

# Workingmums.co.uk: Recruitment Insights Future of Work Report



Thought leaders in Smart Working share their views on the next 10 years

 **workingmums.co.uk**  
Quality. Diversity. Flexibility

**LinkedIn**  
Join the Smart Working Group

# Contents of the Report

Introduction	Page 1
<i>Gillian Nissim, Founder of Workingmums.co.uk</i>	
Here's to the next 10 years	Page 3
<i>Chris Parke and Jo Lyon, founders of coaching consultancy Talking Talent.</i>	
Making flexible working the norm	Page 5
<i>Professor Clare Kelliher, Cranfield School of Management</i>	
Family support in the next decade	Page 7
<i>Q &amp; A with Jennifer Liston-Smith, Director of Coaching &amp; Consultancy at My Family Care</i>	
Making the case for flexible working in cash constrained times	Page 10
<i>Dave Dunbar, Head of Digital Workplace at Nationwide Building Society</i>	
Supporting sustainable flexible working	Page 12
<i>Gail Kinman, Professor of Occupational Health Psychology and Director of the Research Centre for Applied Psychology at the University of Bedfordshire.</i>	
Towards a smart and flexible future	Page 14
<i>Andy Lake, Editor of Flexibility.co.uk</i>	
The priorities for family support in the next decade	Page 17
<i>Ben Black, Director of My Family Care</i>	
Join the debate	Page 20

*This report is intended as both a celebration of achievements over the last 10 years and a look forward to some of the big issues for the next 10 years.*

## Introduction

When I set up Workingmums.co.uk in 2006 the aim was to link employers able to offer flexible working and women with years of experience who needed that flexibility, whatever form that took. Things have come a long way in the last 10 years and the number of women who are working, many of them full time, after having children has risen by at least a fifth since the 1990s along with statistics for the number of women who are now the main breadwinners in their families [around a third]. That has increased pressure for change.

### A decade ago...

A decade ago it was hard to persuade businesses about the benefits of flexible working and there was little research around. There is a much better understanding of the business benefits of flexible working and diversity now and good examples of best practice, of companies walking the talk. Workingmums.co.uk's Top Employer Awards are a case in point and reveal the continuing innovation in this area across a huge breadth of organisations, both large and small and in a large range of sectors. Linked to diversity is movement towards greater equality at home and in the workplace, latterly with Shared Parental Leave. That is quite a significant step forward from 2006.

We've also seen a rising number of women setting up their own businesses or becoming franchisees after having children, often because they want greater flexibility than their employer can offer. In response Workingmums.co.uk has set up sections giving advice, support and inspiration to those seeking to work for themselves or to become a franchisee. Recently we've also set up sections for returners in response to the growing number of returner initiatives and for dads, given the links between equality at home and at work.

There is still much more work to be done to make flexible working the norm, rather than the exception, and to support women to get as far up the career ladder as they want to go.

### Diversity

The past months have been turbulent ones for business and that turbulence is set to continue for some time, but diversity initiatives are still firmly on the agenda, backed up by the media spotlight on gender pay audits and all aspects of gender pay equality and the continued interest in boardroom gender balance. There is tremendous work being done to help women who have taken a career break to get back to work, with a raft of returner initiatives now on offer.



*Things have come a long way in the last 10 years and the number of women who are working, many of them full time, after having children has risen by at least a fifth since the 1990s along with statistics for the number of women who are now the main breadwinners in their families [around a third].*

Another big barrier to women in work is childcare and government initiatives to address this are welcome, although there are concerns about the implementation of the extended free childcare to three and four year olds and tax credit cuts. New fledgling flexible childcare organisations are springing up to cater to parents' needs, but affordability is still a major issue.

## Flexible working

Meanwhile, the momentum behind flexible working is growing with more and more research coming out backing agile working. Over the summer news on maternity discrimination made the headlines. Having such a spotlight on the issue and the creation of an employer alliance to share best practice can only boost efforts to address it, showing the positive impact of supporting women through pregnancy and maternity leave.

This e-book is intended as both a celebration of achievements over the last 10 years and a look forward to some of the big issues for the next 10. Of course, it is hugely difficult to predict what the future might bring, particularly amid the current uncertainty. Will there be major job losses and if so, how will that impact on women? Will women be among the traditional victims of economic uncertainty? What will be the continued impact of technological developments - will it mean greater flexibility, on the one hand, and new jobs coming online and on the other, more unemployment? How will the rising pension age affect workers, particularly those with caring responsibilities?

Kate Sweetman of global management consulting and training firm SweetmanCragun says that one thing is clear from the existing turbulence the jobs market has faced since the 2008 crash and the fast rise of digital businesses: flexible working and work life balance are a key aspect of companies that will thrive in the age of disruption because they understand the need for mutual respect between employee and employer. "That kind of culture will benefit women," she states. But she warns flexible working cannot be bolted on. She says: "It has to be in the culture; it has to be the new normal."

I hope you enjoy this e-book which covers everything from smart working to family support and talent attraction. I would like to thank all the experts who have contributed to it and trust it provides food for thought on where the next 10 years could lead us.

*Will there be major job losses and if so, how will that impact on women?  
Will women be among the traditional victims of economic uncertainty?  
What will be the continued impact of technological developments - will it mean greater flexibility, on the one hand, and new jobs coming online and on the other, more unemployment?*

# Here's to the next 10 years

**Chris Parke and Jo Lyon, founders of coaching consultancy Talking Talent.**

The corporate working landscape has changed dramatically over the last 10 years, and we are proud of the part we have played in helping women and working parents' achieve their most fulfilling ambitions at work and home.

Of course, there are always opportunities to push the diversity debate further, and here are some of the challenges we think there are for the next 10 years:

We need more male advocates across the gender arena. It is really important to engage and win over men across every layer of the business. Some of these men may need to learn how to be inclusive and create gender-balanced organisations, and so we must give them far more support. They may feel nervous and exposed and without proper guidance. We need to create safe and open spaces for all our leaders and managers, men and women to come together and have open and honest dialogues without fear of reprisal or judgement.

Diversity must become a top business priority. Currently diversity tends to a 'side of the desk issue' that is too often the responsibility of HR or women's networks. We need to see gender balance as a business challenge that requires proper budget and involves every employee from across the business. We need to shift cultures in a faster way and invest in the talent pipeline much earlier in both male and female careers.

## Champion agile working

Ten years ago many of our coachees thought part-time working was an impossibility. Women who asked to work in different ways were radical. Nowadays we don't talk about part-time or flexible working but 'agile working'. Organisations have started saying, 'yes let's try it'. However, there is still more to do – we need to make sure that when people work in an agile way, they are set up for success. Jobs need to be redesigned to fit new work patterns and hours and the infrastructure has to be in place to make sure agile working can work smoothly. We have a way to go on this, especially in senior positions.



*We need to see gender balance as a business challenge that requires proper budget and involves every employee from across the business. We need to shift cultures in a faster way and invest in the talent pipeline much earlier in both male and female careers.*

## Address parental leave challenges

Ten years ago women had just six months maternity leave and little support from their employers whilst they went through this transition. Now there is generally good support, with recognition that people, and their priorities, do change but that they are still incredibly valuable and it is important to make their role work on their return. Organisations recognise the commercial benefit and power of a successful maternity transition – by retaining their women, and maintaining performance and team harmony. With recent changes to shared parental leave laws, we must address new challenges as men take up increased responsibilities at home.

## Longer term career management

The way in which people work is changing every day. We need to get better at really talking to our employees, understanding their unique situations and valuing the long-term relationship, not just the short-term. We need to equip individuals and managers to have quality conversations about careers, not just jobs and we need to make sure that business structures, policies and attitudes enable individuals to have alternative career paths and to progress at different speeds.

*The way in which people work is changing every day. We need to get better at really talking to our employees, understanding their unique situations and valuing the long-term relationship, not just the short-term.*

# Making flexible working the norm

**Professor Clare Kelliher, Cranfield School of Management**

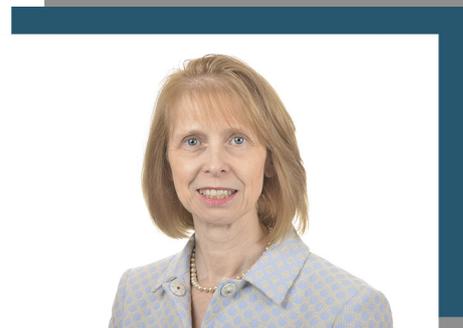
Flexible working in the UK has come a long way in the past 10 years. In 2006, the 'right to request' legislation was relatively new and since then we have seen it extended to cover carers, parents of older children and most recently all employees in 2014. Employers have become increasingly aware of the business benefits from giving employees some choice over their working arrangements, whether it be where they work, when they work, or how much time they spend working. Research we conducted at Cranfield School of Management shows that employees on flexible working arrangements often deliver better performance than those who work in more traditional ways. It also shows that flexibility builds loyalty to the employer and that employees achieve better job and life satisfaction.

However, as with so much of people management 'the devil is in the detail' and some organisations have found that the implementation of flexible working policies presents a number of, sometimes unforeseen, challenges and there can also be unanticipated consequences (good and bad!). Maybe it is not surprisingly that when people change the way in which they work, other things have to change too. Getting it right and maximising the benefits available requires hard work and careful thought.

In spite of access to flexible working becoming more widespread and an accepted way of working in many organisations, many challenges for successful implementation remain. Our work at Cranfield has identified a number of areas which continue to challenge employers.

First, making part-time working work is often more difficult than other form of flexibility, such as remote working and flexitime. Not only does this involve a change to the formal contract of employment, but where an employee moves from full-to-part time there are often practical difficulties establishing an appropriate workload and expectations of availability.

Second, much of the attention to date has been on the implications of flexible working for the individual and their performance. However, many employees work in teams (which may include other flexible workers), where team members need to co-ordinate and rely on one another to complete their tasks. In order to maximise the benefits from flexible working, employers need to pay attention to how different working arrangements actually influence how a team operates.



*Employers have become increasingly aware of the business benefits from giving employees some choice over their working arrangements, whether it be where they work, when they work, or how much time they spend working.*

Where flexible working has become 'business as normal', it is often the case that much of it is arranged on informal basis – it is simply agreed between the employee and their line manager that they will work remotely a day or two a week, or will arrive at work a bit later or earlier to accommodate non-work commitments. Whilst there is much to commend informal arrangements, it can also mean that less attention is given to what else needs to be taken into account to ensure that a person who works in a different way fits with the overall organisation and management of work and the workforce. Too often the 'making it work' falls mainly on the employee. This is unlikely to be the best way to gain most benefit from flexible working and also implies a penalty associated with changing working arrangements.

Finally, as many organisations seek to become more agile in the way in which they run their businesses and at the same time offering employees flexibility, there is a need to be alert to tensions which may arise.

*Too often the 'making it work' falls mainly on the employee. This is unlikely to be the best way to gain most benefit from flexible working and also implies a penalty associated with changing working arrangements.*

# Family support in the next Decade

**Q & A with Jennifer Liston-Smith, Director of Coaching & Consultancy at My Family Care**

**Workingmums.co.uk: Where do you think the main developments will be in terms of family support, including maternity support, in the next few years?**

Jennifer Liston-Smith: Naturally employers are likely to focus more on gender-neutral support for parents at work (given developments such as Shared Parental Leave and overarching social developments towards different styles and blends of families, including increasingly involved fathers in many homes). I also see a growing interest in supporting the ongoing parenting journey: the teenage years, choosing schools and colleges. Employers realise that support across the employee lifestyle will be a differentiator and also will enable people to stay engaged through different life stages.

**WM: Given your long experience in maternity coaching, how do you view the progress made over the last 10 years and what do think are the priorities for the next 10? Our annual survey, for instance, shows many women/employers are still not bringing up flexible working before they go on leave. How can they be encouraged to do so?**

JLS: We've made good progress over this decade so that in some sectors it is almost a hygiene factor to have this kind of service for employees (in the sense that you miss it if it's absent rather than being bowled over by it being there because other firms also have it). The emphasis next needs to be on wider access across new sectors (beyond finance, law, tech, engineering, higher education and other relatively early adopters), but also providing services and support for the whole employee population as well as providing fuller support for those in key roles whose talents and retention are most crucial.

A good conversation has two sides and we have found that equipping managers with a simple checklist of what to cover in a pre-leave meeting goes a long way towards overcoming the natural reticence and reluctance managers feel about opening up a dialogue. There also needs to be support through providing individuals with the tools and knowledge to make a good business case for how they will work: showing how they will deliver in their role while working differently, rather than simply asking for a personal favour. The other cultural help is making sure that flexible working is seen as simply the best way to work in the 21st century and should be reason-neutral (not simply a special arrangement for parents and carers).



*The emphasis next needs to be on wider access across new sectors (beyond finance, law, tech, engineering, higher education and other relatively early adopters), but also providing services and support for the whole employee population as well as providing fuller support for those in key roles whose talents and retention are most crucial.*

**WM: Will we see/are we seeing a change in the work calendar, with more intense working in term time to cope with holiday childcare issues?**

JLS: We are seeing lots of changes in how people work and how organisations are resourced. In the gig economy there are many choices and ways for individuals to sell their services and knowledge into the marketplace and therefore more leverage on how they work: where, when and on what terms, though I would say that term-time working in particular remains somewhat hard to manage in many sectors and in middle management where the pressures are relatively constant.

**WM: Are you optimistic about the take-up of SPL or does the legislation need to be amended?**

JLS: The take-up of SPL is increasing, particularly among those employers who have a) found the budget to enhance the pay, b) provided internal specialists in HR to support it so that questions are answered and it is normalised and c) promoted the option so that people know it really is possible.

There may be some need for a partner-specific use-it-or-lose it component of leave, but that has been present for some time in Japan, for example, as paternity leave and is rarely taken up as it is still seen as counter-culture so we all - employers and parents - will need to be more open to it if it is to increase on a grand scale, including women seeing the benefits of sharing.

**WM: Do you anticipate any further innovation in flexible working or is the challenge now more one of spreading best practice more widely?**

JLS: I see us being more technologically networked as well as spreading capability for managing perceptions and personal brand while working differently.

**WM: Do you think the larger employers will look more at enhancing the leave policies they have, including SPL, paternity leave, etc, if they haven't already? What about parental leave - do you see this as an area where there may be scope for enhancement so that parents who have particular pinch points at times other than the first year after their child is born can afford to take time out?**

JLS: I think parental leave is a great place to look for more flexibility and a very good way to enable parents. However, a fresh approach taken by some employers is to provide sabbaticals or unlimited leave potentially accessible to all on the basis that everyone has a life. Managing parental leave among teams where people have other life issues and interests can cause a level of resentment too.

*I think parental leave is a great place to look for more flexibility and a very good way to enable parents. However, a fresh approach taken by some employers is to provide sabbaticals or unlimited leave potentially accessible to all on the basis that everyone has a life.*

**WM: What do you think the impact of Brexit might be on family support packages? If City firms are hard hit and jobs go, will there be a retreat on diversity issues or could we see a greater battle for talent in some sectors, for instance, meaning employers need to do more to attract and keep the best talent, including doing more for women returners?**

JLS: This is a big question, but, as a very brief response, there will probably be a fiercer battle for talent in some areas and so deeper investment in the top talent, but also a quest for lower budget, high-touch resources and programmes for all employees, probably more based on technology solutions.

**WM: Finally, do you think the majority of employers have given enough thought to the demographic issues that are pushing the need for greater family support and what kind of support do they need to be able to adapt to these?**

JLS: Many employers already sense there is a 'ticking time bomb' around eldercare, with later retirement and longer-lived relatives, and yet do not find the budgets to tackle this issue with the same vigour as the parent transition. Perhaps this is because the need is more diverse, more hidden, and yet it can impact people at crucial moments in their career and when they have a great deal of experience, relationships and knowledge. This is just one area: smart employers who see the choices people have about the way they sell their services to employers could choose to make employment (versus contracting) into a more wraparound type of support and resourcing for life in order to encourage their well-trained talent to be loyal.

*Many employers already sense there is a 'ticking time bomb' around eldercare, with later retirement and longer-lived relatives, and yet do not find the budgets to tackle this issue with the same vigour as the parent transition.*

# Making the case for flexible working in cash constrained times

**Dave Dunbar, Head of Digital Workplace at Nationwide Building Society**

How do we make the case for flexible working overwhelming, even in the most cash constrained of times?

It all hinges on how successfully you quantify the real game-changers. That's because the case for flexible working is often more notable for what is left out than what is built-in. The real case isn't about the property cost savings that inevitably feature. It's bigger than that. It's about your people being able to cope, in the good times where productivity has to meet the challenge of rapid growth, and in the bad times when productivity has to meet the challenge of cost initiatives. Flexible working isn't just a cost-cutting exercise; it's survival of the fittest, commerce red in tooth and claw.

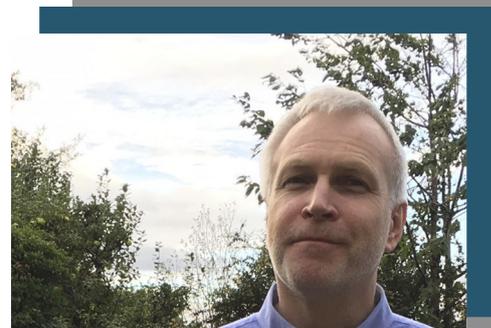
But that's not how business cases are written. So the challenge isn't about identifying what the benefits are, the challenge is to quantify those benefits across all of the components that deliver business gain.

I suggest that involves looking at three broad categories: cost savings, people and blue sky; each of which can be broken down into cashable/non-cashable, quantifiable/un-quantifiable aspects.

## Cost savings

The easiest of these categories to put in a business case is cost savings. This fairly well trodden territory includes savings from property when desk sharing is introduced, in travel costs as people work more remotely and in provision/support savings as tools/IT become shared resources. More spectacularly, but harder to quantify, are efficiency gains, reduction in move churn, reductions in people churn and absenteeism. These are all very quantifiable, but in most cases they depend on agreement on a set of assumptions. Making those assumptions explicit is the key to broadening the benefits case.

Then we have people. What return is there on a more engaged, more empowered, more responsive workforce with a more rounded work/life balance? How do we quantify the benefits of attracting the talent who want to work for an employer who values flexibility, of keeping that talent or of sharing knowledge more quickly and effectively? This component is huge, and I have seen organisations who have absolutely presented this component in both quantifiable and cashable terms.



*The real case isn't about the property cost savings that inevitably feature. It's bigger than that. It's about your people being able to cope, in the good times where productivity has to meet the challenge of rapid growth, and in the bad times when productivity has to meet the challenge of cost initiatives.*

## Blue sky thinking

Lastly, we have the biggest set of benefits of them all. I have labelled them “blue sky” because they are so big that they often never even get a mention. These include baked-in disaster avoidance, cultural change, an objective-based management environment, more collaborative and better decisions more quickly reached, the value of massive conversations and user-generated knowledge bases. Things where a number is too difficult to peg, or so huge that the case is unbalanced by it. So big that, bizarrely, they are often ignored. That’s a shame because the numbers are such that you can make the most conservative assumptions imaginable and still show a good contribution to the overall business case.

So, there is no doubt that the case for flexible working can be made in cash-tight times. The real question becomes how expansive and daring do you want to be in making that case come to life?

# Supporting sustainable flexible working

**Gail Kinman is Professor of Occupational Health Psychology and Director of the Research Centre for Applied Psychology at the University of Bedfordshire.**

Over the last decade, we have come a long way in raising awareness of the need to support working parents. Nonetheless, working conditions have become more challenging for many – we are working at an increasingly relentless pace and it is becoming harder to maintain a healthy work-life balance. There is overwhelming evidence that the long-hours culture is not sustainable and people who put more hours are typically less, rather than more, productive.

While most would agree that being asked to work overtime in a genuine emergency is not unreasonable, people who frequently work long hours are likely to burn out. Organisations must acknowledge the risks of long hours to wellbeing, retention and productivity and encourage employees to prioritise their work-life balance in order to be happy, healthy and productive.

Flexible working is very popular among parents. In theory, flexibility should benefit work-life balance and wellbeing as it offers more control over where and when work is done.

Research findings show, however, that the advantages of flexible working are surprisingly modest – in fact, it is only beneficial if people are given control and choice over their working patterns and if boundaries between work and personal life are respected. It has become increasingly common for organisations to designate individuals as remote workers with little consultation and without providing them with guidance on how to maintain a healthy work-life balance.

## Supporting remote working

Although advances in technology can enable flexibility, it is increasingly recognised that the ability to work anywhere and any time can threaten rather than increase balance. This is a particular risk for workers who are experiencing high demand and who are deeply involved in their work – and reluctant to disengage from it. Long hours and a psychological preoccupation with work limits opportunities for recovery – switching off is essential to restore mental and physical resources and maintain sustaining personal relationships. Guidance is needed to help people switch off effectively, especially in jobs that are emotionally demanding.

Women may see flexible working as a way of juggling the demands of their work and family life more effectively. Nonetheless, flexibility is not a panacea and under some conditions it may intensify work-life conflict rather than reduce it and increase the likelihood of burnout.



*Organisations must acknowledge the risks of long hours to wellbeing, retention and productivity and take to encourage employees to prioritise their work-life balance in order to be happy, healthy and productive.*

People may be tempted to put in extra hours in order to compensate for being “allowed” to work remotely and to try to gain the trust of their manager. There is also evidence that flexible workers are stigmatised by women as well as men and people who request to work flexibly for caring reasons may be seen as less committed and less worthy of promotion. Steps must be taken to reduce this stigma, offer more creative flexible working options and provide employees with guidance on how to work flexibly in a healthy and sustainable way.

*Flexibility is not a panacea and under some conditions it may intensify work-life conflict rather than reduce it and increase the likelihood of burnout.*

# Towards a smart and flexible future

**Andy Lake, Editor of Flexibility.co.uk**

Writing about the future of work naturally prompts reflection on how the world is changing. In many ways it's changing at breakneck speed. Yet in other ways, it's not changing at all, or too slowly to make the most of new possibilities.

We see this very much in the world of work. Flexible working was an oddity 20 or so years ago when I began working in this field. Now it's part of the mainstream, offered by most large organisations and adopted organically by many small businesses. Yet still people need to be persuaded that flexibility should be a 'normal' way of working, rather than something granted as an exception on a case by case basis.

New technologies are making a big difference to the way we work. New communications technologies, new portable devices and moving physical resources to electronic environments enables people to have much more freedom about where they are able to work. New work environments based on 'activity-based working' enable us to move away from the century-old office paradigm of rows of desks + formal meeting rooms + file storage.

Instead we have offices with (much) less focus on the desk and instead a range of spaces for collaboration, quiet high-focus working, project rooms, combined café/work settings, breakout areas, wellbeing facilities and so forth. Add to this the ability to work almost anywhere away from the office, and we have the evolution of flexible working called 'smart' or 'agile' working.

The potential to rethink how we work, where we work, when we work and why we work is immense. Yet most organisations approach smart working with extreme caution. At times it seems that each one wishes to reinvent the wheel. People cling to their desks – both artefact and symbol of their old ways of working – as if it's the only thing that will keep them afloat amidst the tides of change.

## Virtuality as normal

The changes we have seen, though, are just the beginning.

New and much more immersive forms of communication will greatly improve the experience and increase the functionality of working remotely. From intelligent surfaces to whole-wall screens to 3D telepresence to holopresence, we are about to progress from 'flexibility as normal' to 'virtuality as normal'.



*The potential to rethink how we work, where we work, when we work and why we work is immense. Yet most organisations approach smart working with extreme caution. At times it seems that each one wishes to reinvent the wheel.*

The generations going through school and university at the moment are much more accustomed culturally to virtual interactions as normal and they are doing it with pretty basic technology compared to the ones coming over the horizon. Artificial intelligence and robotics are also making a difference to who does what when, where and how. And with whom. Just as robotics has revolutionised manufacturing and distribution, it is making an impact on all aspects of knowledge work. Any work that can be automated, will be. Turning up in the office to push paper around will fade into memory. However, having people who can supervise the automated workflow, help machines to analyse the output and innovate to improve the processes will be in demand. And such people can pretty much work from anywhere. Similarly with much high skilled work such as surgery. With the aid of robotic machines that achieve a precision the human hand cannot achieve, surgeons will increasingly be able to work from anywhere, alongside people who are physically present with the patient. Already there are many people involved in remote diagnostics in various fields who work remotely.

Culturally, though, we are lagging behind the possibilities. If organisations are slow to change, public policy is even slower. For example, I read article after article talking about building more homes, but no one seems to be asking “what kinds of homes” except in terms of tenancy and ownership. What kinds of homes do we need to support economic development locally, given that so many work activities can be carried out remotely? Clearly homes with space to work or run a business for those that want to do so, alongside family life.

Similarly what kind of workplaces do we need? The fastest growing kind of workspace at the moment – though still overall a small segment of the market – is the workhub sector (also called co-working). That’s shared workspace, where people take out membership to touch down to work or rent space on an as-needed basis. Again, this would help local economic and community development and help to counter any risk of isolation amongst remote workers.

## A positive future

And how does public space need to be reconceived if people want to work on the move, or away from both the office and home? There is much scope for innovation here, but planners and developers alike seem to have mindsets rooted in the 20th century.

*The fastest growing kind of workspace at the moment – though still overall a small segment of the market – is the workhub sector (also called co-working). That’s shared workspace, where people take out membership to touch down to work or rent space on an as-needed basis.*

There are other issues we need to address too. Like the amount of time that is considered the default working week. The Swedish six-hour day has attracted attention. And the New Economics Foundation's proposals for a standard '21 hours' or three-day working week is something we're sure to be discussing as robotics and AI impact on the labour market and the demands for skills change rapidly over the next 10 years.

So – we need to be both flexible and smart if we are to adapt to and make the most of these changes. Approached positively, the changing nature of work over the next decade can support a way of life that integrates work and the rest of life in a way that enhances personal aspirations, equality of opportunity, family life and reinvigorated instead of dormitory communities.

*We need to be both flexible  
and smart if we are to  
adapt to and make  
the most of these changes.*

# The priorities for family support in the next decade

**Ben Black, Director of My Family Care**

Ben Black is Director of My Family Care ([www.myfamilycare.co.uk](http://www.myfamilycare.co.uk)). Workingmums.co.uk asked him for his views on the main priorities for employers looking to provide family support for their staff.

**Workingmums.co.uk: Where do you think the main developments will be in terms of family support in the next few years, for instance, do you see employers looking to innovate more in terms of the childcare support they offer as vouchers come to an end [for new employees] or are things like elder care more of a priority?**

Ben Black: The end of vouchers will do loads to clarify the working parent and carer debate. Once vouchers have been phased out employers will need to be very clear about what they do and why they do it. And clearly the employer offering needs to be better than anything parents can go off and find on their own as consumers. The push will be all about supporting the twin needs of more flexible working and gender diverse leadership. Yes, there will be plenty of innovation and the support will get broader and broader to include anyone with any kind of family commitment - baby, teenager, elderly parent or even a badly behaved Labrador.

**WM: Do you anticipate a greater demand for emergency childcare?**

BB: Yes. Massively so. Emergency childcare is a “rare breed” as an employee benefit: the ROI is incredibly easy to see and measure; and it's not generally available to parents in the same seamless way unless they work for an employer that offers it. Not only will more employers take it up, but the price will come down as technology takes over. When we started offering it 93% of bookings involved at least one phone call. In two years' time less than 40% of bookings will require a call as bookings will go straight from parent booking app to the nanny's smart phone.

**WM: What about those employers who can't afford emergency childcare? Do you expect to see them looking at different ways to innovate or for employees/parents to find new ways to link up, particularly with regard to flexible childcare?**



*I think we will get to is a place where all employers can offer some sort of childcare support. Remember childcare remains one of the lowest paid professions so in theory it should pay nearly every employer to provide some childcare help.*

BB: I think we will get to is a place where all employers can offer some sort of childcare support. Remember childcare remains one of the lowest paid professions so in theory it should pay nearly every employer to provide some childcare help. It's the level of subsidy - and hence the employer cost - that will be completely flexible. For example, it is easy to justify the top talent at Google getting 10 free days a year. Why shouldn't we see every shop worker getting a bit of help to find and book a brilliant local affordable childminder?

**WM: What are the main challenges with flexible childcare in your opinion and can these be overcome, given falling numbers of childminders, considered by many the most affordable flexible childcare option?**

BB: The industry is so incredibly fragmented and conservative that change doesn't happen quickly. And Government initiatives don't help - 30 free hours for three and four year olds is a crackpot scheme that does nothing to help parents go back to work. But that doesn't mean childcare isn't getting more flexible. Ten years ago you booked your child into nursery full time or not at all. These days you can pick and choose the days you want. Nannies used to be too expensive. Prices have now dropped by 20% and hundreds of parents use sites like [www.nannyshare.co.uk](http://www.nannyshare.co.uk). So the industry will change and become more flexible and at some point childminders might even find some bold and commercial people to represent them. I live in hope!

**WM: With regard to elder care, will we see more companies developing carer policies as the workforce ages? How important is it to have thought these issues through and to have a strategy in place?**

BB: The workforce is getting older. More and more of us will be carers at some point. If you thought managing a career and childcare was complicated - it's not a scratch on the challenges you face when one of your parents becomes a dependent. The strategy isn't that complicated: identify who your carers are; provide some empathy and flexibility; and make sure there is some practical support in place when it's needed. The real challenge is budget. Eldercare is new. Benefits budgets aren't increasing. So putting in place a comprehensive eldercare package may well involve turning off something else. That is the sensible approach, but it is still full of challenges for hard-pressed benefits teams in any case.

*The workforce is getting older. More and more of us will be carers at some point. If you thought managing a career and childcare was complicated - it's not a scratch on the challenges you face when one of your parents becomes a dependent.*

**WM: Finally, do you think the majority of employers have given enough thought to the demographic issues that are pushing the need for greater family support and what kind of support do they need to be able to adapt to these?**

BB: It's the usual mix. Some have and are pushing the agenda forward - think the likes of Google, PwC and SKY. Some will just follow the lead. And some (perhaps most still) haven't really started the journey yet.



Join the debate



The Smart Working Group

Join the Smart Working Group on LinkedIn and tell us what you think about the Future of Work. Share what you are doing around flexible working, diversity and how you are progressing women in the workplace. Listen to what other companies are doing and what they have planned for the next 10 years.

Connect with like-minded people

[JOIN HERE](#)



**workingmums.co.uk**

Quality. Diversity. Flexibility