

Flexible working arrangements and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

Data shows a drop in all other forms of flexible working arrangements - other than homeworking - since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic

More action is needed to increase the uptake of flexible working arrangements, as data shows a drop in all other forms of flexible working arrangements (other than homeworking) since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. CIPD research suggests that UK workers face inequality due to a stark difference in employers offering flexible working practices, with just under half (46%) of employees saying they do not have flexible working arrangements in their current role.

The CIPD's view is that flexible working practices should be the norm - not the exception - for all UK workers. With that in mind, our [#FlexFrom1st](#) campaign encourages employers to support flexible working for all and the right to request flexible working from day one of employment. We're also calling for a change to UK law to make flexible working requests a day one right for all employees.

A rise in homeworking

Our examination of the Labour Force Survey (of 74,832 people in Oct-Dec 2020)ⁱ (the most up to date evidence) reveals the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on flexible working arrangements. Unsurprisingly, there's been a substantial increase in homeworking during this period. Back in 2010 there were around 3% of workers working from home all the time. That figure was rising gradually to around 5% in January-March 2020, before the impact of the pandemic. However, after that point, the figures then rose rapidly in response to the Government's guidance that all workers (who were able to) should work from home. In Oct-Dec 2020, the number working from home all the time was at 10%.

We identified home workers as those responding 'own home' to the question 'HOME - Whether working from home in main job'. Less conservative estimates sometimes include 'In the same grounds or buildings as home' and 'In different places using home as a base', which will give larger numbers.

While homeworking is split fairly evenly between the sexes, those working in professional occupations were most likely to work from home all the time and particularly those in professional, scientific and technical roles, information and communication and financial and insurance. Unsurprisingly, those least likely to work from home all the time were in mining and quarrying, water supply, sewerage and waste and electricity, gas and air conditioning supply roles.

A drop in all other forms of flexible working arrangements

What is more surprising, and concerning, is that the data shows a drop in all other forms of flexible working arrangements since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Across the board, the number of workers in a job-share, working flexi-time, compressed hours, part-time hours, term-time working, annualised hours and zero-hour contracts has reduced significantly since the start of the pandemic.

Table 1: Prevalence/uptake of flexible working practices before the full impact of the pandemic and after

Flexible working arrangement	Prevalence/uptake before the impact of the pandemic (Apr-June 2020)	Prevalence/uptake since the pandemic (Oct-Dec 2020)	Increase or decrease
Homeworking (all the time)	7.86%	10.17%	↑
Part-time hours	28.38%	27.64%	↓
Flexi-time	12.77 %	12.60%	↓
Annualised hours	6.45%	6.29%	↓
Term-time working	4.68%	4.22%	↓
Zero-hour contracts	3.27%	3.02%	↓
Compressed hours: 4 ½ day week	0.74%	0.64%	↓
Job-share	0.46%	0.38%	↓
Compressed hours: 9-day fortnight	0.42%	0.39%	↓

Unmet demand and potential

CIPD [survey data](#) shows a real unmet demand around flexible working arrangements. This finding is corroborated by the Labour Force Survey, which finds that 9.3% of workers – equivalent to 3 million people – said they would prefer to work shorter hours and accept the cut in pay that comes with this. This finding suggests that for many, the 9-to-5 working day is too rigid, and policies such as flexi-time (flexible start and finish times), compressed hours and part-time hours would better match peoples' preferences.

We can see in the table above, the proportion of workers on compressed hours (either a 9-day fortnight or 4-and-a-half-day week) is particularly low. There is real potential to increase this type of flexible working, in line with worker expectations. Doing so could also boost employer agility and help to enhance customer/ client response times.

The proportion working a job-share is also currently very small (about 1 in every 200 workers) with very few in senior positions. This seems like a missed opportunity. For employees, job shares can often facilitate progression, and the ability to balance personal commitments. Employers can benefit from two sets of skills, knowledge and experience.

Now is the time for organisations to increase their flexible working offerings not pull back. The CIPD encourages organisations to collaborate with their employees to find flexible solutions that are mutually beneficial.

Flexibility is needed in hours worked as well as in location of work

While many see the pandemic as a driver of flexible working practices, particularly around home working, the reality for many is very different. We need a new understanding of what flexible

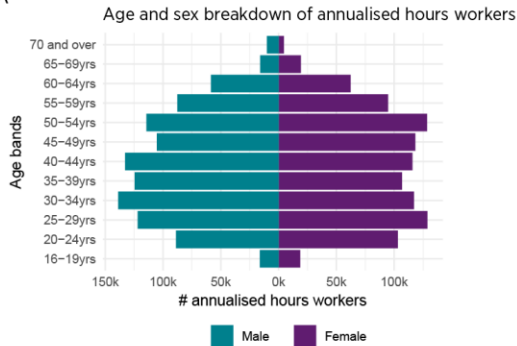
working is, and we need employers to embrace flexible working arrangements beyond home working, to give opportunity and choice to all. Employees may not always be able to change *where* they work, but they should have more choice and a say in *when* and *how* they work.

Having the ability to build in flexible working arrangements, such as changes to hours, term-time working or job shares, will empower people to have greater control and flexibility in their working life. This is good for inclusion and opening up opportunities to people who have other constraints in being able to work standard-hour weeks or in getting to a place of work. It also supports peoples' wellbeing and productivity. Fairness of opportunity in working flexibly ensures organisations do not end up with divisions or a two-tier workforce.

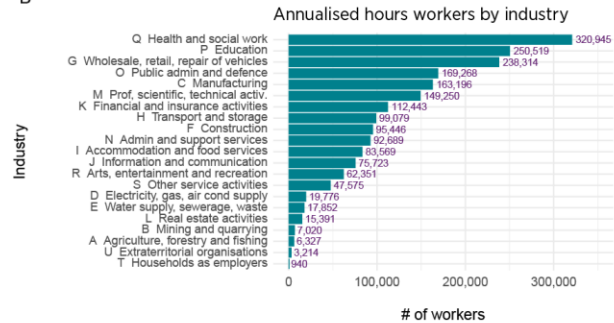
Annualised hours working

6.3% of workers work annualised hours

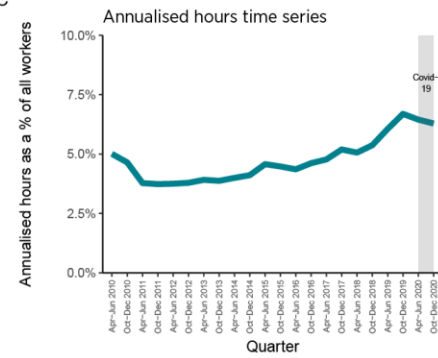
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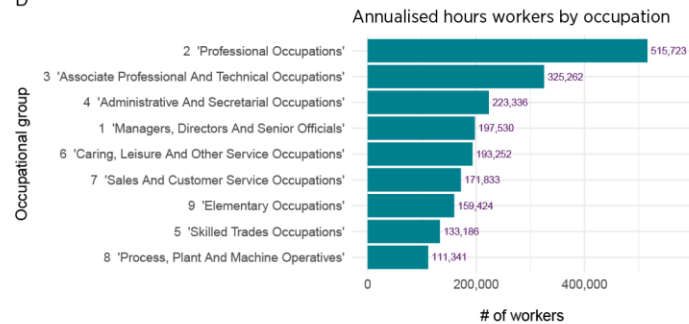
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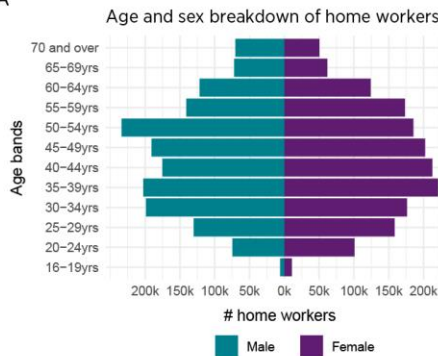
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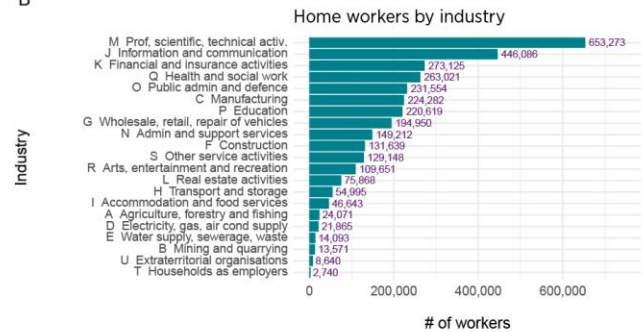
Home working

10.2% of workers are worked in their own home in Oct-Dec 2020 (though as we know this figure has varied over the past year).

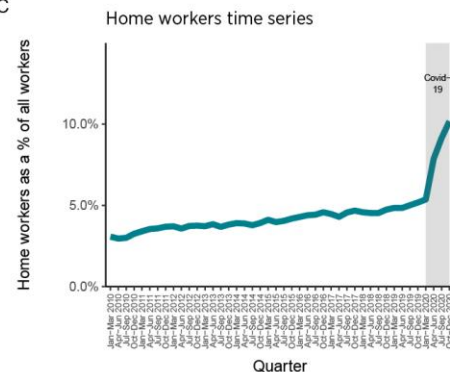
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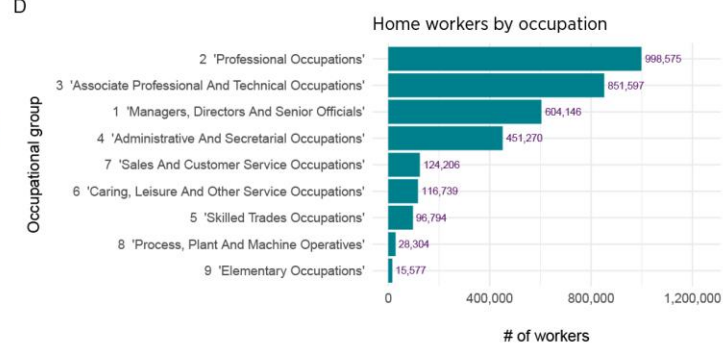
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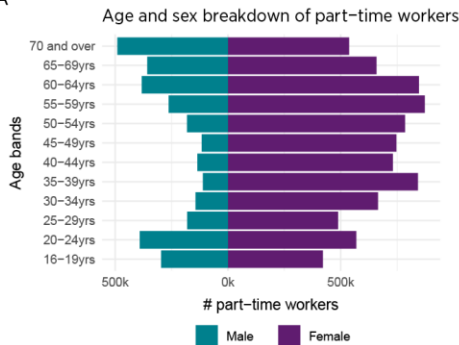
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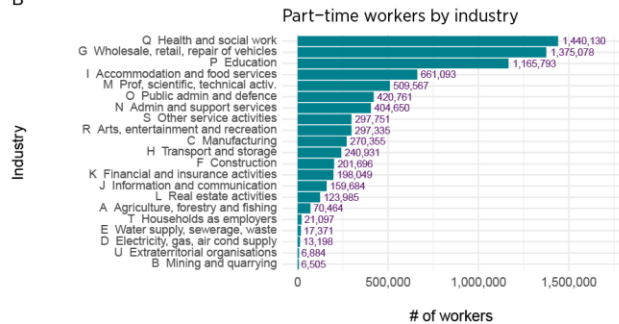
Part-time working

27.6% of workers are part-time

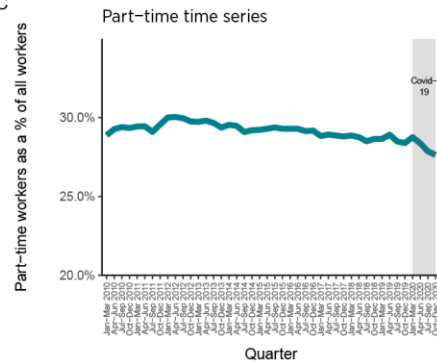
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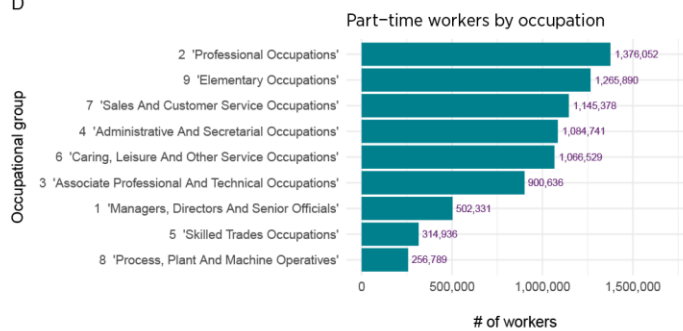
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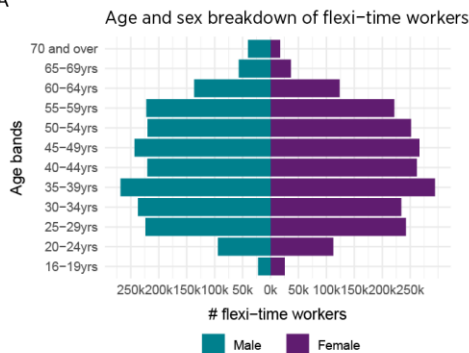
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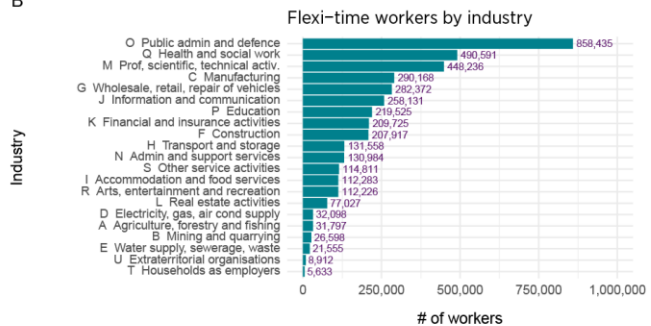
Flexi-time working

12.6% of workers use flexi-time

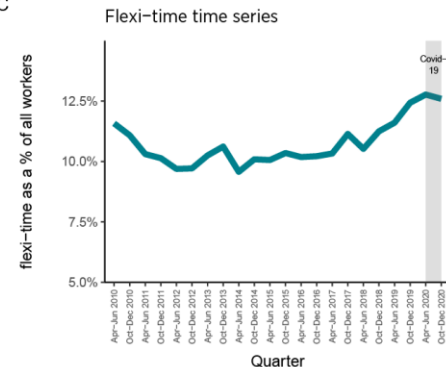
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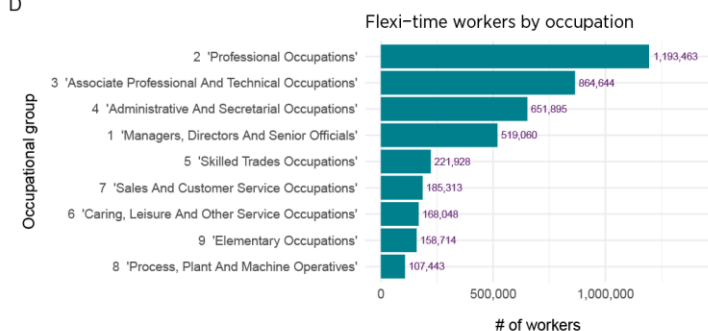
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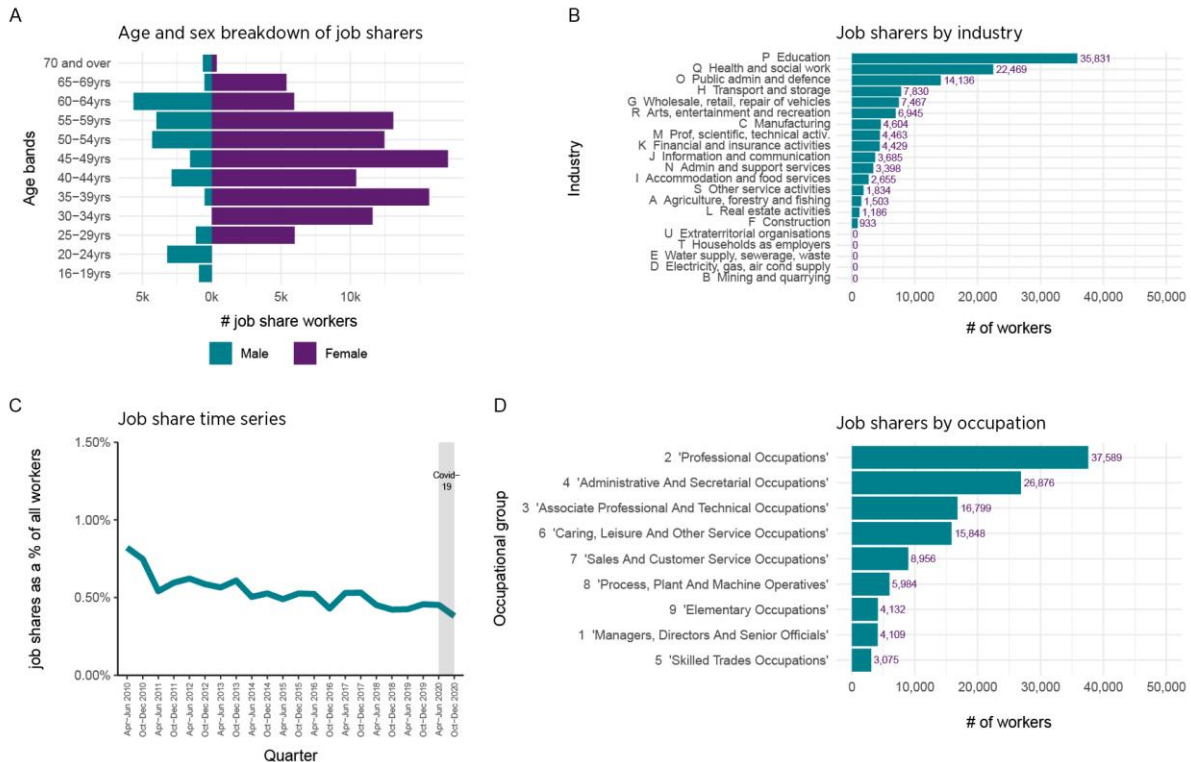


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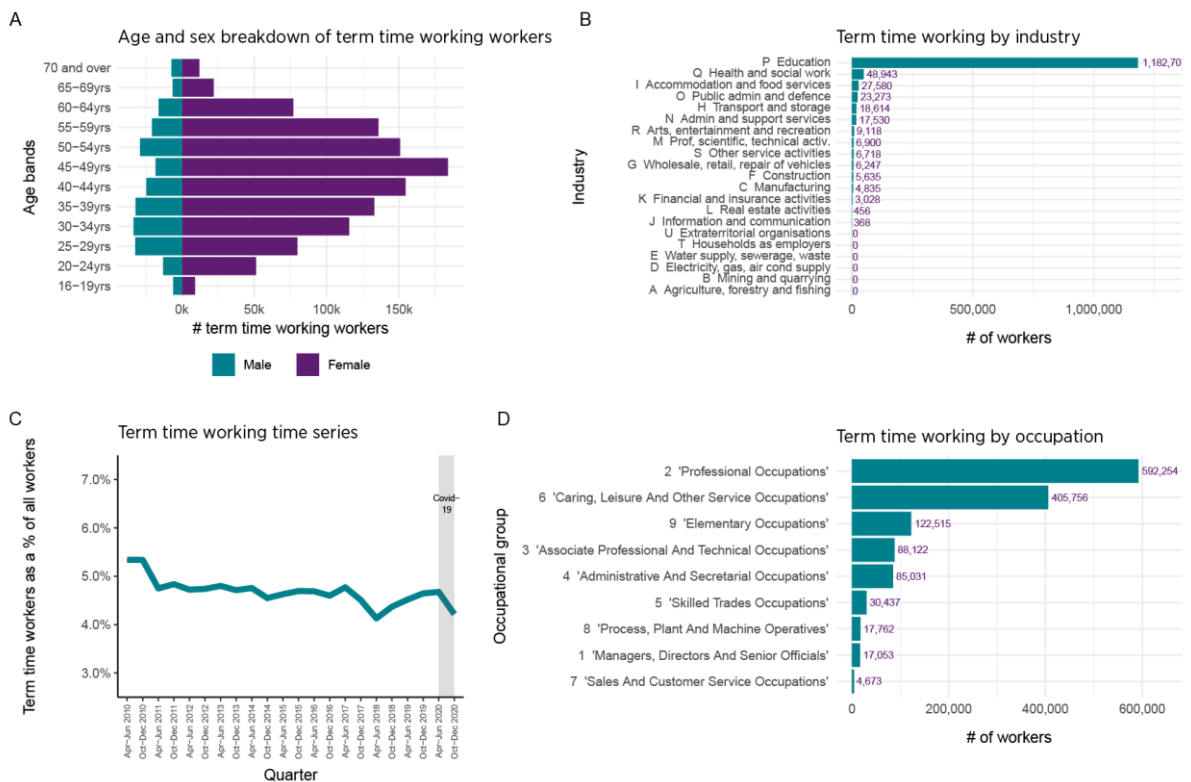
Job shares

0.4% of workers job share. With such small numbers in the sample some smaller groups appear to have no data. Though numbers in these groups are unlikely to be zero, they will still be very small.



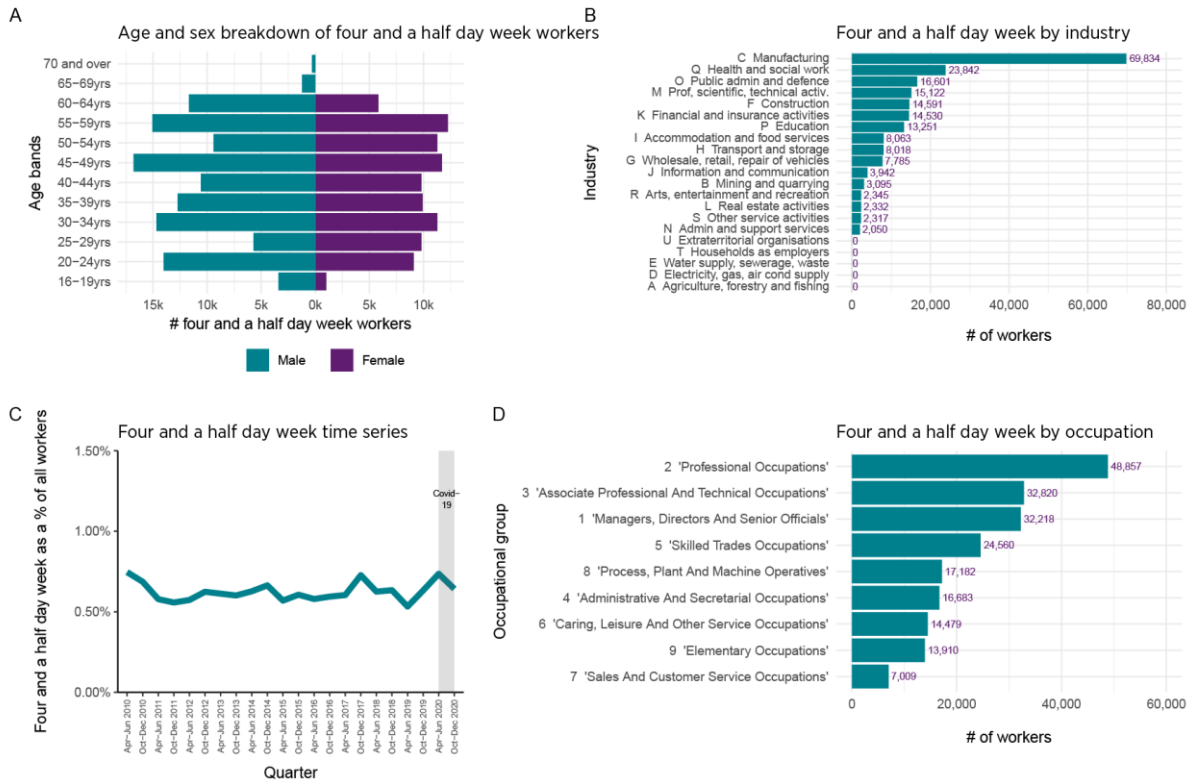
Term time working

4.2% of workers have a term time working arrangement



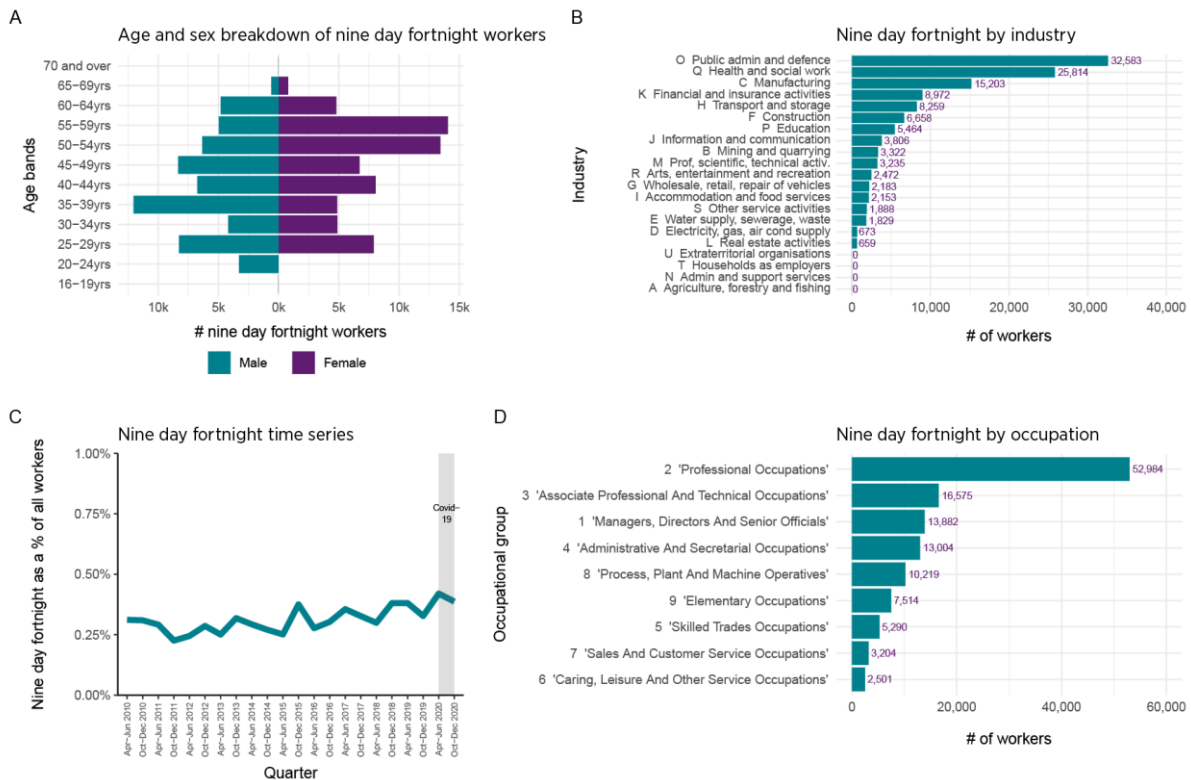
Four and a half day week working

0.6% of workers work a four and a half day week arrangement. With such small numbers there is less certainty about some smaller groups in these charts



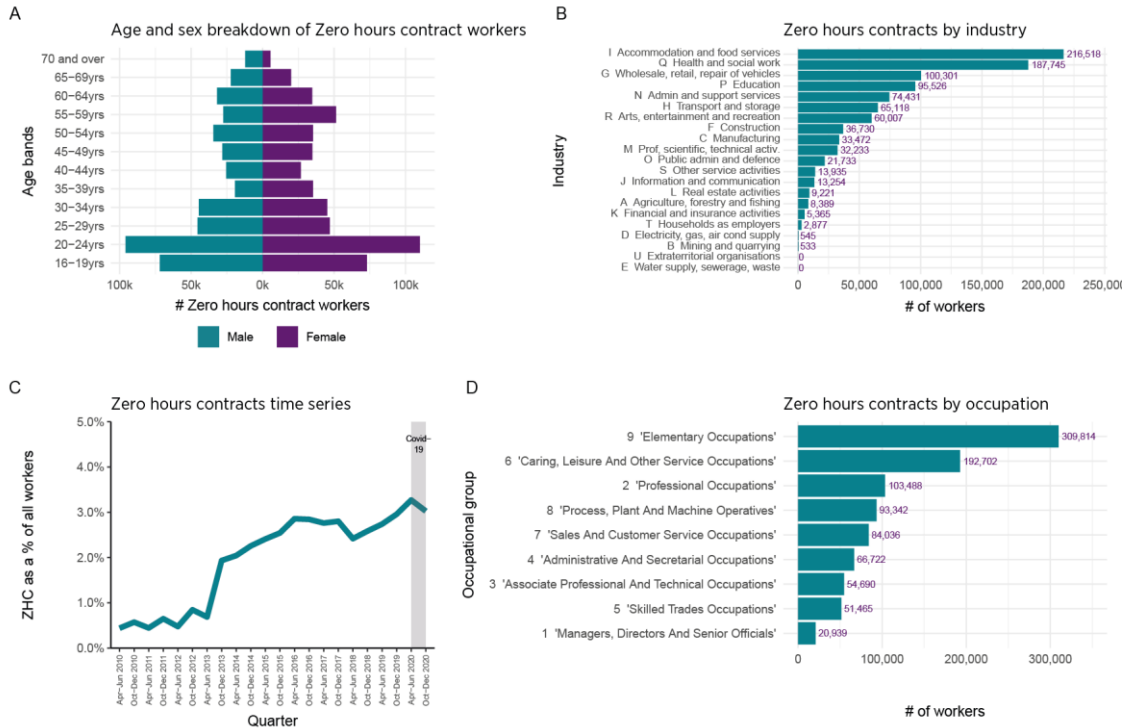
Nine day fortnight working arrangements

0.4% of workers work a nine day fortnight arrangement. With such small numbers there is less certainty about some smaller groups in these charts.



Zero hours contracts

3.0% of workers have a Zero hours contract



ⁱ For all cross-sectional cuts, the latest available labour force survey (Oct-Dec 2020) was used. All time series LFS quarterly datasets are clearly labelled on the x axis: Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA), Office for National Statistics, Social Survey Division, 2021, Quarterly Labour Force Survey, October - December, 2020, [data collection], UK Data Service, 2nd Edition, Accessed 25 March 2021. SN: 8777, <http://doi.org/10.5255/UKDA-SN-8777-2>