely looking after children.

Instead 12% of respondents were caring for a relative, 6% for a partner and 2% for a friend, while many were looking after both an adult and children. The study also exploded the myth that women are the main carers, with 36% of women indicating that they had such responsibilities compared with 33% of men.

Ben Wilmott, the CIPD's senior public policy adviser, said that the survey highlighted the challenges that many staff faced in managing what were often a range of caring responsibilities – a situation that was only likely to increase as life expectancy continued to rise and people worked longer to save for retirement.

"This is why the CIPD is calling for the right to request flexible working to be extended to all employees rather than just parents by 2013," he said. "This is not about employers putting the interests of employers before the business. It is just about them seriously considering whether they can accommodate flexible working requests in order to recruit and retain a diverse workforce."