

timewise



TIMewise SECTOR GUIDE

Secure and Flexible Work in the **Transport and Logistics Sector**

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The purpose of this short guide is to provide an introduction to promoting flexible and secure work for employers and industry actors. It offers snapshot insights into the sector-specific challenges and barriers to flexible and secure work, shares opportunities for good practice and identifies priority actions that can be taken by employers and sector bodies. It will help you to answer:

- What is the state of play in your industry?
- What can good look like?
- How can you take action now?

The guide has been developed following a 12-month engagement programme with employers, workers, experts and sector representatives.

This guide has been created as part of the Industry Voices for Better Frontline Work programme, supported by the abrdn Financial Fairness Trust, which is seeking to increase the supply of good flexible jobs for low and middle-income workers across key frontline sectors.



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WHAT IS THE STATE OF PLAY?

SECTOR INSIGHTS

Transport and storage, as a broad industry category, employs approximately 1.6 million people in the UK¹. It is a growing industry group, the growth in which over the last decade has been led by hauliers and couriers, with other land transport, water and air transport remaining relatively stable².

In terms of workforce, this is a sector that struggles to attract and retain women - only 25 per cent of people working in the sector are female³, and representation of people from minoritised ethnic backgrounds, although increasing, is below the ONS UK population average⁴.

1. Office for National Statistics, Employees in the UK
2. Office for National Statistics, The rise of the UK warehouse and the “golden logistics triangle”
3. Data source: SN06838.pdf (parliament.uk)
4. Action Sustainability, Transport Sector Join Forces to Record Largest-Ever UK Data Survey on Employee Diversity





CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

It is important to recognise the variations across the different parts of the industry, but there are also common factors affecting the sector as a whole: improvements in technology and automation requiring new skills and role types; decarbonisation and moving to net zero emissions; changing passenger demand; increasing need for distribution services as more retail activity moves online and supply chain challenges.

Some of the key challenges to the greater provision of secure and flexible work across transport and logistics, as discussed in our industry roundtables, are:

- The rigid nature of scheduling processes and collective scheduling agreements gives limited opportunity for worker choice or input, and can lead to unpredictable and highly variable shift patterns.
- Lack of understanding of what ‘flexible and secure work’ means for frontline and shift-based roles within the sector.
- Lack of knowledge amongst employers in the sector about the type of flexible and secure work that is sought after by their existing workforce and about the demand from potential candidates and those we would wish to attract into the industry.
- Work security and flexibility are often considered as part of ‘pay and rations’ and, in unionised environments within the sector, fall within the collective bargaining activity alongside agreements on pay and terms and conditions. This can make innovation more challenging, particularly where there are multiple local union agreements within a single employer.
- Traditional organisational cultures and corresponding leadership behaviours – unaccustomed to change and innovation in workforce approaches, and strongly wedded to current practices and procedures.
- Complex service delivery requirements, coupled with lack of knowledge and capability amongst line managers and those responsible for scheduling and rostering work.

WHAT CAN GOOD LOOK LIKE?

VISION FOR WHAT GOOD COULD LOOK LIKE

So what would a more embedded secure and flexible working approach look like in this sector?

- Flexibility as part of a wider agenda to make work and careers attractive. A life-course approach building flex into work and careers at all levels, to help people enter the industry and progress their careers within it.
- Working cultures where employees have greater choice, voice and ownership of their working patterns.
- Flex no longer limited to individual-focused 'request-response' arrangements (where individuals are granted fixed patterns of work within a roster, often reducing the options available to colleagues). Rather, a range of new working patterns and arrangements, tested via pilot projects, and open to all employees.
- Strategic leadership in the sector provides vocal support and promotion of the importance of secure and flexible work. In turn, cultural change across

organisations – e.g. shifts in manager mindsets/ capabilities, training and development to integrate and socialise new working patterns, increased understanding by all workers of their rights and opportunities for secure and flexible work.

- Employers engaging with, working with and influencing unions to take an active part in the agenda. Having constructive dialogue around wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, security and flexibility - agendas that are good for their members and the broader workforce.
- Different solutions for different sectors and sub-sectors, with opportunities to learn and share practice.
- Employers considering and supporting wider enabling factors to allow employees to access work. Factors such as childcare provision, transport to and from work, parking, are addressed as flexible working arrangements and new working patterns are developed.

CASE STUDY

Transforming the Highways Sector

The Highways Sector Council is a voluntary organisation bringing together industry and the government to transform the highways sector. One of their priority areas is People & Skills, focussing on increasing diversity, investment in training, and development of graduates and apprentices into the sector.

They sought to understand how to make highways a career of choice, to attract and retain skilled candidates and existing talent within the sector. Undertaking a research survey of over 1,000 people in 300 jobs across highways provided valuable insight, including: evidencing a lack of awareness of the range of careers available, perceived bias that it is a male-dominated industry, the need to attract and listen to both the younger workforce and those mid-career, and not to make assumptions about when people might join the sector.

This has led the HSC to convene working groups across the sector to improve the 'highways brand', in the ways identified, and to promote opportunities in a unified way.

OPPORTUNITIES AND GOOD PRACTICE

There are already organisations within the transport and logistics sectors who have adopted initiatives to try and improve the options their staff have and introduce different working arrangements. Some of the examples of good practice we heard about are:

- A pilot project trialling a roster preference system, enabling bus drivers to state a preference for shift patterns from a range of options.
- Adoption of technology to allow staff to select and swap shifts, improving work life balance and giving increased control to workers, within the operational delivery requirements.
- Clear advertising of the flexible working options available from day one of employment, rather than waiting for candidates to ask.
- Offering part-time employment to older workers approaching retirement, encouraging them to work longer, on terms that suit them.

There are also opportunities to learn from smaller operators and micro-businesses within the sector, who have developed informal flexible working cultures which are enabling them to retain and engage their staff.



CASE STUDY

Amazon and operational flexibility

Amazon has a range of sites across the UK, including its fulfilment centres, delivery stations and sort centres, which are at the heart of its operations. After seeking views from employees at many of those sites post-Covid, a clear narrative around the importance of flexible working emerged. Many survey respondents in operational roles said they wanted more flexibility in working hours and there was a clear sense that family commitments, such as childcare, were the main reasons for that. Following this, Amazon launched a number of key initiatives for teams within its operations network, including:

- Term-time working, so employees could have a guarantee of time off during school holidays

- Greater control over hours worked with the introduction of a pick-your-shift option
- Shift swaps

To facilitate this, the organisation further developed the technology that was already being used in their warehouses, to give employees access to a phone app where they can select and swap shifts. Amazon has promoted flexible working programmes and opportunities through roadshows across sites and at manager briefings. The responses to this have been overwhelmingly positive – employees appreciate increased control and greater predictability in their shifts, and the organisation is also benefiting from better workforce planning and a reduction in unplanned absences.



HOW CAN YOU TAKE ACTION NOW?

For the transport and logistics sector to progress in relation to secure and flexible work, we have identified key actions to take at national level, across the sector bodies and for individual employers. This is based on the ideas and discussion of our industry roundtables.

EMPLOYER PRIORITIES

The participants felt that employers within the sector had an important role to play in improving working arrangements to benefit their own employees, and to drive up practice across the sector.

Specific actions we are recommending employers take are:

1. DESIGN AND DEVELOP POLICIES, PROCEDURES AND GUIDANCE WHICH ARE MEANINGFUL FOR ALL YOUR EMPLOYEES

It is often not enough to have a policy and procedure on flexible work. Staff need to know about it and feel it is relevant and available to them. Consider the range of employee groups that your policy and approach cover. Ensure that you provide examples and options which make sense for drivers and engineers as well as their desk-based colleagues. Think about how you communicate and roll out your policy and approach – is written documentation always the best option? Would some of your employees be more likely to engage with a short video explaining the policy and options and how to apply, and/or giving examples of what is available and how to access it?

2. ENGAGE & UPSKILL THE ROLES WITHIN YOUR BUSINESS WHO ARE THE REAL ENABLERS OF INNOVATIVE PRACTICE

For many operators, the teams involved in planning, scheduling and rostering are the key enablers of flexibility and security for shift-based staff. Engaging these teams is critical because they are responsible for designing the framework of working patterns for operational colleagues. Provide training to build their knowledge and understanding of the importance of predictable working patterns for work life balance and wellbeing and set out expectations about security and flexibility for shift-based staff. Then, establish Key Performance Indicator's in relation to the input, notice, predictability and security of shift patterns, alongside your measures of efficiency and safety.

3. SHARE PRACTICAL EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE – FOCUSING ON ‘HOW’ AS WELL AS ‘WHAT’

Support and encourage local teams to act via pilots and trials and ensure that you are capturing the impact of their innovations and amplifying these. Where a new working arrangement is established, or a new approach to building the roster is trialled, share these examples across the organisation and celebrate them – even where they need further tweaks to get them quite right. When doing so, explain the practical mechanisms which have been put in place which enable these new ways of working. This will help others to feel they can make changes in their teams.

You should also seek out opportunities to share your experiences outside of your organisation, via conferences and networking events. In this way you can showcase your own practice and help drive up standards across the sector by inspiring other operators and advocating for what is possible.



SECTOR PRIORITIES FOR TRADE ASSOCIATIONS, SECTOR BODIES, AND UNIONS

There are opportunities to take a sector-wide approach to driving change across transport and logistics, and sector bodies, trade associations and unions are key actors in this. The recommendations from our industry roundtables are set out below:

1. TALK ABOUT THE BUSINESS CASE FOR THE SECTOR

Use opportunities to communicate with operators and member organisations about the value of offering more flexible and secure work. Highlight these workforce practices as ways to help address labour and skills shortages in the sector and place them in the context of the demographic shifts that are happening within the workforce.

Consider the costs and benefits of investing in flexible and secure work for the sector. Timewise research demonstrates that the benefits of flexible working interventions outweigh the costs within a short time period.⁵

5. Timewise (2022) Fair Flexible Futures, available at: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/reaching-a-positive-financial-return-on-investment-in-flexible-working/>

2. SET THE STANDARDS AND SHARE LEARNING FROM EMPLOYERS WHO ARE ALREADY LEADING THE WAY

Champion the importance of flexibility and security for workers within the sector and use your influence to change practice. As a collective group develop and agree a set of principles or commitments for operators to work to and benchmark themselves against. This could take the form of a good practice guide in relation to flexibility and security for workers in the sector.

Influence and encourage operators to share their learning and good practice via case studies and at events. Operators are likely to be seeking to drive organisational competitive advantage from their workforce practices, and so sharing insight across different organisations will require coordination at a sector level.

Sharing guidance and examples at a sector level will start to create a ‘burning platform’ for members, who will feel more compelled to act when they observe competitors and other operators doing so.

3. CHALLENGE UNHELPFUL PERCEPTIONS OF THE INDUSTRY AND BUILD THE IMAGE OF TRANSPORT AND LOGISTICS AS A CAREER OF CHOICE

Greater flexibility and security would help attract and retain a more diverse range of entrants into the sector, and should form an important part of the employment ‘brand’ for transport and logistics. Ideas were shared by roundtable participants about activity which could be undertaken at sector level to help inform and build the image of the sector as a career of choice. These included:

- Demonstrating the social value of the sector through its links to decarbonisation, climate, supporting local communities and improving public transport.
- Highlighting the breadth of roles and opportunities within transport and logistics, not just drivers and engineers.
- Understand the views of potential new recruits to the sector, in terms of their views, needs and demand for working patterns and preferences. Sector bodies are well positioned to gather these insights and to amplify the voices of potential candidates. This can help inform the design and advertising of roles as well as training and skills development to support them.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank the following organisations for their participation in our industry roundtable discussions:

- DHL
- Gregory Distribution
- Amazon
- First Bus
- Road Haulage Association
- Women in Transport
- The Chartered Institution of Highways & Transportation (CIHT)
- Confederation of Passenger Transport UK (CPT)
- Community Transport Association



Timewise's mission is to create healthy, equitable and inclusive workplaces for all by widening access to good quality, flexible work. We are the UK's leading experts on job design and we tackle barriers to change with both policymakers and employers. Through our research, we evidence the need for good flexible and predictable work to boost the living standards of low and middle earners. We believe good flexible jobs enable employees to gain increased autonomy and control over how much, when or where they work. Through our programmes, we trial practical solutions and scale these through consultancy and campaigns.

If you would like more information on this guide or to work with us, please email: info@timewise.co.uk.