

APPENDIX G

EMPLOYERS SURVEY

Telephone Survey with Employers - Report by Coda Consultants

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G.1. Introduction

In September 2007, Coda Consultants Ltd - an independent research consultancy which specialises in conducting research for clients in the children and families sector - conducted a telephone survey with employers located in the London Borough of Islington, as part of the Childcare for Islington Report (childcare sufficiency assessment).

The primary objectives of the survey were to:

- Gain an understanding of (any) existing policies which employers implemented with regard to childcare (support for their employees)
- Gain an understanding of employers' attitude(s) towards the concept of supporting their employees with their childcare needs
- Gain an understanding of the types of childcare which employees were currently accessing and would like to access - supported by their employer

The document 'Childcare Sufficiency Assessments: Guidance for Local Authorities' (February 2007), stated that:

"Local authorities will need to take account of the views of employers, through surveys or group discussions, to obtain a better understanding of employment patterns which will affect demand for childcare. In addition, local authorities should look at consulting with employers about how employer-provided childcare, encouragement of the take-up of tax

credits, more flexible work patterns and helping employees with the costs of childcare through allowances or vouchers could help with recruitment and retention...”

G.2. Methodology

In September 2007, the London Borough of Islington supplied Coda Consultants with a list of potential employers that the organisation could contact, in order to conduct a telephone interview with an appropriate representative of each organisation about childcare.

During the week of 24 September 2007, Coda was successful in contacting seven organisations/employers in the borough:

1. The London Borough of Islington (HR Department)
2. Kier Group: Islington
3. Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
4. Capita Symonds
5. Almeida Theatre
6. Sainsbury's
7. Homes for Islington

On establishing contact with an appropriate representative of each employer, Coda arranged a suitable time to conduct a 25-30 minute telephone interview, using a standard interview form.

G.3. Outcomes of the Survey

The following section details the outcomes of the telephone survey. The outcomes are divided into specific topic areas:

Question 1. Numbers of Employees

Table G.1 - Numbers of employees working for the employers that were surveyed

Organisation/Employer	Numbers of Employees
London Borough of Islington	3,200
Homes for Islington	1,000
Kier Group Islington	450
Whittington Hospital	1,900
Capita Symonds	200
Almeida Theatre	70
Sainsbury's	410

Table 1 indicates that the seven employers who participated in the survey had an average of 1,032 employees.

Question 2. Childcare Support

The majority of the employers believed that they have a work-life balance policy in place. The Almeida Theatre stated that they would be interested in developing one in the future. Five of the seven employers offered childcare vouchers to their employees:

- The London Borough of Islington
- Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
- Capita Symonds
- Almeida Theatre
- Homes for Islington

For example, the London Borough of Islington stated that they offered childcare vouchers for permanent employees which could be used as full or part payment for most forms of childcare up to age 15 (16 if the child has a disability). Flexible leave arrangements were offered by all of the employers surveyed. For example, Kier Islington reported that they tried to work, *“flexibly, in partnership with parents of children under 6 years old”*. Kier Islington also stated that they allowed for specific arrangements to be made to best suit employees need rather than having a, *“blanket [childcare] policy”*.

Figure G.1 - Childcare Support offered by employers surveyed

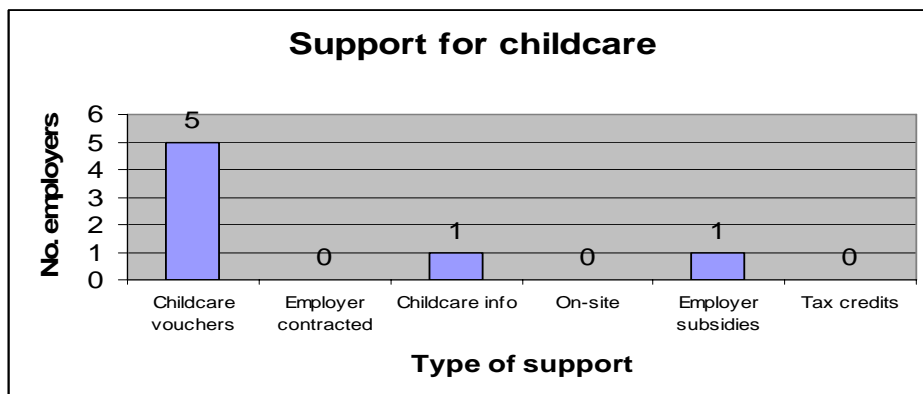
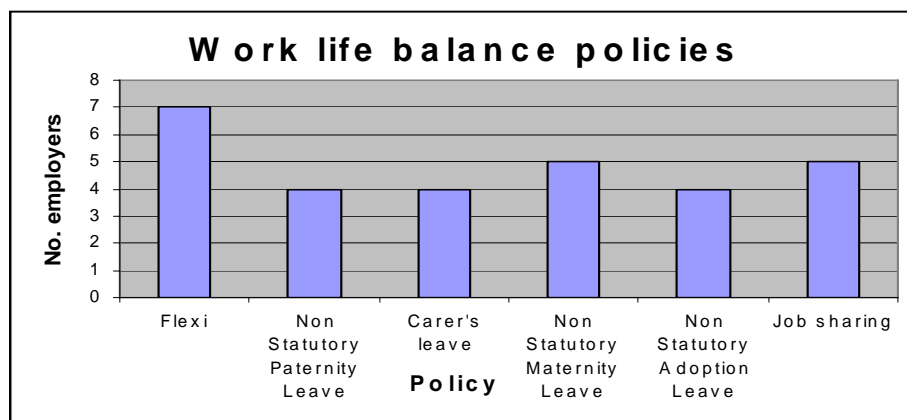


Figure G.2 - Work-life Balance Policies offered by employers surveyed



Other examples of family friendly policies/initiatives implemented by the employers surveyed included:

- Extended leave arrangements (Whittington Hospital)
- Term-time contracts (Whittington Hospital)
- Sabbaticals (The Almeida)
- Additional 6 months unpaid maternity leave (Sainsbury's)

Question 3. Information on Childcare

Four of the seven employers reported that they were aware of the existence of Islington Children's Information Service (CIS), i.e.:

- The London Borough of Islington
- Whittington Hospital NHS Trust
- Capita Symonds
- Almeida Theatre

These employers confirmed that they regularly access the CIS's website.

Three employers stated that they prefer to access information on childcare via the website rather than receive updates from the CIS: Whittington Hospital NHS Trust; Capita Symonds; Almeida Theatre.

Figure G.3 - Employers knowledge of Islington CIS and their reasons for establishing contact

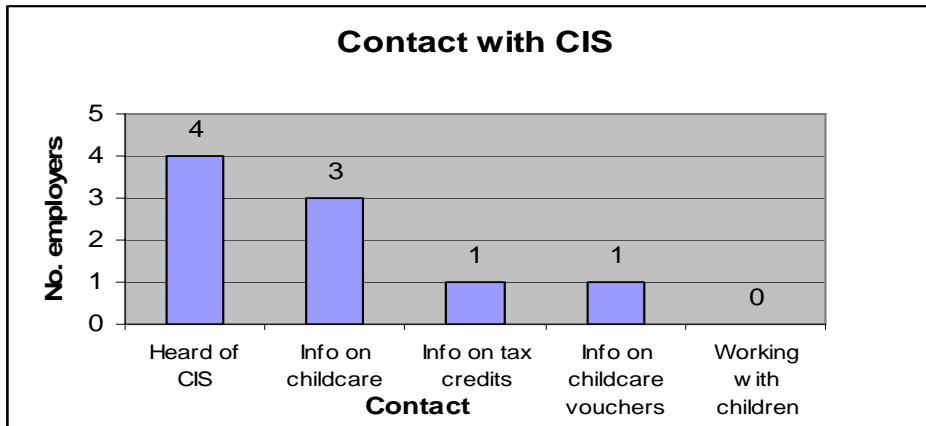
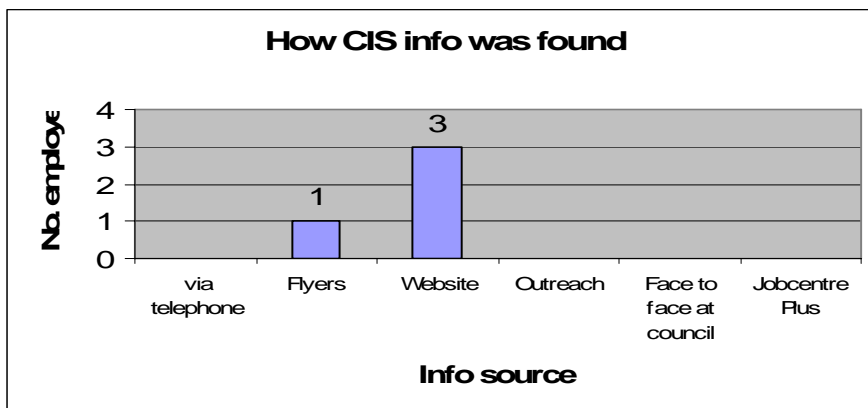
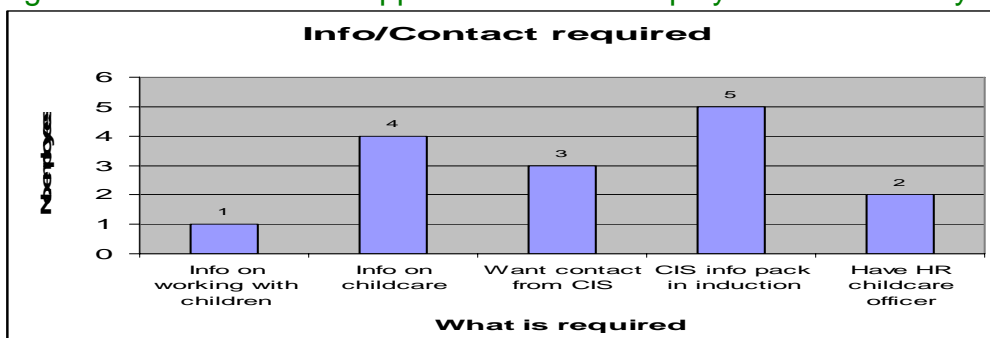


Figure G.4 - How employers accessed the CIS



The majority of the employers stated that an information pack in staff induction packs, or sign-posting of the website in such induction packs, would be an appropriate method to keep employees informed about their childcare options. These employers stated that they would be willing to liaise with Islington CIS in order to develop such support.

Figure G.5 - Information support from which employers believed they would benefit



Question 4. Barriers to Childcare

Only the Almeida Theatre reported that barriers to accessing childcare - specifically cost - had acted as a barrier to them *recruiting* staff. The Almeida Theatre reported that they had lost one member of staff due to that individual not being able to afford their childcare fees. Sainsbury's, an employer with relatively low paid staff, reported that the cost of childcare had acted as a barrier to the *retention* of staff.

Of the employers that were surveyed, none of them indicated that (to the best of their knowledge), the following issues had acted as a barrier to them either recruiting staff or retaining staff:

- Lack of appropriate childcare (available to employees)
- Lack of quality childcare
- Inflexible hours
- Unsuitable locations of childcare options

Question 5. Knowledge of Employees' Domestic Status and Childcare Arrangements

The survey indicated that employers do not generally hold information on their employees' domestic status, and thus potential need for childcare support. Such information was reported to be invariably 'informal knowledge', in terms of probably known numbers of parents and carers.

Question 6. Maternity/Paternity Leave Arrangements

Naturally all of the employers who were interviewed reported that they made (statutory) provision for maternity and paternity leave. The survey indicated that mothers tended to reduce hours after returning from maternity leave. Indeed, employers generally believed that mothers were (more) likely to reduce hours in order to spend time with their child(ren) rather than due to a lack of suitable childcare.

Table 2 indicates the numbers of employees, in each organisation, that were either due to go on maternity/paternity leave in the near future, or who (at the time of the survey), were on maternity/paternity leave.

Table G.2 - Maternity/Paternity leave arrangements

Organisation/Employer	Numbers of Employees due to go on Maternity/Paternity Leave	Numbers of Employees on Maternity/Paternity Leave at the time of survey	Percentage of Total Employers on Maternity/Paternity Leave at the time of survey
London Borough of Islington	Unknown	101	3%
Homes for Islington	1	4	<1%
Kier Group Islington	0	3	<1%
Whittington Hospital	10	63	3.5%
Capita Symonds	Unknown	4	2%
Almeida Theatre	0	1	1%
Sainsbury's	0	5	1%

Table 2 indicates that the seven employers who participated in the survey had an average of 26 employees who were on maternity/paternity leave at the time of the survey.

Question 7. Employees Terms and Conditions (Annual Leave arrangements)

A variety of Terms and Conditions were implemented by the seven employers that were surveyed. It was noted that Sainsbury's restricted annual leave at Holiday (Christmas and Easter) periods. However, annual leave was also restricted by other employers, particularly when there was a need to meet specific project deadlines.

The survey indicated that across the seven organisations, employees were entitled to, on average, 25 days annual leave. Annual leave entitlement tended to begin at 22-25 days and increase to up to 33 days with long service (in the case of Whittington Hospital).

Question 8. Shift Work Patterns

Five employers provided *specific numbers* on employees who worked shift hours: London Borough of Islington; Whittington Hospital; Homes of Islington; Kier Islington and Sainsbury's.

71% of those employees working shift hours - i.e. outside of traditional 9.00am – 5.00pm hours - were public sector employees (i.e. were employees of the London Borough of Islington or Whittington Hospital), or were contracted to work for a public sector organisation (e.g. Kier Islington and Homes for Islington). The remaining 29% were employees of Sainsbury's. The feedback indicated that three of the larger employers: London Borough of Islington, Homes for Islington and Kier Islington, have an average of 5% of their staff working shift hours/patterns. The employees of Sainsbury's and Whittington Hospital were reported to work shift hours as a standard practice. Indeed, Sainsbury's reported that the majority of their staff worked shift hours. The organisation believed that their employees could thus, "*choose shifts which work for them in terms of childcare requirements*".

The Almeida Theatre confirmed that a proportion of their staff worked a 1.00pm – 11.00pm shift, during show times.

Feedback from specific employers included the following examples of shift hours, which in the case of the organisations in questions, tended to be evenings/overnight shift hours rather than early mornings:

- 24 hour shifts
- 2.00pm – 9.00pm
- 6.00pm – 1.00am
- 4.00pm – 10.00pm
- 7.00pm – 11.00pm

G.4. Summary of Findings

The survey has indicated that local employers are generally not finding that a lack of suitable childcare is acting as a *significant* barrier to their staff being able to perform their work roles.

A number of employers stated that, in their experience, parents tended to explore their childcare options before taking up a post. Interestingly, employers tended to highlight that childcare, for their employees, was not as much of a priority issue as ‘employee relations’.

Ultimately, there was an evident tendency to describe childcare support as a, “*bonus*” rather than an “*essential*” form of support.

Report ends.

Further thoughts:

- Generally these employers were engaging with the work-life balance agenda - their support was mainly childcare vouchers, information and flexible working, no on-site childcare. Note they were large organisations generally which could sustain such support without putting their viability at serious risk.
- childcare was only a recruitment issue for one employer and a retention issue for another (supermarket)
- shift working was prevalent - most staff were presumably making their own arrangements to cover their childcare needs
- Further work needs to be done with these and other employers to maximise opportunities to give their employees information about childcare and about help with paying for it - CIS to liaise further.
- Further work needs to be done to build relationships and support with smaller employers - Islington has a large number of small and medium enterprises (SMEs).