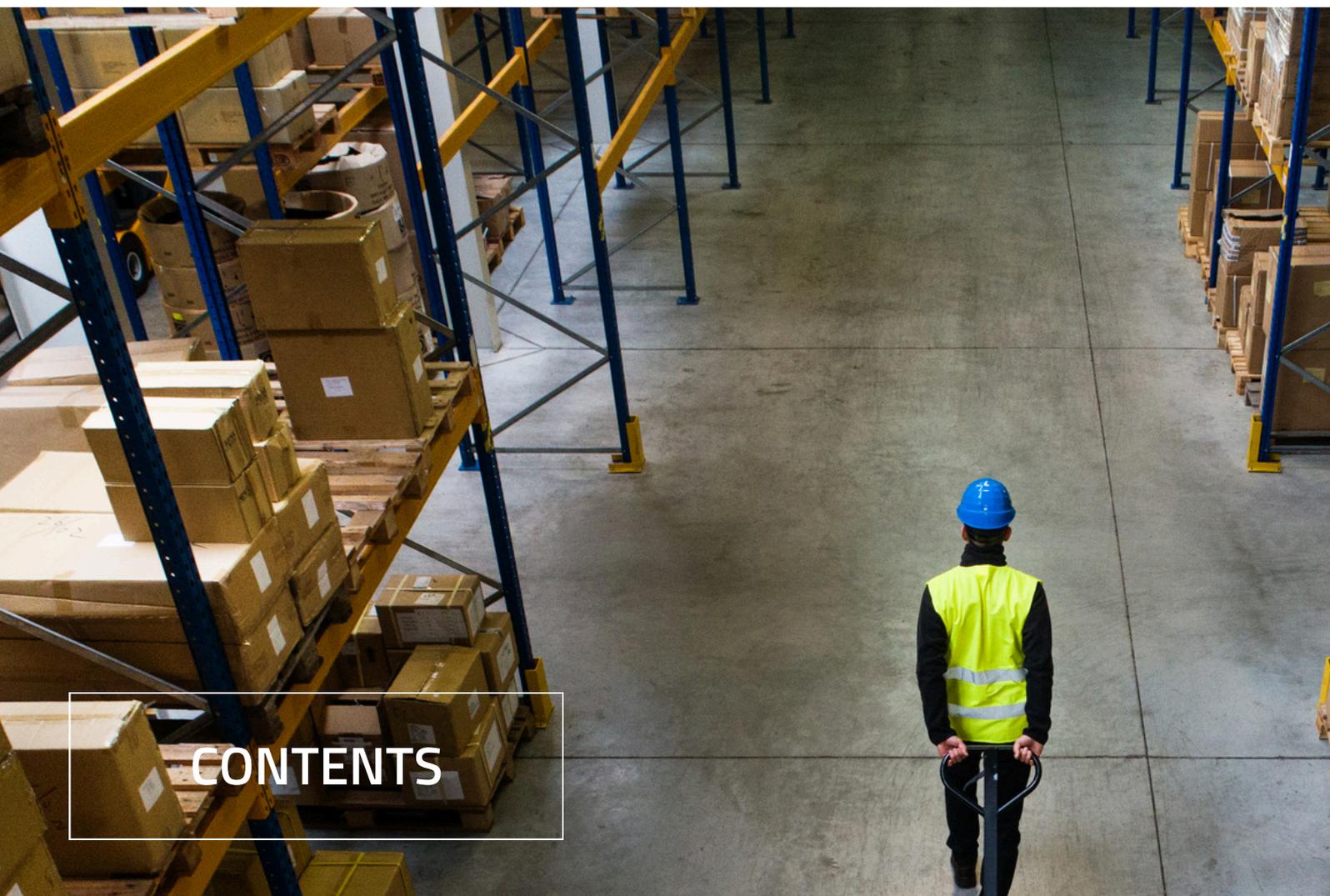




MORE THAN MILES

Designing healthier jobs in the
logistics sector



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A Timewise Insights Report, March 2026

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A TIMEWISE INSIGHTS REPORT, MARCH 2026

This Timewise Sector Insight Report explores the role of improvements to scheduling and job design in tackling the workforce challenges facing the logistics sector – including an ageing workforce, difficulties recruiting and retaining staff, and persistent skills gaps and vacancies. The report focuses on frontline roles in warehousing, road haulage and delivery.

Most initiatives to tackle these issues focus on strengthening recruitment pathways and attracting younger and more diverse workers into the sector, alongside education and advice to improve the health of the existing workforce.

The role of job design has received comparatively limited attention. Yet evidence suggests that insecure and inflexible working patterns are critical factors affecting the difficulty the sector has in both attracting new entrants and retaining its existing workforce. Work intensification due to shortages are exacerbating this issue, leading to concerns about the physical and mental health of the frontline workforce.

The first half of this briefing sets out the case for change, based on evidence about the workforce issues facing the sector and the role of healthy job design in this.

The second half looks at what good could look like, setting out examples of employers who are trying to do things differently, including case studies from the warehousing and delivery sectors. We end by drawing out lessons for employers in the sector and wider implications for sector leaders and policymakers.

Photo credit: Holly Revell for The Trucking Lives Photography Exhibition

THE CASE FOR CHANGE: SPOTLIGHT ON LOGISTICS

1. The logistics sector is of vital importance to the wider economy and set to grow

The logistics sector distributes products and materials to businesses, public services and households across the country - from food, petrol, clothing and medicine to the materials required to make and build. According to Logistics UK, haulage, warehouses and just-in-time deliveries make up 12 per cent of the UK's non-financial use economy and contributed £170 billion to the UK economy in 2023.¹

Logistics is also a major source of employment, with estimates of up to 2.7m workers, or 8 per cent of the UK workforce.² The sector reports that over 250,000 people are employed in logistics roles in London alone, accounting for ten per cent of all logistics roles.³ Similarly, Office for National Statistics data suggests nearly 300,000 jobs in London are in the transport and storage sector⁴; the highest of any English region.

The vast majority of logistics jobs are in road freight, wholesale and warehousing. They span the transport managers and planners overseeing delivery systems, to the pickers and packers working in the hubs and warehouses that hold and organise goods and vehicles in transit, to long haul drivers and the last mile delivery vans, motorbikes and cyclists that bring goods to their final destination.

The logistics sector is projected to grow over the next five years, driven by demand for efficient transport and supply chain solutions. It is also experiencing rapid change due to intense competition, technological advancements such as automation, robotics and digitisation and the need to reduce carbon emissions to meet Net Zero commitments. These trends are all projected to grow and will influence the skills needs of the sector over the next five years.⁴

2. However, logistics businesses are facing significant workforce challenges

Performance reports on logistics and transport frequently highlight recruitment and retention challenges. Vacancies among HGV drivers in particular reached crisis point during the pandemic, leading to essential goods shortages across the country in 2021.⁵ The situation has since improved, but the sector is still struggling with an ageing workforce and difficulties attracting new entrants.

The **ageing workforce** creates an immediate and short-term replacement need for existing roles, adding to the long-term skills gaps that the sector will need to meet. This includes:

- A projected shortfall of between 409,000 and 618,000 transport workers by 2030, fuelled by the 350,000 transport sector employees due to retire over the same period.⁶
- A particularly acute replacement challenge for long-haul lorry drivers, where 53 per cent of workers are over 50 years old⁷ and the sector needs to attract at least 40,000 drivers a year between now and 2029.⁸
- The increasing prominence of other shortage areas in recent years, with 58 per cent of businesses surveyed by Logistics UK reporting severe or very severe issues hiring fitters, mechanics and technicians in the first quarter of 2025.⁹

¹ There is no single official definition of the logistics sector, but Transport and Storage is the best available proxy, covering land, water and air transport, warehousing and courier services, as well as passenger travel services.

The logistics and transport sectors **struggle to attract younger and female workers**, linked to reputational problems including an association with low-paid, physically demanding jobs¹⁰ and a macho culture¹¹:

- Four out of every five workers (80%) in transport are male, rising to 85 per cent of workers in freight and logistics.¹²
- Just 1.6% per cent of HGV drivers are under 24 and only 2 per cent are female. Lorry drivers are also more likely to identify as 'White British' compared to other sectors.¹³
- Research conducted in 2022 found that less than 10 per cent of young people would consider a career in logistics as an option.¹⁴

These challenges are compounded by **high absence and sickness rates** within the existing workforce:

- The transport and storage sector has the second highest sickness rate of any industry, with 2.7 per cent of working hours lost due to sickness absence in 2024. Only the health sector, where workers are routinely exposed to sickness, had a higher rate.¹⁵
- Long haul driving is associated with high blood pressure and obesity, a lack of physical activity and poor-quality sleep,¹⁶ with 1 in 6 drivers estimated to have diabetes, rising to 1 in 3 for drivers aged 55 to 64.¹⁷
- Surveys suggest that over a quarter (27 per cent) of logistics workers have taken time off work due to stress or mental health conditions, with a fifth of workers saying that they plan to leave the profession because of it.¹⁸
- Government data suggests forklift truck, van and large goods vehicle drivers all have suicide rates well above the national average.¹⁹

The situation has **wider social and economic implications**. Analysis by Timewise shows that, for every 1,000 workers in the transport and storage sector, nine moved into economic inactivity due to long term sickness between 2022 and 2024. This was the fifth highest rate out of 19 sectors and accounted for seven per cent of all flows into inactivity due to sickness during this period, with implications for national health and social security spending.²⁰

The pressures on drivers also have public safety implications. Road accidents and crimes have been linked to chronic ill-health, daytime sleepiness and distraction caused by mental health challenges among lorry drivers.^{xx} A joint report by the Road Haulage Association and the Diabetes Safety Organisation warns of the dangers associated with high rates of diabetes among drivers - including risks of hypoglycaemia affecting driver performance, judgement and in some cases capacity, and nerve damage in the feet affecting pedal pressure and pedal confusion.²¹

3. Healthy job design has a critical but underexplored role to play in tackling these problems

The workforce issues affecting the logistics sector have been the focus of several high-profile initiatives in recent years, particularly those affecting road freight. This has included:

- **Recruitment campaigns to encourage new entrants to the sector** – such as the sector-led, government backed Generation Logistics campaign, launched in 2022: <https://generationlogistics.org/>
- **Training programmes targeting underrepresented groups** – from the national Skills Bootcamp and LGV apprenticeship schemes to strengthen employer-led routes into key skills gap areas, to sector initiatives such as the Road to Logistics training programme, which seeks to encourage new talent to the transport and logistics industry from sections of society where individuals need help and support to regain self-confidence and independence: <https://roadtologistics.org/>
- **Health education programmes targeting workers** – such as the Structured Health Intervention for Truckers (SHIFT) Project, which provides education and support to help lorry drivers to change their lifestyles. This has been developed into a Certificate of Professional Competence module for drivers, tested with 6,500 drivers at logistics company Wincanton: <https://www.ncsem-em.org.uk/research/optimising-health-wellbeing/impact/the-shift-study/>
- **Industry-led campaigns, resources and training to enable managers to identify and support workers with mental health issues** – from the incorporation of modules on mental health in driver competency training programmes to Logistics UK's THRIVE campaign, launched in October 2025: <https://logistics.org.uk/thrive>

These are important initiatives that provide a range of resources for employers in logistics and have had some success in boosting recruitment to driving roles since the pandemic.

However, these efforts will likely fall short without simultaneous reforms to job design and work organisation. Specifically, tackling the gruelling hours, irregular shift patterns and lack of control over working time experienced by many logistics workers. The transport and storage sector has the highest levels of workers reporting job insecurity (39%), poor work life balance (32%) and low work autonomy (40%) of any sector, and the second highest proportion of workers saying that they work over 48 hours a week (37%), behind agriculture.²³

Tackling insecure and excessive hours is the linchpin of worker retention. It is essential to enabling people to stay in work for longer and achieve genuine work-life compatibility:

- Long and anti-social hours, instable and unpredictable shift patterns, and long periods away from home are a key factor in the health issues among drivers, alongside long periods of sitting and lack of access to healthy food.²⁴
- Long hours, shift work and high levels of responsibility have been highlighted by senior industry leaders as factors driving mental health and wellbeing challenges, “from HGV drivers and warehouse staff to supply chain managers and logistics leaders”.²⁵

- A major UK study of truckers shows work-life incompatibility is the top reason for considering leaving among current drivers and the third highest reason that former drivers have left (behind nearing retirement and low pay).²⁶
- More than a third of current drivers report that the job impacts negatively on their relationship with partners, friends and family and over half report a negative impact on their relationship with their children.²⁷
- The very small proportion of female drivers working in logistics are overwhelmingly likely to be primary caregivers, but report difficulty finding childcare that matches the levels of pay or demands of the job, as well as problems securing reasonable adjustments when pregnant (including reductions in heavy loading duties) and unsuitable facilities.²⁸

The need to improve stability and control over working patterns is also crucial to attracting a more diverse workforce to logistics. Studies suggest that a real and perceived reliance on an ‘ideal worker’ model, based on a full-time worker who is fully responsive to the needs of the business and unencumbered by caring responsibilities, affects the sector’s ability to attract and retain women in driving roles.²⁹ More broadly, Timewise’s work has highlighted the rising importance of flexible working to all workers. Nine out of 10 people – including eight out of 10 men – want some form of flexibility³⁰, and young people increasingly value workplaces that are diverse, inclusive, and protect health and wellbeing.³¹



Photo credit: Holly Revell for The Trucking Lives Photography Exhibition



“The reputation of the [logistics] industry exacerbates [the] candidate shortage, with companies having a hard time convincing candidates that they have modernised and can offer flexibility - something increasingly important to people in general.”

The Adecco Group, 2022³²

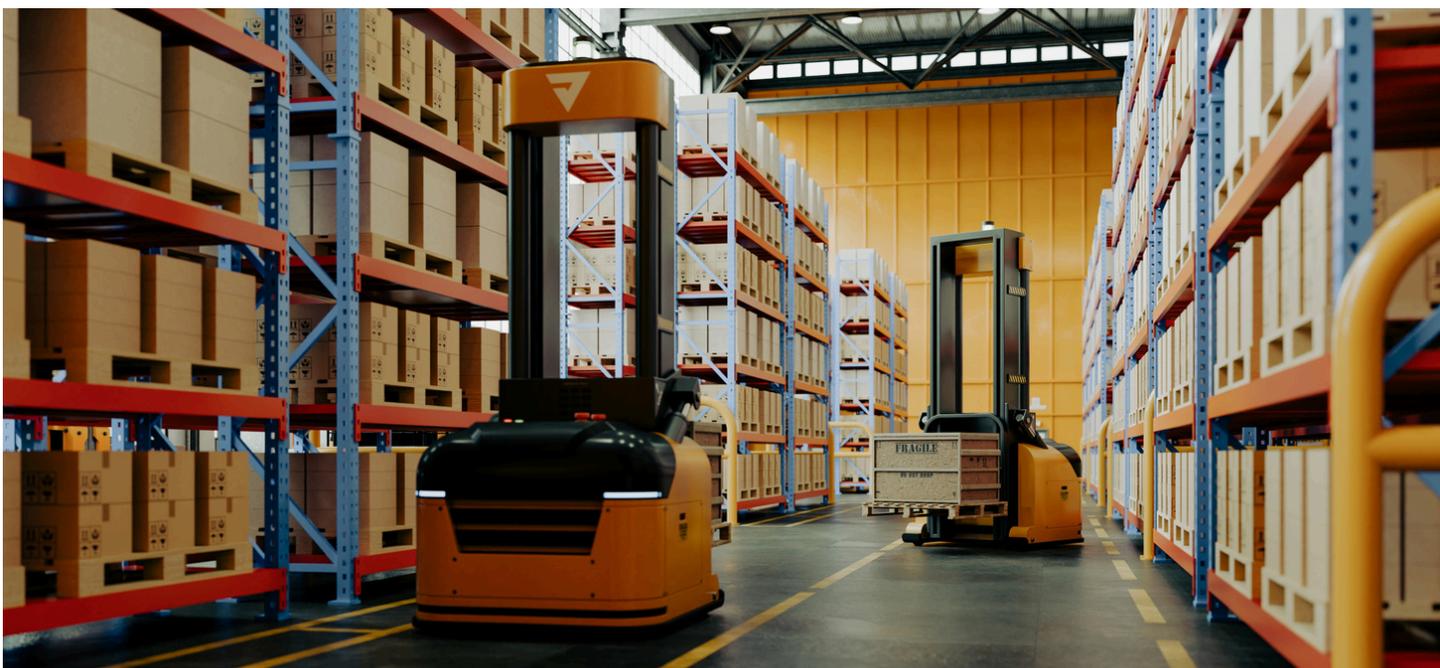
4. Current trends and technologies risk scaling rather than solving the problem

The logistics sector faces a significant ‘collective action’ hurdle to tackling these work design issues. This includes:

- **The focus on speed:** “Just-in-time” systems seek to move goods as fast as possible to reduce expensive storage costs and speed up delivery times.
- **The reliance on staff flexibility to business needs:** For this fast system to work, frontline staff across production, transport and warehousing must keep the system moving and be flexible for any changes or disruptions.
- **Fragmentation:** Complex sub-contracting arrangements mean that operations take place across different businesses, many of which are small, making improved working practices more difficult to coordinate.
- **Tight budgets:** The logistics sector is highly competitive and operates on tight margins (less than 2 per cent), making it difficult for companies to find the time or money to try something new.

These trends are likely, if anything, to intensify in the years to come, as demand for efficient transport, delivery and supply chain solutions increases. In this context, there is a risk that the need to tackle job design issues and consider staff needs or preferences in the scheduling process will be seen as an added complication.

The adoption of increasingly sophisticated real-time technologies and predictive analytics to plan and coordinate product flows presents an opportunity for the sector. Scheduling technology can be used to enable greater staff input and control over their shift preferences, particularly where automatic rostering is available to reduce labour intensity and set rosters that meet as many staff preferences as possible while meeting complex operational needs. Technology can also be deployed to do the more mundane or physically demanding tasks, freeing up workers to focus on more rewarding and skilled aspects.³³



However, technology providers do not always offer this functionality or promote these potential benefits, focusing instead “workforce optimisation” to “minimise employee downtime” and enable companies to “unlock new levels of efficiency”.³⁴ In practice, technological developments to schedule work, allocate tasks, and set, monitor and incentivise performance have been associated with work intensification, casualisation and intense controls on working time across long-haul, warehousing and last mile delivery staff:

- The use of back-office route-planning technology and in-truck tracking and surveillance technology for long-haul drivers has been found to set unrealistic expectations about delivery windows and arrival times, traffic and stamina (the ability to work without rest). This encourages drivers to overwork including pre-dawn start times and breaches of working time legislation. It creates anxiety as drivers ‘chase time’ and seek to avoid financial or operational penalties for missed deadlines.³⁵
- Last-mile delivery and courier services make up a significant proportion of ‘gig’ workers in the UK. Studies suggest that the use of phones, algorithmic control and travel time pressure by the technology platforms that manage their workflows is associated with overwork and psychosocial anxiety, as well as higher risk of traffic violations and road accidents.³⁶
- AI-driven picking systems were pioneered in the UK by Amazon³⁷ and are increasingly deployed in warehouses to track and increase the number of orders individual workers can process and minimise downtime, leading to concerns about workers’ health, wellbeing and autonomy.³⁸

To resolve the workforce crisis, new technology must address worker needs. Without this focus, digital tools risk exacerbating existing issues and making the human element even less visible in the planning process.

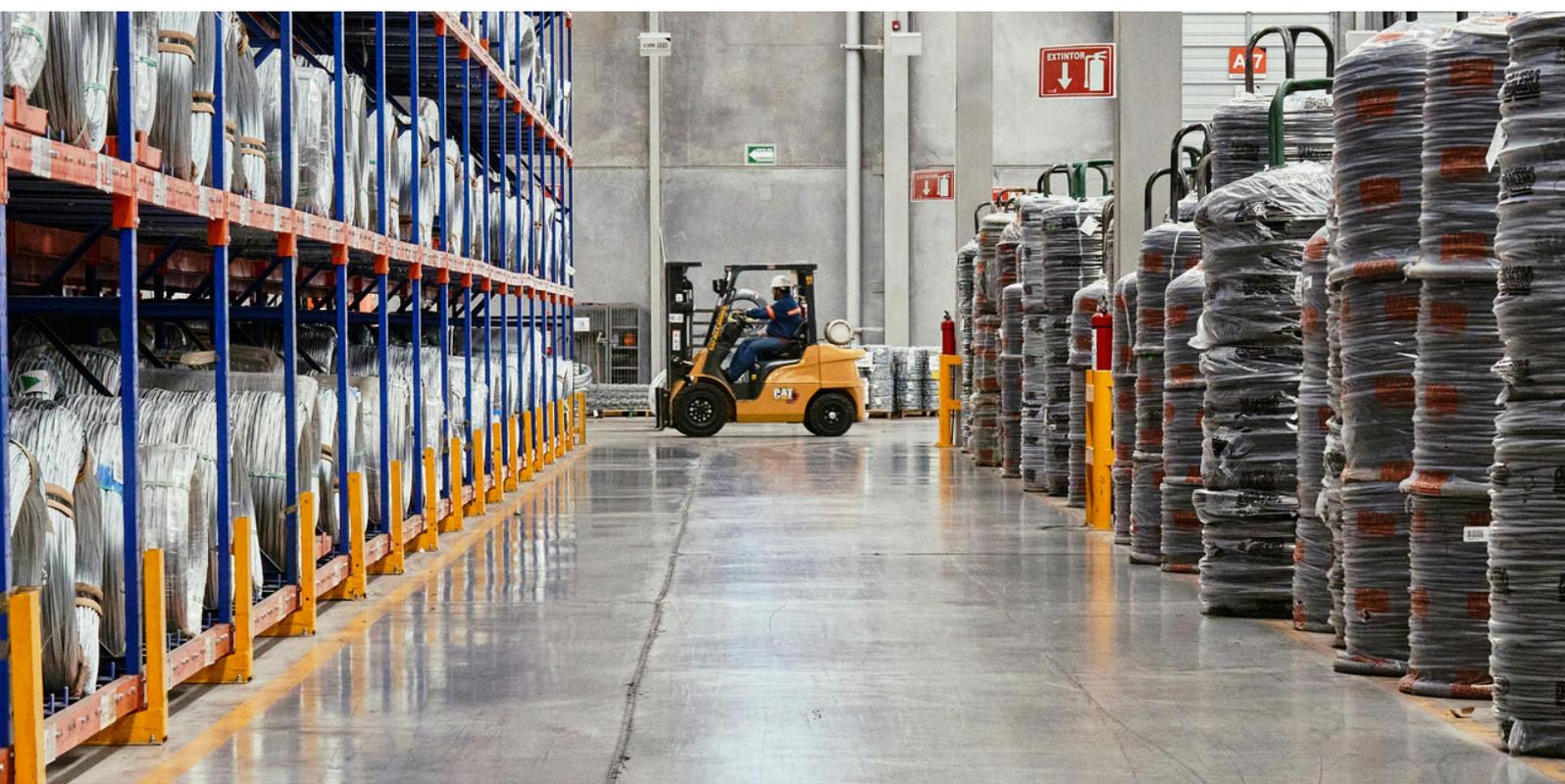
THE NEED FOR INNOVATION: WHAT COULD GOOD LOOK LIKE?

Despite the operational barriers faced by individual employers, some are choosing to tackle retention issues linked to overwork and the lack of family-friendly or diverse working arrangements. This section sets out some examples of good practice for site-based staff and mobile workers in logistics and other sectors.

Site-based staff: warehousing

Despite the competitive cost pressures, employers and experts we spoke to felt that the poor work design for site-based staff in warehousing should be relatively simple to address. Some employers are working to improve job quality, including efforts to meet staff preferences as well as business needs in the rostering process.

We spoke to employers that had committed to decent pay, fair scheduling practices and access to flexible working for their warehouse staff. The box below highlights two case studies that show how these commitments are not only achievable but also economically beneficial for the logistics sector. ACS Clothing Ltd and Wincanton both report business benefits including the ability to attract and retain good staff. Even Amazon, once seen as the epitome of dehumanising algorithmic controls, has more recently sought to distance itself from these practices and promoted options such as part-time and term-time working in job adverts. The retail giant says it has introduced an app to allow warehouse operatives to select and swap shifts and promoted flexible working through staff briefings. It reports a reduction in unplanned absences as a result.



CASE STUDIES: WAREHOUSING

ACS Clothing Ltd

ACS Clothing Ltd is a circular fashion fulfilment and logistics centre operating a large warehousing, distribution, and textile care facility in North Lanarkshire. ACS seeks to blend commercial delivery with a strong social mission. The company is an accredited Living Wage and Living Hours employer with the Living Wage Foundation, meaning that they pay a wage that meets the real cost of living to all staff and sub-contracted staff and support secure incomes, fair advance notice, predictable scheduling, and clear contract structures for every employee. ACS holds the world-record B Corp score [214.3], reflecting excellence in 'Fair Work' (defined as clear contracts, fair wages, mechanisms to involve workers in decision-making and a positive workplace culture), inclusion, environmental responsibility, and long-term workforce investment.

The company says that implementing Fair Work and Living Hours has required deliberate redesign of ACS's approach to workforce planning. The company strengthened shift patterns, improved demand forecasting, reduced last-minute scheduling, and created transparent communication channels so colleagues have confidence and clarity about their working week. Line managers are trained specifically to uphold Fair Work principles – ensuring fairness, consistency, and respect in how hours, duties, and opportunities are allocated. These changes have resulted in improved retention, reduced absence, higher stability, and stronger trust across the business.

ACS is currently working with Timewise and our Scottish partner, Flexibility Works, R to explore how flexibility can be introduced into roles traditionally seen as rigid, including warehousing, laundry, and logistics operations. ACS is collecting data from its workforce on preferred flexibility models, including predictable shift swaps, compressed hours, job-sharing, adjusted start/finish times, and modular shift patterns. This is being mapped against workflow peaks and operational constraints to identify flexibility that works in practice.

By combining its existing commitments to fair work with structured experimentation through the pilot, ACS aims to demonstrate that genuine flexibility is possible even in high-throughput logistics environments. The company's goal is to develop practical, repeatable models that improve wellbeing, support inclusion, and strengthen the long-term resilience of the logistics workforce - proving that fair, secure, flexible work is not only achievable but economically beneficial for the sector as a whole.



“ACS is working with Timewise because we believe fair work and flexible working must sit at the centre of the future logistics workforce. As a Living Wage and Living Hours employer, an accredited Supported Business, and the holder of a world-record B Corp score, we have seen for ourselves that treating people well is not only the right thing to do - it strengthens performance, retention, and resilience. [Our new pilot] gives us the opportunity to test new forms of flexibility that genuinely work for both colleagues and operations. Our aim is to show that flexibility in logistics is achievable, practical, and a powerful enabler of a more inclusive and sustainable workplace.”

Anthony Burns, Chief Operating Officer, ACS Clothing Ltd., January 2026

Wincanton

In response to the HGV driver crisis following the pandemic, Wincanton's chief executive, James Wroath, wrote in The Daily Telegraph about the need "to make HGV driving a more inclusive, flexible and rewarding profession", including action to tackle unsociable hours and build more flexibility into shift patterns:

"For too long, we have failed to replenish the ranks of our drivers with younger recruits, deterred by unsociable hours and a lack of appreciation for the skill and responsibility required in the role. We need more diversity, including greater female representation. We also need creativity and flexibility around shift patterns, and more investment in facilities and amenities." ³⁹

Not long after this, Wincanton won HR Magazine's award for the 'Best Diversity and Inclusion Strategy' in 2023. The judges were impressed by the company's concrete targets for diversity improvements, supported by a CEO-chaired steering group and senior sponsors for protected groups, as well as site-based champions and organisation-wide training. They also introduced new policies to support and attract a more diverse workforce, including a flexible working scheme.⁴⁰

As part of these efforts, Wincanton introduced a new type of permanent contract offering cross-site working at its first 'People Campus' – a cluster of three warehouses in a seven-mile radius in Doncaster. This enabled the business to access a greater range of skilled workers to address staff shortages and meet spikes in demand, while also opening up more part time and flexible working options to staff.

The concept has since been expanded to new People Campuses in Northampton and London and other locations around the country – covering over 500 workers. The team has its own management and support structure, which works with the site planning teams to ensure scheduling meets operational needs and staff are supported throughout their employment.

The company told us that its efforts to create a more inclusive workplace had led to improvements in staff productivity and commitment, reporting increases in 'pick accuracy' (by 20 per cent) and faster staff learning time relative to agency staff. The model has also led to improvements in staff diversity. Within the Northampton Campus, for example, 46 per cent of staff are from an ethnic minority, compared to 6.2 per cent at other local sites and 12.9 per cent in the region. Elsewhere, Wincanton has also reported increases in the proportion of female staff, including in driving roles.⁴¹



"People Campus puts our people strategy into action in a number of ways. It is helping us to embed an inclusive culture that respects our colleagues, ensures they sustain work, grow their skills and enhance the career opportunities available to them. We have harnessed the power of listening to peoples' needs and placing this at the forefront of how we resource our contracts. Our colleagues on the Campus have told us how much they value a flexible work pattern, to better fit with their personal life choices. It's a win-win, because it also means we can attract people from much wider areas of our society."

Rob Glen, General Manager – People Campus, at Wincanton, November 2025

Mobile workers: examples from delivery and other sectors

In addition to the pressures of just-in-time operations, managing multiple shift patterns and routes for mobile workers is more complex than it is in the site-based warehouse environment. Increasing driver input into shift patterns requires action from route planners, managers and HR across the supply chain. As well as this operational complexity, the high costs of training HGV drivers can create a disincentive to enabling more part time working. As a result, examples of innovative practice are harder to find.

Nonetheless, a small number of companies are making efforts to improve the quality of working time for drivers. This ranges from basic commitments such as ensuring that drivers' shifts always finish in their home town, to efforts to enable drivers to manage health conditions by accommodating more breaks, alongside improvements to risk assessments, and the more transformative efforts by DHL to support flexible working and job share arrangements, detailed in the case study below.

CASE STUDY: DELIVERY

DHL

DHL has identified flexible working as a strategic priority due to the high proportion of older workers that make up their driving workforce. On one contract, for example, the average age of the 386 drivers is over 50 years old. The company sees flexibility as critical to retaining valuable skills and experience for longer, while giving drivers greater control over their work-life balance as they move towards retirement.

In consultation with trade union representatives, DHL created signposting resources to help staff to understand their retirement options and better plan for the future. As well as providing advice on important topics such as will-writing, health, pensions and other entitlements, DHL is encouraging workers to think about part time and flexible working options to support longer healthy working lives.

Prior to this, the company did not receive high numbers of job-share requests. But the proactive approach has uncovered latent demand: a noticeable share of employees at the pilot site opted for part-time and job-share arrangements. To enable this, DHL provides its resource planning teams with the agreements and requires them to factor these in when planning tasks and routes, such as by placing part time workers on more local delivery routes.

The next phase of the work will build on this early success, alongside a focus on how to attract more people into driving roles, including progression pathways from 'warehousing to wheels'. DHL is also supporting its wider supply chain to implement improvements.

DHL's experience showcases the importance of proactive efforts to challenge the 'ideal worker' model and promote healthier approaches to working live among drivers, alongside upfront planning to enable a more diverse range of working patterns.

Employers in other in operationally complex sectors also offer examples of how to support greater staff input and control for mobile workers. Although the geographic scales are smaller, public bus companies, adult social care, and parts of construction all manage mobile workers. Timewise has worked with employers in these and other frontline sectors to explore how to improve predictability and control over rosters for staff. Our work with employers in different frontline sectors shows that fairer scheduling practices lead to better staff health, wellbeing and motivation, as well as benefits for employers, including improvements in staff turnover, absence retention and productivity.

TRIALLING IMPROVEMENTS TO ROSTERING FOR MOBILE WORKERS – EXAMPLES FROM OTHER SECTORS

First Bus

First Bus is one of the UK's largest bus operators, with a fleet of over 4,800 buses and a workforce of 13,500. The company has a strong focus on building its identity as a service business that prioritises customers and its workforce. As with many others in the sector, it faces major challenges around staff retention, an ageing workforce with significant health issues, and a need to attract more diverse talent.

Flexible and predictable working is viewed as a key opportunity to attract, retain and diversify its workforce. The company replaced top-down job appraisals with more person-centred conversations, alongside multiple employee engagement surveys every year. The large amount of data gathered revealed that work-life compatibility was a key challenge for its workforce. First Bus recognised that to address these issues, it had to explore how to change the way it constructs work, rosters and schedules.

The complexity of setting schedules for a mobile workforce, where the location of shift start and finish times often differs, is in some cases further complicated by regular changes to commissioned routes. For First Bus, different bargaining arrangements have also resulted in a division between staff benefitting from a 'fixed lines' roster with predictable work patterns and those on a general roster with relatively less predictability and frequent shift rotations.

The company has worked with Timewise to design and conduct pilots to explore how it can structure work differently, undertaking surveys and learning about employees' preferences, and partnering with unions to agree principles to enable more input into rosters and more options for part time patterns. It is also working with schedulers and those responsible for allocating staff members to duties, providing tools and advice to help them plan and allocate work and schedules that reflect staff preferences.

The company says that the changes have made it easier to attract and retain staff. They have supported improvements in health by enabling staff to better manage health needs and be more physically active, alongside improvements in access to healthcare and occupational health on site. The next challenge is to scale the improvements across their 60 sites. The company recognises that long-term culture change is needed to shift to a flexible working culture that can attract and retain a diverse and dynamic workforce.

Kier Highways

Kier Highways is the largest integrated Highways Maintenance Contract in the country, employing about 400 people across routine, emergency maintenance and new infrastructure services. Post-Covid, office-based staff had adopted hybrid working but it was inconsistent and dependent on individual managers determining working patterns. Operational staff were frustrated that their office-based colleagues were not in the office and had the ability to work from home when they themselves had no access to flexibility, and this was causing tensions.

Timewise worked with Kier Highways to explore how to address these challenges. Following a series of focus groups and interviews with senior leaders, flexible ways of working for both office-based staff and operational teams working across different sites were co-designed with the company. Office based teams were supported to trial an agile working framework with guided sessions for each team to determine how, when and where they worked best. This resulted in clear, well-thought out and team-based decisions on hybrid working.

Operational teams trialled a compressed fortnight. This included re-shaping how jobs were scheduled to reduce travel time across the city. Crews were allocated to specific 'patches' for the day – enabling them to complete more jobs per day and therefore work nine days in every 10 on rotation. The non-working day was done on a rotational basis for the crews. Supervisors were supported and provided training which gave them the confidence to roster and manage crews with flexible working arrangements. Kier also piloted a part-time crew for older workers who wanted to reduce their hours in the run up to retirement. Again this involved changes to how jobs were scheduled for this crew so that workload matched hours.

The agile working framework led to increased levels of staff engagement and productivity during the pilot, and as a result was fully adopted across all office-based teams. Operational teams who worked a compressed fortnight saw a decrease in absence, a reduction in overtime and a significant improvement in wellbeing. The company reported 38 fewer days lost to sickness absence and a 13 per cent improvement in wellbeing scores following the changes, and 90 per cent of managers say they feel confident to have conversations about flexibility.



"The best bit was seeing the morale boost it gave to operatives."

Ian, Operations Manager

Rathbone homecare provider

Social care might feel like an unusual comparison with road freight. But homecare providers also deploy mobile workers to meet complex service needs that are subject to short-notice change, working within very tight budgets. Risks are often held by the workforce, including through high use of zero-hours contracts and non-payment of travel time.

Timewise has worked with health and care providers to explore how to improve recruitment pathways and scheduling practices to improve staff retention through increased control and input into shift patterns.

In 2018, we worked with a care provider in London, **Rathbone**, to trial a geographical, team-based approach to scheduling for homecare teams. Based on the concept of self-managing teams, this approach involved staff in the planning process – introducing a weekly staff meeting to collectively set the roster. Staff were given responsibility for ensuring business needs were met, with small teams responsible for managing different locations. As a result of their involvement, staff were able to better understand, negotiate and accommodate different working patterns, leading to a more equitable approach and fewer staff tensions.

As a result of the pilot, care staff spent 30 per cent less time spent travelling and one hour per week extra contact time with service users, plus time for a weekly staff meeting. Rathbone reported improved staff commitment and reduced intention to leave – with no turnover during the pilot compared to 15 per cent for same period amongst non-pilot teams. One year later, the pilot teams had consistently reported decreased sick days compared to non-pilot teams – and the organisation had created more fixed-hours contracts.

LESSONS FOR EMPLOYERS SEEKING TO CREATE HEALTHIER JOBS IN LOGISTICS

The examples above show that responsible employers in the logistics sector can take action to support positive changes to work organisation and scheduling. Here we draw out key lessons for employers in the logistics sector and other sectors with a largely mobile workforce:

- **Employee-led design:** Instead of imposing finished schedules, employers should capture staff preferences before the route planning and scheduling process begins. The goal is to accommodate as many as staff preferences as possible while meeting operational needs;
- **Tech-enabled flexibility:** Employers and software providers should ensure that e-rostering tools that allow for automated, preference-based scheduling. This reduces the manual burden on managers while maximising shift satisfaction;
- **Structural innovation:** By organising work into geographic teams or route-based clusters, employers may be able to more easily facilitate fairer and more diverse working patterns such as rotations, job shares and easier shift swaps;
- **Collaboration:** Staff and unions should be active partners in solving rostering challenges to ensure the system is equitable;
- **Cultural change:** In traditionally male-dominated workplaces where full time patterns of work have long been held up as the ideal, changes in workplace culture are more likely to be achieved by proactively promoting healthier working patterns, rather than relying on individuals to request flexible working arrangements.

There are considerable potential pay offs from these approaches, including lower absence and retention rates among existing workers and greater workforce diversity, as other groups are attracted into the sector.

At present, however, only a handful of vanguard employers in logistics appear to be focused on the need to improve job design and scheduling practices. The final section provides recommendations for industry leaders and policymakers to support more innovation and positive change to tackle the deep workforce challenges facing the sector.



Photo credit: Melanie Pollard for The Trucking Lives Photography Exhibition

Photo credit: Holly Revell for The Trucking Lives Photography Exhibition

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR POLICYMAKERS

The logistics sector plays a critical role in keeping the UK's economy moving. It is particularly fundamental to retail and food, but also supports construction, healthcare and many others. It is undergoing rapid change and faces critical workforce shortages that are at least in part caused by the nature of jobs and work organisation in the sector. This includes problems of excessive and insecure hours, and work intensification linked to staff shortages and use of digital technology to manage staff time and performance.

Unhealthy working patterns exacerbate the sector's high rates of workforce sickness including diabetes. This has costs to the sector, but also wider implications for public safety, national productivity, and health and social security costs, as well as the costs to individuals and their families.

The Labour Government's Employment Rights Act introduces measures to strengthen employees' right to request flexible working arrangements, making it more difficult for employers to reject a request from 2027. The Act also seeks to tackle insecurity at work, including a requirement for employers to offer workers on zero- and low-hours contracts a contract that reflects the hours they regularly work, provide reasonable advance notice of changes to shifts and compensate shift workers for cancellations.

More broadly, the Department for Work and Pensions is testing Healthy Working Lifestyle standards developed by the former chief executive of John Lewis, Sir Charlie Mayfield. Working with a group of vanguard employers, they are seeking to strengthen the evidence and guidance for how employers can better support people with health conditions to enter and stay in work.

These are welcome developments that could underpin improvements in healthy job design in the economy. However, the evidence we have gathered suggests that the impact in logistics is likely to be highly disappointing without industry leadership and government support to address collective action hurdles. Deep cultural norms, particularly for driving roles, mean that few workers take advantage of flexible working rights unless encouraged to do so by their employer. While there are pockets of good practice, the operational complexity of logistics means that employers are likely to be able to legitimately reject formal flexible working requests under the legislation.

Current operational trends in the sector are creating more - not less - insecurity and intensity at work, with growing concerns that technology is being used to undermine workers' employment rights. The Resolution Foundation has argued that the 'out of sight' nature of warehousing, combined with high work intensity and a reliance on migrant workers and casualised contracts, are 'risk factors' for poor treatment of workers and abuse of employment rights. They have called for a government-backed sector agreement to improve pay and conditions, modelled on the Fair Pay Agreement being implemented in social care.⁴²

Timewise has previously argued for greater consideration of the dynamics and issues in frontline sectors to support efforts to tackle high rates of economic inactivity due to ill-health and ensure effective implementation of new legislation.⁴³ This report suggests that logistics should be a priority for these initiatives. Technology companies, 'just-in-time' management consultancies, industry bodies, trade unions and employers all have a role to play in supporting the logistics sector to prepare for and embrace upcoming changes to employment law. The Government can play an important convening role to support this process. With this in mind, we recommend that:

- The Department for Business and Trade should expand its Modern Industrial Strategy to include key foundational sectors of the economy including logistics, underpinned by a dual focus on improving job quality and productivity.
- The Department should introduce conditional support to incentivise employers to work in partnership on reducing inactivity and workplace sickness – and monitor the implementation of key Employment Rights Act provisions to ensure effective implementation in frontline sectors.
- The Department for Work and Pensions should test and develop the relevance of the new Healthy Working Lifestyle standards to frontline industries including logistics, providing sector- and occupation-specific guidance, good practice examples, and evidence showcasing the links between the design of good, healthy jobs and productivity and efficiency impacts in specific sectoral and operational contexts, to help make the business case for new ways of working.

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ABOUT TIMEWISE

Timewise is a national non-profit organisation championing healthier working lives. Over the last decade we have worked with many of the UK's leading employers to design work that works for modern lives – bridging the gap between employers and employees to ensure work meets people's life needs.

This work is critical to tackling the 'participation gap' in the UK – ensuring that everyone has access to work that enables them to thrive – and in doing so helping employers to better attract, retain and progress diverse talent.

We undertake research, campaigns and policy work to highlight the social and business benefits of good quality and flexible work that provides predictability and control for workers. We offer bespoke solutions, training and innovation programmes to improve job design, scheduling and work organisation. We specialise in developing frameworks of good practice and tailored solutions for frontline sectors that face operational barriers to change, such as education, health, social care, retail, childcare and construction. We also work with industry leaders, government and other partners to support change at scale. If you would like more information about our work, please email: info@timewise.co.uk

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We value both lived and learned experience, and think it's vital to include those with direct experience of the issues being worked on. To make sure people have the evidence needed to make change happen, we also fund work like London's Poverty Profile and London's Cost of Living Tracker.

Whatever we're working on, all our funded projects have one core aim - to make London a better, fairer city.



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