

Developing a case for the promotion of term-time working

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BELINA GROW CIC

Community Interest Company

Purpose of the paper

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown that work can be organised and carried out very differently. There has been a rapid rise in the number of employees working from home, representing a move away from the normal working environment and an increase in workers' autonomy as to how they manage and deliver their work. This is evidenced in analysis by the Chartered Institute for Personnel and Development (CIPD), showing a dramatic increase in homeworking (rising from 5% to 19% between 2019 and the first quarter of 2022 (CIPD, 2022)). However, such pluralisation in the location of work has not been accompanied by an expansion in other forms of flexibility. Indeed, the CIPD's analysis of the Labour Force Survey has shown that, apart from home working, other forms of flexibility declined or remained stagnant over the period of the pandemic, leading them to conclude that "Now is the time for organisations to increase their flexible working offerings and not pull back (Ibid.)."

The inspiration for this project is from Liz Sewell who is Director of the Belina Grow Community Interest Company (CIC) dedicated to developing projects that engage and empower women who are currently outside the labour market and to conduct research and provide support that will help them transition into work, education, and training. As an employer, over half of Liz's staff work term-time and the majority of the mothers that they work with want to work term-time.

"Through our employability work we know that many mothers want to work during the term-time; they want to work but they also want to care for their children. Term-time working is a positive solution to the high cost and the lack of suitable childcare and is most acute for families who have more than two children or whose children have additional needs. Hybrid working and home working is allowing a more balanced life for many families but there are still a high number of mothers who are shut out from flexible work. Term-time working could be a game changer for many mothers in reducing childcare costs but also potentially opening up a better work life balance including to more disadvantaged families. Term-time working could also encourage more mothers who are away from the workforce back into work which could be positive in addressing the current high level of unfilled job vacancies and to address the skill shortages in the economy. It is interesting to see that in the last month that Amazon has introduced term-time working for its workers and those applying to work for them. Term-time working could be a win for employers and for families." (Liz Sewell – Director of Belina Grow CIC)

The purpose of this paper is to draw together current evidence relating to term-time working, to begin to establish a case for its scaling-up in the UK. It seeks to establish a working definition of term-time working and to explore the current prevalence of, and demand for, this form of flexibility. It considers the potential benefits and challenges for the individual worker and the employer. This paper is the first step to providing the evidence and thinking needed to promote an increase in term-time working in the UK. The next stage

would be a longer-term research project and proof of concept, working with term-time workers, employers and an expert panel with the potential to pilot term-time working in a mayoral authority or with DWP. A longer project would explore how employers can be supported to introduce term-time working.

This paper is based on a review of the policy and literature on term-time working, an analysis of Labour Force Survey data up to the middle of 2022 and five interviews with individuals currently working on a term-time basis.

What is term-time working?

Term-time workers are defined by the Office for National Statistics as “Employees who work during the school or college term” (cited in CIPD, 2022). Those on term-time contracts are only required to work during periods that correspond with when schools or nurseries are open, enabling parents to spend school holidays with their children. A term-time worker is usually contracted to work a certain number of weeks per year, where their non-working time is scheduled at regular, planned periods and is accounted for by a combination of annual leave and unpaid leave. Term-time contracts can vary with some employed on a full-time basis during term-time or a part-time basis usually during school hours. School holidays are on average thirteen weeks a year. Term-time workers can have a contract whereby they work part of the holidays, and this is usually referred to as a term-time plus contract (and includes a given number of additional weeks that will be worked). Term-time employees can be paid an annual salary in equal monthly instalments so that they have a regular income. A recent Supreme Court decision has provided clarity that workers who are on permanent contracts, but who are only required to work for part of the year, such as term-time workers, are entitled to a minimum of 5.6 weeks’ holiday a year, those that are on term-time contracts but work part-time would receive a pro-rated number of those days.

How prevalent is term-time working?

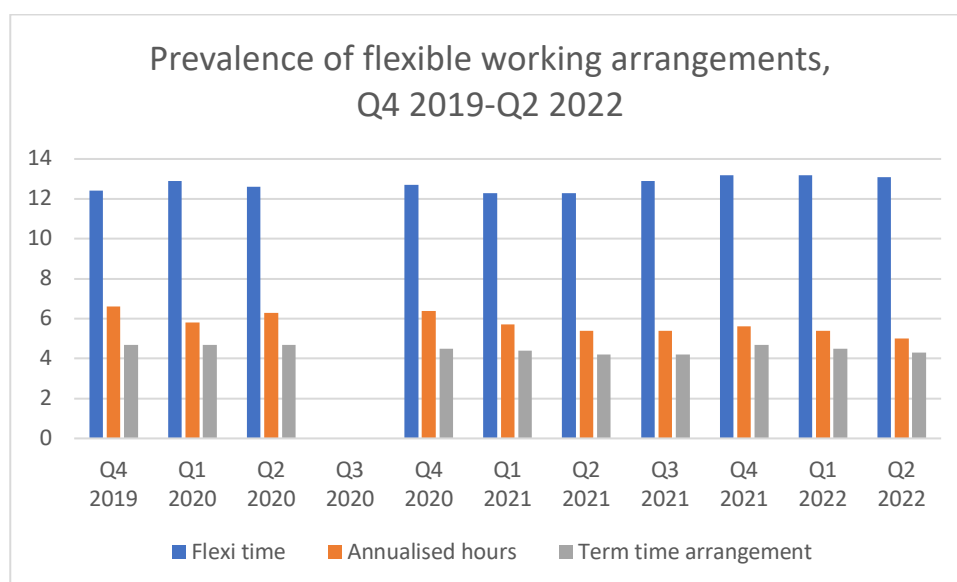
There is a substantial body of academic and applied research in the UK examining flexible working in terms of its current prevalence, the evidence of an unmet demand, and current and future approaches to its provision. However, this literature tends to focus on flexible working in general, rather than the distinct types of flexibility, such as term-time working, that are currently available. For instance, Timewise does not examine term-time working specifically in its annual review of the flexibilities on offer in job advertisements (Timewise, 2022a), although its annual Power List features a small number of case studies of term-time working over the most recent ten-year period (Timewise, 2022b). An exception to this is the Working Families Index (2023) which this year includes a spotlight on lower income families (with an annual income of under 50K). They found that 16% of respondents surveyed this year were working term-time. Whilst they identified that there was a high percentage (42%) of term-time workers employed in education they also found that there were term-time workers across a whole range of sectors.

In recent times, the academic and applied research focus has largely been on the increase in home and hybrid working, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. However, there is little

evidence of academic or applied research relating to term-time working specifically, with the available research almost universally examining the experiences of students undertaking term-time working, and its impact on their studies.

A number of studies have explored the **prevalence** of term-time working, under the umbrella of flexible working more generally. Recent analysis by CIPD has shown that term-time working has remained very stable between 2010 and 2021 – although it appeared to dip slightly during the COVID-19 pandemic (CIPD, 2022). Our own analysis of Labour Force Survey (LFS) data, presented in Figure 1, shows that, in practice, this decline was marginal; between 4% and 5% of workers reported having a term-time contract between late 2019 and the second quarter of 2022. This is the third most common form of flexibility among those measured by the LFS, with flexitime being around three times more common and annualised hours slightly more common than term-time working.

Figure 1 Prevalence of flexible working arrangements, Q4 2019 – Q2 2022



Notes

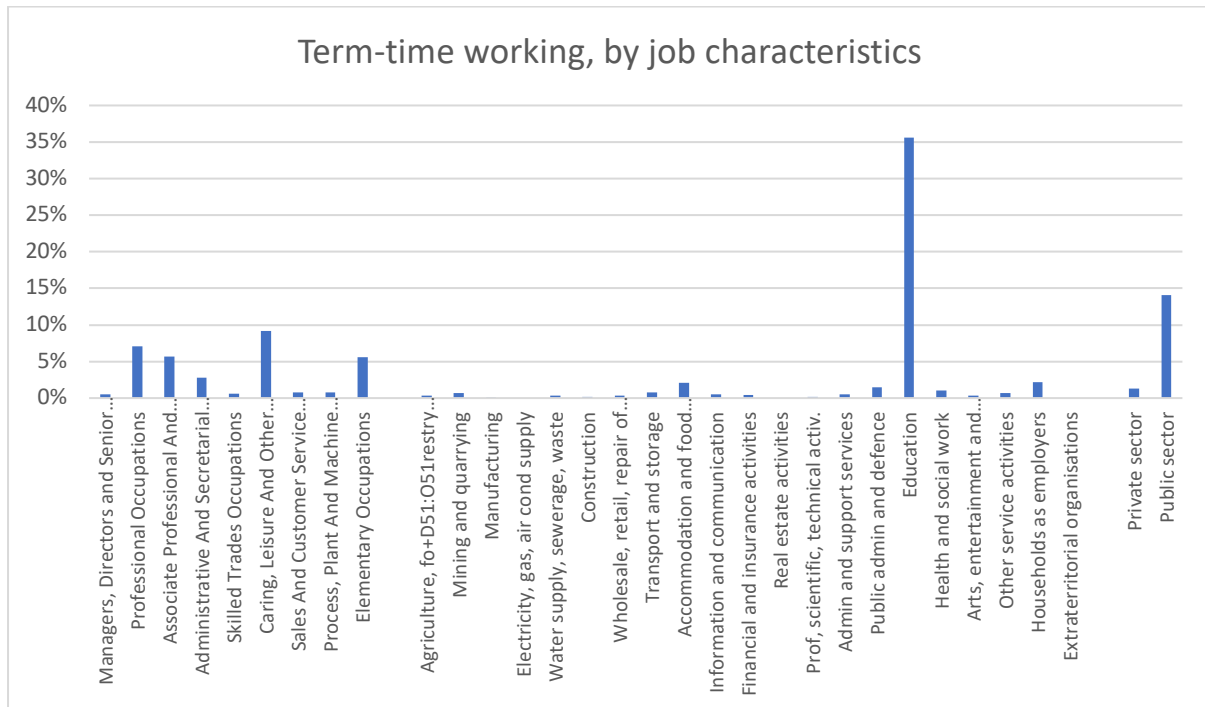
Data was not collected during the third quarter of 2021.

Data for job shares, nine-day fortnights and four and a half day weeks are not shown, but never exceed more than 1%.

However, term-time arrangements are not evenly distributed throughout the labour market. The Office for National Statistics has demonstrated how term-time working is primarily offered when it fits the requirements of the employer, rather than the employee, citing the fact that it explains the vast amount of flexibility that is available within the education sector (ONS, 2019). This is supported by our own analysis of the job characteristics of those undertaking term-time working in the second quarter of 2022, presented in Figure 2. 35% of those working in the education sector have a term-time arrangement, compared with no more than 2% in any other industry. Interestingly, term-time arrangements are not concentrated among higher or lower occupational groups, perhaps reflecting the range of levels of seniority available within the education sector

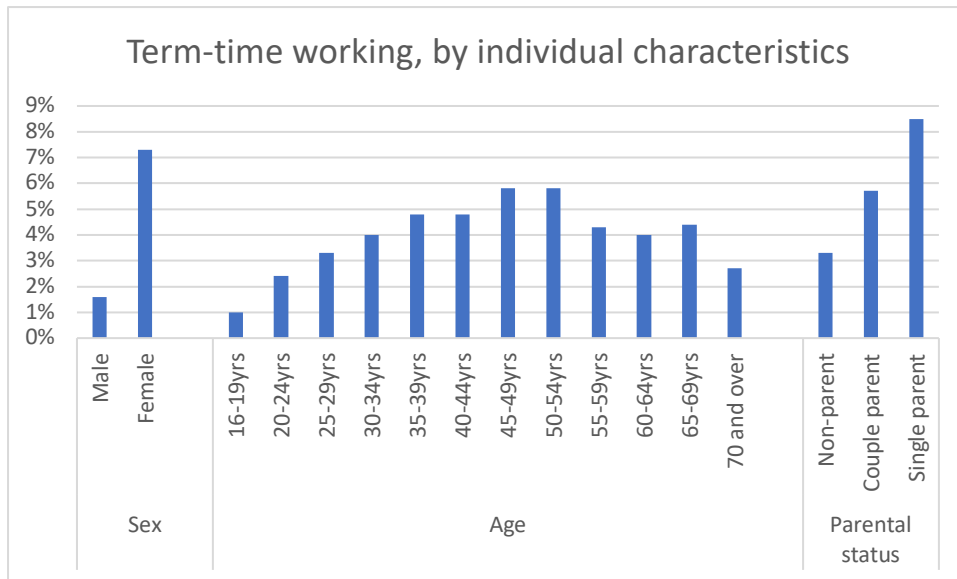
itself. As we might expect, given most education in the UK is state-funded, 14% of workers in the public sector have a term-time arrangement, compared with just 1% in the private sector.

Figure 2 Prevalence of term-time working, by occupational group, industry and sector, April-June 2022



However, the prevalence of term-time arrangements is also associated with individual demographic characteristics. This may reflect the characteristics of those who choose to work in the education sector – but also the characteristics of those for whom term-time working is a particularly attractive option.

Figure 3 Prevalence of term-time working, by demographic characteristics, April-June 2022



As shown in Figure 3, term-time working is much more common among females (7%), compared with males (2%), and among single parents (9%) and couple parents (6%), compared with non-parents (3%). Intuitively, this is unsurprising, as those with responsibilities caring for children are most likely to find term-time working arrangements attractive, albeit parents or, typically, mothers. Related to this, term-time arrangements appear to peak among middle-aged groups, who are most likely to have such caring responsibilities.

Is there an unmet demand for term-time working?

Inevitably, these proportions are unlikely to reflect individuals' preferences regarding the flexibility they would like to have available in practice. However, when it comes to the demand for term-time working, there is even less evidence of a bespoke focus in the research literature, with most studies measuring the considerable unmet demand for flexible working across the board. However, an interest in term-time working is gathering some momentum. For instance, a recent blog by Working Mums references a survey which found that 46% of parents selected term-time working as their preferred way of flexible working in the future, with remote working and school hours topping the list (Working Mums). In addition, recent research from the single parent charity Gingerbread shows that an increasing number of single parents are looking for term-time jobs, because of challenges associated with accessing holiday childcare (Gingerbread, 2022 and 2023). This trend has led Gingerbread to call for the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and the Flexible Working Taskforce to work together to develop term-time working as part of the flexible working menu in adapting to new ways of working after the pandemic (Ibid.)

There are also starting to be examples of employers outside the education sector who are introducing term-time contracts - for instance the Scottish based company Pursuit Marketing. Crucially, as already cited, Amazon, which is a major employer, has recently launched new term-time contracts (May 2023) providing its employees with guaranteed time off during summer, Easter and Christmas holidays. They say that they have launched this new contract that offers parents, grandparents and guardians of school aged children

the choice to work term-time only. So, term-time working is getting increased traction as a viable form of flexibility for families.

There are also a number of trends in relation to childcare that are likely to make term-time working more attractive for parents in particular, compared with other forms of flexibility such as part-time work or flexible hours.

- **Childcare costs:** According to data from the OECD, the UK has some of the highest childcare costs in the world, which for the lowest paid, “can substantially weaken employment incentives for parents”. The Working Families Index (2023) found that 4:10 working parents on lower incomes have gone into debt to pay for childcare. In European OECD countries one in ten families would like to purchase additional childcare hours, but cannot afford to do so, with this proportion rising to one in five families in the UK. The OECD research also found that many middle-income households in European countries cannot afford childcare - “most notably in the United Kingdom” (OECD, 2020).

Costs of childcare are rising in the UK. The Department for Education’s annual Childcare and Early Years Survey of Parents has found that almost half (45%) of families earning under £10,000 per year found it difficult or very difficult to meet their childcare costs in 2021 – an increase from 32% the previous year (Department for Education, 2022). When it comes to holiday childcare specifically, the Coram Family and Childcare Trust’s annual Holiday Childcare Survey has reported that, on average, families would have to shell out £900 per school aged child for the six weeks of summer holiday childcare in 2022, a 5% increase from 2021 and twice the cost of after school care during the term-time (Coram Family and Childcare, 2022).

Whilst the 2023 Budget announcements on increased support for childcare are welcome, particularly the increase to the childcare cap levels and the upfront payment of childcare for those on Universal Credit entering work, there are still ongoing concerns about high childcare costs and limited childcare availability. In addition, the high cost of childcare during school holidays will remain an issue for many families as not all holiday childcare is OFSTED registered and so cannot be claimed for by those on Universal Credit. It should also be noted that for those families on Universal Credit can only claim up to 85% of childcare costs for their first two children.

- **Childcare availability:** Term-time working has particular appeal because work is aligned with the school or nursery terms, removing the need to access holiday childcare that is not always available and as already noted cannot always be claimed for under Universal Credit. Indeed, for younger children, the government’s current childcare offer for two-, three- and four-year-olds is restricted to 38 weeks of the year. Evidence from both Pregnant then Screwed and the Coram Family and Childcare Trust shows that school holiday childcare costs and lack of availability is pushing many families into crisis during the long school summer holiday (Coram Family and Childcare, 2022; Pregnant then Screwed, 2022). Coram’s Holiday Childcare survey reveals that only 27% of English local authorities had enough

holiday childcare available for parents in their area in 2022, down 6% from 2021. Barely a quarter of English local authorities have sufficient summer holiday childcare places for parents working full-time and only 7% of councils can provide childcare places for disabled children.

- **Ability to manage childcare on a planned basis:** Such high costs and limited availability of childcare clearly require parents to come up with alternative solutions to manage school holidays – and the summer holidays in particular. Pregnant Then Screwed’s survey of 27,000 parents, focusing on their summer childcare arrangements, found that 4 in 10 parents said that they would need to take unpaid leave to manage childcare over the summer (Pregnant then Screwed, 2022). For employees and employers, a planned term-time working arrangement would potentially be superior to such short-term ad hoc approaches. Equally, it would be likely to lead to more stable employment. Research from Gingerbread shows that those single parents who gained new jobs, having become unemployed during the COVID-19 pandemic, were frequently unclear how, or indeed if, they would even be able to cover holiday childcare (Gingerbread, 2022 and 2023).

Term-time working: lived experiences, benefits and challenges

As noted previously, there is limited evidence of academic or applied research relating to experiences of term-time working in the UK. In the applied literature, however, there are several examples of cases studies exemplifying how term-time working can be undertaken effectively, showcased both by Working Mums and Women in Business. However, to gain a broad view of both the experiences, benefits and challenges experienced by those working on a term-time basis, we undertook qualitative interviews in November-December 2022 with five employees currently working on a term-time basis, who we became aware of during the preparation of this paper. While there are limitations to such a small sample, the interviews begin to shed some light on workers’ experiences of taking on a term-time contract in the UK, and the associated benefits and challenges for themselves and their employers. Key themes to emerge from the interviews are summarized below.

About the Interviewees¹

Esin is from Afghanistan. She has three children, one at primary and two at secondary school. Two of Esin’s children have additional needs. Esin works as an Employment Adviser for a back to work organisation. She has worked term-time and during school hours for the last three years.

Becky is a single parent and has one child who recently started at secondary school. Becky first moved to a term-time contract when her child went to primary school. Becky worked at Board level in HR and her working pattern was full-time during the term-time with school holidays off including half-terms. She was also contracted to work for two weeks at the end

¹ The names and some details of the parents have been changed to protect their anonymity

of each long summer school holiday to take account of the spike in work. In the last year Becky has set up her own business but still works during term-time.

Maria is from Spain and has four children, the youngest is at primary school and the other three at secondary school. Maria worked term-time for two charities both as a senior manager and at board level. In her previous role where she worked for six years she worked three days a week during term-time. In her new role she works a variation of term-time working by buying additional leave which she takes during the school holidays.

Sarah is a project and outreach worker for a charity that works with parents. Sarah has two primary school aged children. She moved into her term-time only role a year ago just after her youngest child started school. In the first year Sarah worked three days a week during term-time but has recently moved up to working four days a week during term-time.

Harsha has four children, one at primary school and three at secondary school. Harsha is a Development Worker for a back to work organisation. Harsha has worked term-time and during school hours for the last four years.

Themes from the interviews

1. Moving into term-time work and the practicalities

Two of the mothers, Esin and Harsha, moved into term-time working roles because that is how the jobs were advertised. Becky applied to become a term-time worker through the right to request legislation. Maria requested, when she applied for a role, that it be done on a term-time basis. Sarah's role was advertised as being open to flexibility over three to four days. When Sarah was successful at interview, she was told by the recruiting manager that the role could also be done on a term-time basis. Sarah accepted the role on that basis.

Esin stated that the main reason that she took on the Employment Adviser role, was that it was open to be worked during term-time. She wanted a role that allowed her to find balance and to spend time with her children during the term-time as well as being there for them in the three months when they are home from school. Esin works school hours during the term-time. Esin also has some flexibility in how she does her work. For instance, if she goes to a school assembly, she will make sure that she makes up the time in the evenings when her children are in bed. Esin does offer some flexibility to her employer during school holiday periods to catch up on administrative tasks and to be there for the mothers that she works with.

Harsha said that she specifically applied for the Engagement Lead role doing outreach work for a back to work provider because the job was offered on a term-time basis. Harsha works during school hours in the term-time. As well as looking after her children Harsha also cares for a relative. Harsha said that the pattern of her work fits in with the business requirements

of the company where she works, working predominantly with mothers who have school aged children, so when she takes time off in the holidays this corresponds with the mothers that she works with.

Sarah moved to her project and outreach officer role a year ago just after her second child started school. Sarah moved into the role after a career break of a few years to spend time with her young family. In the job advertisement it was stated that it was open to being worked 3-4 days a week and she knows that the organisation did this in order to attract a wide pool of people including parents. Term-time working was not specifically mentioned in the job advertisement or during the interview. However, when she was offered the role, she was asked by the recruiting manager whether she was interested in working term-time. Sarah originally worked three days a week during term-time and worked none of the holidays including half-term. In the last month she has increased her days to four days a week during term-time.

“The recruiting manager asked if I would be interested in working during the term-time and I was... It made a really big difference going into a job that allows me to work flexibly as well as in the term-time.”

Becky originally worked for an organisation at Director level on a four day a week basis. When her child was approaching school age, she had a rethink. On the suggestion of a colleague Becky moved to a term-time working contract when her son was aged four.

“It was a lightbulb moment I realised that now my child was starting school this could be ideal.”

The business that Becky was employed by was connected to the school sector and so she thinks that the model of term-time working was a concept that they readily understood. Other members of Becky’s team also worked term-time.

“It was far easier to explain how it would work to an organisation that worked with schools.”

The nature of the business fitted around the school term times when work was at its busiest. In addition, it helped that there were some members of the team who did work during school holidays, which allowed a good balance across the team and offered some cover to clients. Becky’s term-time contract was full-time during the term-time plus two weeks that she worked during the school holidays (sometimes called a term-time Plus 2 contract). She had every school holiday off including half-terms but agreed to work two weeks at the end of each school summer holiday. This was because the organisation where she worked was particularly busy towards the end of August in the run-up to the school year starting in September.

Maria was full-time at home with her children and was doing some voluntary work when she saw a job advertisement for someone to lead an advice helpline for a charity. She knew that the charity was open to flexible working arrangements so at the interview she asked whether they would agree to term-time working. The charity was keen to employ Maria and she worked a three-day week during term-time and took every holiday off including half-terms.

“It worked really well, and I stayed at the charity for 6 years.”

Maria was a manager at the charity and so she needed to offer some give and take, so she was available for emergencies and if something urgent came up. Maria would also check emails and take urgent calls during the holidays.

“I was the manager and did not want to create a burden on other people in my team.”

In the last two years Maria has moved to a new charity. She has a director level role, again running an advice helpline. Once again, when Maria was interviewed for the role, she made it clear that she wanted to work around the school year. She has an adapted contract which is a hybrid of term-time working for four full days a week. The charity gives her six weeks annual leave and, on top of that, Maria takes an additional six weeks where she works two days instead of four. Again, Maria is flexible and is contactable during school holidays if she is needed.

“It works because I have a team and it also works as I always check my emails and will take urgent phone calls.”

2. Shortage of term-time work

Both Esin and Harsha work with mothers who are keen to find work during the term-time but find that there is a dire shortage of such roles. The roles that are available are predominantly in schools.

Esin pointed out that, of the 35 women that she is currently working with, 28 want to work term-time.

“Finding term-time jobs is really hard and they are nearly all in schools”.

Esin said that that she sees mothers who are qualified at degree-level and have worked in managerial roles now moving into jobs in schools as teaching assistants or as dinner ladies as these are the only advertised term-time jobs.

“We have perfectly qualified and experienced mothers who are job seeking who see their only option as to work in a school...many of them would not choose to work looking after other people’s children.”

Harsha finds that there are very few advertised term-time jobs. She has found that job sites do not necessarily have a filter for term-time working and those that do have a very limited number and narrow range of jobs. Harsha points out that some of the mothers that she works with, because of their cultural background, are not keen to use formal childcare and so want to find a job that fits around school hours. While she does help parents to find formal childcare and encourages parents to take up childcare support, she appreciates that it is harder for some women, for instance some mothers from the Asian community, to accept formal childcare away from the home. This accords with the Working Families Index which showed that 25% of parents who were working term-time identified as being Asian or Asian British. Expanding, term-time working could allow many more women, including those who are currently economically inactive, to move into work without necessarily having to use formal childcare. This is likely to become a more pressing issue with the Spring Budget Announcement that both members in a couple on Universal Credit will now be expected to work as a condition of receiving the benefit.

3. Childcare costs and availability

Esin’s two eldest children have additional needs, and she knows how hard it is to find suitable childcare and the challenges of being confident about someone else meeting their needs.

“When you have a child with a special need it is difficult to build up the trust with someone else looking for your child.”

Esin has also seen first-hand the difficulties for the mothers that she works with accessing childcare when their child has additional needs.

“Trying to find childcare for my clients whose child has a disability is impossible.”

She gave the example of a mother of a child with ADHD who she had recently worked with who could only find a childminder mile from where she lived who was prepared to take on her son and she needed to pay a higher rate to the childminder to look after her child.

Esin also points out that, when she is trying to find childcare for the mothers that she works with, there is a real shortage of provision during the holidays and so this is an added reason for these mothers to try and find work that fits in with the school terms. Holiday clubs in her area that run during school breaks would not cover someone working 9-5. They are also expensive, costing on average £25 per day and run between 9.30 – 3pm. In addition, she has found that they don’t run the holiday clubs for every week of the holiday or for each

half-term they just run them for the occasional week. As already noted, parents on Universal Credit can only claim holiday childcare provision which is Ofsted registered.

For Harsha not having to arrange formal childcare for her four children was a major draw to working term-time only.

“I don’t have to pay for childcare or have to organise childcare for children with different ages and needs.”

Sarah does not work any of the school holidays. Her role is also worked flexibly during term-time. Sarah works a combination of school hours on some days, her children going to after school club on one day a week, a relative looking after her children on another day and her partner picking up and looking after the children whilst she works on the other days. On the days that she works school hours she picks up her children from school and then makes up her work time in the evening whilst her partner looks after the children. So, there is minimal paid for childcare. Sarah enjoys that her role means that she is able to pick up her children from school three days a week (including the one day when she is not at work) and to take them to school for most of the week.

Whilst the cost of childcare was one element in her decision to use childcare on just one day a week it was also an issue around her children’s preferences.

“It makes a difference to my children and their well-being...they don’t have to have so much after school childcare, my youngest is only in year one so would not cope with it so well if they had to go to after school care more... If my youngest had to be in after school care every day I don’t think my job would be sustainable.”

Sarah’s children did need to go to holiday clubs when she was doing a volunteer role prior to starting to work at the charity.

“My children definitely vocalised that they would rather be at home than in holiday clubs.”

Sarah’s working pattern means she does not need to find or pay for holiday childcare. She does not think that the childcare in the holidays necessarily fits in with the working week. The holiday clubs that run in her area have different emphasis and they don’t necessary fit around what you children want to do. She gave the example of one of her children really not liking sport and yet the only available holiday club in her area had an emphasis on sport and were regularly doing football and her child just sat on the sidelines not wanting to get involved. There are not holiday childcare clubs available in her area for the Christmas holidays and she knows that this is a particular issue for parents in the week leading up to Christmas.

“The big advantage for me is for my children. The children get a proper break from school in the holidays. They can get to have down time if that is what they need and they are not put into childcare at all.”

Becky worked full-time during term-time in her last role. Her childcare in the term-time was a combination of before and after school clubs, informal care through friends and a babysitter to cover any evening meetings. Although she did need to meet childcare costs in the term-time she did not need to pay for childcare in the holidays where she thought the costs were particularly high.

“Childcare is very expensive (in the school holidays), and I am a high earner.”

Maria worked a three-day week during term-time and needed to organise some before and after school care during the term-time. With her newer role she still needs to organise some before and after school care on the four days that she works during the term but only needs to organise and pay for very limited childcare in the holidays (when she is either not working or is working two days a week).

Maria thinks that this is a really positive benefit.

“Because it would be really difficult to find reliable childcare especially when your children are different ages and have different needs... My teenagers don’t need childcare, but they need me around. They want to be able to talk things through and for me to listen to them.”

Interestingly, from the Working Families Index 22% of the parents who were working term-time had a child aged between 16-17.

4. Limitations of term-time working

All five of the mothers who were interviewed identified some of the limitations of term-time working.

Esin talked about not earning as much because she worked both term-time and during school hours. However, she thought that this was balanced out by the financial advantages of not having to pay for childcare and not having to source childcare for her eldest children who have additional needs.

Harsha talked about one of the disadvantages of term-time working is worrying sometimes about outstanding work, and the difficulty of being able to fully switch off from work when she has picked up her children from school. This sometimes leads to work spilling into her

evenings when she checks her emails. However, she does find it easier to totally switch off from work in the longer school holidays.

Sarah sees a slight disadvantage being that the quieter times in her role might be a time that she could catch up on wider projects in the organisation, but she thinks that this might also be the case for someone who works part-time and not so related to the fact that she works during the term-time. As her role develops it might be more challenging to work in exactly the way that she currently does (in terms of not working at all during the holidays).

“The good thing about the charity where I work is they are inclusive. My team manager recognises the importance of having development opportunities within the pattern of me working part-time during the term-time.”

Becky thinks that term-time working is not for everyone, but she thinks it is a great model for those with school aged children.

“It would not have worked for me when my child was pre-school, and it might not be right for me when my child leaves education. But term-time working should be in the kitbag of flexible working options.”

Becky also observed that term-time working might not be great in certain industries where there are peaks of work during the school holiday periods including for instance in retail or the leisure industries. Becky also thinks that there are disadvantages to term-time working, especially where someone is working full-time during the term. Like Esin, she also talked about the financial hit of working during term-time.

“Whilst the balance is good in the holidays it can involve working very hard when you are working in the term-time, and you will be paid less. Some parents cannot afford to work term-time only.”

Maria also talked about the difficulty of being able to switch off from work and maintain her work during her agreed hours. Maria also thinks that term-time working has some limitations within smaller teams where there may be a number of people who want to work in the same way. She can see that this could cause difficulties to other team members who don't work term-time but are impacted and more restricted in taking time off during the holiday periods.

5. Positives for family life

All five mothers talked about the positive benefits of term-time working for their family life, particularly for their children.

Esin talked about the long summer school holidays being a real opportunity to have quality time with her children. She also pointed out that other women in her Afghan community saw her as a positive role model to genuinely balance working and caring. Esin thought term-time working was especially important for those mothers in her community who would not consider formal childcare and without term-time working would not move into work.

Harsha also talked about term-time working allowing a good balance between work and home.

“It is really nice to spend time with your kids. It is good for your mental wellbeing to have that balance between work and home. It is really important for your mental well-being.”

Harsha also talked about it being positive to be there for her children.

“I can pick my children from school. It is good to be able to look after them when they get home. They know mum is around for them after school and the holidays. When I am home I am their mum. When I am at work that is a different role.”

In addition, Harsha thinks that it is positive that her children also sees that she works.

“Mums got a life, and they see you as a role model. Mummy helps women thrive.”

Becky really emphasised the value of her working term-time for her child and thought this was especially important as she is a single parent.

“It has been a gamechanger for my child. I moved over to term-time working at the same time as I became a single parent. So, it enabled some stability for my child during a tricky time.”

Although Sarah’s children only have to go to after school care one day a week, she said her youngest child really struggled with this in the first term when they started school. She thinks that starting school is very tiring for children and that after school provision makes the day very long. She wanted her youngest child to settle and be happy at school and not to add extra time at the end of the school day away from being at home.

“The children like me or my partner picking them up from school. It also helps in knowing what is going on in the school community. It is fantastic to do a job during the term-time which is not in a school. In terms of my mental health and wellbeing and my family it is all very positive.”

Becky saw the positive impact of working term-time working on her child. She has really appreciated the time she has been able to have with her child during the school holidays as well as doing a demanding and interesting paid job.

"It was also good for them when I was at home I could be there in mind and body rather than always feel I was never balancing things. We can have quality time together in the holidays and we created a lot of happy memories. My child has had lovely times and I feel really lucky."

Despite there being some financial cost Maria thinks that working how she does gives a good balance to her and her children

"I can't imagine going back to working full-time when my children are at school... It allows me to spend quality time with my children."

6. Other observations about term-time working

As well as term-time working being good for the mothers that Esin works with she thinks that if other employers offered term-time working that they would be rewarded with great employees who would be loyal and stay in their job.

"If you offered mothers term-time working you will get great and loyal employees."

The flexibility of Harsha's role and the autonomy that she is given means that she is loyal to her employer and *"she gets the job done."* For her and colleagues in the same company *"We are delivering and working term-time."*

Sarah thinks that employers offering term-time working is paid back in loyalty and commitment from employees and can contribute to their wellbeing.

"It is also productive because you get a break from work during the school holidays and then can come back to work with a different perspective."

Sarah's role fits in with the peaks and troughs of her work.

"More organisations should definitely introduce more term-time working."

Whilst she is currently the only person at her charity that works term-time her charity is part of a group of organisations a number of which work directly with schools and have term-time workers. Sarah thinks that because of this her charity were more confident about term-time working and the HR team knew how such contracts worked. Sarah is aware of

other organisations that don't strictly have term-time working but offer a varied contract whereby someone has the full school summer holiday off. She thinks it would be interesting to see the development of similar contracts. Not a full term-time working arrangement.

"It could be a cost-effective way for businesses to operate to allow people to not work in the summer holiday when work is much quieter. You could cost less to the organisation."

Becky has now set up her own business and still works during the term-time. As her business grows, she will consider employing staff to work on a term-time basis, it will definitely be in the toolkit of flexible working options. Becky does see the potential of term-time working and thinks it is timely for expansion including the new technology that means that flexibility across teams can be more easily organised. She gave the example of some good practice in relation to flexible working in the NHS and possibilities in relation to term-time working now that they now have e-rostering to help organise different flexible arrangements in their hospital teams.

Maria thinks that term-time working is definitely a good retention tool for employers.

"Term-time working kept me at the charity for six years."

Maria also thinks not working term-time and having time away from work is a positive contributor to how she does her job.

"I come to work more refreshed and enthusiastic. The advice work that the charity does is stressful. It is a good thing to be able to recharge your batteries by having time away from work."

Maria thinks that job advertisements may need to be more explicit about term-time being on offer (like it is with other forms of flexibility). She agrees that some parents may be reticent to ask for term-time working if it is not set out in a job advertisement. From her own experience she thinks that more senior staff might find it easier to ask for term-time working because their assertiveness might be more acceptable, especially where there is a shortage of senior level applicants for a role and also because of a greater acceptance of senior staff having more autonomy in how they can undertake their work.

Conclusion and the need for further research

This paper has presented an overview of policy and practice in relation to term-time working as it currently exists in the UK, including up-to-date data on prevalence and take-up. It has shown the growing momentum from families that they want their work and family lives to be combined differently with a move away from the total reliance on formal childcare. The interviews with parents who currently do term-time working show the

practical ways that this can work across different levels of organisations and how it has increased their work life balance and, crucially, the quality of time with their children. The research paper has provided an indication of the families that might particularly benefit from term-time working, including families who culturally do not want to use formal childcare and would otherwise be locked out of the labour market altogether, those families with more than two children, single parent families and families where at least one child has additional needs. While term-time working inevitably has its limitations, it is currently an under-utilised form of flexibility and rarely appears in job advertisements away from the education sector, although it is promising that a large employer like Amazon has started to offer term-time working contracts. A longer-term research project would seek to build on the evidence of this paper, with the overall aim of making term-time working more established in the tool kit of flexible working options.

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