

Outline of the approach

1. Rapid evidence assessment: systematic search of adult social care and broader literature with limited results.
2. Employer and staff survey: widely promoted resulting in 318 responses.
3. Contact with advisory group members: invitation to reflect views of people who use care and support services but resulted in limited feedback.

Findings from the work

Contract and working hours

- Range of contracts employed including full and part time and zero hour contracts.
- Around two thirds of staff in our sample report working shifts of eight hours or less.
- The majority of staff had a single place of work. For those expected to travel to multiple sites, half had travel time included in their contract.

Views and experiences of working longer hours

Some evidence to support benefits including:

- staff: reduced travel and child care costs, increase recovery time, more days off work
- organisations: cost savings, impact on staff absenteeism, continuity of care and planning time. Continuity of care was the most frequently quoted benefit by employers.

Some evidence to support drawbacks including:

- staff: increased fatigue, less family time on working days
- organisations: reduced quality, increased fatigue and errors, reduced motivation and performance. Staff fatigue was the most common issue raised by employers
- individuals: limited evidence of poorer care linked to tired staff.

Impact on quality

While there was some evidence to support the outcomes noted, there was not always a clear link between longer shifts and changes in the outcomes.

- Employers had mixed views on the impact of longer working hours on quality and safety of care delivered, and ability to complete duties required.
- Staff also presented a mixed picture when thinking about the general workforce and quality and safety of care. However, there was some support staff that felt that longer working hours did impact negatively on productivity.
- Reflecting on personal practice staff felt there was no impact on delivery and safety of care. However, there was evidence that staff feel longer working shifts do negatively impact on fatigue levels, their temperament and levels of motivation.

Conclusions

The research has indicated that respondents, both employers and staff, hold a range views in this area. It would appear that there is no right or wrong answer but rather a spread of opinion. It seems to work for some employers and staff and not for others. Flexibility linked to workers, organisations and people using care and support services could be more appropriate than a blanket approach to endorsing or refuting longer working shifts.