

Directorate of Human Resources and the Business School

Centre for Diversity Policy Research

Work-Life Balance

An audit of staff experience at Oxford Brookes University

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Work-Life Balance: An audit of staff experience at Oxford Brookes University

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Executive Summary.

1.1 This report presents the findings of a university-wide audit that was carried out to gain information on staff experience of work-life balance policies and practices at Brookes. The audit was conducted through a staff survey and a series of focus groups. The report also outlines the meaning of work-life balance in the context of employment relations and the importance of work-life balance for employers.

1.2 The concept of work-life balance is based on the notion that paid work and personal life should be seen less as competing priorities than as complementary elements of a full life. It is important for employers to support work-life balance to comply with legal requirements that afford working parents the right to request to work flexibly, to promote equality of opportunities by ensuring that staff with caring responsibilities are not disadvantaged in the workplace, and to widen access to paid work and career opportunities.

1.3 There is also a strong business case in support of work-life balance. Evidence from independent research as well as from employers' own assessments of flexible working practices shows that helping staff to strike a balance between paid work and personal life can lead to improved recruitment and retention, reduction of absenteeism, and an improved staff commitment and productivity.

1.4 A self-completion questionnaire focusing on issues surrounding work-life balance was distributed to all university staff. The questionnaire was designed to:

- Elicit information on staff views of work-life balance and the attitudes of line managers and colleagues towards flexible working.
- Investigate the current use and implementation of university policies and practices that support work-life balance at Brookes
- Assess potential demand for flexible working
- Examine the experience of staff who have used the university childcare facilities.
- Obtain staff views on what more the university could do to help them to strike a balance between the demands of paid work and those arising from their personal life.

1.5 In total 492 questionnaires were completed, representing around 23% of total staff numbers. The sample is broadly representative of Oxford Brookes University's staff population in terms of age, gender and employees with childcare responsibilities.

1.6 Results indicate that over 90% of respondents believe that it is important to achieve a balance between paid work and personal life and that this

enables them to work better. Most respondents also agree that doing so is a joint responsibility of employers and employees.

1.7 The majority of staff feel that their line managers style supports the notion of work-life balance at least some of the time (89.5%) and that they can discuss work-life balance related issues with them, again at least some of the time (83.4%). Academic staff are the group least happy with their line managers attitudes towards work-life balance.

1.8 There are marked variations in current levels of flexibility for staff on different contracts. Manual staff are the most likely to work part-time (42.9%) APT&C the most likely to have flexitime (42.8%) and academics and senior managers the most likely to work from home occasionally (62% and 68.4% respectively).

1.9 Over half of respondents (55.2%) would like to work more flexibly. The working arrangements most often cited as being of interest to those who would like more flexibility were flexitime (48.2%), working from home occasionally (40.4%) and compressed working hours (39.3%). The most common reasons given for wanting more flexible working were: 'To suit overall needs' (29.9%), 'To reduce the amount of travelling' (24.2%), 'To pursue a course of study or training' (18.5%), 'Childcare responsibilities' (17.5%) and 'To pursue a major interest outside work' (14.2%).

1.10 With regard to special leave arrangements results indicate that so far only maternity leave and compassionate leave have been taken by more than 10% of staff. Figures however, are much higher when looking at the type of special leave that staff might take in the future. 25% say that they are likely to take compassionate leave, 14.4% that they might take a career break, 11.6% that they might take maternity leave, 11.4% that they may take additional leave.

1.11 The numbers of respondents who had taken or are still taking advantage of the childcare facilities provided by Oxford Brookes were low. The main reasons given for not using the nursery were the limited number of spaces available, the opening hours and, for staff based at Harcourt Hill and Wheatley, its location. Reasons for unsuitability of the play scheme focused in the main on the number of weeks it is available throughout the year (e.g. only 3 weeks in the summer holidays) and its appropriateness for children over the age of 12.

1.12 60 employees volunteered to take part in the focus groups and represented a good cross section of university staff. The results supported most of the findings of the survey and provided more in depth information concerning staff awareness of current work-life balance policies offered by the university, their experience of work-life balance at Brookes and the perceived advantages and disadvantages of introducing more flexible working practices.

1.13 Some members of staff who participated in the focus groups were satisfied with the current level of flexibility in their work and it appears that there are examples of good practice that can be extended. The opportunity of working flexibly was regarded, particularly by staff with childcare responsibilities, as a decisive factor for continuing to work at Brookes.

1.14 One of the main issues raised by the great majority of focus group participants was their lack of knowledge of all the current university policies and practices that support work-life balance. Furthermore staff experience of using current policies indicated that there is some inconsistency in the way they are interpreted and implemented.

1.15 Academic staff appeared to be the least satisfied with their present work-life balance due to what was perceived as substantial work intensification, which makes it difficult for them to achieve a satisfactory work-life balance. This group also expressed concern about the increasing demand for evening and weekend teaching as it was felt that it could prove difficult to reconcile these requirements with family life.

1.16 Non academic staff were more positive and acknowledged that Brookes was overall a good employer to work for. Some however often feel that they have to justify why they want flexible working arrangements rather than it being viewed as a legitimate request. Many expressed the view that progress will come from a change of attitude as much as from new policies.

1.17 Overall all the groups were positive about the idea of work-life balance and they were pleased to see that senior management were seriously considering the issue. Key words that emerged from the focus groups were knowledge, clarity and fairness. Non academic staff in particular mentioned the need for more autonomy and trust.

1.18 Based on the findings of this audit a number of recommendations have been formulated that include the need to:

- Clearly communicate the university commitment to work-life balance, to raise awareness and to improve knowledge and understanding of university policies and practices that support work-life balance.
- Undertake a review of existing policies and improve current practices on flexible working arrangements.
- Ensure fairness and consistency in the way university policies that support work-life balance are implemented.
- Promote a work-life balance culture and encourage innovative approaches to flexible working through staff development.
- Share and extend existing good practice.
- Consider the implications for work-life balance in relation to workloads and work outside conventional hours.
- Consider potential demand for further flexibility.
- Assess the possibility of extending the availability of childcare provisions in terms of both hours and location.

1 Introduction

1.1 Purpose of the report

The main purpose of this report is to present the findings of a university-wide audit that was carried out to gain information on staff experience of work-life balance policies and practices at Brookes. The audit was conducted through a staff survey and a series of focus groups. In addition the report discusses the following:

- ❖ The meaning of work-life balance in the context of employment relations.
- ❖ The importance of work-life balance for employers.
- ❖ The significance of work-balance policies and practices for the university.
- ❖ The main findings of the staff audit, leading to a number of policy recommendations.

1.2 What Is Work-Life Balance?

Work-life balance has been widely discussed since the launch of a major government campaign in 2000 (Changing Patterns in a Changing World, DfEE, 2000). This initiative was aimed at encouraging employers to adopt flexible working arrangements such as job sharing, flexi-time, compressed hours and others, to help their employees to achieve a better balance between the demands of paid employment and those arising from their private life.

The concept of work-life balance is based on the notion that paid work and personal life should be seen less as competing priorities than as complementary elements of a full life. The way to achieve this is to adopt an approach that is “conceptualised as a two way process involving a consideration of the needs of employees as well as those of employers” (Lewis, 2000: p.105). In order to engage employers in this process it is

important to demonstrate the benefits that can be derived from employment policies and practices that support work-life balance, and the scope that exists for mitigating their negative effects on the management of the business.

1.3 **Why does work life balance matter to employers?**

The government's promotion of the work-life balance campaign is based on the evidence that there is a strong "business case" for adopting flexible working arrangements through their contribution to improved recruitment and retention of staff, employee satisfaction and work productivity.

1.3.1 ***Where is the evidence?***

A major study funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and carried out on a nation-wide level by researchers at the university of Cambridge (Dex and Smith, 2002), concluded that:

- There are positive effects on employee commitment from having family-friendly policies.
- Approximately nine out of every ten establishments with some experience of these policies found them cost effective.
- Increase in performance was associated with having one or other family-friendly policy in the case of five out of six performance indicators.

(Ibid: p.42)

In addition there is a significant body of evidence provided by major UK and world-wide employers such as IBM, GlaxoSmithKline, BT, Lloyds TSB and others, which shows that work life balance policies and practices can bring clear benefits to their business (see The Business Case, DTI, 2001 and A Good Practice Guide, DFEE, 2000). There is a wealth of information that outlines the advantages of offering flexible and special leave arrangements to employees in terms of improving staff recruitment, reducing turn-over, absenteeism and the costs associated with all this as well as increasing employee satisfaction and productivity:

"There's a very clear business imperative for us, as what distinguishes us from our competitors is the quality of our people. Since we introduced

Work Options, morale has improved among individuals working flexibly, leading to better productivity” (Fiona Cannon, Head of Equal Opportunities, Lloyds TSB, cited in The Business Case, DTI, 2001: p.32).

“The more flexible you can be in your working hours, the better you can tackle absenteeism, which tends to happen because people need to be somewhere else” (Linzi Payne, Director of Personnel at Huber + Suher, cited in A Good Practice Guide for Employers, DfEE, 2000: p.10).

Work-life balance policies and practices are becoming increasingly important also to Higher Education employers. An audit was carried out last year, by HEFCE, to look at flexible employment practices in HE and identify examples of good practice (Scott, 2002). The HE Employers Association (UCEA) has produced a set of guidelines to assist institutions to develop policies in support of flexible working arrangements. This guide will also provide a number of examples of good practice from universities that have already identified the benefits of adopting a work-life balance approach.

Furthermore the adoption of work-life balance policies and practices can improve an organisation’s ability to respond to customers’ demands for increased access to services and deal with changes in a way that can be satisfactory to both employers and employees. This was the experience of Bristol City Council that was able to meet its customers’ demands and extend the opening hours of public libraries to Sundays. As Kamaljit Poonia, Equality Team Leader for the Council, explained:

“We have been able to meet the two fundamental principles which underpin the project: to maintain and improve service delivery to the public, whilst meeting staff aspirations for a better work-life balance” (cited in A Good Practice Guide for Employers, DfEE, 2000: p.16).

There is also evidence which suggests that employers who support a work-life balance ethos and offer flexible working arrangements are likely to have a competitive advantage in the labour market; in particular in relation to the new generation of employees. A survey carried out among 6,000 students in 44 universities shows that ‘achieving a healthy work-life balance is the most important consideration for graduates when it comes to choosing an

employer' (Personnel Today, 2002). This is an important factor when taken in the context of the estimate by the Employers' Forum on Age that by 2020, 50% of the workforce will be over 50 years old and that the competition for younger talent is expected to become increasingly fierce. This reinforces the conclusion from the other data that work-life balance policies and practices are an important, and perhaps essential, recruitment tool.

1.3.2 *Demographic and Social Trends*

Another powerful argument in support of work-life balance policies that cannot be ignored by employers is represented by current demographic and social trends. As seen above an aging population will be a feature of all European countries in the next 20-30 years, as a result of a decline in fertility rates and as an increase in life expectancy (The Social Situation in The European Union, 2001). Employers can expect to have not only an older workforce profile, but also more employees with eldercare responsibilities. Parental responsibilities are also set to last longer as more individuals are encouraged to progress into higher education. Furthermore the number of dual earning families and lone parent families is increasing (Brannen, 2000). Thus both men's and women's caring responsibilities are likely to last longer and are becoming increasingly more visible and more complex to accommodate.

1.3.3 *Economic Goals.*

Work-life balance policies and practices are also instrumental to ensure that some important economic goals are achieved particularly with regard to women's employment and earnings. The European Union has set a goal of increasing the number of women in work to more than 60% by 2010 (The Social Situation in The European Union, 2001). Although the domestic figures show that the UK is well ahead of this target, as overall 67% of women and 79% of men aged between 16-64 are in employment, there is still a significant gap between the percentage of men and women with dependent children who are in employment, 89% and 65% respectively. The gap widens considerably when one looks at the percentage of women in employment whose youngest child is aged 5 or under, in this instance only 53% work, and many of those do so on a part-time basis (Equal Opportunity Commission, 2003). Women's interrupted and patchy employment history has a detrimental effect on pension entitlements and leads to a high level of female poverty in old age. Therefore there is a compelling case for helping women to remain in

employment throughout the years of child rearing by offering working patterns that are compatible with their childcare responsibilities.

1.4 **Why Is Work Life Balance Important to Oxford Brookes University?**

1.4.1 ***The Business case***

Oxford Brookes University operates in a very tight labour market where the combination of low levels of unemployment and high costs of living can make it difficult to recruit the best people. In this context work-life balance policies and practices can be an effective recruitment tool as well as a necessary one to be able to compete with other local employers. Two studies carried out by Brookes researchers show that major local employers, both in the public and in the private sector, like the NHS Trust, Local Authorities, Oxford University, major Publishers, Rover and others have developed a wide range of work-life balance practices. Some of them also offer enhanced maternity and paternity leave and childcare services (Doherty et.al, 2000; Manfredi, 2001).

The Oxford Brookes University Human Resource Strategy notes that although the institution has a 'relatively stable workforce' there are some areas of concern across all categories of staff with regard to recruitment and retention. It further highlights the fact that it is not easy to attract 'experienced and well-qualified academic staff in fields where commercial employers are able to offer substantially higher salaries'. The turnover of administrative and support staff is around 17% and although this is not particularly high, if compared with other public sector employers, it still represents a substantial cost to the university. Turn over among manual staff is rather high.

The findings presented in this report identify clear evidence that flexible working arrangements and the provision of services to help employees to balance their work and life are an effective recruitment and retention tool. A number of members of staff stated that flexible working arrangements, childcare facilities and general support for a work-life balance approach were one of the main reasons for either joining or not leaving the university:

"I am trying to plan long term to balance my career, family and interests and although this is not easy, I have found Brookes to be a supportive employer, on the whole. This is one of the biggest reasons why I stay at

Brookes rather than seeking higher paid employment elsewhere". (Female support staff)

"I am happy with my work life balance. In fact, it is the contract I'm on and the flexibility it gives me that stops me looking for jobs outside the university". (Female support staff)

"The opportunity to try a condensed week enabled me to stay in post when my partner was relocated". (Female support staff)

With regard to staff perceptions of work-life balance, 78.3% of those who took part in the survey indicated that they strongly agree and 19.3% that they agree with the statement that it is important to them to achieve a balance between paid work and personal life. 59.3% indicated that they strongly agree and 33.3% that they agree with the statement that work-life balance enables people to work better. This demonstrates how important to staff work-life balance is and how it can help them to work more efficiently.

The overall profile of Oxford Brookes staff shows that a high percentage of employees are women (58.5% in total) and that 30.6% of the total number of staff are over the age of 50. As stated by the paper on Improving Equality of Opportunities and Diversity at Oxford Brookes University 2003-2006 "the university should seek to ensure that its practices support the work-life balance of an ageing workforce as well as the work-life balance issues of people with young families" (p.4).

1.4.2 The Legal case

Under the present government, legislation in support of working parents has been considerably strengthened by the enhancement of maternity rights, the introduction of parental leave, right to time off to care for dependants, paternity leave, right to request a change in working hours and the rights of part-timers. This legislation not only has to be complied with but it also has implications for working patterns. In particular it can be expected that as a result of the right afforded to working parents to request a reduction in their working hours more departments throughout the university will have to accommodate more flexible working.

1.4.3 *The Equal opportunity case.*

There is no doubt that 'dual role' of women as workers and carers can affect their participation in the labour market. Thus maternity rights, flexible working arrangements and childcare facilities are of fundamental importance to women in combining paid employment with family commitments (McRae, 1991). As has already been indicated, women represent more than half of the total university workforce (58.5%) and although not all of them have childcare responsibilities, many do and many others are likely to acquire such responsibilities in the future. It is therefore important that the university provides support to enable women to balance their paid work with family commitments.

Evidence also indicates that work-life balance policies and practices can make a difference to women's career progression. A study undertaken on the experience of women in senior management positions at Oxford Brookes University clearly shows that the younger generation of senior women, who had access to improved maternity rights and family-friendly working arrangements, were able to progress along a more linear career path and more quickly, compared to the senior women belonging to the older generation (Ledwith and Manfredi, 2000). Women in senior posts are still under-represented at Brookes, particularly among senior managers and professors (see *Improving Equality of Opportunities and Diversity at Oxford Brookes University 2003-2006*). The University Human Resources Strategy has set a target 'to increase the number of women in senior management by 5% per annum over the period of 2002 to 2004' (p.17). In order to achieve this it is essential to tackle all possible barriers that can hinder career progression and prevent the university from making a full use of talented staff.

Work-life balance is not primarily a "women's issue" as the principles apply with equal force to men. Men also have family responsibilities and there is clear evidence that they are playing increasingly important roles in childcare and eldercare, and support for men who wish to make their caring responsibilities more visible in the workplace is important. To use the words of one member of staff who participated in the survey:

"More encouragement should be given by employers to fathers so that they can take an equal role in parenting." (Male academic)

1.4.4 *The Ethical case.*

Work-life balance is about improving people's quality of life and widening access to paid employment and career opportunities. It is also linked to the university commitment to Continuing Education by enabling staff to combine paid work with gaining further qualifications or training.

A work-life balance ethos supports staff who wish to have a greater involvement in public life and in the community. It sends a positive message to students with caring responsibilities and promotes positive values to the rest of the students.

Working more flexibly can contribute to reducing traffic and pollution thus reinforcing the commitment of the university to the local environment.

It can be concluded that supporting and further developing work-life balance policies and practices is important to the university as it presents a series of benefits both for the institution and its employees. For this reason the Directorate of Human Resources has carried out a university-wide staff audit to gain information in order to ensure that work-life balance policies and practices are consistently implemented, match the needs of staff and are compatible with the operational requirements of the university. The following section of this report explains how the audit was carried out and provides an in-depth analyses of its main findings.

2 **Section two**

2.1 **The audit**

A university-wide audit was carried out by asking staff to volunteer to fill an on-line questionnaire. Staff who do not have regular access to a computer were provided with a paper version. Staff were also asked to volunteer to participate to a number of focus/discussion groups. The broad aim of the audit was to gain information on the following:

- Current use and implementation of university policies and practices that support-work life balance at Brookes.
- Staff views on work-life balance and attitudes of line managers and colleagues towards flexible working.
- Potential demand for flexible work
- Experience of staff who have used the university nursery or the holiday play-scheme.
- Staff views on what more the university could do to offer further support to employees with caring responsibilities or to simply help them to balance paid work and personal life.

The on-line questionnaire was piloted on a small sample of staff in term one 2002 in order to check clarity and any possible technical problem. It was then sent to all staff at the beginning of term two 2003. The results were analysed by using an SPSS package.

In total 492 questionnaires were completed, representing around 16% of total staff numbers¹. Looking only at core staff² this equates to a response rate of 23%. Section three gives details of how the sample of staff who responded breaks down. The sample is broadly representative of Oxford Brookes' staff

¹ As at February 2003

population in terms of age, gender and whether or not respondents had children. The main differences are that a higher proportion of respondents were APT&C as compared to the university in total (56.5% versus 32.3%) and a lower percentage were Academic staff (27.8% versus 45.1%³)

The focus groups took place in March 2003. An invitation was sent to all staff via e-mail and through OnStream (the university internal newsletter), asking them to volunteer to take part in the discussion groups. Eight focus groups were organised to discuss staff experience of Work Life Balance. The number of members of staff who volunteered to take part in each group ranged from 4 to 12 and, overall, 60 people participated.

Participants were self-selected as staff took part in the focus groups on voluntary basis. Overall the groups represented a good cross section of university staff from different age groups, with different jobs, length of service, degree of seniority and different personal backgrounds and needs. From a gender point of view, women's participation (43) was higher than men's (17).

It should not be assumed, however, that the groups were overwhelmingly attended by staff with childcare responsibilities, on the contrary, a significant number of staff that participated had no children at all or grown up children who were no longer dependants. In some groups staff with childcare responsibilities were in the minority.

The groups involved academic, administrative and technical staff from a number of different Schools and Directorates (Appendix 1). Each meeting lasted for just over an hour and comprised of lively discussion focused on key issues to do with work life balance at Brookes. The discussions revealed many shared views and concerns as well as a variety of perspectives around these issues.

An in-depth analysis of the audit is provided in the following parts of this section, looking both at the quantitative data collected through the questionnaires and the qualitative data obtained through the focus groups.

² Excluding casual staff & hourly paid academics

³ Academic staff only account for 35.9% of staff excluding casual staff & hourly paid academics

2.2 **Results of the Work-life balance questionnaire**

2.2.1 ***Introduction***

This part of the report provides an in-depth analysis of the questionnaire results, which is split down into seven sections:

- Introduction
- Summary of results
- Respondent profile
- General views on work-life balance
- Flexible working arrangements
- Special leave arrangements
- Employee support

Any significant differences identified in the results by job category, age, gender or parental status are included in the main body of the analyses.

2.2.2 ***Summary of Results***

A wide variety of staff from across the university responded to the survey of which just under 42% have children. The most commonly cited interests outside of work are sport (21.3%) and undertaking a course of study or training (20.7%).

The vast majority (97.6%) of respondents believe that it's important to achieve a balance between work and personal life and most (84.2%) agree that doing so is a joint responsibility of employer and employee.

Certain categories of staff (single, no children, manual staff and senior management) are more likely than average to believe that policies to promote work-life balance can be unfair to them.

The majority of staff feel that their line managers style supports work-life balance at least some of the time (89.5%) and that they can discuss issues with them, again at least some of the time (83.4%).

Academic staff are the group least happy with their line managers attitudes towards work-life balance. They are also the group most likely to feel that their

colleagues needs to balance work and personal life impacted on them in a negative way.

Marked variations exist in current levels of flexibility for staff on different contracts. Manual staff are the most likely to work part-time (42.9%), APT&C the most likely to have flexitime (42.8%) and academics and senior managers the most likely to work from home occasionally (62% and 68.4% respectively).

Flexible working is certainly not just something for parents as 'To suit overall needs' (32.7%) was the most common reason given for flexible working followed by 'To reduce the amount of travelling' (22.4%). 'Childcare responsibilities' (19.9%) was the third most important reason.

The reasons for wanting flexible working change depending on the age of the respondents. In all age groups apart from those aged 21 to 25 'to suit overall needs' was the most common reason given. For 21 to 25 year olds 'to pursue a course of study or training' was the reason cited most often (28.6%). Childcare responsibilities take on their greatest significance in the 26 to 35 and 36 to 45 age groups.

Over half of respondents (55.2%) would like to work more flexibly. The majority who don't want to say it's because they were happy with their current situation.

The working arrangements most often cited as being of interest to those who would like more flexibility are flexitime (48.2%), working from home occasionally (40.4%) and compressed working hours (39.3%).

The most common reasons given for wanting more flexible working are: 'To suit overall needs' (29.9%), 'To reduce the amount of travel' (24.2%), 'To pursue a course of study or training' (18.5%), 'Childcare responsibilities' (17.5%) and 'To pursue major interest outside work' (14.2%).

In terms of special leave only maternity leave (10%) and compassionate leave (11.8%) have been taken by more than 10% of respondents. However figures are much higher in other areas when looking at leave staff think they might take in the future. 25% say they are likely to take compassionate leave, 14.4%

that they may take a career break, 11.6% that they may take maternity leave and 11.4% that they may take additional leave.

Results suggest there is a need to make details of the policies and practices relating to special leave (including who staff should talk to about obtaining it) much clearer. Depending on the type of leave taken there were wide variations in from where staff received their information and in the quality of information they obtained. Staff taking compassionate leave were most likely to feel the quality of information they received was poor (23.5%) and staff taking maternity leave the least (12.2%).

Few staff had taken advantage of the employee support available to them with the occupational health service being used by the greatest number of respondents (13.4%)

2.2.3 Profile of respondents (Q1 – 14)

Just over two thirds of respondents are female. Almost 75% are married or living with a partner and 40% have dependent children. The majority of respondents fall in the 26 to 55 age groups and over 50% are APT&C (table one). It is not possible to tell from these results whether the relatively high response rate from APT&C (almost 28% of APT&C staff responded as compared to the overall university figure of around 15%) is due to increased interest on their part to the issues surrounding Work-life balance.

Table one – respondent profile			
Percentage of total respondents		Percentage of total respondents	
	%		%
Male	31.1	16-20	0.4
Female	68.5	21-25	7.1
Dependant children	40.9	26-35	21.7
No dependant children	58.1	36-45	25.2
Full time	74.6	46-55	32.7
Part time	24.4	56-60	9.1
Permanent	70.7	60+	3.3
Fixed term	15	Married	58.1
APT&C	56.5	Living with partner	15.4
Manual	4.3	Separated	2.4
Academic	27.8	Divorced	6.5
Senior Management	3.9	Widow/er	0.6
Term time only	5.5	Single	16.7
All year	75.8		

Slightly more male respondents than female have dependent children (41.8% versus 40.7%). Just 28.6% of manual staff and 32.4% of APT&C respondents have dependent children as compared to over 50% of academic staff and 42.1% of senior managers.

Although 40% of respondents have dependent children only 24% stated they have primary childcare responsibilities with female respondents more likely to do so than males (28.5% versus 15%).

Just under 20% of those with primary care responsibilities have sole responsibility for their child with the remainder sharing caring with a partner (table two).

Table two – sharing of childcare responsibilities			
Figures expressed as a % of those with primary childcare responsibilities			
	Total	Male	Female
	%	%	%
I have sole responsibility	19.6	12	22
I take most responsibility	40.8	16.7	48.9
I share equally	30.2	52.4	23.7
Most of the care is done by the other partner	8.9	19	6

Other than childcare the most common forms of caring responsibility are eldercare and caring for a disabled adult (table three).

Table three – primary carer responsibilities	
Figures expressed as a percentage of total respondents	
	%
Childcare	24.2
Eldercare	5.1
Caring for sick child	2.4
Caring for disabled adult	2.2
Caring for sick adult	1.2
Caring for disabled child	0.4

The most common interest outside of work was sport, closely followed by study or training (table four). Training and sport were particularly important to the 16 to 25 age group, with over 50% of respondents in this group taking a course of study or training and over a third (35.1%) getting involved in sport.

Table four – major interests							
Total respondents		Age of respondents					
		16 -25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-60	60+
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Sport activities	21.3	35.1	29.0	16.9	18.6	15.6	12.5
Taking course of study or training	20.7	54.1	19.6	20.2	19.9	4.4	12.5
Voluntary work	10.2	5.4	9.3	6.5	14.3	8.9	18.8
Involvement with local organisations	8.5	5.4	5.6	8.1	10.6	6.7	25.0
Involvement with church or faith groups	8.1	2.7	11.2	6.5	8.7	8.9	6.3
Involvement with local schools	6.3	2.7	3.7	10.5	8.1	0.0	0.0
Political activism	2.6	5.4	1.9	3.2	2.5	0.0	6.3
Trade union activism	1.8	0.0	0.9	1.6	1.9	6.7	0.0
Art activities	0.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	6.3
Other	9.1	8.1	11.2	9.7	9.3	2.2	12.5

There was a wide variety in the hours staff work, with the majority (54.9%) falling into the 31 to 38 hours a week category.

2.2.4 General views on work-life balance

Q15 -Statements on work-life balance

Staff were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a variety of statements on work-life balance (table five)

Table five – how strongly do you agree with the following statements?						
	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
	%	%	%	%	%	%
It's important to achieve a balance between work & personal life	78.3	19.3	1.4	0.4	0.2	99.6
People have different needs at different stages of their life	61.6	34.8	2.6	0.2	0.2	99.3
WLB enables people to work better	59.3	33.3	5.9	0.4	0.4	99.4
WLB is entirely an individual responsibility	2.8	13.0	14.8	54.1	12.6	97.4
WLB is partly employer partly individual responsibility	29.3	54.9	9.6	3.3	1.2	98.2
WLB is entirely an employer responsibility	1.2	1.6	11.2	52.6	30.1	96.7
University policies that help WLB are important	42.3	42.3	12.8	1.0	0.4	98.8
University policies that promote WLB can be unfair to people like me	2.2	10.0	31.5	35.2	18.7	97.6

Over 90% of respondents strongly agreed or agreed that it was important to achieve a balance between work and personal life and that work-life balance enables people to work better. Over 80% agree or strongly agree that university policies that help work-life balance are important, but very few (2.8%) believe that it is entirely an employers' responsibility.

The majority (84.2%) agrees or strongly agrees that it is a shared responsibility for employers and employees, with just under 16% believing that it is entirely an individual responsibility. A small percentage (12.2%) feel that policies that promote work-life balance can be unfair to them.

Over 80% of all respondent groups apart from senior management (63.2%) agreed that university policies that support work-life balance are important to them. The groups of respondents most likely to agree that policies can be

unfair are single respondents, manual staff, those without children and senior management (table six).

Table six – views on WLB			
	University policies are important	University policies can be unfair to people like me	WLB is entirely an individual responsibility
	Total agree %	Total agree %	Total agree %
Male	81.5	10.6	17.1
Female	87.3	13.4	15.6
Children Yes	90.3	6.1	14.3
Children No	82.5	16.8	17.5
Married	85.2	11.1	14.7
Living with partner	83	9.5	13.1
Separated	91.7	0	0
Divorced	93.8	16.1	12.5
Widow/er	100	0	0
Single	84.1	21.8	23.2
APT&C	86.2	14.6	17.1
Manual staff	90	20	35.3
Academic staff	86.3	8.3	10.5
Senior management	63.2	16.7	16.8

There are a variety of reasons why this could be the case. It may be that because work-life balance has traditionally been seen as something for parents and especially working mothers that other groups feel disenfranchised or disadvantaged by the process and see little relevance in it for them. It could also be that they feel that the type of job they do does not lend itself to flexible working.

The groups of respondents who were most likely to agree that policies were unfair to them were also in general most likely to agree that work-life balance is entirely an individual responsibility. It is possible that some groups (for instance manual workers) have been offered little in the past in the way of employer support for work-life balance and so see it as an individual responsibility due to personal experience

In order to gain support from these groups for work-life balance it is important that whatever policies the university adopts are seen (wherever possible) to be available to, and relevant to all staff.

Questions 16 to 20

Respondents were asked to indicate whether they felt that their line managers and colleagues supported work-life balance and whether their colleagues needs to balance paid work and personal life impacted on them in a negative way at all.

The majority felt that their line managers style supported work life balance at least part of the time, and that they could discuss matters of work-life balance with their manager (table 7). From individual comments it appeared that staff felt managers were at their most sympathetic if the issues were related to work or children, e.g. *'I can discuss childcare but not the wish to take time out for voluntary activities'*

Table seven – line managers attitudes towards WLB		
	My line managers style supports WLB	I can openly discuss issues relating to WLB with my manager
	%	%
Yes all the time/anytime I need to	40.9	47.2
Yes sometimes	48.6	36.2
Depends on the matter	N/A	7.5
Not at all	7.9	7.1
No response	2.6	2.0

The group most likely to feel that their line managers style didn't support work-life balance were academics. Almost 14% of them responded to the question with 'not at all', as compared to 6.6% of APT&C, 5.3% of senior management and 0% of manual staff. Academics were also the group most likely to feel that they couldn't discuss matters relating to WLB with their line manager (12.3%).

The majority of respondents felt that their colleagues had a sympathetic attitude towards flexible working arrangements, almost 90% said ‘yes’ or ‘yes sometimes’. There was though to some extent a feeling that colleagues were more understanding on certain areas than they were on others, as one respondent commented *‘yes if for further study, not necessarily for fun activities such as sport’*

A significant percentage (19.7%) felt that their colleagues’ needs to balance paid work and personal life affected them in a negative way. A variety of reasons were given as to why it had a negative impact. These related in the main to staff finding they had to take on additional work, the difficulty of working around part time staff in terms of arranging meetings, meeting deadlines etc. and the obligation single staff feel to fit in around parents schedules. As one female respondent commented *‘As a single women without dependants there seems to be an expectation that it is all right for me to work over the odds whilst others with families and children will not be expected to do so’*

Academic staff were the group who most felt the negative impact of their colleagues needs (table eight).

Table eight – have your colleagues’ needs to balance paid work and personal life affected you in a negative way?		
	Yes	No
	%	%
Academic staff	25.2	74.8
Senior management	21.1	78.9
APT&C	17.5	82.5
Manual staff	9.5	90.5

2.2.5 Flexible working arrangements

Current working arrangements

Currently just under a third of respondents (30.7%) were using flexitime and a similar percentage (32.9%) were able to work from home occasionally. A further 10% worked from home regularly. These overall figures however hide marked differences between staff on different contracts (table nine).

Table nine – flexible working arrangements

	Flexible working arrangements							
	Part-time	Job share	Term time only	Shift work	Flexi-time	Working from home occasionally	Working from home regularly	Compressed working hours
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
APT&C	23.0	1.4	5.0	4.7	42.8	18.7	2.2	0.7
Manual	42.9			9.5	9.5			
Academic staff	20.4	0.7	4.4	2.2	17.5	62.0	29.9	
Senior management					10.5	68.4	5.3	

Manual staff were the group most likely to work part-time and shift work and the least likely to work flexitime. Given the nature of their work it is not surprising that none were able to work from home. This is in distinct contrast to academic staff and senior management where over 60% of both groups were able to work from home occasionally, and 30% and 5% respectively were able to work from home regularly. Senior managers and academic staff were also the groups most likely to have the autonomy to work flexibly.

Reasons for flexible working were varied, with the most common being 'childcare responsibilities' (19.9%), 'to reduce the amount of travelling' (22.4%) and 'suits overall needs' (32.7%). A very common reason cited for working from home in the 'other' category was the ability to concentrate and focus without distractions, either from other staff, (e.g. *'to be able to concentrate as I work in an open plan office'*) or students, (e.g. *'Because it is the only way I can avoid almost constant interruption by students demands'*).

Different age groups gave different reasons for needing flexible working (table 10). For all groups apart from the 21 to 25 age group the most common reason was 'Suits overall needs'. 'Childcare responsibilities' came second for the 26 to 35 and 36 to 45 groups whereas 'To reduce the amount of travelling', was second for the 46 to 55 and 55 to 60 age groups. For the 21 to 25 age group 'To pursue a course of study or training' was the most frequently cited reason.

	21-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	56-60	60+
	%	%	%	%	%	%
Childcare responsibilities		24.3	33.1	14.3	13.3	12.5
Caring for a sick child		3.7	9.7	3.1	2.2	
Eldercare responsibilities		0.9	4.0	8.7	4.4	6.3
Caring for a sick adult		1.9	0.8	1.2	2.2	
Caring for a disabled adult				1.9		6.3
Other caring responsibilities		0.9	0.8	0.6		
Health problems		1.9	0.8	1.9	6.7	
To reduce amount of travel	14.3	20.6	20.2	27.3	20.0	31.3
To pursue a course of study or training	28.6	10.3	4.0	8.1	2.2	6.3
To pursue major interest outside work		5.6	4.0	5.0	4.4	
Suits overall needs	22.9	31.8	33.9	35.4	28.9	43.8
Approaching retirement					2.2	12.5
Required by the job	14.3	15.0	9.7	13.0	15.6	6.3
Other	8.6	15.9	14.5	21.7	17.8	6.3

Demand for flexible working

When asked if they would like to work more flexibly over 50% of respondents said yes. APT&C staff were the most likely to say they would like more flexibility (table 11). The majority of respondents who didn't want more flexibility stated that their present working patterns suited them.

	APT&C	Manual staff	Academic staff	Senior management
	%	%	%	%
Percentage who would like to work more flexibly	65.9	50	42.5	44.4
Reasons for <u>not</u> wanting more flexible working (% of those not wanting flexible working)				
Present working patterns suit me	74.2	88.9	74	80
Can't afford to reduce working hours	23.7	22.2	15.6	
Can't work more flexibly because of job	30.1	22.2	24.7	30
Line manager would not agree	3.2		1.3	
Negative effect on colleagues workload	9.7	11.1	3.9	

The most popular working arrangements for those who would like more flexibility were flexitime, working from home occasionally and compressed working hours (table 12).

	Percent of those wanting flexible working
	%
Part-time	10.7
Job share	3.3
Term time only	5.9
Flexitime	48.2
Working from home occasionally	40.4
Working from home regularly	26.1
Compressed working hours	39.3
Shift work	2.2
Other	8.1

Almost half of all APT&C staff who were interested in more flexible working stated they would be interested in working from home occasionally and compressed working hours, and over half expressed an interest in flexitime. Academic staff were also interested in all three but the most popular arrangement for them (perhaps because over 60% of them already work from home occasionally) was working from home on a regular basis (table 13)⁴.

	Part-time	Job share	Term time only	Shift work	Flexi-time	Working from home occasionally	Working from home regularly	Compressed working hours
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
APT&C	7.2	2.2	3.3	1.1	55.6	47.2	19.4	43.9
Academic staff	12.3	5.3	14	1.8	24.6	29.8	50.9	33.3

The reasons given for wanting flexible working mirror to an extent the pattern seen for the reasons staff have flexible working. 'To reduce the amount of

⁴ Numbers of manual and senior staff who responded to this question are too low to allow for any meaningful analysis of the data.

travel' and 'To suit overall needs', remain the two most important reasons. In addition 'To pursue a course of study or training' becomes more significant (table 14).

Table fourteen – reasons for wanting more flexible working arrangements	
Percentage of those wanting more flexible arrangements	
	%
To suit overall needs	29.9
To reduce amount of travel	24.2
To pursue a course of study or training	18.5
Childcare responsibilities	17.5
To pursue major interest outside work	14.2
Eldercare responsibilities	6.7
Caring for a sick child	4.1
Health problems	2.6
To reduce workload as approaching retirement	2.4
Caring for a sick adult	2.0
Caring for a disabled adult	1.6
Other caring responsibilities	0.4
Caring for a disabled child	0.2
Other	4.7

2.2.6 *Special leave arrangements*

Staff were asked whether to indicate whether they had used any special leave arrangements and whether they were likely to use any in the future (table 15). The only ones which had been used by more than 2% of respondents were compassionate leave for caring reasons, maternity leave, paternity leave and additional leave for duties or commitments. In terms of potential future requirements some percentages increase significantly. Compassionate leave remains the most likely to be used but a career break becomes substantially more important, as do additional leave and statutory unpaid parental leave.

	Special leave taken	Special leave likely to be used in the future
	%	%
Compassionate leave	11.8	25.4
Maternity Leave	10.0	11.6
Paternity leave	4.5	4.3
Additional leave for duties/commitments	4.1	11.4
Career break	1.2	14.4
Statutory unpaid parental leave	0.2	7.7
Adoption leave	0.2	0.8

Comparison of leave arrangements.

Staff were asked if they had taken leave who had provided the information, how good the quality of the information was and whether they had had any difficulty in arranging leave. Comparisons across the different types of leave highlight variations in where information was obtained (respondents could cite more than one source) and in its quality (tables 16 and 17).

	Maternity leave	Paternity leave	Additional leave	Compassionate leave
	%	%	%	%
Line manager	14.3	45.5	34.5	66.2
Personnel/HR	85.7	40.9	34.5	14.7
TU rep	2.0		3.4	1.5
Colleagues	6.1	18.2	6.9	5.9
Other	4.1	22.7	24.1	20.6

⁵ Numbers taking unpaid parental leave, career break and adoption leave are too low to allow for the data to be analysed any further.

	Maternity leave	Paternity leave	Additional leave	Compassionate leave
	%	%	%	%
Good/very good	59.2	51.9	44.8	47.1
Satisfactory	20.4	22.2	24.1	14.7
Poor/very poor	12.2	18.5	20.7	23.5
No comment	8.2	7.4	10.3	14.7

The vast majority (85.7%) of those taking maternity leave obtained information from personnel. This is in marked contrast to compassionate leave where just under 15% used them. This may be due to the fact that the major reasons cited for taking compassionate leave were bereavement and illness, both unlikely to be able to be planned for, hence leaving respondents with less time to research what is available. Alternatively it could be because staff are unaware there are currently policies and practices in place with regard to compassionate leave and therefore assume that it will be at the discretion of their line manager.

Whatever the reasons for using different sources it appears that the quality of information being received is not always good, especially where the information is non-standard. There is no guarantee that using personnel will guarantee that staff are happy with the quality of the information they receive (table eighteen) but it does appear that, in the case of compassionate leave at least, other sources of information are more likely to be unreliable.

Percentage rating quality of information from each source as poor or very poor					
	Line manager	Personnel/HR	TU rep	Colleagues	Other
	%	%	%	%	%
Maternity leave		14.3			
Compassionate leave	20.4	10		25	35.7
Paternity leave	10	11.1			60
Additional leave	11.1	20			28.6

Although the information they received was not necessarily of a standard that they felt satisfactory those arranging compassionate leave had the least

difficulty in doing so (table 19). Just over 13% of respondents experienced problems compared to over 20% in all other instances. What problems they did encounter tended to relate to consistency of information, as one male respondent commented, *'No difficulties from my line manager in taking it but personnel said I should take it as sick leave (taken for death of father with associate care of disabled mother)'*

	Maternity	Paternity	Additional leave	Compassionate leave
	%	%	%	%
Yes	20.4	22.2	28.0	13.2
No	77.6	74.1	72.0	86.8

Maternity and paternity leave – returning to work

In the cases of maternity and paternity leave respondents were also asked to indicate whether they had asked to return part time and if so had their request been granted.

Very few staff who had been working full-time requested return on a part-time basis (just 19% of those taking maternity leave and 1 person taking paternity leave) and in all cases their requests were granted. Of those taking maternity leave who requested to return part-time half were intending to stay part-time and half to return full-time at some point in the future.

Respondents taking maternity leave were additionally asked how much time off they had taken. There were wide variations in this with the majority (55%) taking between 4 and 6 months (table 20).

Percent of those taking maternity leave	
	%
Under 2 months	8.2
2 to 3 months	8.2
4 to 6 months	55.1
7 months to a year	14.3
Over a year	4.1

A few staff taking both maternity and paternity leave commented on feeling pressured to return to work, as one female respondent commented, *'My maternity leave was perceived almost as an inconvenience. Pressure was put upon me before I even started my maternity leave to indicate a date when I would return to work in spite of the fact that Brookes maternity policy clearly states that people should not be put under pressure'*

2.2.7 Employee support

Numbers who had taken advantage of employee support services were low (table 21) and the ability of those services to suit the needs of those who did use them varied considerably.

Table twenty one – employee support services		
	Have you used any of the following services?	If yes did the service suit your needs?
	% of total	% of those using service who said yes
Occupational Health Service	13.4	90.1
The Holiday Play Scheme	10.4	68.9
The Nursery	5.7	47.1
The childminder network	1	46.7

There are likely to be a variety of reasons why numbers using these services are low. In the case of doctors and dentists many staff will be registered where they live, and the nursery and holiday play scheme have limited spaces available so may not be able to accommodate all those who wish to use them. It is worth noting however that the greater the percentage of users who say a service does not suit their needs, the smaller the percentage of total staff who have actually used it. It may be that in some instances usage is not higher because the service does not reflect the needs of staff.

The main reasons given for the nursery not suiting staff needs were the number of spaces available, the hours it is open and (for Harcourt Hill and Wheatley staff) its location. Reasons for the unsuitability of the play scheme focused in the main on the number of weeks it is available throughout the year

(e.g. only 3 weeks in the summer holidays) and its appropriateness for older children (12 and over)

2.3 **Results of the Work Life Balance Focus Groups**

2.3.1 ***Introduction***

The authors of this report facilitated the focus groups. The facilitators used a set of prepared questions to help structure the meetings and to ensure comparability of results. These aimed to elicit discussion about awareness of current work-life balance (WLB) policies offered by Oxford Brookes, staff experience of WLB at Brookes, potential barriers (if any) to the introduction of additional WLB policies and finally, perceived advantages and disadvantages to introducing more flexible working practices at the university. Different groups focused more on some aspects of these questions than others. However, all groups were anxious to communicate their thoughts.

Further qualitative data was also obtained through informal discussions with individual members of staff who were unable to participate in the focus groups, but were nevertheless keen to convey their ideas and experience on WLB. This data has also been included in this part of the report.

Current Awareness of work life policies at Oxford Brookes

In advance of the discussions all participants were provided with a list of policies and practices that support work-life balance currently in force in the university (Appendix 2). These policies and practices were also displayed on an overhead during each discussion. Comments made in all eight groups about the policies fell into a number of categories:

2.3.2 ***Lack of awareness of practices and policies***

Staff were generally unaware that a number of the policies and practices mentioned existed. Some came as a real surprise and this included career breaks, job-sharing, flexible working hours, study leave, unpaid leave, time off

to attend interviews, time off for blood donation and time off while under notice of redundancy.

Very few members of the groups knew where to find the information and there was a consensus that if policies are available staff should be made aware of them and should not have to hunt them out. It was suggested that the information should be provided when staff joined the university and should also be clearly signposted on the Intranet and presented in a user-friendly way.

It was felt that lack of knowledge could stop staff requesting leave they are entitled to, or could lead to a manager refusing leave that staff were entitled to because they didn't know details of all the policies. When looking at the list of policies provided, some members of staff realised that they had missed out on some of their entitlements, as they had no previous knowledge of them. Others noted that what they had thought were informal flexible arrangements practised at the discretion of their School or Directorate, were in fact based on formal university policies.

2.3.3 *Clarity of information*

Legal v non-legal requirements

A number of staff commented on the fact that some of the policies were legal requirements whereas others were at the discretion of the university. It was felt that the distinction between the two should be made clear. Equally where the university was offering additional benefits over and above a legal minimum this should also be highlighted.

Paid v unpaid leave

A few staff wanted to know whether all the policies would enjoy paid leave or whether they were unpaid. It was suggested that this should be made clear.

Application of policies to part-time staff

Some staff indicated that it should be made clear to what extent existing policies apply to part-time staff. For example the question was raised by more than one member of staff in different groups as to whether part-time staff would be entitled to time off for medical appointments or would be expected to

arrange them outside working hours. Another question raised was whether part-time staff would be entitled to study leave.

Exact meaning open to interpretation

In a number of cases staff suggested that the exact meaning of the wording was open to interpretation. For example some staff wondered what 'time off for public duties' would include. Similarly people were uncertain about what type of situations 'time off for *domestic* matters' would cover. It was felt that some of the wording was too vague and could therefore lead to different managers interpreting policies very differently. Whilst it was acknowledged that managers should have some flexibility and that staff didn't want, for example, to go as far as the civil service where they have a list of exactly which family members' funerals you are allowed time off to attend, there was a general view that more guidance as to what was acceptable would be beneficial.

Clarification of resources available from the University to replace people on leave.

It was seen as important, particularly from the point of view of line managers and staff responsible for workload planning, that it should be made clear what resources would be made available by the university to replace staff on leave. It was also suggested that availability of additional resources should be considered in the case of sick leave. It was pointed out by some members of academic staff that under current university regulations additional resources to replace staff on sick leave are made available only after a period of four weeks absence. This can cause difficulties when having to plan teaching replacements.

2.3.4 *Fairness of policy application throughout the university*

Policies open to the interpretation of managers

Lack of knowledge of what policies are available and lack of clarity as to what they exactly mean can lead to different managers offering their staff very different levels of flexibility even within the same School or Directorate. An example of this is bereavement leave, the length of which seems to have been interpreted differently, depending on the sensitivity of line managers. This can lead to feelings of resentment.

It was also felt that in some cases the extent to which university policy provisions are made available to staff, might depend on the relationship that individuals have with their line managers. It was therefore suggested that managers need not only to be better informed as to what policies are available but also need training to ensure they can administer the policies fairly.

Differing contracts of academic v non-academic staff

There was a clear difference expressed between the groups as to how useful the current policies are given the very different nature of academic versus non-academic contracts. For example policies such as flexi-time have little relevance to academic staff whose contracts do not specify any working hours.

In addition academic staff were keen to express the view that although they are on what appear to be very flexible contracts this does not necessarily translate into flexible working practices. The nature of the job with reference to requirements such as teaching, marking and exam boards means that a great deal of work has to be done at fixed points each term.

Equity of availability of policies between Schools and Directorates.

It became clear during the discussions that there was variation in the extent to which different Directorates and Schools had adopted the policies highlighted on the list. The most obvious difference was in the availability of flexi-time.

It was accepted that certain jobs are more open to flexible working than others however the view was expressed that there was no reason why similar jobs within different directorates should not be offered the same level of flexibility. One group suggested that the current role analysis programme offered a good opportunity to look at similar job descriptions between different Schools and Directorates to ensure they offered the same levels of flexibility.

Transparency in the application of policies.

The application of policies should be transparent in order to avoid misunderstandings or give the impression that some staff may be favoured or disadvantaged.

Equity of application of policies between sites

The example was given that staff at Harcourt Hill got a full days holiday on Christmas Eve whereas staff at other sites only received half a day. The group who mentioned this point felt that staff on all sites should be seen to be treated equally.

Availability of, and equity of access to, facilities provided to help WLB

The point was made that currently some of the facilities the university provide to help staff balance WLB (e.g. the nursery) are not equally available to staff at all sites. The opening hours of the nursery (8.30 till 5.25) mean that is much harder for staff based at Wheatley Campus to use the facility and work a full week than it is for staff at Gipsy Lane Campus due to the fact the nursery is located at Gipsy Lane. Staff located at Harcourt Hill Campus made the same comment. However, staff based at Gipsy Lane too found the current opening hours of the nursery unhelpful.

It was also noted that the use of flexi-time in practice could be made very difficult by pressure on car parking spaces at the Wheatley Campus after about 8.45 in the morning; *'if I'm not in by 8.45 it's almost impossible to find anywhere to park'*

2.3.5 Staff experiences of using existing policies that support work life balance

Overall staff that used Brookes policies reported having had a positive experience. Staff who had taken maternity leave were happy with the arrangements provided by Brookes.

One member of staff indicated that she would have found it helpful to be kept in touch with the university while on maternity leave. For example she would have appreciated receiving a copy of OnStream to keep up with university news and major developments. The only contacts that she had during that period were with the trade unions.

Those who intended to work part-time on their return from maternity were able to do so. One member of staff on her return from maternity leave was able to

use her annual leave to arrange her work temporarily on part-time basis without loss of full-time salary.

Returning to work after maternity leave was not seen as being problematic as staff were able to choose either to return to their full time job or change it to part time according to their needs. What concerned mothers with very young children was being allowed some flexibility in their working patterns to cope with the time when their children start school. This time can prove rather problematic particularly at the beginning as early year units usually operate a shorter day than a normal school day.

Another concern expressed by mothers was what they perceived as a change in some of their colleagues' attitude towards them when they returned from maternity leave. They felt that they were being viewed, particularly by their male colleagues, as no longer fully committed to their work and that consequently they were not being considered for new work developments and opportunities. This was perceived as a very subtle form of discrimination that is difficult to tackle.

A couple of members of staff from the same school had taken a career break. One person decided to make use of this policy for childcare reasons while the other simply wanted to have some time off work. Although they are both based in the same school their experience of negotiating their break was rather different. For one person to arrange a career break of 18 months was unproblematic, while for the person who needed it for childcare reasons, it took almost a year of negotiation coupled with support from the Human Resources Department before her request was finally agreed.

A few staff had made use of compassionate leave either to care for a sick child or to care for elderly parents. They found these policies very helpful and overall arranging time off was unproblematic. Only in a few cases did staff report problems in arranging leave due to unsympathetic attitudes and lack of understanding of staff entitlements by line managers. Some staff made use of bereavement leave. As mentioned earlier the number of days off that staff may be allowed seems to vary significantly with some Schools and Directorates appearing to be more generous than others.

Procedures to apply for these entitlements also seem to vary, ranging from having to apply formally in writing, to filling in forms, to a simple verbal request to the line manager.

2.3.6 *Other policies and working practices of interest*

Staff were shown a list of other WLB policies and working practices available in other institutions. The two that sparked most interest within the groups were working from home and compressed working hours. It was acknowledged though that not all staff would be able to take advantage of them. Staff were also asked to express their views on flexible working practices of particular interest to them.

Working from home

All academic staff that took part in the focus groups reported doing some work from home. The main reason given for this practice was that it enabled them to work more productively. Furthermore, staff that have shared offices, consider doing some work from home as a necessity in order to carry out quality work that requires a high degree of concentration such as research. Reducing travelling time was also mentioned as a major benefit of working from home. This group of staff felt that the university could better support this type of work by providing some technical assistance, some financial help with the purchase of home computers and free access to the Internet for a fixed period of time each day.

A number of non-academic staff also felt that doing some work from home would increase their productivity, but for them the issue was being allowed to do so. One member of staff reported that in a Brookes' department where she had worked previously, working from home was not allowed as apparently some staff had abused the practice in the past. Although it was accepted that not all administrative jobs lend themselves to home working there was general consensus that more administrative staff could do some work from home. It was felt that it is easier for academics to work from home, as they have more autonomy in the way they organise their work, than for administrative staff who are expected to be seen at their desk in their offices.

Compressed hours

There was a great deal of interest in compressed hours among administrative staff. Some staff are currently working compressed hours by informal arrangement (see existing good practice).

More benefits for staff

Staff who had worked for the private sector noticed the lack of benefits made available to university employees compared to some private companies such as leasing schemes and reduced childcare costs. It was also felt particularly by staff based at Harcourt Hill that car park fees were unfair as some of them, due to childcare responsibilities or limited availability of public transport in their area, had to use their car to come to work.

To make working life more sustainable.

It was suggested that the university should consider offering more flexibility to staff with a number of years of service and staff approaching retirement age, such as, for example, the possibility to go part-time for a year or so, or to use unpaid leave to have breaks.

To make flexi-time more widely available.

It was felt that everybody copes well with flexi-time and it should be made more widely available. It was also noted that the rigidity of working times currently affecting some administrative jobs across the university could cause difficulties for staff with young children.

Functional flexibility

It was suggested that in order to allow more people to make use of flexi-time and compressed hours the university could develop teams of staff with core competencies that could be deployed in different Directorates and Schools to help covering some core tasks whenever needed.

Time off in lieu

It was pointed out that there are occasions when both academic and non academic staff have to work unsocial hours over and above their normal working hours or work at week ends in order to attend special events, conferences or travel outside Oxford to visit students. On these occasions it

would be appreciated if time off in lieu could be taken in order to compensate for the over time.

2.3.7 *What would help staff make better use of the policies available?*

The answer to this question is covered to some extent by the answers to question 1. Factors mentioned as important were:

Knowledge of what's available to help staff to develop a "sense of entitlement" to use policies that support WLB: *"you feel uncomfortable about asking because you are unsure about what you are entitled to"*.

Clarity as to how the policies are applied.

Training for managers as to what's available and how flexible working is of benefit. It was suggested that examples of good practice from within the university could be posted on the Intranet to offer encouragement to staff and managers to look at the issue positively.

A positive attitude and a more imaginative approach about what can be delivered from management, both line managers and senior managers. Managers should also recognise that there is a positive link between enabling people to find a balance between their paid work and personal life and staff motivation.

A change to the '*long hours*' culture (i.e. visibility & working long hours are perceived as important to being seen to be doing a good job).

An understanding that WLB is not just for staff with families and an appreciation of the different needs of staff at different stages in their life (e.g. single, married, young children, elderly parents).

An opportunity for staff to reflect on WLB in personal development plans (e.g. use of leave entitlements, changes to working patterns, including reduction in working hours etc.) It was suggested that staff appraisal, if carried out on regular basis, might be a suitable tool to do this.

To review the existing policy on annual leave. At present staff are allowed to carry forward into the next year only 5 days of unspent annual leave. It was reported, particularly among academic staff, that sometimes due to work pressure there is no time to use up the whole annual leave entitlement. It would be helpful if staff were allowed to carry forward more unspent annual leave into the next academic year.

A change in attitude in those schools where there seems to be an unspoken assumption that academic staff should use their annual leave to carry out their research work.

Replacing academic staff on leave can be problematic due to the difficulty of finding subject specialists. It was suggested that in order to ease this problem, rules preventing the re-employment of staff that have taken early retirement or redundancy, should be relaxed.

Enough staff to make flexible working possible. Staff in areas with ongoing vacancies (e.g. cleaning staff & staff within halls) commented that there were simply not enough staff for them to work flexibly, even if their working pattern allowed it. The problems of filling vacant posts means that staff have to cover the work that the staff in those jobs would be doing as well as their own.

2.3.8 *Good practice*

A number of members of staff are satisfied with the current level of flexibility in their work, which has been arranged either by informal agreement with their line manager or by mutual agreement with colleagues who are prepared to accommodate one another's needs.

Some members of staff work compressed hours by informal agreement and they seem to be very satisfied with this arrangement. One of its main advantages is considered to be the possibility of reducing travelling time. Reducing childcare costs was also mentioned as a benefit.

The opportunity of working flexibly was regarded, particularly by staff with childcare responsibilities, as a decisive factor when considering applying for

jobs elsewhere. Some of them admitted that having been offered jobs elsewhere in Oxford they preferred to remain at Brookes because other institutions were not prepared to offer them the same or similar flexible working arrangements that they had at Brookes.

2.3.9 *What problems can you see in the introduction of new ways of working?*

Problems fell into two main categories – practical and attitudinal.

Problems identified included:

The requirements of the job – not all posts are going to be able to embrace flexible working because of the practicalities of the job.

Financial implications – e.g. if staff are offered flexi-time they are more likely to claim the extra hours they work rather than as now (as was suggested) just working them for 'free'.

Work intensification due to a substantial increase in the number of students.

Lack of a university wide common workload planning for academic staff (see summary). Linked to this is the lack of guidance particularly for new members of staff on workload management.

The attitude of some line managers who are concerned about possible increases in the number of part-time jobs as they fear that this could lead to recruitment problems and add pressure on accommodation.

Increased work pressure being put on staff who are not working flexibly.

Extra workload for managers ensuring new policies don't impact on the effective working of their department.

The resources the university is prepared to put forward to support the scheme(s)

Staff taking advantage of any new working arrangements. Some non-academic groups mentioned the potential problem of staff abusing the

system. They also noted however that this was likely to be a small minority and that they shouldn't be allowed to 'spoil it' for the rest of the staff.

The lack of commitment to the ideas at a senior management level

The long hours culture (see above)

Staff resentment – unless the policy is seen to be fair then it could lead to resentment from staff that are not able to benefit.

2.3.10 *What benefits do you see in the introduction of new ways of working?*

Benefits identified were:

- Staff working more productively
- Staff recruitment
- Staff retention
- Staff motivation
- Staff commitment
- Polices show Brookes in a good light

One group commented that although these polices could help in these areas they should not be seen as being able to solve problems on their own. The issue of staff pay (especially for some of the manual jobs) is also very important if Brookes want to recruit and retain good staff.

2.3.11 *Summary of sessions and points raised*

Of the 8 groups conducted, 4 were with academic staff and 4 with administrative and technical staff. Arranging the focus groups in this way enabled the facilitators to gain a better understanding of different issues relating to different groups of staff.

The academic groups appeared to be the least satisfied with life at Brookes due to what was perceived as substantial work intensification, which makes it difficult for them to achieve a satisfactory WLB.

One of the main issues that was raised by most academics who took part in the focus groups was the need to establish a university-wide common framework to harmonise workload planning. Many members of academic staff felt quite strongly about this as they think that at the moment there are considerable differences across the university, and sometimes across departments within the same school, in the way workloads are organised. Some were not even sure about the criteria on the basis of which academic staff workloads were arranged.

In some schools discussion on workload planning was encouraged in order to ensure fairness, while it was reported that in other schools staff do not talk about it. It was also felt that the lack of a clear workload planning framework can lead some employees, particularly new members of staff with no or little prior experience of working in HE, to take on too much work and subsequently to find it difficult to manage their work.

Another issue that was raised related to teaching in the evening and at weekends. It was recognised that it can prove difficult to reconcile the increasing requirements for teaching outside conventional working hours and week with staff needs. However, it was suggested that it might be helpful if the University were to provide some guidance to staff involved in the planning of timetables on how to deal with requests from staff with caring responsibilities.

It was acknowledged that academics have a certain degree of autonomy in the way they organised they work, although they are also constrained by the demands of teaching, exams and the administration associated with it. One academic commented that:

“Flexibility in a healthy academic environment can be empowering but if resources are strapped it can lead to exploitation”.

Non-academic groups were more positive and acknowledged that Brookes was overall a good employer and that staff work hard. They noted that some flexible arrangements do exist already though they are often unofficial and arranged on an ad hoc basis. There was a view that progress will come from a change of attitude as much as from new policies. Currently staff often feel

that they have to justify why they want flexible working arrangements rather than it being viewed as a legitimate request.

Overall, all the groups were positive about the idea of WLB, were pleased to see that senior management was seriously considering the issue, and were keen to know *'what happens next'*.

Key words that came out of the focus groups were *knowledge, clarity, and fairness*. Administrative staff in particular mentioned the need for *more autonomy and trust*.

3 Section three

3.1 Conclusions

A number of common themes have consistently emerged from all the data collected for this audit. It can therefore be assumed that even if a larger sample of staff had taken part in this audit it is likely that the final results would have not been very dissimilar to those currently available. From the information gathered the following broad conclusions can be drawn:

3.1.1 *General staff views on work-life balance*

There is a strong perception among the respondents that it is important to achieve a balance between paid employment and personal life ((97.6%), that this enables people to work better (92.6%) and that work-life balance is a joint responsibility of both employers and employees (84.2%). These views were further reinforced by comments made in the open questions, included in the questionnaire, and during the focus groups discussion. As one respondent suggested:

"Recognise the importance of a work-life balance life as opposed to the 'workaholics life' ". (Female academic)

There is an expectation among staff that an employer should be sympathetic towards employees' needs by providing work-life balance policies and flexible

working arrangements. It can be inferred that this is likely to influence employees' choices in terms of employment.

From an employer point of view it makes good business sense to support work-life balance not just to recruit and retain staff but also because people feel that work-life balance enables them to work better. However, it should not be ignored that there are some employees particularly among manual staff, senior management, singles and staff with no children, who believe that university policies on work-life balance can be unfair to them and that the latter is entirely an individual responsibility. It is therefore important, as stressed by staff who attended the focus groups, that the university should promote a culture of work-life balance for all and this should be communicated effectively to staff.

3.1.2 *Line managers' attitudes to work-life balance*

The qualitative data collected both through the open questions included in the questionnaire and through the focus groups indicates very clearly that the experience of staff of work-life balance at Brookes largely depends on their line managers' attitude. Staff can be either very satisfied or very dissatisfied, depending on their line managers' understanding of universities policies and the general way in which they handle requests for special leave or more flexible working arrangements, as the following quotations, from staff questionnaires, demonstrates:

"I am lucky that my line manager strongly believes in work-life balance, and encourages me to work flexible hours to suit my other commitments and this helps to reduce stress and improve my performance at work. I am not sure if this already happens, but line managers should be encouraged by the university to allow various work-life balance methods to be used, where it will not adversely affect work, i.e. where it is essential to be in at certain hours"
(Female support staff)

" I feel Brookes is ideal for my particular circumstances, a lot of this is due to the flexibility of my line manger at department level". (Male support staff)

“Some managers seem to look on people that do not put in excess hours as disloyal” (Male support staff)

“There seems to be a mistrust of the whole idea of work-life balance with some levels of management at Brookes- almost a view that staff who are interested in it are somehow trying to take the university for a ride. This attitude needs to be dispelled if work-life balance initiatives are to be successful” (Male academic)

Line managers seem to have a key role to play in ensuring that university policies and practices on work-life balance are consistently implemented. At the moment there is a lack of consistency that needs to be addressed. Research shows that the effectiveness of work-life balance policies largely depends on “attitudes, skills and behaviours of line managers” (Park, 2000 cited in Wilmot, 2002).

3.1.3 Issues related to workload and working patterns.

Intensification of work and the need to extend services are challenges that many public HE employers are facing. Academic staff in particular felt overburdened by excessive workloads and they expressed the view both through the focus groups and through the open questions included in the questionnaire that this has a negative impact on their private life. It was suggested that workload planning should be more realistic and should better reflect time spent on roles and responsibilities. As one respondent suggested:

“Sort out an equitable system with heads of schools to ensure that staff are not continually overburdened” (Male academic).

Another issue raised by academic staff was evening and weekend teaching. Staff with caring responsibilities are quite concerned about this as some of them feel that this is

“not an option for those of us who are primary or lone carers” (Female academic).

Staff with responsibility for arranging the teaching timetable expressed a desire for the university to issue some guidelines in order to help them deal with this matter.

A culture of “ long working hours” was also considered to impact in a negative way on family life and to be not necessarily an indication of greater productivity. The following quotations summarise well the majority of views expressed on this point:

“Eliminate the ‘long hours culture’ that exists in parts of the university. Senior management are prone to perpetuating this culture”. (Male senior manager)

“There is a long hours culture in the school in which I work, which is often not necessarily the most effective/ productive way of working but is often for show” (Female support staff)

Another group who expressed concern that their current workloads and working patterns would impact on their ability to benefit from work-life balance policies was manual cleaning staff. An ongoing problem with staff vacancies led them to question whether there are ever enough staff to allow flexible working. They also suggested that the requirements of the job in terms of when certain areas of the university have to be cleaned made it an unrealistic option.

A further issue for manual staff was the relative importance of work-life balance to them. A number of staff suggested that their relatively low levels of pay were of more concern to them than whether or not they had a flexible-working pattern. Staff working within this area felt that because of these issues work-life balance policies would do little to improve recruitment and/or retention.

Overall administrative and support staff were more positive about their current working patterns. However, many of them felt that there should be more support for non-academic staff to work from home, provided that this is allowed by the nature of the job. They suggested that academic staff have much more freedom and control about when and where they do their work, unlike support staff who are always expected to be seen. This was perceived

as an issue about fairness, as it is believed that academic staff have greater access to flexible working than non academic staff:

“More equity between academic and support staff, in particular flexibility to work from home” (Female support staff).

“Individual departments and offices should take a more structured approach to home working, to ensure that all staff are treated fairly” (Male support staff).

3.1.4 What more can the university do to help staff to strike a balance between paid work and personal life?

Results from this audit clearly show that staff knowledge of existing university policies that support work-life balance is very patchy and often inaccurate. Consequently many members of staff are not sure about what is available and what they can ask for when the need may arise for flexible work or special leave:

“All these sentiments are very good but getting the message across to everyone who needs this information is where the system fails”. (Female support staff).

Improving communication by making information on existing work-life balance policies and practices more easily available would help staff to make a better use of special leave arrangements as well as other policies .

Most administrative and support staff expressed the wish for greater access to flexible working arrangements such as flexi-time, compressed hours and working from home. It was also felt by this group that more autonomy in their job and trust would enable them to achieve greater flexibility.

Women, particularly among academic staff, would like to see the university promote more job sharing opportunities, as this could enable them to better combine increased responsibilities associated with job promotion and family responsibilities:

“Be more open to job shares. I have chosen not to go for immediate promotion which has management responsibilities, because the balance is important and I wish to remain part-time in order to spend quality time with my partner and family as well as current voluntary activities with my local church”. (Female academic).

“I think that job shares are beneficial to both employers and employees since the former gains two people’s work-related energy and ideas, and the latter doesn’t end up going to all the meetings” (Female academic)

Staff from both academic and non-academic groups with several years of service or over the age of 50s expressed great interest in the possibility of taking a career break or reducing their working hours:

“When my daughter is older, I would like to take a career break to pursue some of my more creative interests (music) and I am so glad that working at Brookes means that I do not have the stress of worrying that I would have to give up my ‘whole life’ to do so.” (Female support staff)

“...I am unlikely to remain in my present type of full time working pattern far into my 50’s, preferring to “downsize” to part-time working” (Male senior management)

“It would be useful and beneficial to be allowed unpaid leave for 6 months, 1 year to pursue other when working for Brookes for over 10-15 years” (Female support staff).

Staff who have already taken up the opportunity to do some work from home would like the university to communicate more openly its support for this practice:

“When working from home I would like to have the confidence that this practice is approved by the university and by my school” (Male academic).

“It could be a point of information in the induction process that flexible working is OK so long you are contactable when working from home elsewhere” (Female academic).

They would also like the university to provide greater support for it, such as for example:

*“Sponsor better Internet connectivity in order to facilitate working from home”
(Male support staff).*

To conclude, this audit has provided some clear indications of staff general views on work-life balance, their experiences and their needs for flexible working. It has also identified a number of areas where improvements could be made and policies supporting flexible working arrangements could be further developed. The following parts of this report consider the implications for the university to further develop work-life balance policies and practices and it concludes with a set of recommendations based on the audit’s main findings.

3.2 **The implications for Oxford Brookes to further develop work-life balance policies and flexible working arrangements.**

In order to further develop the work-life balance agenda it is recommended that the university should adopt a combined approach to it by promoting both equality of opportunity and diversity. To explain what this approach would involve with regard to work-life balance and its implications for the university it is useful to use the framework elaborated by Torrington et. al. (2002; 371) that clearly summarises the differences between the two approaches as follows:

Aspect	Equal Opportunities	Managing Diversity
Purpose	Reduce Discrimination	Utilise employee potential to maximum advantage
Case Argued	Moral and Ethical	Business case – improve profitability
Whose responsibility	HR/Personnel Department	All managers
Focuses on	Groups	Individuals
Perspective	Dealing with different needs of different groups	Integrated
Benefits for employees	Opportunities improved for disadvantaged groups, primarily through setting targets	Opportunities improved for all employees
Focus on management activity	Recruitment	Managing
Remedies	Changing systems and practices	Changing the culture

By applying these two approaches in a combined and complementary way the development of work-life balance policies and practices should be informed by the following principles:

Purpose: Work-life balance policies and practices can help to reduce discrimination, as staff with caring responsibilities should not be disadvantaged in the work place. At the same time they can help to utilise employees’ potential to maximum advantage by enabling staff to work better by striking a balance between paid work and personal life.

Case Argued: There is a moral and ethical dimension to work-life balance as it seeks to promote a sustainable life-style for individuals as well as for society as a whole. The university, and likewise other HE institutions, has an important role to play in promoting positive values as well as a healthy work ethic. A business case can be added to this, as work-life balance should be seen as an opportunity to improve organisational performance. Evidence collected nationally on work-life balance policies and practices and from this audit, clearly indicates that work-life balance can be a powerful recruitment and retention tool, and also help to improve job satisfaction and staff productivity.

Whose Responsibility: The overall responsibility for the development of a university-wide framework of work-life balance policies and practices and its

consistent implementation and monitoring, rests with the Directorate of Human Resources. However, all managers too have a responsibility to implement consistently and fairly university policies and practices, and to contribute to developing innovative approaches to working practices by trying to strike a balance between the needs of staff and those of the institution.

Focus on: University policies such as maternity/paternity leave and career breaks focus on groups of staff (e.g. working parents) who, as a result of their childcare responsibilities, have some special needs. It is important that as well as continuing to focus on groups with special needs the university adopts a more inclusive approach by focusing on specific needs of individual staff thus promoting a work-life balance for all ethic. This is crucial to ensuring the success of a work-life balance initiative as it is important that staff who do not have caring responsibilities feel that they too can benefit from a work-life balance approach.

Perspective: Work-life balance should not be treated as a separate issue but should be strategically integrated into all relevant university policies and practices. In other words, similarly to the equal opportunity and diversity agenda, the implications for work-life balance on institutional practices and policies should be considered.

Benefits for employees: The university should work towards improving opportunities for all its employees by creating a satisfying and inclusive working environment where everyone can find a balance between paid work and personal life.

Focus on management activities: Work-life balance can be an effective tool in relation to staff recruitment and retention as well as for staff management by increasing and/or sustaining job satisfaction and productivity.

Remedies: In order to further develop the work-life balance agenda within the institution some changes will be needed to policies and practices but above all it will be important to promote a work-life balance 'friendly' culture in the workplace. Key to developing a work-life balance culture within the university is the ability to strike a balance between an institutional formal approach through policies, guidelines and monitoring and the need to retain some

informality and flexibility. This will ensure that a balance is kept between the needs of individuals and the operational requirements of the institution.

3.3 **Recommendations**

In order to improve staff experience of work-life balance at Brookes, to better respond to some of their needs and concerns, and to contribute to improving institutional performance the following is recommended:

3.3.1 ***Improve communication.***

There is a need to clearly communicate the university commitment to work-life balance, to raise awareness and to improve knowledge and understanding of university relevant policies by making information more accessible to all staff. It is therefore suggested that information on current and future policies be provided in a user-friendly version through the Intranet, within the context of the Equal Opportunity and Diversity website. A paper version of the same information should also be produced for staff who may not have the opportunity to access the Intranet and for potential job applicants. It would also be useful to identify names of staff in the HR Directorate, Schools and Directorates and among Trade Unions representatives, who can give advice on work-life balance policies and practices at Brookes.

3.3.2 ***Undertake a review of relevant existing policies and extend their scope where appropriate.***

A review of existing relevant policies should be undertaken in order to clarify meanings and remove ambiguities where needed. It is also recommended, in the light of this audit's results, and in order to promote a more inclusive notion of work-life balance for all, to extend the scope of policies wherever appropriate.

3.3.3 ***Ensure fairness and consistence in the way university policies that support work-life balance are implemented.***

It is suggested that in order to achieve greater fairness and consistency in the way university policies that support work-life balance are implemented, guidelines should be issued providing examples of good practice.

The implementation of policies should be monitored in order to achieve a satisfactory level of consistency in their application across the university.

3.3.4 *Staff development*

Line managers have a key role to play to ensure the success of a work-life balance approach. It is important that their views are sought with regard to work-life issues and that they are encouraged to take ownership of the process. This could be achieved by conducting a series of focus groups with them that could also serve as a forum for sharing ideas, concerns, information and good practice on work-life balance. In addition to this, aspects of work-life balance could be inserted in the existing management development programme as well as in the proposed core staff development programme on equal opportunities and diversity. This should be organised in close collaboration with the Equal Opportunity/Diversity Co-ordinator and OCSLD.

3.3.5 *Sharing good practice*

A positive step to take would be to give more visibility to existing good practice with a view to sharing it and providing inspiration for future developments. For this purpose a good practice guide could be compiled using internal examples as well as examples from other HE institutions and local employers. Some of this information has already been collected as part of this project and as part of studies on local employers conducted by Brookes researchers. The guide could be made available to all interested staff through the Intranet. It could be a resource for managers interested in the implementation details of work-life balance policies and practices. It would also be useful to identify names of line managers willing to be contacted to give practical advice on how to arrange flexible working. This would encourage some positive networking among line managers.

3.3.6 *Consider implications for work-life balance in relation to workloads and working outside conventional hours.*

It is suggested that consideration be given to the development of guidelines in order to ensure that staff workloads reflect fairly and realistically employees' responsibilities and commitments. It is also recommended that guidelines be developed relating to the allocation of evening teaching and at weekends.

3.3.7 ***Consider potential demand for further flexibility.***

The audit results indicate a potential demand, particularly from administrative and support staff, for greater access to flexible hours, occasional home-working and compressed hours. It should be considered, subject to operational requirements, whether such practices could be extended. As has already been done by the University of Oxford, Staffordshire University and by De Montfort University, as part of the Flexible Employment Options Project, one or two pilot schemes could be run in order to test the feasibility of more flexible working arrangements and to develop appropriate policies.

3.4 **The way forward**

In order to take these recommendations forward, subject to VAG approval/amendments, it is suggested that a detailed action plan is drawn up which specifies action to be taken, staff responsible, expected outcomes and a timetable. It also recommended that a benchmarking chart should be used in order to measure progress and achievements. For this purpose the university might consider using the Work-Life Balance Standard_or the forthcoming work-life balance module that will become part of the Investor in People assessment. Finally in order to gain additional resources to take these recommendations forward it is recommended that an application should be submitted in partnership with Brookes Trade Union Representatives to the DTI Partnership Fund.

⋮

Appendix one – group profiles

The groups included academic and administrative staff from the Schools of:

Business

Technology

Health & Social Care

Art and Humanities

BMS

Built Environment

Social Sciences and Law

Education

There was also staff from the following Directorates:

Finance and Legal Services

Human Resources

Academic and Student Affairs

Learning Resources

Buildings and Estates

Corporate Affairs

Research and Consultancy

Appendix two

University Work Life Balance practices and policies

Bereavement Leave

Compassionate Leave for Caring Responsibilities

Leave for Service in Non Regular Forces

Leave for Witness Duty

Sabbaticals/Unpaid Leave

Special Leave for Jury Service

Special Leave for Public Duties

Special Leave for Unforeseen Circumstances

Study and Examination leave

Time off for Blood Donation

Time off for Domestic Matters

Time off for Hospital/Doctor/Dentist Visits

Time off for Medical Screening

Time off to Attend Interviews

Time off while under Notice of Redundancy

Attendance at Work during Abnormal Weather

Career break Scheme

Flexible Working Hours

Compassionate Leave

Parental Leave

Annual Leave

Maternity leave

Adoption leave

Paternity/Maternity Support Leave

Sickness leave

Some staff work term time only contracts, part time contracts, job share.

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