

Flexible working – the role of job boards in better promoting flexible work.

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April 2020

Report to: Gavin Owen
Status: Final
Summary of Purpose: For publication

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Executive Summary

Caring, Working, Living (CWL), led by Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO), and delivered in partnership with Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce, is a Greater Manchester wide project that supports employers to develop their recruitment and employment practices to make job opportunities more accessible to Returners.

Returners are people who have taken at least a year out of work to undertake caring responsibilities for children, or elderly or sick relatives and are looking to return to the workplace at a level commensurate with their skills and experience.

The project is funded by the Government Equalities Office (GEO) from June 2019 to May 2020.

Purpose of this report

1. To evidence and highlight the value parents and carers bring to the workforce
2. To identify and provide evidence for the benefits for existing job boards to extend their remit by developing their resources to be more inclusive and better tailored to Returners
3. To identify and evidence the need for a 'flexible' jobs board in Greater Manchester.

Returners

Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSCP), estimate there are over 280,000 known carers in Greater Manchester. At the time of this report 85 Returners were engaged with CWL.

Benefits to engaging with and recruiting Returners are presented in recent reports by the GEO. The key points made in both publications are:

- That Returners provide access to an untapped pool of talent; they have a lot to offer in terms of skills and experience and often have a different perspective on tackling difficulties which can enrich cognitive diversity in the workplace. (Over 20% of CWL Returners have degree level qualifications)
- That Returners provide an alternative pool of talent that could be advantageous to employers seeking to fill skill shortages
- That the recruitment of female Returners encourages greater gender diversity and has the capacity to constructively influence the gender pay gap
- That organisations adopting recruitment practices that are understanding of the needs of Returners demonstrate their appreciation of the value of caring in society.

Returners registered with the CWL project identify with several scenarios when defining caring. More than half are known as sandwich carers (where parenting is combined with caring for an adult, which reinforces their need for flexibility at work because of the complexity of the care they provide), parents caring for older children identify with being a carer and those caring for young children with a disability identify with being a parent/carer.

Flexible Job Boards

Research and analysis of the job board's market and its relevance to this report and Returners in Greater Manchester was conducted. The following job boards were also identified in the initial proposal as 'flexible' in meeting the needs of the target groups supported by CWL: **Working Mums; Rest Less; Work from Home Careers; Timewise.**

Returners and employers found that job boards need to be more accommodating of flexible working opportunities. The main observations were:

- The primary advantage of Working Mums and Rest Less was that they provided additional information relevant to job seekers e.g. careers advice, financial advice
- All four job boards targeted specific audiences, but the value of soft and transferrable skills was not present in job advertisements
- The quantity and quality of job opportunities was mixed – many of the jobs advertised on the boards were full-time
- Where full-time roles with flexible working options were offered, there was a lack of clarity from the employer and recruiter as to what this meant.

Need for Flexible Job Boards

Returners and employers who were engaged with CWL completed an online survey regarding the need for a Flexible Jobs Board in Greater Manchester. Many of the points raised were echoed in the round-table discussions at the targeted CWL Panel workshop which was set up to provide research for this report. The main observations were:

- It would be an excellent resource to showcase that employers and jobs can be flexible and provide a level of confidence regarding the values of the employer to job seekers
- It would align with and reinforce the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter (GEC)
- There is the potential to attract a large audience as more people (e.g. millennials) are seeking flexible working arrangements
- There is a need to address the culture of flexible working on a leadership and management level and the Panel suggested that this should be done first.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This report concludes that existing job boards are not meeting the needs of Returners, employers or job searchers generally. This includes those boards defined as “flexible” in our preliminary research. The main factors for this include the use of aggregated data and the relatively low number of jobs advertised on these sites. Additionally, mainstream job boards need to widen their search parameters to include a “flexible” search as they currently lack that functionality.

Employers want to recruit from as wide a pool of candidates as possible and demonstrate their flexibility. Therefore, there is a need for a flexible jobs board that is not targeted at a specific demographic. As Greater Manchester has recently launched its Good Employment Charter with an “Extending Flexible Work” Standard the opportunity to host a Flexible Jobs Board is a principal recommendation from this report.

Recommendations

- There is a case for developing a regional/Greater Manchester jobs board hosted by the GEC that focuses broadly on flexible opportunities rather than being targeted at a specific demographic. This can be developed more widely once it is possible to evidence the impact a local board has had on the local employment landscape.
- Job boards need to use a clear definition of what they mean by flexibility, in order to provide clarity that roles advertised are able to be worked flexibly as opposed to requiring flexibility from the applicant. This clarity will improve the job seeking experience for Returners, and their confidence to seek employment.
- There is a need for a flexible jobs board that is not targeted at a specific demographic, as the general appetite for flexible working options increases.
- Job boards need to widen their search parameters to include flexible, as opposed to just full or part-time roles. Part-time roles are not necessarily flexible.
- Employers require further support to fully understand flexible working options, and the benefits to their business.
- There is a need for wider and ongoing discussion between job seekers, Employment Support Organisations (ESOs) and employers about flexible working, as this drives good practice. This conversation needs to happen at a leadership level in order to embed cultural change within organisations.
- Job boards need to be better maintained and regulated to ensure that jobs advertised as flexible are indeed able to be worked flexibly; are current; and include roles for experienced job seekers not just entry level roles.

Introduction

Guidance published by the Government Equalities Office (GEO) states that there are currently 2.1 million people out of work due to caring responsibilities in the UK, 89% of them women. The Returners Fund grant initiative was launched by the GEO in 2018 providing financial support to organisations delivering innovative approaches towards working with 'Returners' and supporting them back into the workplace. A *Greater Manchester Working Carer Toolkit* written by Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership quotes a figure of 280,000+ carers in Greater Manchester; 142,000 of whom are currently working (ONS Census, 2011).

Caring, Working, Living (CWL), led by Greater Manchester Centre for Voluntary Organisation (GMCVO), in partnership with Greater Manchester Chamber of Commerce (GMCC) is one such project funded by the GEO designed to make the workplace more accessible to Returners. The project works in collaboration with local employers, Employment Support Organisations (ESOs) and Returners from across Greater Manchester.

Within the bid to the Returners Fund, an aim of GMCVO was to develop an ethical recruitment agency that would work to increase the availability of opportunities via employers committed to offering employment to those requiring support to access the job market. This was reliant upon Returners linking with an ESO and the development of a brokerage system between ESOs and employers. However, whilst CWL provides information about local ESO provision, five months into the project, none of the Returners had been referred by them.

An investigation identified that Returners are mostly finding information regarding vacancies through social media and bulletins circulated by VCSE sector organisations. As a result of this, a decision was taken to focus on providing Returners with access to information about 'Returner-friendly' employers and job opportunities.

Initial research was undertaken to understand the flexible job board market and how accommodating they are in addressing the needs of Returners in Greater Manchester both in terms of advertising roles with a variety of flexible work patterns and quality job opportunities.

What is meant by flexible?

Flexibility is one of seven characteristics of good employment endorsed by The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter, where in conjunction with other criteria, it states that 'flexible working describes any type of working arrangement that gives some degree of flexibility on how long, where and when employees work'. The CWL project adopts this position in relation to this report and its work generally.

The CWL project developed a set of 'What is Flexible Working' toolkits between 2019-2020, including the below visual: What are the types of flexible working? Information in this visual was provided in the CIPD 'Examples of flexible working toolkit' and was then adapted with input from local employers engaged with CWL.



Purpose of this report

There are three elements to this report:

To demonstrate the link between working parents and carers in terms of:

- The value they bring to the workforce
- The kind of support they require from an employer (i.e. flexible working arrangements).

To identify and provide evidence for the benefits for existing job boards to extend their remit by developing their resources to be more inclusive and better tailored to Returners

To identify and evidence the need for a 'flexible' jobs board in Greater Manchester.

Approach

To provide contextual information about Returners and the need for access to flexible working opportunities, a review of relevant literature was carried out. This includes publications from the GEO, Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), Timewise, Greater Manchester Combined Authority, Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership and GMCVO. The research incorporated in this report is referenced throughout with links to documents where available.

Research and analysis of the job board's market and its relevance to this report and Returners in Greater Manchester has also been conducted. The following job boards were identified in the initial proposal as 'flexible' in meeting the needs of the target groups supported by CWL. Knowledge of and opinions about these also contribute to the evidence in this report:

- [Working Mums](#)
- [Rest Less](#)
- [Work from Home Careers](#)

To ensure a valuable contribution from Returners, meetings focusing on job boards were organised so that their experience and knowledge of using job boards would be included in this report. We also sought their opinions on the development of a Greater Manchester-wide jobs board exclusively for flexible job opportunities.

Scope and Limitations

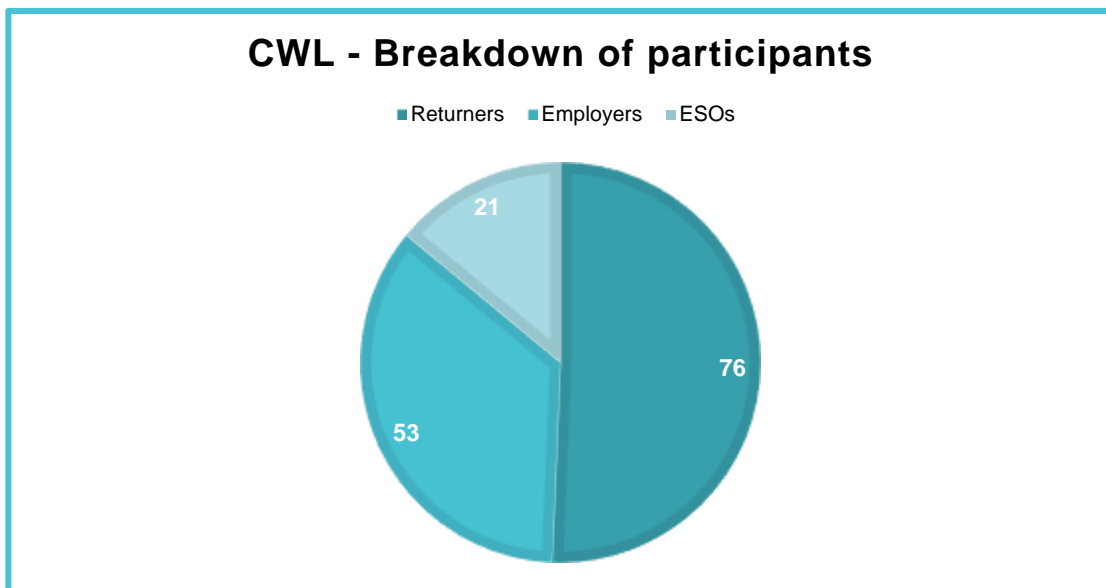
It is important to recognise the size and scale of the CWL project and that the evidence presented in this case is gathered from a small cohort of Returners, ESOs and employers.

It is also important to note that representatives of ESOs and employers may have expressed their own opinions during their involvement in gathering evidence for this report and not the views of their organisation.

The voluntary nature of the project means that attendance at events or completion of online surveys is at the discretion of participants and this has been considered in assuming involvement both in turnout at events and response rates to surveys.

Whilst there is no definitive benchmark for response rates, in this case, the online survey generated a 10.5% response rate from Returners and a 21% response rate from employers; 19 Returners attended events to support informing this report as did four employers and three ESOs.

At the point of writing, participation in the project was as follows:



Returners and the workplace

Benefits to engaging with and recruiting Returners are presented in both the 'Returners: a toolkit for employers' published by the GEO in conjunction with the Women's Business Council and 'Returners Programmes: Best Practice Guidance for Employers' again published by the GEO but co-authored by Timewise and Women Returners. The key points made in both publications are:

- That Returners provide access to an untapped pool of talent; they have a lot to offer in terms of skills and experience and often have a different perspective on tackling difficulties which can enrich cognitive diversity in the workplace
- That Returners provide an alternative pool of talent that could be advantageous to employers seeking to fill skill shortages
- That the recruitment of female Returners encourages greater gender diversity and has the capacity to constructively influence the gender pay gap
- That the hiring of Returners can expand age diversity in the workplace
- That organisations adopting recruitment practices that are understanding of the needs of Returners demonstrate their appreciation of the value of caring in society.

Returners registered with the CWL project identify with several scenarios when defining caring. More than half for instance are known sandwich carers (where parenting is combined with caring for an adult, which reinforces their need for flexibility at work because of the complexity of the care they provide), parents caring for older children identify with being a carer and those caring for young children with a disability identify with being a parent/carers.

All Returners taking part in round-table discussions at the CWL Panel workshop reinforced the point that they are an under-represented pool of talent in the job market.

What do Returners need from employers?

Since the introduction of 'the right to request flexible working' legislation in 2003, the accessibility of flexible working has been a key employment policy for successive governments, employer organisations, trade unions and activists ('Flexible Working in the UK', CIPD, 2019). Despite the known benefits of flexible working to both individuals and employers, however, the proportion of those working flexibly only increased from 23 to 27% between 2005 and 2017 (Megatrends report, CIPD, 2019) with this small rise attributed to the rise in zero hours contracts.

According to the Greater Manchester Health and Social Care Partnership (GMHSCP), there are an estimated 280,000 known carers in Greater Manchester (a figure obtained from the 2011 census, which is thought to be significantly higher). In 2018 they conducted a survey that looked at the experience of carers in balancing work and care commitments, the results of which were used to form 'A Greater Manchester Working Carer Toolkit'. The principal needs identified by carers are:

- That their individual situation is understood by their employer
- That they are supported by management and colleagues at work and
- That there is a degree of flexibility in working hours.

The need for employer support is repeated on behalf of Returners in 'Returners Programmes: Best Practice Guidance for Employers' where results of internal research conducted by

Women Returners is documented and asserts that Returners require supported pathways back into work and that support of line management is integral to this being successful.

The Timewise 'What Women Returners Want' survey of 2015 supports the need for flexibility in working hours stating that '93% of career break women who have taken a break of more than one year want a part-time job, while only 6% of women will consider a full-time job with no flexibility. 43% of women will consider a full-time job that offers some form of flexibility (a day or more per week working from home; flexibility on the start and finish times; or a condensed week).'

These factors were also pinpointed by those attending the Breaking Down Barriers workshops, where participants assessed company websites and job vacancy documents against a 'wish list' which included that employers should be understanding and compassionate. The factor mentioned most, however, was flexibility and in their evaluation of job descriptions participants found that either:

- Flexible working options were not mentioned anywhere in the job description
- That flexible working options were not clearly defined
- That flexible working was an expectation placed on the worker and a quality required of the employee, rather than an option provided by the employer.

All attending the CWL Panel workshop reaffirmed the opinions published in research with employers specifically acknowledging that, as best practice, flexibility should be considered at the role design stage and expressed clearly in new and existing job vacancy documentation.

Recommendations

- Job boards need to use a clear definition of what they mean by flexibility, in order to provide clarity that roles advertised are able to be worked flexibly as opposed to requiring flexibility from the applicant. This clarity will improve the job seeking experience for Returners, and their confidence to seek employment.
- Employers require further support to fully understand flexible working options, and the benefits to their business.
- There is a need for wider and ongoing discussion between job seekers, ESOs and employers about flexible working, as this drives good practice. This conversation needs to happen at a leadership level in order to embed cultural change within organisations.

Participant position on recruitment and job searching

Employer recruitment methods

The response rate for the online survey circulated to employers was 21%. The main objectives of this survey were to gain some understanding of their preferred recruitment methods and their knowledge of the three job boards identified as 'flexible' and meeting the needs of the CWL target groups.

Results of the survey confirmed that employers use a variety of avenues to advertise vacancies. These range from mainstream job boards to social media platforms (Fig.1) and suggest that they use more than one approach (Fig. 2) – none of the employers responding to the survey used Working Mums, Rest Less or Work from Home Careers to advertise vacancies.

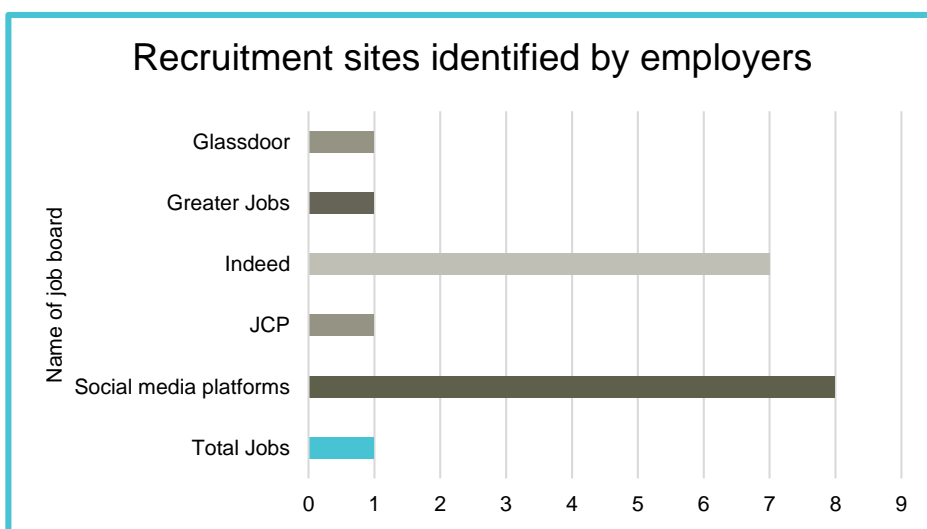


Fig.1

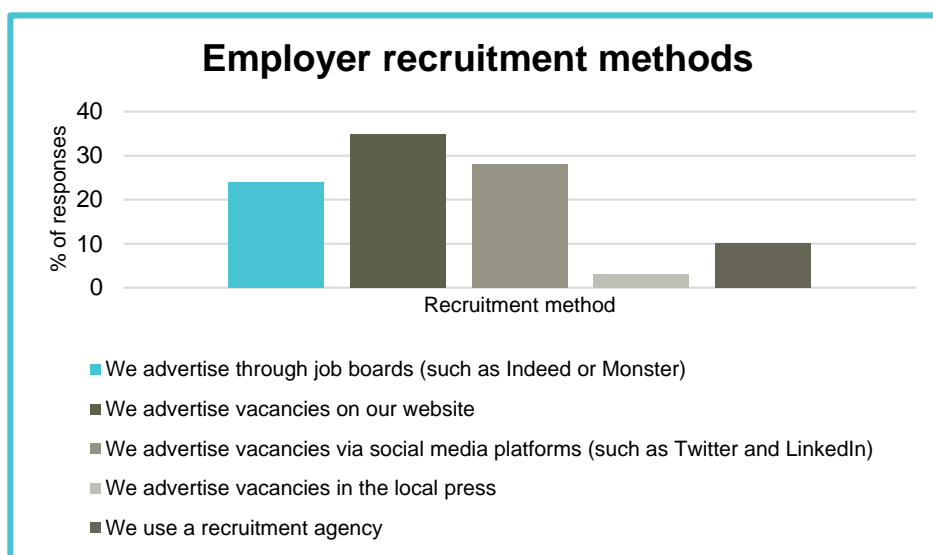


Fig. 2

Reasons given by employers for using specific job boards included:

- Service is either free or competitively priced
- Service offers some scope to 'tailor' advertisements
- Service has a broad reach in terms of number of applicants
- Service delivers a high number of applicants.

Job search resources used by Returners

Returners were asked about where they currently search for jobs, why they use specific resources and how often.

The table below indicates the number of responses from Returners when asked how often they looked at job boards:

How often	No.
Every day	3
Once a week	2
A couple of times a week	3
Once every couple of weeks	0
Once a month	2

Fig. 3 below provides an indication of the type of resources Returners use for job searching and Fig. 4 provides an indication of the job boards they are using to look for opportunities.

It is worth noting here that whilst details of the three job boards identified as 'flexible' and meeting the needs of the CWL target groups are made available to Returners when joining the project, as with employers, none of the respondents mentioned these sites as a resource they used for job searching in their reply to the survey.

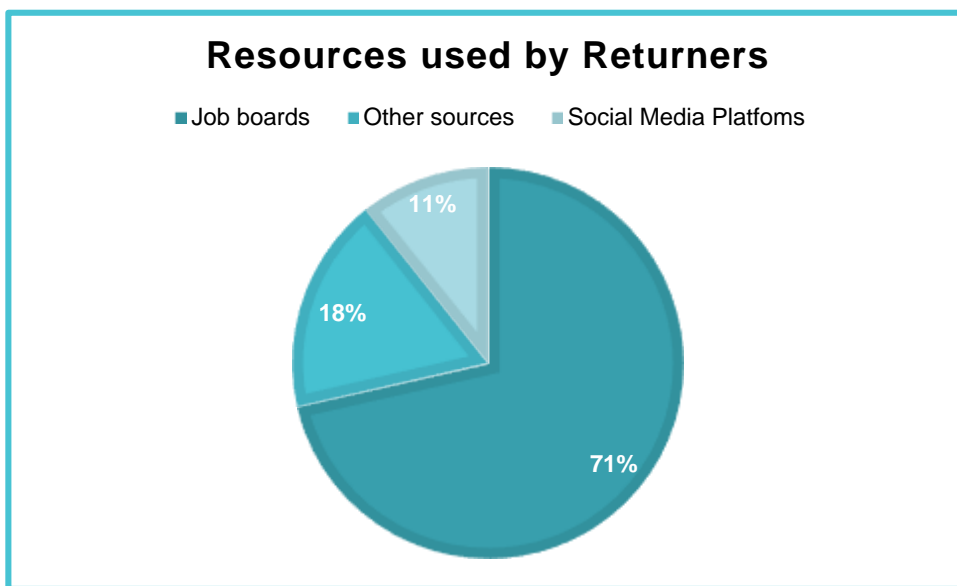


Fig. 3

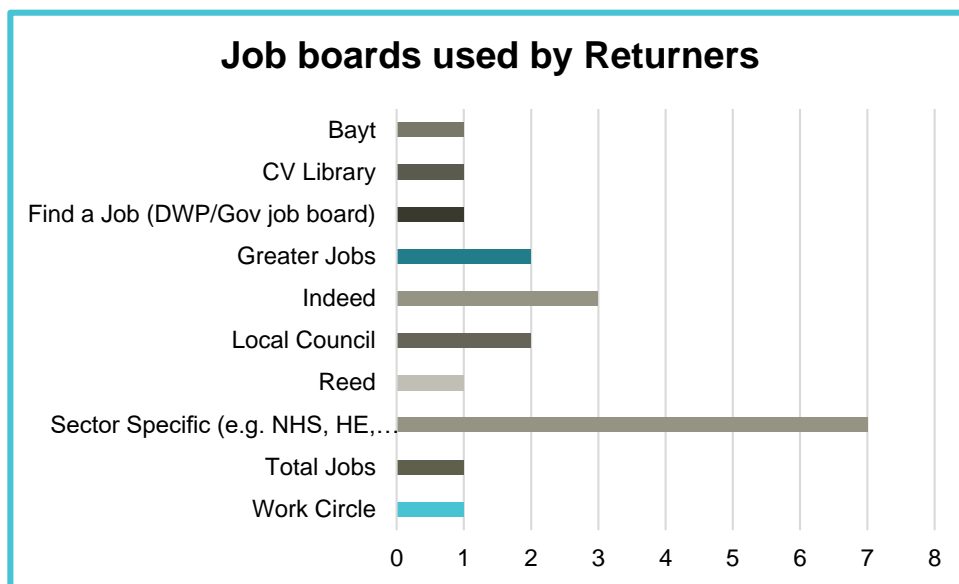


Fig. 4

Reasons given by Returners for using specific job boards included:

- Seeking flexible working options i.e. part-time, term-time only – the opinion being that local government job boards are best at offering this
- Familiarity with and popularity of certain job boards – i.e. where most jobs are advertised
- Seeking work in a specific sector.

Reasons for using other resources like email bulletins and social media platforms e.g. LinkedIn included:

- Emails, depending on the subscription provider, can be received daily
- Social media platforms, particularly LinkedIn, can provide good support if you are well connected.

Returner experience of job searching

Returners attending CWL events shared the following about their experience of job searching:

- There is an assumption that everyone has IT skills and knows how to use the internet
- There are too many job boards to navigate
- It is difficult to get a perspective on the origin of job vacancies with boards like Indeed pulling in data from all websites
- Mainstream job boards promote a lot of low-level opportunities
- Job boards are not well maintained and lots of vacancies are advertised for a long time, which does not give confidence in the organisation
- There is a lack of clarity in what employers are offering and looking for in job adverts, which frequently affected confidence in applying for roles they are interested in
- There were very few opportunities targeted at Returners, this included work placements and work experience, as well as paid roles
- Flexibility is often something employers are looking for and not offering

- Mainstream job boards e.g. Indeed, do not have comprehensive search options, are difficult to navigate and have a lot of duplication.

ESOs supporting people into work clarified that the points made above are all too common experiences for job seekers but that there were strategies they used to improve the job search experience. These included:

- Assessing beneficiary levels of computer literacy and providing support for this where appropriate
- Supporting beneficiaries to set up email alerts for the type of work situation they are looking for and with reputable organisations they would like to work for
- Providing information about sector specific and/or local job boards and bulletins which are generally easier to use e.g. Greater Jobs, Charity Job and local VCSE sector job boards.

Recommendations

- Job boards need to be better maintained and regulated to ensure that jobs advertised as flexible are indeed able to be worked flexibly; are current; and include roles for experienced job seekers not just entry level roles.

Are existing job boards flexible?

Existing job boards and flexible working options

According to [Job Board Finder](#), a site collating information about job boards from around the world, there are approximately 182 job boards operating in the UK. Unlike employment agencies, however, where the Employment Agency Standards Inspectorate is responsible for regulation, there is no evidence of government regulation of job boards.

Preliminary research by the CWL team indicated that there was only a handful of job boards advertising flexible working opportunities and as mentioned in the introduction only three job boards were identified as meeting the needs of Returners – these are [Working Mums](#), [Rest Less](#) and [Work from Home Careers](#).

As previously mentioned, Returners are given details of these job boards on registration with the CWL project. However, when asked about the resources they use for job searching, none of them said that they used any of these sites.

Results from the online employer survey indicated that only one employer had heard of all three sites, one had heard of Working Mums, one Rest Less and one Work from Home Careers.

Working Mums

Working Mums states that it is the ‘#1 job and community site for working mums’ and advertises roles available in Greater Manchester. The site also provides a comprehensive set of resources for job seekers and employers.

They operate other job boards called Working Dads, 'A job and community site for working dads looking for flexibility and improved work-life balance' and Working Wise that caters for 'older workers and the employers who value their experience and maturity'. Both sites have resources for job seekers and employers – Working Wise having a section for sandwich carers.

Job searchers can filter by flexibility and it includes options for:

- Home working available
- Flexible working available
- Job-share available
- Term-time only
- School hours
- Choose your own hours
- Weekend jobs
- Evening jobs
- Set hours
- None

A random search of within a 10-mile radius of Manchester returned 185 vacancies. However, many of these vacancies were advertised via recruitment agencies that linked through to CV Library, which suggests that this is an 'aggregated' site, meaning it has the technical aptitude to collect data from various job boards.

An additional random search on 'flexible working available' within a 10-mile radius of Manchester returned 18 vacancies (six were in locations outside of Greater Manchester and included vacancies in Leeds, Chester; Sowerby Bridge, West Yorkshire and Edinburgh). Vacancies included positions in the Digital/Technical, Construction and Catering and Hospitality sectors.

The 18 vacancies were advertised by six different employers: 11 vacancies were advertised as full-time with flexible working available and one full/part-time with flexible working available. Of the six employers only five had profiles, two with 'top employer' profiles and only three offering flexible working in the profile. One role advertised as full-time specified shift patterns with variable start and finish times between 8am and 6pm.

Using the same search criteria as above, results returned one vacancy on Working Wise and 12 vacancies on Working Dads (with only six based in GM); an exercise in cross referencing revealed that these vacancies were the same as those returned in the search via Working Mums.

Rest Less

The Rest Less jobs board is aimed at over 50s looking for part-time work or for a career change. It states that it advertises thousands of jobs from employers who 'see the value that age diversity can bring to the workplace'. There are no criteria defining such employers on the site. The site also offers a wealth of information and resources for job seekers including an online forum, careers advice and information on training, volunteering and money.

The search facility is basic, offering no capacity to search on flexible working options.

A random search, the same as that conducted on Working Mums, was carried out and returned 1,108 vacancies – 140 of which were part-time. Many of the vacancies listed were from large public and private sector employers e.g. NHS, Civil Service, Co-op Group. Whilst

Rest Less offers employers a recruitment service, the number of vacancies returned in the search and the quantity listed from the aforementioned organisations gives the impression that this is also an ‘aggregated’ site. This is confirmed in its Terms and Conditions, where it states that it uses information from third parties, including job adverts.

Work from Home Careers

There is very little information about the Work from Home Careers jobs board or the service it offers to employers. The associated LinkedIn profile, however, states that it is ‘the place to search for careers that are home or field based’.

The search engine is very basic – only offering the option to search in the north west. A search was conducted on this basis, but results did not specify the actual number of vacancies available and instead returned 65 pages of vacancies to look through. In the first five pages there were 38 vacancies available in the Greater Manchester region and only four of these were ‘work from home’ or flexible opportunities.

Whilst there is no indication in the Terms and Conditions, there is evidence to suggest that this is also an aggregated site since clicking through to view vacancy details takes you to listings posted on other job boards e.g. CV Library.

What Returners and employers think of ‘flexible’ job boards

The overwhelming opinion of Returners and employers is that job boards need to be more accommodating of flexible working opportunities and the main view was that the job boards above did not achieve this. The main observations were:

- The primary advantage of Working Mums and Rest Less was that they provided additional information relevant to job seekers e.g. careers advice, financial advice
- All three job boards targeted specific audiences, but the value of soft and transferrable skills was not present in job advertisements
- The quantity and quality of job opportunities was mixed – there was not many vacancies advertised on Working Mums for instance and many of the jobs advertised on all three boards were full-time
- Where full-time roles with flexible working options were offered, there was a lack of clarity from the employer and recruiter as to what this meant
- Employers might be resistant to using job boards targeting specific cohorts as recruiting from certain groups could be viewed as discriminatory
- The inclusion of zero-hour contracts on Rest Less was viewed as unethical. The zero-hour contract was not identified as a flexible working option by employers and ESOs contributing to CWL’s toolkit and local employers who have a policy not to promote zero-hour contract vacancies
- The use of aggregated data and/or algorithms favouring specific employers was noticeable, meaning that these job boards are not offering anything different to mainstream boards in terms of opportunities.

Fig. 3 below shows results from the online survey where Returners and employers were asked if existing job boards should be accommodating of all working patterns.

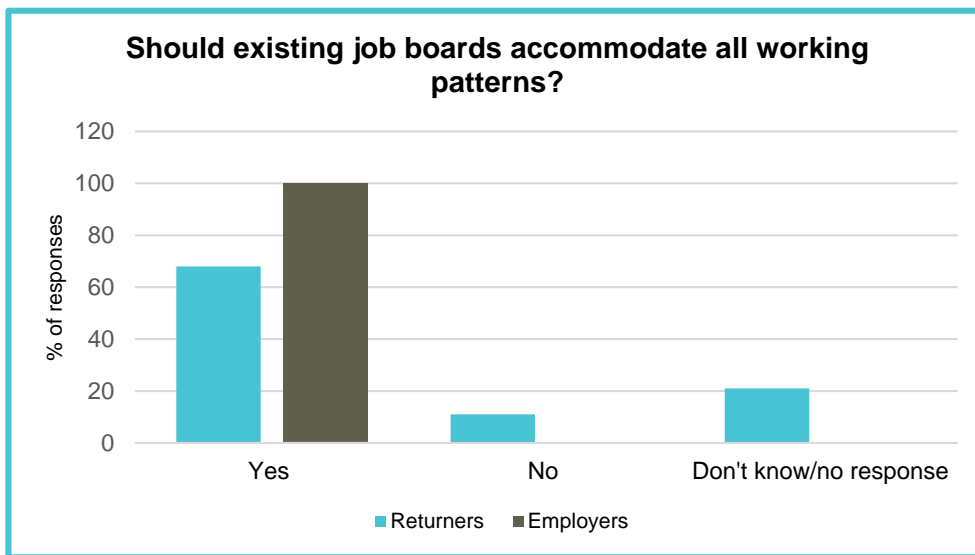


Fig. 3

Reasons given by Returners for this included:

- Job searchers can plan for work-life balance
- It removes the perception that those with other/additional priorities do not want to work
- Clarity would improve confidence in job searching
- Time could be spent on applying for roles that are relevant
- Applicants can be clear on what they are applying for from the outset – it would take away the need to negotiate flexible working arrangements later in the recruitment process
- It would remove the perception that most jobs are full-time or standardised hours
- It would make the job search experience inclusive for all job seekers.

Reasons given by employers for this included:

- It would increase employer accessibility to job seekers (and vice-versa)
- It would help resolve issues around under-employment for those requiring flexible working options
- It would ensure that those who cannot work full-time, traditional hours, are not excluded from the job market due to inflexible recruitment processes
- It would help clarify how businesses define flexible working options
- It would support the consideration of flexible working at job design stage.

Recommendations

- Job boards need to widen their search parameters to include flexible, as opposed to just full or part-time. Part-time roles are not necessarily flexible.
- There is a need for a flexible jobs board that is not targeted at a specific demographic, as the general appetite for flexible working options increases.

Is there a case for a 'flexible' jobs board in Greater Manchester?

Fig. 4 below shows the response from Returners and employers when asked whether there was a case for a 'flexible' jobs board in Greater Manchester.

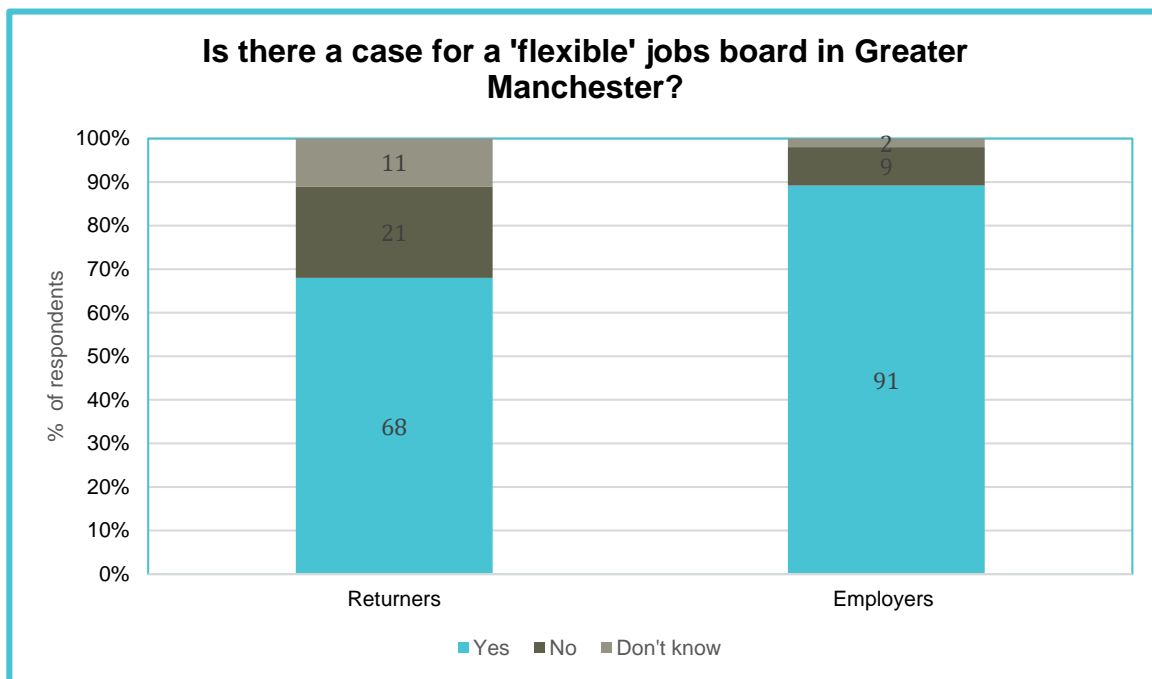


Fig. 4

What resources are available locally?

Both Returners and ESOs said that they used local job search resources (job boards and email bulletins); those identified as good examples of this were Greater Jobs, Manchester Community Central (Macc) and Manchester City Council’s Work and Skills email bulletin. The following provides a snapshot of local resources available to job seekers in Greater Manchester:

Local Government

The Greater Jobs portal provides access to job opportunities in local government across all ten boroughs of Greater Manchester. It offers the option to search on a range of working patterns with 'flexible' being one of them.

Manchester City Council (MCC) is the only local council that operates a jobs board advertising their vacancies independently of Greater Jobs. This also offers the opportunity to search by working pattern and although 'flexible' is not one of them, Timewise is listed as a place to visit for those looking for flexible working.

Some councils provide additional access to vacancies via other initiatives e.g. by working in partnership with local recruitment specialists, operating job boards outside Greater Jobs that provide access to vacancies from local employers and subscription to email bulletins.

Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) Sector

In addition to GMCVO, seven regional volunteer centres have a dedicated page on their website advertising jobs in the region. All pages are simple in design with only one providing search options.

Local media

The Manchester Evening News (MEN) online provides access to job opportunities via the [Fish4Jobs](#) jobs board, which is operated by Reach Regionals (a subsidiary of Reach PLC who own the MEN and other local newspapers in Greater Manchester).

In addition to the above, other online resources for job searchers include those available through local housing providers and local ESOs.

Key observations

- Where there is an option to search for flexible working options, there is no explanation of how these terms are defined
- Random searches across all boards revealed that whilst there were part-time and flexible job vacancies available, the majority were advertised as full-time.
- There are often no criteria for advertising on VCSE sector job boards.

What are the benefits and disadvantages of a flexible jobs board in Greater Manchester?

The online survey revealed the following in terms of the benefits such a resource would offer:

Benefits for Returners

- Having local, flexible job opportunities advertised in one place would mean they were better able to find work that fits in with their caring commitments and within reasonable travelling distance
- It would improve inclusivity by:
 - Providing all who want to work but are unable to or want to work standard hours the chance to find flexible working arrangements
 - Providing access to flexible opportunities across all sectors (i.e. Public, Private, VCSE)
- It would be of benefit to job searchers and local employers who are potentially missing out on a wider talent pool.

Benefits for employers

In addition to reflecting the points made by Returners about accessibility to centralised, local information, local talent etc. employers added that:

- A resource like this could provide a platform for local organisations to stand out in the job market
- It would help reduce applications from those outside the region who are only interested in satisfying job search criteria for benefit claims

- It would enhance the process for designing job opportunities in that employers wishing to use the service would automatically need to question whether roles can be done flexibly at the start of the recruitment process.

Disadvantages for Returners

- The assumption that everyone has the technical and literacy/language skills to use a computer and the internet is a problem, but not unique to job searching
- Advertising Greater Manchester-based jobs only would mean that employers on the periphery could miss out on sourcing applicants in remote areas of the region that may physically be closer to them (and vice versa).

Disadvantages for employers

- It would require an agreed definition of 'flexible' that all employers using the service sign up to and this could hinder usage
- It would require strict governance/regulation which has implications for resources
- Employers would need support which also has implications for resources.

Many of these points were echoed in the round-table discussions at the CWL Panel workshop where attendees were also asked their thoughts and asked to identify pros and cons on the subject.

The main observations in favour are as follows:

- It would be an excellent resource to showcase that employers and jobs can be flexible and provide a level of confidence regarding the values of the employer to job seekers
- It would align with and reinforce the Good Employment Charter
- Making opportunities available more locally would be beneficial in supporting the growth of the whole Greater Manchester economy
- There is the potential to attract a large audience as more people (e.g. millennials) are seeking flexible working arrangements.

The main observations against were as follows:

- There is a need to address the culture of flexible working on a leadership and management level and the Panel suggested that this should be done first
- It could impact on those employers from outside the region who mainly advertise via their own website by creating additional work and the need for additional resources
- It could over complicate an already complex market.

Recommendations

- There is a case for developing a regional/Greater Manchester jobs board hosted by the GEC that focuses broadly on flexible opportunities rather than being targeted at a specific demographic. This can be developed more widely once it is possible to evidence the impact a local board has had on the local employment landscape.

Conclusion

The main finding from this research is the need for better understanding and clarity around what flexibility means and how this is conveyed to job seekers, including Returners, who are a group known to be actively seeking flexible working arrangements.

Employers need support to understand flexible working, presented in an accessible format. In addition to the more recent guidance and support provided by CWL and the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter, there are a number of organisations providing support and resources for employers to achieve this including the 'Happy to Talk Flexible Working' campaign led by [Working Families](#), and Timewise.

There is a need for further discussion between job seekers, ESOs and employers about flexible working. Work undertaken by CWL to facilitate the discussion between Returners and employers has achieved positive outcomes and could be seen as the catalyst in taking the conversation forward. Events like the CWL Panel have revealed information about how employers are addressing flexible working in Greater Manchester. However, it is evident that there is still some work to do on changing organisational culture on flexible working at leadership level. Remaining indifferent to the desire for flexible working arrangements could be costly both in terms of job design and recruitment of talent. This need could provide leverage for the Good Employment Charter, where membership criteria requires employers to provide evidence of embedding flexibility in the workforce.

This research has illustrated that job searching is not necessarily a positive experience for Returners. The job board market is a saturated one, making it more difficult for those that have not sought employment for a period of time. The lack of clarity around the flexibility that employers can offer affects Returners' confidence in their perception of the job market and their capacity to seek employment.

This report concludes that existing job boards are not meeting the needs of Returners or job seekers generally. This includes those boards defined as "flexible" in our preliminary research. The main factors for this include the use of aggregated data, which hinders the job search experience because job seekers are potentially seeing the same vacancies on multiple sites. Additionally, mainstream job boards lack the functionality required by job seekers. There is no consistency in terms of search options which include the capacity to search for flexible working patterns. Working Mums, however, is a good example of how this information is mapped. Finally, the quality of flexible job boards is mixed. Whilst Working Mums and Rest Less offer additional resources such as careers advice, they are not really offering anything different to mainstream job boards in terms of job vacancies. There is also no clear definition of flexible working on behalf of the jobs board provider and employers using their service. Based on our findings there is a need for this industry to be regulated.

This research has found that mainstream job boards are inadequately maintained and the quality of job opportunities advertised can be poor. 73% of employers responding to the online survey said that they were responsible for recruitment within their organisation and 100% expressed that job boards should accommodate all flexible working options. However, this is not reflected in the quality or quantity of flexible working opportunities promoted by job boards, flexible or mainstream. Results of our online survey indicated that cost of advertising jobs was a key factor as to why employers use specific job boards. However, employers attending the CWL Panel workshop said that some employers are willing to pay to advertise, either via recruitment agencies or job boards.

Furthermore, jobs board operators do not appear to understand the appetite for flexible working arrangements amongst the working population generally. In 'Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative', a report published by Timewise, key findings were that flexible working is not something mainly required by Returners. It states that '87% of all full-time employees either work flexibly already or say they want to'; this rises to 92% of younger workers. This is supported by the results of a recent Powwownow survey where 81% of people surveyed believe that flexible working arrangements would make a job more appealing to them. This would indicate a need for a flexible jobs board that is not necessarily targeted at specific groups.

The value of local job searching resources should not be underestimated. It is clear that local employers, job seekers (in this case Returners) and ESOs are using them. Figures obtained from the Work and Skills team at Manchester City Council, for example, show that their weekly email bulletin has over 11,000 subscribers with 8,000 opening the email to potentially look at what is on offer. The development of a regional flexible jobs board would be an opportunity for Greater Manchester to continue to lead the way in the Work and Skills arena. It could, as attendees at the CWL Panel suggested, set the benchmark not only in showcasing that employers are progressive and supportive but also in assuring the promotion of genuine, ethical, high calibre employment opportunities. This, however, would require buy-in from employers. It was noted that employers thought it would be better to work with existing jobs board providers to improve how they facilitate flexible working options and embed this as the norm. Their reasons include the cost of developing a resource from scratch and that a new jobs board could get lost in an already congested and complex market.

Appendix

Questions in the survey to employers:

1. Name of your organisation or business
2. Are you one of the people responsible for the recruitment process in your organisation?
3. If no, please tell us who is responsible (i.e. a local or national HR department)
4. How does your organisation advertise vacancies? Please select all that apply:
 - We advertise via jobs boards (such as Indeed or Monster)
 - We advertise vacancies on our website
 - We advertise vacancies via social media platforms such as Twitter and LinkedIn
 - We advertise in the local press
 - We use a recruitment agency
 - Other (Please specify)
5. If you use jobs boards, please tell us which boards you normally use to advertise roles
6. If you use jobs boards, please tell us why you use these particular boards
7. Have you heard of the following jobs boards? Please tick the ones you have heard of:
 - Working Mums
 - Rest Less
 - Work from Home Careers
8. Do you think that jobs boards should accommodate job listings for all variations of work patterns (e.g. job share; flexi-time; term-time only; compressed working hours)?
9. Why do you feel this way?
10. Do you think there's a case for an "exclusive" Greater Manchester- wide jobs board that provides access to jobs accommodating all working patterns (e.g. job share; flexi-time; term-time only; compressed working hours)?
11. Why do you feel this way?

12. Does your organisation use recruitment algorithm software for shortlisting candidates prior to interview? (This is software, instead of an employee looking at CVs or application forms).
13. Algorithms may be biased against people with a gap in their CV (such as parents and carers). If you have made considerations so people are not excluded from the recruitment process, please tell us.

Questions in the survey to Returners:

1. Do you use jobs boards (like Indeed or Monster)?
2. Please tell us which boards you use.
3. Please tell us why you use these particular boards.
4. Please tell us how often you use these boards?
 - Every day
 - Once a week
 - A couple of times a week
 - Once every couple of weeks
 - Once a month
5. Please tell us why you don't use jobs boards.
 - I don't have access to the internet
 - I don't have a laptop or smart phone
 - I don't know which boards to use
 - I can't find a job board with roles that suit me
 - I prefer other ways of finding out about jobs
 - Other
6. Do you think existing job boards should accommodate job listings for all working patterns (e.g. job share, flexi-time, term-time only, compressed working hours)?
7. Why do you think this?
8. Do you think there is a case for an 'exclusive', Greater Manchester-wide jobs board that provides access to jobs accommodating all working patterns (e.g. full/part-time, job share, flexi-time, term-time only, compressed working hours)?
9. Why do you think this?

Glossary

Age diversity	The inclusion of people of different ages (in the workplace in this case).
Cognitive diversity	The inclusion of those that think differently about and provide an alternative outlook to problem solving.
'Flexible' job board	An online resource where job opportunities offering flexible working arrangements are advertised.
Gender diversity	The inclusion of people of different genders (in the workplace in this case).
Gender pay gap	The difference between the average hourly earnings of men and women.
Job board	An online resource where job opportunities are advertised. This includes specific websites e.g. Indeed, dedicated pages on the websites of organisations e.g. MCC and social media platforms e.g. LinkedIn.
Returners	People with existing work experience who have taken at least a year out of work to undertake caring responsibilities; this could be for children, or elderly or sick relatives.

Acknowledgements

This report would not have been possible without the time, expertise and contributions of several individuals and organisations.

The author would like to thank Returners, employers, ESOs, CWL project team members, programme partners and external workshop facilitators for their input and support for this piece of work.

Thanks also to research, professional and policy-informing organisations, whose research and reports have also been drawn upon to inform this report.