AN INVESTIGATION TO ASSESS THE PRIORITY OF FLEXIBLE WORKING INITIATIVES TO NEW GRADUATES WHEN CHOOSING A GRADUATE LEVEL JOB.

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Business and Management with Human Resource Management.

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the contents of this dissertation entitled “An investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job” is entirely my own work. It has also never been submitted for any other degree.

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Abstract

The CIPD (2016) define flexible working as an arrangement in the workplace, which offers flexibility on how long, when and where employees work. Research suggests that flexible working is on the rise with over a third (34%) of employees highlighting that they would prefer the opportunity for flexible working over a pay rise (Frith, 2016). A study by NUS and Endsleigh found that over 95% of 2000 final year students and new graduates highlighted work-life balance as an extremely important factor when looking for a job (Guinness, 2014). As a result the aim of this research was an investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job. In addition to the overall aim of this research the research objectives outlined the importance of flexible working to new graduates and an assessment of their expectations in comparison to their experiences. Samples of both upcoming and new graduates were used in order to obtain a comprehensive overview of flexible working.

The qualitative approach to the research used a contemporary sample, of upcoming graduates participating in focus groups, and new graduates participating in semi-structured interviews. Through the analysis of secondary data and the primary data collected three key themes were highlighted. The three themes included work-life balance and well-being, support and the impact of experience. It appeared that the majority of responses linked to one or more of these categories and in turn also related to one or more of the research objectives. The data collected suggested that unlike previous findings from Woods (2010), Guinness (2014) and Frith (2016) upcoming graduates did not regard the opportunity to work flexibly as important or did not expect it from their first role. However, this significantly contrasted to the new graduates who regarded flexible working as important in their current roles and any future roles. This highlighted the impact of experience on the attitudes towards flexible working between the upcoming and new graduates. The results also suggested that overall the majority of the new graduates were satisfied with their experiences of flexible working which again differed from the findings in secondary data in the works of Wright (2016) and studies by PWC (2014). One of the main points to take away from the research findings was the need for increased education to create awareness of the potential benefits of flexible working to the upcoming generation.

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## Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Introduction</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1. Chapter Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2. Overview</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3. Aim and Objectives of the Research</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>2. Literature Review</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Chapter Introduction</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1. Developments of Flexible Working</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.2. Changing Attitudes of Flexible Working</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3. The Importance of Flexible Working to New Graduates</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.4. Expectations Vs Experiences</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.5. Chapter Summary</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>3. Methodology</strong></td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1. Chapter Introduction</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.2. Research Philosophy</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3. Research Approach</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4. Access</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5. Research Strategy</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.51. Focus Groups</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.52. Semi-structured Interviews</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.6. Sampling Method</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7. Ethics</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.8. Validity and Reliability</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9. Chapter Summary</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>4. Results and Discussion</strong></td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1. Chapter Introduction</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.2. Theme One- Work-Life Balance and Well-Being</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Conclusions and Recommendations 47

### 5.1. Chapter Introduction 47

### 5.2. Aims and Objectives 47

### 5.3. Key Findings 48

### 5.4. Strengths of the Study 49

### 5.5. Limitations of the Study 50

### 5.6. Suggestions for Future Research 51

## Reference List 53

## Appendices 58

- **Appendix 1** - Focus Group and Interview Result 58
- **Appendix 2** - Focus Group Transcripts 62
- **Appendix 3** - Interview Transcripts 80
- **Appendix 4** - Participant Information Sheets 102
- **Appendix 5** - Participant Consent Forms 106
- **Appendix 6** - Focus Group and Interview Question Guides 108
- **Appendix 7** - Ethics Form 112
1. Introduction

1.1. Chapter Introduction

This research presents an investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job. The CIPD (2016) define flexible working as an arrangement in the workplace, which offers flexibility on how long, when and where employees work.

1.2. Overview

This research primarily seeks to address how important flexible working is to both upcoming and new graduates in relation to their first role out of university. The study will delve into how important the opportunity of flexible working is to both upcoming graduates in their first role out of university and new graduates in relation to their current and future jobs. In addition to this the expectations in relation to flexible working opportunities will also be highlighted from upcoming graduates and new graduates. These expectations will then be analyzed alongside the experiences of flexible working from the new graduates. This will then show if there are any gaps between what new graduates are expecting in terms of flexible working initiatives and what employers are offering. Key themes that will be addressed will include work-life balance and well-being, support and the impact of experience. This will then link back to the overall priority of flexible working to new graduates when choosing a job and the two research objectives, to ensure discussions are relevant to the research aim.
1.3. Aim and Objectives of the Research

The central aim of this research is an investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job. In addition to the overall aim, two objectives have also been set. These include;

1. Explore the importance graduates give flexible working when applying and choosing a job
2. An analysis of new graduate’s expectations and experiences of flexible working

The research objectives were arrived at through the analysis of secondary data in the topic area surrounding new graduates and flexible working. It was apparent that two key topic areas from previous literature included the increasing importance of flexible working to new graduates along with a gap between expectations of flexible working opportunities in comparison to new graduate’s experiences of flexible working. It was found that over 95% of 2000 final year students and new graduates highlighted work-life balance as an extremely important factor when looking for a job (Guinness, 2014). Along with over 28% of new graduate’s expectations of work-life balance were not met during employment (PWC, 2014). It was found that different generations have different expectations of the workplace (Crumpacker and Crumpacker 2007; Westerman and Yamamura, 2007). With the rise of graduate recruitment (The Guardian, 2014) it is clear that meeting the needs and wants of the new generation of labour is important to ensure a retained workforce. Jusoh et al (2011) state that new generations attitudes to the workplace including the importance of flexible working, has resulted in a development of changing attitudes within the whole workforce. Arguably the requirements of the new generation of labour could indirectly effect the whole organisations attitudes to expectations in the workplace. As a result this research proposes to address these issues to give a deeper insight
into why new graduates value flexible working and in turn why their needs are not being met in the workplace.

As a result, in addition to previous work this research will look to gain upcoming graduates expectations of flexible working and new graduates experiences of flexible working. The importance of flexible working will be discussed with both upcoming and new graduates to uncover factors that influence this opinion. This will build on previous studies (Thompson et al, 1999; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Jusoh et al, 2011; Guinness, 2014) in similar topic areas as the sample will be contemporary- ensuring an up to date view is represented in this study. It also appeared that previous studies did not delve into explaining in much depth why new graduates regarded flexible working as important.
2. Literature Review

2.1. Chapter Introduction

Aligning with the aim and objectives of this study, the below analysis of secondary data discusses previous findings regarding flexible working and new graduates. This evidences the foundations of this study concerning key themes and trends. This chapter will include an explanation of the developments of flexible working regarding legal changes and organisational adaptations. A discussion of changing attitudes and the importance of flexible working to new graduates is also addressed. Finally, a comparative approach to new graduates expectations compared to actual experiences of flexible working, in an employment context are evaluated.

2.2. Developments of Flexible Working

The CIPD (2016) define flexible working as an arrangement in the workplace, which offers flexibility on how long, when and where employees work. Similarly, the Citizens Advice Bureau (2016) define it as a working arrangement, which differs from the existing working pattern. Some common flexible working practices include part-time working, job-sharing, teleworking and compressed hours (Sujansky and Ferri-Reed, 2009). Research suggests that flexible working is on the rise with over a third (34%) of employees highlighting that they would prefer the opportunity for flexible working over a pay rise (Frith, 2016). Leading organisations such as Google and Morningstar both adopt a strong commitment to flexible working, though adjusting their organisational practices to accommodate the changing needs of flexible working (Bannon et al, 2011). Employers are now recognising the advantages of meeting the rising demand for
Flexible working (Unison, 2014) and as a result are incorporating it as a key element of their benefits packages.

Flexible working is not a new concept but in the past has generally been associated with working parents and carers' needs, to balance professional and personal commitments (Unison, 2014). This was evident in the 2003 legislation introduced by the UK government, the 'right to request flexible working' that applied to certain carers and parents (CIPD, 2016). However, through changing attitudes, legal developments and reported benefits, flexible working has now become a widespread opportunity for employees. In 2014, previous legislation was extended and now applies to employees with over 26 weeks' continuous employment (CIPD, 2016). As a result, all employees now have the legal right to be able to request flexible working (GOV, 2016). However, not all employees utilise this opportunity (Preston, 2014; Dulk and Ruijter, 2008; Snowdon, 2011). Wright (2016) identifies an expectation gap regarding flexible working initiatives that employees require, and what organisations are offering (Wright, 2016).

2.3. Changing Attitudes of Flexible Working

Smola and Sutton (2002) highlight that different generational groups have different “Peer Personalities”. This leads to each generational group having different values and expectations of the workplace. Currently it has been identified that there are three generational cohorts in today's workforce; Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y (Crumpacker and Crumpacker 2007; Westerman and Yamamura, 2007). Baby Boomers value challenging work practices (CIPD, 2008) and seek a rewarding profession (Carver and Candela, 2008) through rewards such as pay increases and promotions (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002). Whereas Generation X, seek career security (Lancaster and Stillman, 2002) and tend to feel more engaged in an organisation where
there is a sense of teamwork (CIPD, 2008). Whereas the latest generation to enter the workforce, Generation Y, regard flexible working as a priority with over 40% indicating that work-life balance was of high importance (Stork et al, 2005). This indicates that generational groups value different experiences in the workplace.

However, Beekman (2011) argues that regardless of generation all workers now seek flexible working options. Similarly, Jusoh et al (2011) highlight that new generations attitudes to the workplace including the importance of flexible working, has resulted in a development of changing attitudes within the whole workforce. As a result, this affects the way that previous generations, still in the workforce, utilise flexible working initiatives. This is evident in Baby Boomers attitudes to flexible working, as they approach retirement age. Rocco et al (2003) suggest that Baby Boomers seek to enter the third age of their careers. This is defined as “the search for a continued contribution... whilst satisfying financial needs” (p.156). Smith (1992) suggests that a one-size fits all approach to flexible benefits has lost its effectiveness, and instead should be adapted to meet the needs of the individual in the contemporary environment.

Generation Y as the latest generation to enter the workforce, have been described by Eisner (2005) as technically literate, educated and ethnically diverse (sourced from Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008). Fast paced, busy lifestyles aided by advances in technology have resulted in Generation Y being far more adapt to technology than their counterparts ten or even five years ago (Jusoh et al, 2011). This has resulted in over 45% of new graduates expecting to be able to access work files remotely (Woods, 2010). In a recent study by NUS and Endsleigh over 95% of 2000 final year students and new graduates highlighted work-life balance as an extremely important factor when looking for a job (Guinness, 2014). Similarly, research by Orange found that over 53% of new graduate participants expected flexible working practices to be available
to them, using email and skype to name a few (Woods, 2010). The priority that Generation Y place on flexible working practices and work-life balance could arguably be a result of their knowledge of the advantageous uses of technology. However, it could been questioned, if delocalising the workplace could result in ergonomically related issues including increased stress levels, due to a constant connectedness to the workplace (Allen, 2015).

2.4. The Importance of Flexible Working to New Graduates

Studies by Howe and Strauss (2000) and Zempke et al (2000), suggest that Generation Y have a high level of social consciousness and take an active role in their own development due to a reduction of lifetime employment. As a result, Generation Y experience levels of uncertainty and a lack of control over their career (Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008). Research by Martin (2005) and recently Hines (2011) shows how Generation Y seek to be in control regarding both how and when their work is done. Attitudes to work-life balance and flexible working are linked a feeling of control but also trusted and supported by management (Unison, 2014). Thompson et al (1999) conducted research into the psychological contract regarding flexible working. It was found that managerial support and influence played a vital part in the whole organisations attitudes to flexible working and created employee empowerment through an increased level of trust. This was also evident in research by Bunch (2007) who highlights a gap between formal policy and culturally accepted policies in organisations, due to a lack of informal support and commitment from management. This suggests that the importance of flexible working to new graduates is not only related to its direct benefits, but is also related to the employee and employer relationship through increased levels of mutual trust. This idea also supports research
by Martin (2005) who highlighted that Generation Y expect freedom and flexibility but also seek managerial support (sourced in Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008).

As a result of the lack of control over their career it has been suggested that new graduates place a larger emphasis on their personal needs over the needs of the organisation (PWC, 2014). It has been found that there is a positive correlation between flexible working and employee well-being (Giebel et al, 2004). This idea contrasts to the previously mentioned argument by Allen (2015), who found a positive correlation between flexible working and increased ergonomic issues. A study by Rivard (2014) suggested that new generations are growing up in an environment where looking for opportunities for ‘good lives’ is equally important as looking for ‘good jobs’. Equally the study suggested that important factors of well-being are ‘purpose’ and ‘community’, linking to research by Thompson et al (1999) into the workplace psychological contract. Again, the importance of flexible working to new graduates lies in its correlation with their values. However, Jorgensen (2003, sourced in Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008) presents a pluralistic outlook and rejects the idea of generational differences in attitudes and believe that expectations of the workplace are related to behaviours and personal traits. It could be argued that there is credibility in this argument, due to its links to the high contrasts between various motivational theories. For example, Taylor’s (1911) theory of motivation recognised financial rewards. Whereas McCelland’s (1987) theory highlights motivation though achievement, presenting how different groups are motivated by different things. However, trends in recent studies (Guiness, 2014; Rivard, 2014; PWC, 2014; Wright, 2016) show that new graduates are regarding flexible working as an important factor when choosing a job.

In relation to Jorgensen’s (2003) research regarding expectation of the workplace and personal traits. It could be argued that new graduates attitudes to flexible working are reflecting
their working style preferences and personality types. Research suggests that in addition to personal commitments individuals choose flexible working patterns, as they are happier and more focused in a quieter working environment, without the distraction of other employees (Thompson, 2014). As previously discussed, Shaw and Fairhurst (2008) highlighted that graduates feel a lack of control over their career. As a result, it could be said that the choice of flexible working opportunities empowers new graduates to choose a working style that fits with their personality. Similarly, Richard Branson who famously promotes unlimited leave for employees at Virgin says that a content workforce is a result of empowerment and choice (Branson, 2014). A study by Stent (2014) presented that long-term happiness within a workforce is created through daily measures. The study found that receiving a financial bonus had no impact on a person’s happiness after three months. Whereas flexible working resulted in a continuously happy, loyal and honest workforce. Similarly, a study by the CIPD showed that 83% of respondents suggested that adopting flexible working opportunities increased productivity rates. In addition, over 58% said it lead to increased profits and a positive impact on the reputation of the organisation (Crush, 2016). This reinforces the potential for flexible working to be an opportunity for both the employee and the organisation. Fagan (2004, sourced in Chung and Tijdens, 2013) highlights this as structured flexibility where needs of both the employee and the employer are met. However, research suggests that over 76% of workers do not work as remotely as often as they would like (Preston, 2014). This presents a gap between expectations and experience of flexible working.

2.5. Expectations Vs Experiences
Through the above research it is clear that a significant proportion of new graduates both want and expect flexible working to be available to them. Nevertheless, research conducted by Wright (2016) highlights a gap in expectation towards flexible working. With reference to Table One, it is evident that the highest proportion of employees, over 45% wanted flexitime. However, only 37% of employers actually offered it. Whereas, only 7% of employees wanted job-share but, over 23% of employers offered it. This suggests that there is not only a gap in expectation but also a break-down in communication between organisations and their employees. Vroom’s expectancy theory (1964), suggests that the employment attraction process is driven by the organisations ability to satisfy employee needs. As a result it could be said that meeting employee’s needs is a strong retention tool and can be used as a source of competitive advantage. However, Dulk and Ruijter (2008, sourced in Sivatte and Guadamillas, 2013) found that opportunities for flexible working were not always utilised by employees. It has been found that some employees are uneasy about adopting flexible working practices, as they believe it may hinder their future career prospects (Snowdon, 2011). Similarly, a study by Virgin showed that a quarter of employees would work from home more often, but feel there is a stigma attached, that less work is being done (Preston, 2014). Flexible working opportunities collaborated with informal support methods, is key to its integration and acceptance within an organisations culture (Sivatte and Guadamillas, 2013). This coincides with Thompson et al (1999) research, highlighting the need for communication and support in the workplace to create empowered employees.
### Table One- Flexible Working—What employees want and what their employers offer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of flexible working</th>
<th>What employees want</th>
<th>What their employers offer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of respondents</td>
<td>% of respondents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexitime</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working from home</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compressed hours</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual hours</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staggered hours</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career breaks/sabbaticals</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job-share</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile working/teleworking</td>
<td>7%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

(Adapted from Wright, 2016)

Evident from Martin (2005), Sivatte and Guadamillas (2013) and Thompson et al (1999) research, it is evident that new graduates want to feel valued and supported in the workplace. As new generations place great emphasis on flexible working, meeting the needs of work-life
balance creates an increased level of trust and support (Thompson et al, 1999). A recent study by large graduate recruiter PWC found that over 28% of new graduate’s expectations of work-life balance were not met during employment (PWC, 2014). It was found that expectations were influenced by the recruitment process and perceptions of the employer brand. It could be argued that this dissatisfaction is due to a lack of experience in the workplace, leading to false misconceptions. Heithemper (1998, sourced in Jusoh et al, 2011) found that graduates with previous employment experience had a deeper understanding of the employment relationship and as a result were more likely to be satisfied in their first job. However, recognised by the CIPD (2016) recruitment advertisements should clearly indicate various elements such as benefits packages, in order to give the potential candidate an accurate representation of the role. It could also be argued that employers should provide graduates with a clear orientation programme so they are aware of the role in relation to the organisation as a whole (Jusoh et al, 2011). Again, this links to Wright (2016) study, arguing that the expectation gap regarding flexible working could be a result of employers having a lack of understanding about the motivations of a new generation of employees.

It is evident from the above study by PWC (2014) and Wright (2016) that graduates are dissatisfied with their experiences of flexible working in comparison to their previous level of expectation. With Wright (2016) concluding that new graduates view flexible working as a hygiene factor and are increasingly expecting it to be a norm in the workplace. However, a form of flexible working highlighted by the CIPD (2016) are zero-hour contracts. Interestingly zero-hour contracts are a contemporary issue and tend to be negatively portrayed in the media. Zero-hour contracts are described as strategic management tools (BBC, 2015) which result in income insecurity (Inman, 2016). Research suggests that over 21% people on zero-hour contracts are graduates, resulting in no certain work hours and no holiday or sick pay (Ellis, 2014). This
significantly contrasts to previous findings by Shaw and Fairhurst (2008) and Unison (2014) who linked the importance of flexible working to new graduates to feelings of control over their career. This highlights a gap in research literature, to clarify what types of flexible working new graduates want and expect.

It could be argued that there are disparities between new graduate’s emphasis on work life balance and expectations to be continuously connected to work files through technology (Woods, 2010). However, as Eisener (2005) and Jusoh et al (2011) highlight, todays graduates-Gen Y have grown up in an environment where access to technology is the norm. Evident in online graduate scheme application processes such as GE, Civil Service and Unilever is the mix of flexibility and technology. Video interviews and online testing means candidates can work their way through the application process at a time that suits them resulting in ease and convenience (Roennevig, 2016). Similarly, the online application process has been described as cost effective and efficient for the prospective employer due to its automated process (Rani, 2014). This aligns with previously discussed Fagan’s (2004) research into structured flexibility, presenting how flexible processes can benefit both the employee and the organisation. From PWC (2014) study as discussed above, it is evident that expectations of flexible working are influenced during the recruitment stages. Even though the online recruitment process adopts a flexible approach, its automated stance contrasts with new graduates needs regarding interaction with the organisation, evident in Thompson et al (1999) research. However, research suggests that e-recruitment is rising with 71% of employers ranking online methods as highly effective (Williams, 2009) and 87% of graduates favouring online methods (PWC, 2014).

In addition, research suggests that differences between initial expectation and new graduates experience of the workplace is the major cause of voluntary turnover amongst millennials (Bateman, 2014). Over 57% of generation Y workers said that they did not believe it
was likely for them to stay with their current employer for the rest of their working life (Kohut et al, 2010, sourced in Bateman, 2014). This is problematic for organisations with the departure of the ageing workforce. As a result, organisations are looking for strategies to recruit, but also to retain new graduates (Ng et al, 2010). The study suggested that on average new graduates quit their job after just three years due to differences in individual needs and what organisations offered. Work-life balance was ranked as the most important to participants followed by meaningful work experiences and culture. The results also specify common links between flexible working, meaningful work and culture. This shows how flexible working alone is not a singular motivating factor. Previous findings relating to the implementation of flexible working such as; Thompson et al (1999) research into the importance of management support and culture, Giebel et al (2004) study which looked at the priority of well-being and Sivatte and Guadmillas (2014) research into value and empowerment, shows how flexible working does not operate in isolation. Flexible working opportunities provide a foundation for new graduates to experience their generational values in the workplace. The results also suggest that work-life balance was a key initiative to join the organisation to new graduates. However, the lack of opportunities for flexible working was also a key factor highlighted in exit interviews. This links to the above research by PWC (2014 and Wright (2016), again showing an expectation gap in flexible working experiences for new graduates.

Research suggests that Generation Y is rising and are now the largest population subgroup (Howe and Strauss, 2000). As a result, understanding the impact of generational differences on workplace culture, is important to retention (Crumpacker and Crumpacker, 2007, sourced in Holian, 2015), linking to Batemans (2014) study on millennial turnover rates. Similarly, McGuire and Brashler’s (2006) case study of large graduate recruiter KPMG, highlighted the introduction of flexible working initiatives to overcome internal challenges with
retention rates and organisational commitment. Highlighted in an employee survey was the desire for teleworking and compressed hours. As a result, KPMG incorporated these initiatives into their Employer of Choice Initiatives and seen a 50% improvement on employee productivity rates as a result. This shows clear links between flexible working and improved retention rates. However, much like the opinion of Heithemper (1998), Sujansky and Ferri-Reed (2009) suggest that new graduates have unrealistic expectations of the workplace due to a lack of practical employment experiences. This is a result of their supported upbringing and strong ties to academic achievement. Similarly, research does suggest that lifetime experiences do affect generational attitudes to the workplace. This is evident in Jusoh et al (2011) study, presenting links between Generation Y’s adaptability and reliance to technology and how this has influenced their attitudes to flexible working. A study by Bannon et al (2011) regarding Generation Y and flexible working suggested that a key factor influencing their emphasis on flexible working was learning from their parent’s mistakes, and not spending too much time in the workplace. Not only does this link to Rivard (2014) study into new graduates seeking to find ‘good lives’ but also shows how Generation Y’s expectations of the workplace are built from past generations experiences and the conditions of the contemporary environment.

2.6. Chapter Summary

Evident through legal developments, the demand for flexible working is on the rise (Frith, 2016). As a result of changing attitudes from new generations. Research suggest that the opportunity for flexible working is becoming an increasingly important factor to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job (Guinness, 2014). Arguably, this could be a result of Generation y’s adaptability and dependence on technology (Eisner, 2005) or a way to gain control over their
career due to the reduction in lifetime employment (Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008). It has also been suggested that the high priority of flexible working to new graduates is simply a quest to achieve work-life balance and support their personal well-being (Rivard, 2014). However, research also suggests that the importance of flexible working is a result of their personality types and values. Thompson et al (1999) found that opportunities for flexible working lead new graduates to feeling in control, but also trusted and supported by management. This leads to an increased feeling of empowerment through choice.

Nevertheless, research suggests that there is an expectation gap in new graduate’s experiences of flexible working. This leads to dissatisfaction in the workplace (Wright, 2016) with over 28% of new graduates expectations of flexible working not being met (PWC, 2014). However, it is also important to note that the expectation for constant connectedness to work through technology (Woods, 2010) greatly contrasts to graduates mission for work-life balance. Similarly, zero hour contracts are regarded as a type of flexible working (CIPD, 2016), which contrasts to graduates needs of control over their careers. This suggest that there is a gap in literature, which explores not only the importance of flexible working but also new graduates specific expectations of flexible working.
3. Methodology

3.1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter both identifies and justifies the research methodology and methods chosen to conduct this study. A critical discussion of the research philosophy along with a detailed account of the research approach provides the philosophical foundations of the primary data collection relevant to this study. A discussion of the research strategy includes an evaluation of the qualitative methods, including focus groups to final year university students and semi-structured interviews to new graduates. For the purpose of this study new graduates are defined as individuals who have graduated within the past five years.

3.2. Research Philosophy

This study adopts an interprevist philosophical approach which supports the research aim and objectives through the collection of qualitative data. It has been argued that qualitative research is characterised by the interpretivist approach (Denzin and Lincoln, 1995). Williams (2000) refers to interpretivism as an interpretation of meanings and actions based on individual experiences. The central aim of this study is to investigate the priority of flexible working when choosing a graduate level job also looking into the importance, expectations and experiences of flexible working. As a result qualitative methods taking an interpretivist approach is appropriate to gain and understanding through detailed accounts of previous experiences. The positive philosophical approach which is defined by ‘The Sage Dictionary of Social Research Methods’ as a scientific approach to investigation (Jupp, 2006), is not being utilised in this study. This is
because the central aim is an investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job. So, with reference to Saunders et al (2009) this research will investigate the differences between “humans in their role as social actors” (p593), as opposed to the end product focusing on “law-like generalisations” (p598).

This qualitative approach takes an epistemological position as the research looks into the theory of knowledge. Whereas the oncolgical approach and is concerned with knowledge that is subjective to experience, there is no prospect of knowledge that is objective or independent of experience (Marsh & Furlong, 2002). Evident in findings in section 2 (Jusoh et al, 2011; Woods, 2010; Howe and Strauss, 2000; Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008; Rivard, 2014), different generational values and experiences effects the outlook of flexible working. As a result this study rejects the idea that knowledge is independent to experience.

3.3. Research Approach

Due to the interpretivist nature of the research, this study adopts an inductive approach. Inductive analysis uses descriptive data to arrive at concepts and uncover themes through the interpretation of the researcher (Thomas, 2006). This approach looks to identify patterns and relationships of flexible working from the perspective of new graduates. This approach coincides with Scriven (1991) description of ‘goal free’ evaluation, where he data looks to uncover genuine results and is not focused on a planned result only. Through qualitative methods this study aims to explore the priority of flexible working to new graduates and identify patterns between the importance of flexible working initiatives and the similarities and differences between initial expectations and actual experiences of flexible working. As a result, the deductive approach, only comparing theory to collected data using logical reasoning to arrive at
results (Bryman and Bell, 2007), would not be appropriate for the aim of this study. However, it is important to note that the inductive approach does not prevent the use of existing theory (Saunders et al, 2009). This study will use existing theory regarding Generation Y and flexible working but will look to discover relationships between the data collected for the purpose of this qualitative study.

3.4. Access

The ability to obtain primary data for the purpose of this study was dependent on gaining access to a relevant pool of participants. With reference to Saunders et al (2009), the extent to which the source of data is fitting aligns with the research aim and its related objectives. Similarly, in Garcia and Gluesing’s (2013) research into ‘Qualitative Research Methods in organisational change research’, it was found that the alignment between research methodology and the purpose of the study is vital to ensure the collection of relevant qualitative data. Participants in focus groups will be required to be in their final year of university for the data to be relevant and fitting to the research aim. Similarly, participants for the semi-structured interviews will be required to be new graduates and have some experience of flexible working in an employment position. Gathering data from both sources will enable the research’s central aim and objectives to be addressed.

In order to obtain participants for focus groups, a purposeful sample of final year students has been used through the researcher’s contacts at university. Similarly, participants for the semi-structured interviews have been gathered through building relationships with Cardiff Metropolitan Universities alumni students. A purposeful sample has been collected through defining key requirements of the participants. These included being a new graduate
who has graduated within the last five years who has had some experience of flexible working in an employment context.

3.5. Research Strategy

This study adopts a qualitative strategy using focus groups and semi-structured interviews in answering the research question. Ritchie and Lewis (2003), define qualitative research as an interpretive approach that seeks to understand beliefs and values within the social world. Similarly, Garcia and Gluesing (2013) define qualitative research methods as best suited to examine unique characteristics of particular groups. A qualitative approach has been used for the purpose of this study as a detailed understanding of new graduates attitudes, expectations and experiences were required to address the central research aim. This is opposed to a quantitative research which involves numerical data (Easterby-Smith et al, 2008). Quantitative data would not provide a detailed account of individual’s outlooks and experiences of flexible working unlike qualitative data, as required for this study.

Focus groups were used to uncover attitudes and expectations of flexible working amongst students in their final year at university. In addition, semi-structured interviews were used to also uncover attitudes and expectations of flexible working, but are also looking to understand new graduates actual experiences of flexible working. This indicates if there is an expectation gap between what is expected of flexible working to upcoming graduates and what is experienced by new graduates. This was an area highlighted in the literature review regarding new graduates and flexible working.

The themes used in both focus groups and semi-structured interviews were derived from the knowledge obtained from the analysis of secondary data in the literature review. Key
themes drawn upon in both the focus groups and semi-structured interviews include the
importance and priority of flexible working, generational values and their impact on
expectations of flexible working. In addition, the semi-structured interviews involving new
graduates also took into consideration experiences of flexible working in comparison to initial
expectations.

3.51. Focus Groups

Hague et al (2004), defines focus groups as an avenue to collect data on a specific topic through
a group discussion, providing in depth qualitative data. Similarly, Gastil and Levine (2005)
suggest that as participants engage within a focus groups their individual statements become
thoughtful and informed leading to better quality data. However, it is important to consider that
reliable data is sometimes not produced due to dominant members halting others from actively
participating in discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000). In order to meet the aim of this study
detailed and informed data was necessary from all group members to determine trends in
opinions. But, also to enable further analysis to uncover relationships between key themes
discovered in the literature review.

Through the use of a focus group a broad range of information can also potentially be
obtained (Rothwell et al, 2016). However, it is important to consider that the knowledge of the
participants on the chosen topic area does impact the quality of the data that is captured (Cobb,
2011). As the aim of this study and the focus groups is to generate data regarding thoughts,
opinions and expectations of flexible working little information was required prior to the
discussion. Despite this, all participants were informed of the themes that were discussed prior
to the formal discussion through the distribution of participant information sheets evident in the
appendix chapter. This will decrease the chances of irrelevant discussion and allow the
participants to gather their thoughts about the topic of flexible working and encourage a broader range of discussion.

Each respondent were asked for consent to participate in the focus group prior to the formal discussion. Full anonymity was given to each participant throughout the research. Focus groups will be referred to as focus group A, B and C along with participant 1, 2, 3 and 4 etc in the analysis chapter. This will ensure that each participant cannot be directly identified. Full confidentiality of collected data was also given with the data only being accessible to meet the aim of the study. However Parker (2005), sates that there is no such thing as confidentiality in research as the purpose of any research is to uncover findings and present them to others. Even though the findings of this study will be presented through the results chapter of this study, the source of the data will not be evident as a result of the terms of full anonymity as previously stated. All participants will also have the right to withdraw from the research at any time which will also be outlined in the participant information sheet given prior to the participation in the focus group.

In order to ensure the collection of high quality data that is directly relevant to the topic area, a deliberative discussion structure should be adopted for the focus group (Fishkin & Luskin, 2005). Key elements of a deliberative discussion include participants who are informed and supported and balanced guide of information that includes the pros and cons of the subject. In order to ensure a deliberative discussion against these key terms, all participants received a participant information sheet prior to the discussion. This not only set out the project summary but also the protection of privacy to show support to the participants. To ensure a balanced view was represented both positive and negative areas of the topic of flexible working were presented that were derived from the analysis of secondary data in the literature review. An example of positive areas included employee well-being with negative areas such as zero-hour
contracts being open to discussion. Hamlett and Cobb (2006), state that small groups are idyllic for deliberative discussions due to the ability to share and hear opinions and their reasons for the opinions. As the aim of this study requires opinions and reasons behind these opinions, the deliberative discussions framework was utilised within the small focus groups.

3.52. Semi-structured Interviews

With reference to McIntosh and Morse (2015), semi-structured interviews are defined by a preset question guide. They are designed to obtain subjective responses from individuals regarding a particular situation or phenomenon that they have experience of. In relation to this study, semi-structured interviews were used to obtain new graduates attitudes, expectations and experiences of flexible working through their individual perspectives. Semi-structured interviews were chosen for this study so a structured guide could be followed to address key themes highlighted in the literature review.

All questions were open ended and encouraged discussion. It has been suggested that there is value in semi-structured interviews ability to adapt, with the researcher being able to clarify and expand questions (Richards & Morse, 2007). Questions were asked in a systematic order to all interviewees. However, due to their semi-structured nature, the researcher had the freedom to ask additional questions related to the same topics. This ensured that all avenues relevant to the research aim are addressed, whilst remaining responsive to each interviewee (Bartholomew et al, 2000). However, it is important to consider that as a result of adaptability from one participant to the next, all interviews are unique which makes it difficult to directly compare results (McIntosh and Morse, 2015). In the blank semi-structured question guide evident in the appendix chapter, potential additional areas to cover are shown through bullet points under key themed questions. However, these were only used as guides and so varied
between interviewees, dependent on their individual responses. This is known as probing and aim to elaborate beyond the participant’s initial response (Berg, 1989). Probing was utilised during the semi-structured interviews to ensure pertinent data was gathered in relation to the research aim.

In order to make the semi-structured interviews accessible for new graduates the interviews were conducted over the telephone. This was an efficient process for participants as appropriate times could be arranged to suit the needs of the individual. Telephone interviews enhance accessibility for those who are time poor or live in geographically hard to reach areas (Shuy, 2001). With reference to Fontana & Prokos (2007), the key advantage to telephone interviews is the “exclusive auditory communication” (p.7, sourced in McIntosh and Morse, 2015). As a result barriers are broken down relating to the researchers visual appearance, facial expressions and visual surroundings of the interview. These factors were highlighted by Fontana & Prokos (2007), as features that could potentially impede the participant from fully expressing their views during the interview process. However, it has been highlighted by Liamputtong (2007) that the use of telephone interviews could potentially restrict the recruitment of participants due to access to a telephone or telephone coverage. During the recruitment of participants for this study there was an option for participants to meet the researcher face to face if this aspect of the interviewing process is deemed challenging for some potential participants.

Similar to the formalities of the focus groups each respondent was asked for consent to participant in the semi-structured interviews prior to the event. Full anonymity was given to each participant throughout the research. Participants will be referred to as interviewee A, B, C etc. Full confidentiality of the data collected was also be given, with the data only being accessible to the researcher to meet the aim of the study. All participants also had and still have
the right to withdraw from the research at any time which will also be outlined in the participant information sheet given prior to the participation in the semi-structured interviews.

3.6. Sampling Method

It is important to consider that sampling strategies should align with research purpose to ensure relevant information that is of high quality (Kemper et al, 2003, sourced in Suri, 2011). A purposeful sampling method was used to recruit participants for both the focus groups and the semi-structured interviews. With reference to Suri (2011), a purposeful sample requires access to participants within a chosen field that are able to provide information-rich data. As a result, participants for the focus groups were final year students who gave personal attitudes and expectations of flexible working as they will soon be entering the workplace. However, participants for the semi-structured interviews were recruited from the universities alumni students who are newly graduated and have had some experience of flexible working. This purposeful sample not only had opinions and expectations of flexible working but also had experience of flexible working in an employment situation. These purposeful samples would be identified as homogeneous sampling (Saunders et al, 2009). This is because all participants had something in common- being a new graduate. This ensured that the data collected was directly relevant to the research aim.

These samples enabled comparisons to be made regarding what graduates are expecting of flexible working and what they are experiencing in the workplace. The decision to collect data in this format was derived from findings in the literature review regarding generational importance of flexible working and a clear expectation gap between expectation and experience.
3.7. Ethics

Research ethics can be defined as the “behaviours that respect the right of all people to be treated in a fair, just and respectful manner” (McSkimming et al, 2006, p53.). During the course of the collection of primary data for the purpose of this study, all participants were treated in respectful and in a fair manner. A detailed discussion regarding ethical processes in this project are outlined below.

Longmire (1996), states that ethics can be broken down into two concepts; human subjects and the dissemination of information. Research ethics regarding human subjects relates to confidentiality, informed consent and deception. As previously discussed full anonymity and confidentiality was be given to all participants who take part in this study. This will be evident through every participant being referred to as participant 1, 2 or 3 and interviewee A, B or C etc. As a result no names will be evident so the participants cannot be traced to any information that they decide to contribute. In addition to this, consent was given before any participant took part in either the focus groups or interviews. This was in the form of a signed consent sheet. The final concept of ethics regarding human subjects includes deception. This study will ensure that no participants experience any form of deception on the content or nature of this study. Every consenting participant received a participant information sheet prior to the discussion and will have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

Dissemination of information relates to the falsifying of results (Longmire, 1996). In order to alleviate the potential of this issue all focus groups and interviews were voice recorded. Participants were fully aware of this aspect as evident on the consent sheet prior to participation. All voice recordings were then transcribed word for word and added to the
appendix chapter. The analysis of results will then be directly taken from the transcribed notes to obtain a fair representation of the data collected. However, due to standards of confidentiality all recordings were destroyed following the transcription of data.

3.8. Validity and Reliability

Denscombe (2014) refers to validity as the extent to which the researcher can present how accurate and appropriate their data is. Saunders et al (2016) refer to construct validity, which looks at the extent to which the research strategy generates data that is relevant to the research aim. The questions used by the researcher in both the focus groups and semi-structured interviews were generated from the findings from the analysis of secondary data in the literature review. This ensured that all questioned used were directly relevant to both previous studies in the same topic area and the aim and objectives of the research.

Reliability refers to the consistency of the research design (Saunders et al, 2016). To ensure that factors of reliability were considered during the generation of the research strategy and the collection of primary data question guides were used. As previously mentioned due to the semi-structure nature of the interviews there was scope for the researcher to clarify and expand questions (Richards & Morse, 2007). As a result it could be argued that the reliability of the research could be considered as weaker than a structured set of questions. However, to ensure both content validity and reliability of the research was considered the pre-set question guides were used to ensure that the content of the questions in both the focus groups and semi-structured interviews were relevant to the research aim.
3.9. Chapter Summary

This qualitative study adopted an interpretivist philosophical approach in order to obtain data in relation to meanings and opinions of flexible working, as a result of individual experience (Williams, 2000). Focus groups were used in order to obtain data from upcoming graduates to explore their attitudes and expectations of flexible working from their first role out of university. In addition, new graduates participated in semi-structured interviews in order to gain information regarding their attitudes, previous expectations and experiences of flexible working. Purposeful sampling was used to recruit participants to ensure relevant data could be collected (Kemper et al, 2003, sourced in Suri, 2011). Data collected will then be analysed using a thematic approach, evident in section four.
4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter will be presented in two sections to ensure thorough analysis of the data collected, in relation to the research aims and objectives. Section one which is evident in appendix 1, will describe the overall results of the focus groups and interviews, highlighting the main points addressing each objective of the study. Section two will take a thematic approach and discuss findings in greater depth in relation to findings from the literature review. Evident will be three key themes including work-life balance and well-being, support and the impact of experience. Key themes were derived from the analysis of previous data and primary data collected from the focus groups and interviews. Through this comparisons will be made through a critical discussion of the two sets of results, highlighting their similarities and differences to findings from the literature review.

4.2. Theme One- Work-Life Balance and Well-Being

The CIPD (2016) define flexible working as an arrangement in the workplace, which offers flexibility on how long, when and where employees work. To ensure that the participants had an understanding of what flexible working was, both the upcoming graduates in the focus groups and the new graduates in the interviews where asked about what flexible working meant to them. Key words in the majority of participant responses included work-life balance, support and trust, control and value. This will form the basis for the below analysis.
Evident in chapter 2, previous literature strongly suggested that upcoming graduates regarded the opportunity to work flexibly as a very important factor when entering their first job. This was evident in the works of Woods (2010) and Guinness (2014) to name a few. The data collected from the new graduates did show strong similarities to this view but the upcoming graduates views significantly differed.

Upcoming graduates appeared to understand the benefits of flexible working for other groups but the majority of the upcoming graduates did not seem to consider these benefits as a top priority for them at this stage of their career. As previously highlighted in section 4.2 the upcoming graduates had different priorities such as development, progression and gaining experience. Another key feature that some participants also highlighted was their association between a lack of structure and flexible working. This also seemed to push flexible working down their list of important features from their first job. This appeared to have stemmed from their work experiences as a student. Some comments included;

“Straight out of university I think I would choose flexible schedules. I don’t think I like the idea of working from home, I would want to separate my work life and my home life and I really wouldn’t want to be doing work in my house personally.”

“Yes after university I just want a stable routine. I want set hours- it’s taking its toll not knowing what hours I’ve got at the moment... At least knowing that you’re working those hours you can still plan your social life around he times that you know that you are in work for.”

Research by Martin (2005) and Hines (2011) suggested that new graduates want to be in control of when and where their work is done. Whereas the data collected from upcoming graduates suggested that they associated control over their work to structure and routine rather than flexible schedules. Nevertheless, it is important to note that even though the majority of
upcoming graduates did not rank flexible working as a priority, some of the participants from the focus groups did recognize the personal benefits it could bring to them. Upcoming graduate from focus group A, participant 2 suggested that one day out of the office per week could help to improve her performance. She suggested that one day out of the office would give her time to reflect on her previous performance and assess ways to improve. This suggests the value and closely links to Jorgensen’s (2003) research regarding expectations in the workplace and personal traits. Also, suggesting that a content workforce is the result of empowerment and choice (Branson, 2014).

Some of the upcoming graduates also considered the length of their daily commute in relation to the importance that they placed on flexible working. Upcoming graduate in focus group B, participant 2 suggested;

“A home office could be good- especially if the commute is long then being able to have the option to work from home sometimes would be nice- and less stressful I think.”

It could be argued that even though the data collected from the upcoming graduates suggested that the majority do not consider flexible working as a priority in their first role out of university, the participants who did recognize its potential benefits links to; work-life balance and less stress. For example though flexible working some of the participants suggests that it would give them the time to reflect on performance, could help with a long daily commute and may make them go the extra mile through bringing work home with them. The upcoming graduates who did recognize the benefits of flexible working correlates with the data collected from studies by NUS and Endsleigh (Guinness, 2014), showing the importance that new graduates put on work-life balance. As a result it could be suggested that if the upcoming graduates were asked if they
see work-life balance as a priority rather than specifically flexible working, the responses may have been significantly different.

Data collected from new graduates who have had experience of flexible working showed different characteristics. The new graduates did also suggest that when they were upcoming graduates—like the majority of the participants from the focus group—they also had a lack of awareness of how flexible working could benefit them. Once the new graduates had experienced the benefits of flexible working these ideas changed. Overall, much like the research of Woods (2010) and Guinness (2014) the new graduates did see the opportunity to work flexibly as important in their current roles and also any future roles. It appeared that after experiencing the positive elements of flexible working, which some participants referred to as; work-life balance, motivation and flexibility, its priority grew.

Nevertheless, even though the new graduates did highlight flexible working as a priority, pay was also mentioned as important in relation to lifestyle in addition to opportunities for development. Participant one stated;

“… I guess in isolation I would say yes definitely it is a priority. But if it is against things such as higher reward pay or training and development and a higher bonus then that could possibly effect that.”

The new graduates also suggested that the opportunity to work flexibly was seen as a priority due to its positive impacts on well-being as a result of improvements to work-life balance. Rivard (2014) suggested that new graduates are looking for ‘good lives’ in addition to ‘good jobs’. The data collected from the new graduate’s showed strong similarities to these findings. Key themes associated with well-being as a result of flexible working from the new
graduates included decreased levels of stress, positive in-work relationships, increased physical activity and healthy lifestyles. Participant 2 stated;

“Being able to work the way that I do (flexibly) it makes me feel in general more clear headed and less stressed and less pressure...I can enjoy my projects more than if I was over worked and stressed...It means I can play football which also helps me to unwind. My relationship with my manager has also improved because he can see how committed I am to my job.”

This suggests that the importance of flexible working to new graduates is not only down to its direct benefits but also links to the new graduate’s values regarding their own health and social lives. There were also links made between increased performance levels and well-being due to a feeling of less pressure and stress from the new graduates. This links to the works of Fagan (2004) structured flexibility, where the needs of both the employee and the employer are met.

Even though the new graduates overall did highlight the positive impact of flexible working on well-being there were also links made to the influence of technology and flexible working. Allen (2015) suggested that delocalising the workplace could result in increased ergonomic issues. Some of the participants who had days off due to flexible working patterns did highlight that even on their days off they did still check their work emails. Participant 3 stated;

“I am guilty of checking my work emails alongside my personal emails...It can be good and it can be bad- so if I check my work emails when I am taking annual leave and I see that there is a problem it will be on my mind...”
Also, some of the upcoming graduates also highlighted the constant connectivity to work as a potential issue. Participant 3 from focus group C stated;

“…when you go out you don’t really want to be on your phone replying to emails- you want to separate both. So have your work separate from your social life to have a balance and make sure that they both do not mix with one another.”

The data collected from the new graduates suggested that work-life balance was harder to achieve with the easy access to work files through technology. However, it appears that the benefits such as the ease of communication and being kept up to date with the office activities, interestingly outweighed its downfalls. In relation to these findings Snowdon (2011) suggests that some employees are uneasy about adopting flexible working practices as they feel that it may hinder their future career prospects. Even though the new graduates did highlight the downfalls of technology in relation to work-life balance, it could be suggested that they see the constant connection to the workplace as a justification to be able to work flexibly. For example, new graduate, participant 1 suggested that technology has given employers the ability to offer flexible working. It could be said that technology has enabled this flexibility due to a constant line of connection even if the employees are not physically in the office.

Similarly, new graduate, participant 4 suggested;

“…does mean that even when we are not in work we are still connected to work through email access or phone calls… But in today’s environment I expect nothing less.”
This coincides with research by Eisner (2005) and Jusoh et al (2011) who suggest that today’s graduates see access to technology as the norm.

### 4.3. Theme Two- Support

In addition, another common theme between the primary data collected and findings from the literature review was support, both organisational and management support. It was found that upcoming graduates placed great importance on organisational support in their first graduate role and the new graduates highlighted the importance of positive management support in relation to shaping their experiences of flexible working. Discussions regarding support in the workplace from both the focus groups and interviews showed strong correlations to the work of Martin (2005) who highlighted that Generation Y seek managerial support (sourced in Shaw and Fairhurst, 2008) and value the employee and employer relationship.

Data collected from upcoming graduates suggested that for the majority of participants flexible working was not very important to them in their first graduate positions. But did highlight organisational support as key, alongside development, avenues to promotion, structure and stability. Studies by Howe and Strauss (2000) and Zempke et al (2000) suggested that Generation Y take an active role in their own development due to the reduction of lifetime employment. The emphasis that the new graduates put on the importance of workplace support and avenues to promotion, suggests that upcoming graduates are sub-consciously looking for ways to develop themselves in the workplace and prove to management that they are competent, before expecting to work flexibly. For example, upcoming graduate in focus group B, participant 1 said;
“...I would look for good support in the workplace. For example support, training, coaching and mentoring is really important to me in my first role. As I am looking to go into HR where currently I don't have any work experience, a supportive work environment would be crucial to me developing.”

Evident though the phrasing used it is clear that this participant links organisational support to their own development. This was also evident in many of the other participant’s responses in the focus groups. Being supported in order to develop and prove their worth to their employer was seen as the first step before considering the opportunity to work flexibly. This would explain the lack of importance that some of the upcoming graduates placed on flexible working, as they have other priorities when beginning their careers. It could be argued that this reinforces data collected by PWC (2014) whose study found that new graduates place a greater emphasis on their personal needs, over the needs of the organisation. However, studies by Guadamillas (2013), Martin (2005) and Thompson et al (1999) suggest that new graduates just want to feel valued. The importance of development, support and value could suggest a high commitment to personal needs but could also be linked to the recognition of competition between jobs in the current market. This is evidenced through responses within the focus groups such as;

“...we have come to university to greater our chances of getting a good job and sometimes work will have to be a priority”

“... If you want to get somewhere within a company to begin with you have to be committed to it...It’s such high competition for jobs now too that even getting a graduate level role is so hard.”

In a similar context to support the upcoming graduates also referred to mutual respect between them and their manager, trust, workplace relationships and environment, as important when
discussing support. These findings linked to studies of Thompson et al (1999), Howe and Strauss (2000) and Hines (2011) who highlight the importance of these factors to Generation Y.

However, even though the majority of the upcoming graduates discussed the impact of management support in relation to their own development, some upcoming graduates did make alternative points. Upcoming graduate from focus group B, participant 3 highlighted how your own commitment to your job can significantly impact your career. They suggest;

“…we have come to university to greaten our chances of getting a good job and sometimes work will have to be a priority to be able to make the most of our degrees.”

Similarly, upcoming graduate from focus group C, participant 3 suggests;

“If you’re working flexibly the one day and your manager is not you could miss out on key information. You’re not getting the full learning experience.”

It could be suggested that this links to the findings of Martin (2005) and Hines (2011) who suggest that new graduates seek to be in control of their work. The participants who showed recognition of their own influence over their career as opposed to management support alone may suggest why the majority of the upcoming graduates do not see flexible working as a priority. The impact of their own development and proving themselves competent appeared to be key. This could be down to individual personality traits (Jorgensen, 2003) or even a sub-conscious reaction to the high competition for graduate jobs. However, it did appear that even
the upcoming graduates who did highlight the importance of management support also recognised their own influence on their careers. This was evident through the high priority given to learning and development and access to promotion.

The findings from the focus groups clearly presented that the majority of participants are looking for management support to help them integrate into their first role and discussed this as a priority over the opportunity to work flexibly. As previously discussed in section 4.2 it appeared that the upcoming graduates looked at their career as being mapped out in stages. In the initial first stages flexible working was not highlighted as a priority whereas support and development was. It could be argued that the interviews with the new graduates looked at a group that was transitioning into the next stage of their career as a result of experience in the workplace. This closely links to the findings of Heithemper (1998) and Sujansky and Ferri-Reed (2009) who highlight the value of practical employment experiences. As a result the interviews looked at the impact of support in relation to the new graduate’s experiences of flexible working.

Research by Thompson et al (1999) found that new generation’s emphasis on flexible working creates increased levels of trust and support. Also Shaw and Fairhurst (2008) found that new graduates want flexibility but also seek managerial support. Discussions with the new graduates throughout the interviews about support also showed strong links to trust and organisational culture. It appeared that the new graduates did recognise the strong influence of management support in relation to how well flexible working policies were adopted in the workplace. Participant 1 made some direct comments regarding support as evident below.
“...helps when you have a very supportive line manager as well. I think you’re experience is also down to the team that you are in- this can change your experience...it definitely helps when your line manager has the right attitude to flexible working.”

“So if the tone is set from the top and it's a very family culture where people are independent and are allowed to express themselves then this translates to a more favorable experience.”

Similarly, participant 4 states;

“...one of the reasons that I think so highly of flexible working is that my manager is so supportive of it. She trusts me to get my work done...this gives me more motivation to also do a good job.”

Many of the other respondents also took a very similar view to participant 1 and 4 and highlighted how the manager's attitudes to flexible working can be the reason if flexible working is adopted and accepted in the organisation. This coincides with research of Bunch (2007) who stated that there is a gap between formal policy and cultural accepted policy in organisations, due to a lack of informal support from management. However, the majority of the participants in this study did not appear to experience a lack of support from their managers, which looked to impact their generally positive experiences of flexible working.

Another area that linked to support was trust and culture, highlighted in both the previous literature and findings from primary research. Thompson et al (1999) also found that meeting the needs of work-life balance creates increased trust levels of trust and support. Similarly, the new graduates discussed positive experiences of flexible working alongside support but also a feeling of increased trust by their manager. Many of the participants highlighted that trust was important for the employee as well as the employer. In relation to some of the responses given by the new graduates, it was evident that they felt comfortable
with their flexible work pattern when they linked it to being trusted by their manager to get their work done. This could be linked to attitudes and stigmas regarding flexible working, which will be further discussed in section 4.6.

Organisational and management support was presented to be much more important to upcoming graduates as opposed to the opportunity to work flexibly. This linked to their desire for development and promotional opportunities from their first role. New graduates also appeared to value management support but in relation to its impact to their experiences of flexible working. Similar to the findings of Thompson et al (1999) and Bunch (2007) the data from both the focus groups and interviews suggested that opportunities to work flexibly do not operate in isolation. Organisational policy is shaped by the culture and attitudes of management.

4.4. Theme Three- Impact of Experience

Evident from the above discussion it is clear that the majority of the upcoming graduates do not expect the opportunity to work flexibly from their first graduate role. Similarly, the new graduates also highlighted that they also did not associate flexible working with graduates before actually experiencing flexible working. It was highlighted from both the focus groups and interviews that the lack of association between flexible working and new graduates was down to the exposure of flexible working to younger people. Even though the laws regarding flexible working changed in 2014, the development still has not appeared to have been communicated effectively to upcoming graduates. The upcoming graduates appeared to still associate flexible working with the outdated 2003 law, relating to carers and parents. A flavour of responses in relation to this from the upcoming graduates included;
“...when I think of people who use flexible working I do think of middle aged people- who have children and other responsibilities.”

“...I think it could be beneficial if you have a family who needs your support or someone who relies on outside of work.”

The new graduates also discussed that they also had a similar view before experiencing flexible working. In terms of the works of Woods (2010) and Guinness (2014), the primary data collected from upcoming graduates does not present many similarities regarding the expectation levels of flexible working for graduates. However, this expectation level did change after experiencing flexible working, evident from the data collected from the new graduates. The new graduates suggested that the key to awareness of the benefits of flexible working is education and communication.

Following on from expectation, were the experiences of flexible working to new graduates. A key theme found in the analysis of previous literature in chapter 2 was a gap between the expectation of flexible working and new graduates experiences of flexible working. Even though from the primary data collected it was evident that upcoming graduates did not expect flexible working, it was still relevant to analyse new graduates experiences of flexible working to see if their needs regarding flexible working were being met in the workplace. Wright (2016) suggested that there was an expectation gap towards flexible working. Similarly, a survey carried out by PWC (2014) found that over 28% of new graduates expectations were not met. However, from the data collected from the new graduates overall the findings were again very different.
Overall, the new graduates appeared to be satisfied with their experiences of flexible working and were keen to discuss its benefits to their lifestyles in terms of work-life balance and increased levels of trust between themselves and their manager. Some comments from the new graduates included;

“My experience of flexible working is far more positive than my initial expectations. It’s so easy to work from home in my role – all you need is internet and a laptop really!”

“Personally the only gap has been how good the experience has been for me. Going into it (flexible working) I was not sure how it was going to work but my experience as I have said has been great.”

However, new graduate, participant 3 did highlight that their current workplace did offer flexible working but did not offer the type of flexible working that they were looking for. It was highlighted that they only opportunities were part-time and job share options, which would not financially be feasible. During discussions regarding the priority of flexible working, pay was highlighted as fundamental for many of the graduates. Again this shows that attitudes towards flexible working are shaped by a range of factors. This data does correlate to the works of Wright (2016) and shows a breakdown of communication between employers and employees. This supports the works of Thompson et al (1999) who highlights the need for support and empowerment in the workplace.

However, overall the new graduates did propose that they were satisfied with the opportunities that were available to them regarding flexible working. When the new graduates were asked if they wanted to add anything else regarding their experiences of flexible working, the responses overall were very positive. This evidenced their positive experiences of flexible working. Some comments from the new graduates included;
Participant 5;

“Giving the core workforce the ability to work flexibly also saves our organisation a huge amount of money in costs of desk space… allowed for greater collaboration and effectiveness and has a huge positive effect on our culture and values.”

“I think every workplace should consider adopting a flexible working approach!”

Participant 2;

“...life is changing—there is lots of pressure and stress in people’s lives now and I believe that flexible working can help to alleviate stress connected to work a little more.”

However, participant 3 who discussed is needs not being met in relation to the flexible working practices available in his current organisation did highlight the need for education and communication about flexible working as evident below.

“Just that I think the idea of flexible working is still linked to working parents... That’s why I wanted to be a part of this research— to show that there is a calling for it (flexible working) among the younger generation also.”

The lack of awareness and association of flexible working to upcoming graduates also reinforces the need for additional communication about flexible working and its potential benefits for both the employee and the employer. Participant 3 also highlighted a lack of loyalty to the organisation due to his needs not being met. This was the opposite for the new graduates who
had positive experiences of flexible working, which will be discussed further below. This links to Bateman (2014) study who looks at voluntary turnover among graduates.

In a similar context, performance and commitment was discussed in relation to the new graduate’s experiences of flexible working. Highlighted in the literature in the works of Bateman (2014) and Crumpacker and Crumpacker (2007) retention of new graduates was seen as a problematic area due to expectations not being met. The new graduate’s high satisfaction with their experience of flexible working appeared to give them a positive outlook on not only their job but also their management and the organisation as a whole. This was discussed in relation to the opportunities to work on a flexible schedule meeting their needs, improvements to their well-being and work-life balance. Having a life outside of work that included less pressure due to the benefits of flexible working appeared to result in a strong loyalty to the organisations that the new graduates worked for. As a result it could be said that primary data collected does coincide with previous literature. Experiences of the workplace do influence employee loyalty. In turn this also appeared to effect the performance and motivation levels of the new graduates.

Some comments from the new graduates included;

“...it works so well for me I would not look for another job- well not at the moment. Being able to work the way that I do (flexibly) it makes me feel in general more clear headed and less stressed and less pressure”

“Being able to work flexibly has made me more content with my job so my commitment to the organisation is... strong. I only look to change jobs when I am unhappy with something and a huge element of why I am so happy in my role at the moment is because I can work flexibly and have the support to do so.”

Performance was also highlighted in relation to having the opportunity and a positive experience of flexible working. Many of the employees discussed that they feel like they
sometimes go the extra mile in work due to having the opportunity to work flexibly. It appeared that the new graduates appreciated their flexible work schedules and as a result not only had stronger ties to the organisation but also worked harder when they was in the office. It could be argued that sub-consciously this could be linked to wanting to prove themselves worthy of the opportunity or to fight back stigmas of flexible working that one participant highlighted as;

“...older family members, and some friends sometimes who think that I do nothing as I work flexibly and from home! They think I don’t do anything all day”

This again reinforces the importance of education and awareness of flexible working and its benefits to both the employee and the employer. Only through education and awareness of flexible working stigmas and outdated ideas will dissolve.

4.5. Chapter Conclusion

From the analysis of the data collected three main key themes were addressed. These included Work-Life Balance, Support and the Impact of Experience. Not only did the three themes address the research aim and objectives but also highlighted the main factors that that influenced both the upcoming and new graduates’ attitudes towards flexible working. Overall in relation to the research objectives it was clear that the majority of the upcoming graduates did not regard the opportunity to work flexibly as important when applying for their first graduate role. However, the new graduates with experience of flexible working appeared to view the opportunity as important, in line with pay. Similar, to the importance that the upcoming graduates put on flexible working they also did not expect to be offered flexible working. This
appeared to be down to a lack of awareness of its functionality. The new graduate’s experiences of flexible working appeared to be overall very positive. Having a positive impact on work-life balance and well-being.
5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Chapter Introduction

This chapter presents the primary aims and objectives of the research and assesses the extent to which these have been addressed through the collection of primary data. Key findings from the focus groups and interviews will also be outlined to give an overview of the findings in relation to the aim of the research. An evaluation of the research will be conducted to show the studies areas of strength and limitations regarding the choice of methods and methodologies used. Finally, the evaluation of the research will then base the foundations for suggestions for future research within the topic area of new graduates and flexible working.

5.2. Aims and Objectives

The overall aim of this research was to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job. In order to address the central aim of the research two objectives were set in order to gain a deeper insight into the topic area. These objectives included;

1. Explore the importance graduates give flexible working when applying and choosing a job

2. An analysis of new graduate’s expectations and experiences of flexible working

Key themes were derived from both the analysis of previous literature and findings from the primary research. These themes included; Work-Life Balance and Well-Being, Support and the
Impact of Experience. These key themes aimed to address the central aim of the research as well as the objectives.

5.3. Key Findings

The key findings presented below will be outlined in relation to the three key themes outlined above and linked back to the central research aim and objectives to clarify their relevance to this research.

The data discussed in theme one- Work-Life Balance and Well-being closely linked to the overall aim of the research and objective one regarding the importance of flexible working to new graduates. It was found that upcoming graduates appeared to understand the benefits of flexible working for other groups but did not associate flexible working with new graduates. As a result the upcoming graduates did not see flexible working as important and did not expect it in their first graduate role. Nevertheless, there were some differences in opinion here. The small group of upcoming graduates who did see flexible working as important appeared to link their reasoning to work-life balance and factors outside of work that were important to them. On the other hand the majority of the new graduates with experience of flexible working did appear to regard flexible working as important in their current roles and future roles.

The discussion of theme two- Support showed close links to objective one of the research also and did also show some links to objective two. The upcoming graduates placed great importance on organisation support in their first role. This showed strong links to their emphasis on development and progression in the workplace. Their emphasis on support and development seemed to outweigh the importance that they placed on flexible working. It appeared that the upcoming graduates were looking to prove their worth to their new employer
before considering the opportunity to work flexibly. The new graduates highlighted the importance of support in relation to shaping their experiences of flexible working. It was highlighted by the majority of the new graduates that a manager’s attitude towards flexible working can be the reason if flexible working is accepted in the organisations culture.

The discussion of theme three- impact of experience linked closely to objective two of the research regarding expectation and experience of flexible working. It was clear that the majority of the upcoming graduates did not associate flexible working with new graduates. It appeared that this lack of association was down to the lack of exposure to younger people and the benefits it could possibly bring. However, the new graduates proved that the association and expectation levels changed after they had experienced flexible working. Overall the new graduates were satisfied with their experiences of flexible working in relation to its benefits to their lifestyles. The discussion surrounding impact of experience highlighted that education and communication is key to begin to develop the younger generation’s judgements of flexible working.

5.4. Strengths of the Study

The qualitative, triangulation nature of the research strategy allowed for in depth responses from participants. This was the result of the researcher being able to expand and clarify questions to the participant if necessary (Richards and Morse, 2007). The open ended style to the questions also meant that participants could add any additional data that the throughout was relevant to the research. This gave substance to the responses making answers unique to every participant. As the aim of the study was an investigation to assess the priority of flexible
working to new graduates, depth of responses was vital to address a range of factors that influenced responses.

An additional strength in relation to the relevance and richness of the data obtained was a result of a deliberate discussion structure. A deliberate discussion ensures that the data collected is directly relevant to the topic area (Fishkin and Luskin, 2005). Both methods ensured deliberate discussion through informed and supported participants, through participant information sheets. The interview and focus group question guides also highlighted the pros and cons of flexible working to participants. This included positively work-life balance but also negatively zero-hour contracts and the possible impact of technology. This subjected the participants to an unbiased view of the topic area through a rounded overview. On a similar note the advantages of telephone interviewing including “exclusive auditory communication” (p.7, sourced in McIntosh and Morse, 2015), enabled visual appearance and surroundings to be broken down.

5.5. Limitations of the Study

The most profound limitation to this research was the size of the sample of participants resulting in the limitation of the studies generalisability. The sample used was a purposeful sample, to ensure that the participants could provide information rich data (Suri, 2011). However, as the terms for the sample for the semi-structured interviews were new graduates with experience of flexible working, access to a larger sample proved difficult. There does not appear to be a large population of new graduates who had experienced flexible working. This corresponds with the data collected regarding the awareness of flexible working to upcoming graduates. Nevertheless, the depth of detail in the participant’s responses did highlight trends...
within the small participant group. This enabled generalisation to be made for the group of participants taking part in this study. However, if the study was to be done a second time more questions would be added into both the semi-structured interview and focus group guides. This would have provided the foundations to gather a wider range of responses.

An additional limitation to this research related to the collection of primary data within the focus groups. Dominant members within the focus groups could potentially halt other members from actively participating in discussion (Krueger and Casey, 2000). Throughout the analysis of the data, some variety in opinion was apparent but during the focus groups there was not a substantial amount of discussion regarding differences in opinion. This has to be taken into consideration when assessing the validity of the data produced from this study. In relation to this, due to the discussion element of the focus groups and semi-structured nature of the interviews none of the interviews or focus groups were exactly the same in terms of question phrasing. As a result the reliability of the data could be debated.

5.6. Suggestions for Future Research

Through the evaluation of this research it is apparent that there would be suggestions to improve the validity, generalisability and reliability of the data collected. As the sample size was relatively small for this study, it would be suggested that a larger sample is generated to ensure the generalisability of the data collected. As this study only used one avenue to recruit a sample it would be suggested that a wider recruitment pool is used. For example, the use of social media to promote the study or connecting with local businesses to gain access to a bigger pool of potential participants.
In addition to a larger sample it would also be suggested to include more questions when conducting focus groups and interviews. This would have generated more data which may have potentially highlighted factors that influence some of the responses that were given from the participants. Not only would this study then have highlighted phenomenon but also explained it greater detail. Even though the questions were open ended and allowed for participants to expand on answers, the lack of awareness highlighted from the upcoming graduates via the focus groups suggests that additional prompts would have generated more understanding. It turn this may have produced more relevant data that could potentially add significant data to future research. Therefore, more questions and prompts would be suggested for future research in this area.
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Appendices

Appendix 1- Focus Group and Interview Result

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Group’s Results</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overall the data collected from each focus group presented strong similarities to each other in relation to the three key themes, as mentioned above. Below will be a discussion of the findings from the focus groups in relation to the research aims and objectives of this study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall the majority of the participants within the focus groups presented that they did not regard the opportunity to work flexibly as important in their first role out of university. In terms of what the upcoming graduates were looking for as opposed to flexible working were opportunities to develop and prove their skill whilst being a part of a supportive working environment. Significantly contrasting to the findings of Woods (2010), Guinness (2014) and Frith (2016) regarding the importance of flexible working to graduates. It appears that some of the students taking part in the discussion had experience of part time jobs throughout their time at university where there was flexibility in their shift patterns due to their contract or the requirement to work on weekends. From the working participants it was highlighted that flexible working was not a priority, they were looking for more stability and structure rather than more flexibility from their first role.</td>
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<tr>
<td>High competition for graduate roles was also mentioned in relation to the lack of importance that the participants placed on flexible working. Securing a job, gaining the experience and proving themselves appeared to be a common area of discussion. It appeared that the participants were considering the market and the high completion for graduate jobs and tailoring their needs from their first role around this analysis. Focus on experience and development initiated that the participants wanted to prove themselves worthy of their first job. But at the same time their attitudes towards workplace culture, management support and social relationships at work also presented their strong values regarding the employer and employee relationship. Linking closely to the findings of Thompson et al (1999) and Martin (2005) regarding the importance of support in the workplace to new graduates.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The overall consensus of what flexible working meant to the participants was work-life balance, choice and the ability to attain responsibilities in your personal life. Even though the discussions suggested that flexible working was not important for the participant’s first role out of university there were links made to the importance of their personal lives. For example, private healthcare was highlighted as being important due to the impact of playing a team sport, referring to commitments outside of work. This highlighted the importance that the participants did place on their personal life but their overall commitment to securing that first role as a graduate appeared to outweigh this. This aspect of the data collected links closely to Rivards (2014) research regarding well-being and the importance that upcoming graduates place of their lives outside of work. Interestingly you would think that this would influence the importance that the upcoming graduates placed on flexible working, but their responses and discussions in the focus groups suggested otherwise.</td>
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The expectation of flexible working being offered to the participants from their first job ran parallel to the importance that they placed on flexible working. Again, showing very weak correlations to the findings of Guinness (2014) in particular. The participants reasoning for this linked closely to why they did not also rate it as a highly important factor. For example, the participants suggested that they would want to prove that they are worthy of having the option to work flexibly and have time in the office to build relationships in order to learn and develop themselves. The participant’s views suggested that they viewed flexible working as an initiative that they would expect more through the different stages of progression throughout their career. There were links made between views of flexible working and an older generation with greater home-based responsibilities, rather than an initiative that was thought of for any age or any stage of your career.

Interestingly, even though the participants did not rate flexible working as important or expect it from their first job as a graduate, they did initiate to expecting to be able to access work emails at home. Linking to Eisners (2005) description of the technically literate graduate. The participants referred to this as adapting to the modern environment. As the discussions developed regarding the use of technology, issues such as a lack of social interaction with the work team and a constant connectedness to work was highlighted. Even though the participants did not expect flexible working and instead want to develop and prove themselves to management, it was also highlighted that the constant connectedness to work through email access was not so desirable.

Interview’s Results

Overall the data collected from each interview presented many similarities but did contrast to some of the key features that were highlighted from the focus groups. It appeared that the new graduate’s experiences of flexible working did influence their answers, which could explain why there was some differentiation between the upcoming graduates and the new graduate’s responses. Below will be a discussion of the importance of flexible working to new graduates, their expectations and their experiences. These areas will be discussed alongside findings from the focus groups as previously discussed in sub-section 4.2.

In contrast to the views of participants in the focus groups, the interviewees did regard flexible working as a very important factor. Showing similarities to the findings of Guinness (2014) and Woods (2010) regarding the significance of the opportunity to work flexibly for new graduates. This was in relation to their current roles and when looking for any future positions. It appeared that the new graduate’s values in relation to work-life balance and personal well-being impacted the importance that they placed on flexible working. For example, commonly the importance of having greater control over personal lives was initiated to through greater options and planning. Well-being in the sense of less stress and having the ability to improve fitness and health was also a common factor. However, even though the importance of flexible working was regarded as the main priority, the importance of pay was also discussed. Compressed hours was valued by the new graduates over part time positions or job shares as a result.
Dissimilarity to findings from the focus groups, where the upcoming graduates highlighted routine and structure as an influential factor to the lack of importance given to flexible working, new graduates appeared to like the flexibility as they had the control over the structure of their working week. Linking to the findings of Martin (2005) and Hines (2011). The data implied that upcoming graduates liked the idea of their employer structuring their week, whereas new graduates found it more convenient to be able to fit their working day to fit their personal needs. However, responses from the two sets of participants did imply that their reasons for this view was a result of previous experience. For example, the upcoming graduates wanted structure and routine due to negative experiences of the lack of structure of part-time work as a student. Whereas, the new graduates value this flexibility due to previous experiences with stress, fitness, motivation and childhood experiences with working parents. This implies the impact of previous experience and how this influences opinions.

The participants were asked if as an upcoming graduate if they then expected to be given the opportunity to work flexibly in their first role out of university. Similar to the participant responses in the focus groups, the interviewees also said that as an upcoming graduate with no experience of the benefits of flexible working they did not expect it. Common themes in this subsection included a lack of awareness, its association to the older generation and working parents and the free rein of university life leading upcoming graduates to not consider work-life balance as a priority. Interestingly it was clear that without the experience of flexible working, the participants appeared to consider flexible working as a scheme aimed at an older generation. This could potentially explain why previous data by the likes of Preston (2014) and Dulk and Ruijter (2008) suggests that not all employees utilise the opportunity to work flexibly. However, once they had then had first-hand experience of flexible working, this assumption disappeared and was closely followed by the benefits of having the opportunity to work flexibly.

Overall the new graduate’s experiences of flexible working were optimistic and had a positive impact on both the participants’ professional and private lives. Amongst the participants the most common forms of flexible working that were used were flexi-time and compressed hours. This appeared to be attractive to the participants as every week is different, as well as a greater control over their personal lives. It was also highlighted that their flexible working schemes also helped the participants to switch off from work, resulting in less work related stress. However, it was also mentioned that access to work files through technology meant that they were constantly connected to work – even on their days off. The participants did address the value of technology regarding flexible working in terms of ease of communication. However, a constant connectedness to work is arguably why some of the participants valued the opportunity to work flexibly- to achieve work-life balance.

Amongst the participants there were two main gaps that were highlighted in terms of expectation and experiences. The first gap that was highlighted was positive. This contrasts to the research by Wright (2016) who suggests the negative gap in expectation regarding flexible working opportunities. From initial expectations as upcoming graduates, in comparison to their experiences, the participants seen a positive improvement. This highlighted again the development of views of flexible working after actually experiencing it in the workplace in comparison to assumption based views. The second gap in expectation was what the participants wanted from flexible working and what was available to them from their employer. This came in two forms; the initiatives that were available and the functionality of flexible working.
Similar to participants of the focus groups the new graduates also appeared to value organisational and management support. The influence of management on the whole organisations attitudes to flexible working was highlighted in relation to the filtration of culturally accepted policies. It was also highlighted that again similar to the contrasts between the responses of the upcoming and new graduates, experience was key. If management either experienced flexible working themselves or had experience of a former employee who had successfully worked flexibly, they were more likely to encourage and accept flexible working initiatives. However, it was highlighted that the experience of flexible working was heavily influenced by the amount of supportive that the manager gave. The negative experiences of flexible working were related to limited access to variety of projects at work and the stigma of ‘laziness’. This closely links to the work of Preston (2014) and Snowdon (2011) who highlight the negative influence of stigma. Also, interestingly another element of negativity that the participants referred to were assumptions of flexible working only being for working parents. As previously discussed this was also the response of the upcoming graduates regarding their opinions of flexible working. The interviewees highlighted awareness and communication regarding flexible working as key to its acceptance in the future.
Appendix 2- Focus Group Transcripts

Focus Group A Transcript

All participants were given the participant information sheets and consent forms prior to meeting for the focus group. Consent forms are then brought along to the focus group.

Participant information sheets given to all participants again before any questions are asked. The participant information sheet is then read to the group. Time is given at the beginning for any participants to ask any questions regarding the study before the semi-structured interview begins.

Researcher: Thank you for all taking the time to take part in this focus group. If there are any questions throughout the interview don’t hesitate to speak up. As I have already referred to in the participant information document this focus group will be about your attitudes and expectations of flexible working. I am now going to make a start, if you’re all ready?

*all participants agree to begin*

So, my first question is what does flexible working mean to you? How would you define flexible working?

Participant 1: It works around you, so I know people in the workplace who can pick one day and choose if they want to do an early shift and finish earlier or if they wanted to start later they then stay later. So it all works around you, as long as you’re getting the work done that needs to be done it shouldn’t make a difference to the employee.

Participant 2: Yes, I think flexible working means to me that you can just choose when you want to work as long as you stick to the task or whatever it is that you have been told to do by your employer. So maybe taking a lazes fair leadership would be used with flexible working hours. As long as you’re getting your task done.

Participant 3: A working environment that suits the employees needs really.

Participant 4: It could be a way to work to your best performance and get the most out of your performance. You would then be willing to go the extra mile for the organisation because they have adapted to help you balance your other responsibilities.

Researcher: For sure, so what types of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you? For example working from home, condensed hours or flexible schedules like previously mentioned by participant 1?

Participant 4: Um I think working from home would be great however, I think in later life it may be a bit more beneficial if you have a family or something.
**Researcher:** So in your job straight after university if you was looking for flexible working what sort of flexible working would appeal to you at this stage do you think?

**Participant 2:** I think maybe one day a week you work from home. The only reason that I would say that is if you’re working in an office and you’re doing your work constantly throughout the day maybe the one day out of the office could be used as time to reflect on what you have done and get some admit done at home. So then you have more freedom to organise your work and there’s also time to think about what you could do differently next time.

**Participant 1:** Straight out of university I think I would choose flexible schedules. I don’t think I like the idea of working from home, I would want to separate my work life and my home life and I really wouldn’t want to be doing work in my house personally.

**Participant 5:** I think personally I would like to have the freedom to go into work earlier and then finish earlier too so you would still have most of the day to get other things done in your own life.

**Participant 1:** Yes I agree, and when you went home it still would not be too late to go home and do some work because it would not be too late. There’s nothing worse - I’m judging this on university- but when you finish at 5:30pm and don’t get home until 6:30pm then you don’t want to be doing any work or your also too tired to do anything else in your personal life. So for me an earlier start would definitely be preferable.

**Researcher:** So would you say that flexible working to you is about having the time to also complete other things in your life other than only going to work?

**Participant 1:** Yes for sure, and having the freedom to be able to have a personal life as well as your work responsibilities.

**Researcher:** How important is the option for flexible working to you when choosing a job? Is it a priority when looking for a job after university?

**Participant 2:** I think for me the only case would be how far away I lived from my job. So at the moment I live one and a half hours away from university so they have developed a flexible timetable for me. This means that I don’t have to leave really early and get stuck in lots of traffic because I can leave a little later- so it’s really worked well for me. So when I start working I think one of the main things that I would think about regarding flexible working is travel and distance from home to the workplace- the commute daily.

**Participant 5:** For me it would be a bonus if I had it but if it was not an option it would not be so important to me that I would quit the job or not take the job in the first place.

**Participant 4:** Yes I agree with you, in my first job after university I don’t think I will be looking for flexible working hours I would just be happy to get a job really.
Researcher: So what elements would be important to you when choosing your first job? Like you said flexible working would not be such a big priority, what would you consider to be a priority?

Participant 1: I would love not to have to work on weekends. I am fed up of working weekends whilst in university. So priority for me would be Monday-Friday work, actually that would be a big priority.

*all participant nod and agree with this*

Unless I had other work to do on the weekends which would be fine, but I don’t want my contracted hours to be on the weekends.

Participant 2: Yes I definitely think that a structured time table is good when you have got a job, especially when you begin to have a family. If you haven’t got flexible hours you could be stuck when you have other commitments personally- which to me would always be more important if they were relating to my family.

Participant 4: For me when I leave university a really important element to me would be private healthcare because I play hockey for the university now I still want to carry on with this hobby after university. So healthcare would useful if I got injured.

Researcher: Do you believe that our generation’s experiences with technology influence the importance of flexible working? So lots of us have not known any different to not always having our phone with us and email access. Do you think that this influences the importance we give to be able to work from home etc.?

*all participants agree*

Participant 1: Yes like we are all so used to being able to send emails on the bus or on the commute- so this impacts the flexibility of the classic work environment. Years ago you would literally only be able to do work when you were in the office and now you have the ability to do work wherever.

Researcher: So would you say that you expect to be able to use technology to work more flexibly? Like you said sending emails on the commute?

Participant 1: Yes I feel that is just adapting to the modern environment. It would be odd if an employer didn’t accept that you couldn’t access your emails and stuff outside of the office.

Participant 4: Yes like you can have a meeting over skype wherever you are in the world really.

Participant 2: If there’s an instance where you are out of the country or you cannot come in that day, then skype and email access where ever you are allows your employer
to be kept up to date with what you are doing and you to be kept up to date with what’s going on with the business.

**Researcher**: So would you associate your any of your own values as influential to your views of flexible working? So do you think your attitudes to work-life balance or our social life impacts how you look at flexible working?

**Participant 2**: Yes I definitely think that everyone just likes to switch off from work and spend the day doing work but then in the evening being able to switch off and stop. I worried that when I start a job the stress is just going to pile up and everyone just wants to be able to go out and enjoy themselves outside of work. Work-life balance is really important to me.

**Participant 1**: I think as long as you have good values and always try and do your best and have a lot of pride in the work that you do- it is quite comforting knowing that you can go home and finish it through using skype or email access at home. I take pride in my work so my views of flexibility and the use of technology do coincide with the value I place on my work commitments.

**Participant 2**: Yes instead of having to say in the office until 9pm trying to get one deadline done you can have the confidence that you can get it done outside of the office.

**Researcher**: So do you have any expectations of flexible working from your first job out of university? Would you expect all employers to offer flexible working?

*all participants say no they would not expect all employers to offer flexible working*

**Participant 5**: I know employers who do offer it but the focus is only flexibility with their hours. So for example, working between 7am and 7pm but she has to do her hours within this time frame, so can come in at 7am and finish at 3pm. But that’s only the big expectation that I would have really.

**Participant 2**: I think flexible working hours are just more important for people who need them so like I said with the commute. So it depends on your experiences if you actually need them.

**Researcher**: In my research I found that zero hour contracts as a form of flexible working? So would you associate zero-hour contracts with flexible working? And would you accept a job after university if the employer advertised the post as flexible working but was a zero hour contract?

**Participant 5**: No I would not take the position if it was a zero hour contract, it is not reliable source of income. I would have bills to pay and things. If one week there was no work I would not be able to fulfil my financial responsibilities.
Participant 1: I would rather stay in a part time job than accept a zero-hour contract, its more stability than a zero-hour contract. I cannot believe that zero-hour contracts are classed as a form of flexible working.

Participant 2: Yes there just would not be any security financially.

Researcher: Would you have any reservations about taking up the opportunity to utilise flexible working initiatives in your future roles if it was not a zero-hour contract at all?

Participant 2: I think that the only thing that I would think about would be if I would procrastinate if I was offered the opportunity to work from home or something. My reservation would be if I would be able to successfully manage the workload if I had so much flexibility. I think if you are an organised person who is disciplined then I can see how it would work well but if you need more structure- like myself it could lead to a lack of effort maybe.

Researcher: Do you think that an organisations culture and support towards flexible working could impact the employee’s views of flexible working? So if your manager was very supportive of flexible working do you think all he employees would be keener to take up the opportunity of flexible working?

Participant 1: I think most people would be really keen to take up flexible working anyway, as it works around you and suits your needs and your own best interests.

Participant 5: I think flexible working for me would be a good incentive and motivates people because it shows that the culture of the organisation takes in account you as a person and not just the job that you're doing. It would for sure make me feel this way anyway.

Participant 4: Yes I completely agree, knowing that I am supported in the workplace would be really important for me, especially if I seen my job as a long term job.

Researcher: So do you think that flexible working shows that an employer respects you? Would this impact the length of time that you stayed with that organisation?

Participant 4: 100%

Participant 3: Yes as long as other things such as the pay and location fitted my needs also, if the organisation were good to me in the respect of adapting to help me fulfil other responsibilities I would be willing to pay them back through hard work and commitment. I think my personal ties and relationship to the organisation would grow if this aspect was taken into consideration. For me, same in university my social relationships in the workplace are really important- if me and my manager share respect in this way then I would feel a part of the team.
Participant 4: Yes I completely agree, knowing that I am supported in the workplace would be very important to me.

*all participants nod and agree with participant 4*

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your expectations of flexible working?

Participant 4: I think straight out of university flexible working would not be a big priority for me it would be more about job satisfaction and enjoyment. As for other things I would look for like I previously mentioned it would be healthcare and probably a good team environment.

Participant 2: Yes I would agree with that it very much to me will depend on if the opportunities for flexible working would benefit my own life at all. If it meant that I could have a better social life or help out my gran more then great, but just earning money will be my first priority out of university.

Researcher: Well thank you again everyone for taking part in this focus group. Remember you have my contact details if you would like to contact me about the research and thanks again for your input!

*End of Focus Group A*

Focus Group B

All participants were given the participant information sheets and consent forms prior to meeting for the focus group. Consent forms are then brought along to the focus group.

Participant information sheets given to all participants again before any questions are asked. The participant information sheet is then read to the group. Time is given at the beginning for any participants to ask any questions regarding the study before the semi-structured interview begins.

Researcher: Thank you for all taking the time to take part in this focus group. If there are any questions throughout the interview just let me know. As I have already referred to in the participant information document this focus group will be about your attitudes and expectations of flexible working from you’re first role out of university. I am now going to make a start, if you’re all ready?

*all participants agree to begin*

So, my first question is what does flexible working mean to you? How would you define flexible working?
Participant 1: When I think of flexible working I think of work-life balance so I have more time to spend with my family, enjoy leisure time but also have sociable hours inside work as well to build relationships with colleagues at work.

Participant 2: Yeah being able to choose your own hours to suit your own needs for your work to suit your life as opposed to it only suiting the business.

Participant 3: Yes I agree with both of you guys but I also think that it is important not to have too much flexibility in the workplace- for me anyway. The balance between work and your own life is important but we have come to university to greaten our chances of getting a good job and sometimes work will have to be a priority to be able to make the most of our degrees.

Participant 1: Yes, I think for me at this stage I would like the option to choose sort of Monday-Friday where Monday to Thursday you work 9am-5pm then on a Friday having the option to work 9am-1pm.

Participant 4: So for me flexible working would be having the opportunity to be able to fit my own life around my work. This wouldn’t mean that I would place more emphasis on my life outside of work as I know that I would be committed and ensure that all my work was done wherever I am doing it. I think people’s views of people who take up flexible working as not being committed to their job is sort of outdated. As long as you complete all your tasks I don’t think it should matter where this is.

Participant 5: I agree with that especially in the environment that we are growing up in- the dynamic of lots of things are changing and adapting now.

Researcher: For sure, definitely. So, what types of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you after university? For example working from home with access to your work over the internet or flexible shifts.

Participant 1: Yes I think it would be quite nice to be able to take your work home with you but at the same time not feeling pressured to take your work home with you- that’s important. I think working from the comfort of your own home is quite nice.

Participant 2: I think it could be beneficial if you have a family who needs your support or someone who relies on outside of work. A home office could be good- especially if the commute is long then being able to have the option to work from home sometimes would be nice- and less stressful I think.

Participant 5: Yes to have the chance to work at home would be really attractive for me.

Participant 4: I’m not sure what other responsibilities I may have after I graduate but at the moment I think for my first role I would be looking for some flexibility with my hours. So if I could maybe come into work early and leave early or visa versa. So then you could plan other things outside of work. I think this is important to me- too have a
work life but also another side where you can do things to help you develop in other ways - like travel I’m not sure.

**Researcher:** Yes, so do you think that flexible working and work life balance go hand in hand?

**Participant 4:** Yes I’ve never really made that connection but yes. Without having the opportunity to work flexibly I suppose that a having a life outside work would be harder.

**Researcher:** Yes so how important is the option for flexible working to you when choosing a job? Would you say that it is a priority?

**Participant 1:** Like I said earlier being able to finish early on a Friday would be important to me. But actually saying that, as I will be a graduate I think getting the experience would maybe be more important for me in this stage of my career and my life.

**Participant 2:** Yes especially because we are young and we haven’t been in the workplace before I would be more interested in proving myself before looking to work flexibly.

**Participant 3:** I would not say that I would class it as a priority no.

**Researcher:** What other elements would you regard as important when choosing a job? E.g. Bonus schemes, healthcare or a company car?

**Participant 1:** For me apart from flexible working I would look for good support in the workplace. For example support, training, coaching and mentoring is really important to me in my first role. As I am looking to go into HR where currently I don’t have any work experience, a supportive work environment would be crucial to me developing. And also getting to know my colleagues.

**Participant 2:** Yes work environment would be really important - social activities, canteen and maybe even classes in work like yoga and counselling sessions if you’re feeling stressed. Being satisfied with the overall feel of the workplace for me is important.

**Participant 3:** Yes for me support would be a really big factor too. Also not only support but also the opportunity for career development - I place a high value on learning so this would be really important for me. I think without this I would not be motivated. I am really goal orientated so if there was nothing to aim towards I wouldn’t perform as well I don’t think - I suppose I like to be challenged at the moment.

**Researcher:** So for you guys would you say that two important factors after university would be organisational support and opportunities to develop?

*Group all agree*
Do you believe that our generation’s experiences with technology influence the importance of flexible working?

**Participant 5:** Yes I think it probably has shaped the way we think of flexible working in terms of the ease of it. We always have our phone and laptops with us and we have grown up to think that it’s just normal to send emails whilst travelling. I think- well in my family anyway my mum even when we are on holiday still sends emails to work and answers phone calls- I think it’s annoying! She never actually leaves work because she always has her work phone in her handbag with her own personal phone. So for me I do like the idea of flexible working after university but I don’t like the aspect of always being linked to work in that sense.

**Participant 3:** I suppose it depends on your role- if you have lots of responsibility I would almost expect to always be at hand for work. But I suppose yes your right it does mean sometimes you cannot get away from work- maybe that would be too much of a challenge! *Participant laughs*

**Participant 1:** I think technology ties in with working from home. Like I think that it’s good that if you don’t physically go into the office on a Friday but have a really important meeting scheduled you can still take part over skype. But I think our generation sort of sees that stuff as normal rather than a bonus- if that makes sense.

**Participant 2:** Yes I would completely agree with that. We are so used to easy access to communication.

**Participant 1:** I think that with new technology there is also less pressure. For example if you do not feel comfortable having a face to face meeting with someone you can sit in the comfort of your own home and take part in that meeting over skype or on the phone.

**Participant 4:** Yes but I do think that companies should be aware that technology may take over. Communication is a key skill that we should all have and I think sometimes with email all of the time we could lose the ability to be able to communicate messages effectively. People skills are important. But saying that I do also rely on email and stuff with my tutors at the moment. I suppose it’s about finding the balance whilst not losing values and.

**Participant 1:** Yes that’s true through more technology the social element of work could be lost.

**Researcher:** So would you say that the team/social element to work is important to you?

*Group agree*

Why is this do you think?
Participant 2: For me I work better when I am familiar with the group that I am working with. So if the environment was really well not many people there as they are choosing to do all their work over email I would feel quite... alone maybe. Or to put it better, a little unsupported. I like being in a team- it’s what motivates me and keeps me feeling a part of something.

Researcher: So would you associate your any of your own values as influential to your views of flexible working do you think? This could be your overall attitudes to work and your own social lives or attitudes to work-life balance?

Participant 1: I think for me it is important to have a good work-life balance because if I feel too much pressure I just will not do it- I get quite down and stressed if I have too much to do. So I think not necessarily my values but knowing how I work- if I could have some flexibility in terms of how to manage the workload more I would find it less stressful. I find when I am stressed it not only effects my work but also my social life because I feel guilty about doing fun stuff when I have lots of work on.

Participant 2: Yeah a perfect balance of work and social life would be great- however feels like a bit of a dream!

Participant 3: Yes, I think work would always be my priority but then yes you do want to have some free time to be able to stay healthy and exercise and things too.

Participant 2: Yes and especially when we are young even though we don’t have commitment as such like a family- it is still important to let go of stress sometimes. Like being able to travel would be great. I suppose that links to the technology aspect too. I think, yeah, flexible working is a really good thing. I think now I’ve actually thought about it- if I seen an employer who offered flexible working I would feel supported by them- like they would trust me to go to another country or have a day out of the office and I would still get my work done.

Researcher: That’s interesting. So now, do you have any expectations of flexible working from your first job after university?

Participant 5: For me I would not expect it as such at graduate level but would like to know it would be an option in the future. The option to work from home really does appeal to me but I’m not sure if I would say that I expect it from my first job.

Participant 1: Yes as a new graduate I would like the opportunity but would also not expect it or try and demand it. I think they need to get to know you- your skills and your level to make sure that they think you can make flexible working beneficial for you and the business. I think sometimes people think of our generation as a bit lazy so maybe employers would not be keen on offering it to us at first.
Participant 4: Yes for me when I first started I would like to be in the office more often than not so I can build relationships with the people that I am working with and prove myself. I think then if my manager offered me the opportunity to work flexibly like work from home on a Friday or Monday or something I would almost feel like I had done a good job. Like they support me and trust me enough to leave me to get on with my work myself.

Participant 2: Yes I would expect them to offer flexible working as a core element I think. I think giving people the choice is the most important part. Like me personally I’m not sure I initially I would take up flexible working as I said I like working in a team. But in a few months once I had settled into the team and role the opportunity would be nice.

Researcher: So during my research I found that a form of flexible working are zero-hour contracts are a form of flexible working. Would you associate zero-hour contracts to flexible working? If your first role out of university was a zero hour contract role would it affect your decision whether to take the job or not?

Participant 4: No way, I don’t understand how zero hour contacts are seen as flexible working. For me flexible working is about freedom and choice where zero-hour contracts are the opposite! I worked on a four hour contract and that was bad enough.

Participant 3: Yes I would much prefer no flexible working as opposed to a zero-hour contract. I haven’t worked this hard for my degree to have no financially stability.

Participant 1: Yes I would much prefer to be in a fixed job - I could live with having to be in work nine hours a day if it meant I knew I could pay my rent for the month.

Participant 2: Yes it’s about having control.

Participant 5: I would not expect zero-hour contract to be a form of flexible working. For me initially when I think of flexible working I think of positive things whereas zero-hour contracts I think of very negative. The two just don’t match. I would not take a job if it was a zero hour contract.

Researcher: Would you have any reservations about taking up the opportunity to utilise flexible working initiatives in your future roles?

Participant 1: I don’t think so no. I think it would depend on the organisation too though. For example if your manager seemed positive about flexible working it could impact your views but if there was a negative feel towards it then your views could be changed. I like to please my team and manager so if I felt that they did not want me to use flexible working I think then I would have to consider my choice a little more.

Participant 5: I think I would see it as a positive. If you then moved on to another employer they could see that you are reliable and committed if you use flexible working.
but have also got your job done. But yes if I thought it would hinder my job or relationships with colleagues then maybe I would change my mind.

**Participant 2:** I do not think I would have any reservations no- it would only be if I thought like you said if it would affect my relationships with my colleagues.

**Researcher:** So would you say that the organisations culture towards flexible working would impact if you were to have any reservations of flexible working?

**Participant 1:** Yes definitely.

*Other team members agree also*

**Researcher:** Finally, is there anything else you would like to add regarding your expectations of flexible working?

**Participant 2:** Yes I didn’t really think about flexible working much before this focus group- but now I am quite interested to look into it more. It could potentially change the way that you see work I think.

Researcher: Thank you everyone for taking part in this focus group if there aren’t any questions now feel free to email me.

*End of Focus Group B*

**Focus Group C**

All participants were given the participant information sheets and consent forms prior to meeting for the focus group. Consent forms are then brought along to the focus group.

Participant information sheets given to all participants again before any questions are asked. The participant information sheet is then read to the group. Time is given at the beginning for any participants to ask any questions regarding the study before the semi-structured interview begins.

**Researcher:** Thank you for all taking the time to take part in this focus group. If there are any questions throughout the interview or even after the interview just let me know. As I have already referred to in the participant information document this focus group will be a discussion about your attitudes and expectations of flexible working from you’re first role out of university. I am now going to make a start, if there are any questions first?
*all participants agree to begin*

So, my first question is what does flexible working mean to you? How would you define flexible working?

**Participant 1:** I would say it’s about fitting work around your life-style. Family comes to mind- parents sort of thing.

**Participant 2:** I think of set times- so someone may work mornings or someone may work in the nights instead based on what works best for you.

**Participant 3:** Yes so I would say that it’s about being able to deal with the unexpected. So if you had an emergency doctor’s appointment you could go to work in the morning but then you can just go your appointment and come back, you don’t need to cancel that appointment or anything because of strict work hours.

**Participant 1:** So yes, like a certain amount of hours that you have to complete by the end of the week but then it’s up to you when you want to work those hours- that would be beneficial for sure.

**Participant 4:** Yes so having a contract so you do have a certain amount of set hours but you have the whole week to work those hours. It’s good because you aren’t limited then because you can finish a bit later one day if you go in early the next day.

**Participant 2:** Yes you may have issues with children or other family members- then you can be there to deal with those commitments too.

**Participant 4:** Yes so people can work from home if they had any issues like that on flexible contracts.

**Researcher:** So what sort of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you? Are there any that would appeal to you after graduating in your first role after university?

**Participant 3:** I think flexible scheduling being able to choose when I do my hours would be really good. But thinking about working from home is personally something that would be good for me after university. I feel like I need structure- I fear that I would not get enough work done a home. With working at home there just would not be enough structure for me.

**Participant 1:** Yes you would feel like you would not get much work done because you’re in your home environment and not a ‘work’ environment.

**Participant 4:** I think that’s why some people- if they have the space have offices at home so they have that space to do work at home. Then when they leave that room they know that they are back at home.
Participant 2: Yeah, hmmm. I think I like the idea of working from home. I feel that I am self-motivated so would actually do better in the comfort of my own home. I think I would feel more relaxed- but in a good way where I would get more work done.

Researcher: So how important is having the option for flexible working is to you? Will it be an important aspect that you will look for in your first role out of university?

Participant 4: I think that if you want to get somewhere within a company to begin with you have to be committed to it- that’s just my opinion. I don’t think you can be too picky to begin with after university and have to work to meet the employer’s needs rather than just think about your own. It’s such high competition for jobs now too that even getting a graduate level role is so hard. So if I got one I would just want to make sure that I kept the job. Routine is important within work I think- it means stability to me.

Researcher: So are there any other priorities that you would be looking for from your first role out of university- in terms of benefits or rewards?

Participant 3: Yes I would be looking for good reward schemes.

Participant 2: Yes more incentives based.

Participant 1: Chance of promotion would be really important for me.

Participant 4: Yes promotion and support. So having... a culture if that is the right word where the management help you. This would keep me motivated and keep me wanting to try my best at work too.

Researcher: Do you believe that our generation’s experiences with technology influence the importance of flexible working?

Participant 2: Yes I suppose if someone messages you and are in need if you’re in or out of the office you can still be available to give them help over the phone or email. I suppose when I do think of flexible working I do connect it with using some sort of technology. Without being able to access your emails outside of work you would not able to work when you are no physically in the office.

Participant 4: Yes so my aunty lives local but works in London. She has to travel there twice a week but works from home the rest of the week. I know she does still have meetings and stuff with her team but she uses skype when she’s not in the office. Also, when she has to commute on the two days that she is in London, she starts at 9 and finishes at 5 but her commuting time is included in those hours.

Participant 2: How does that work?

Participant 4: Well when she is on the train she will start working on her lap top answering emails and stuff and will be available to take calls and things. So yes she
works 9 till 5 on the days that she has to go to London but she still is not physically in the office 9-5 because that includes her commuting time also.

Participant 2: That is such a good idea. I suppose if you work in London but live local you would also be earning a London salary but would not have the high living costs either.

*All of the group agree that this is a really good initiative and is something that they may be interested in after university*

Participant 1: Yes, that shows that technology makes flexible working much easier. Without technology I think it would be hard. But I also kind of like seeing people- like I like coming to university because you create friendships and I feel like if all meetings were done over skype or email you cannot engage with your other colleagues as much.

Participant 4: Yes like I said I really want to show that I am committed and prove this when I first start work. I want to build a relationship with my manager and other colleagues to see where I fit in and where I enjoy working and things. With working from home I feel like getting to know the people that you work with could take longer than if you were in the office full time.

Researcher: So would you associate your any of your own values as influential to your views of flexible working do you think? This could be your overall attitudes to work and your own social lives or attitudes to work-life balance?

Participant 3: Yes when we were just then discussing technology and flexible working where people can pick up emails. I think that does impact a bit on your social life as well. I mean when you are in work and then when you go out you don’t really want to be on your phone replying to emails- you want to separate both. So have your work separate from your social life to have a balance and make sure that they both do not mix with one another. So I think that our ideas of technology can impact it (flexible working) in that sense. Then it could possibly even bring added stress to you if you’re accessing it on your phone. It could be important and you do not want to just leave it- it will be on your mind. It would with me anyway.

Participant 1: Yeah work would be 24/7 then when you can access it on your phone.

Participant 3: Yes you would then question- if your work life is actually separate from your personal life.

Researcher: So do you have any expectations of flexible working from your first job at all?

Participant 1: No I would not expect to be offered flexible working as a graduate but to know it was there if my circumstances did change and I did need it- I would like that.
Participant 3: Yes I would not expect it but to know that it was an option would be quite good- so you could plan things. Even if you did not week in week out work flexibly but used it sometimes to help you get things done and achieve things in your personal life it would be good.

Participant 1: Yes the opportunity would be good but I definitely would not expect to be given flexible working as a new graduate. But, when I think of people who use flexible working I do think of middle aged people- who have children and other responsibilities.

Participant 4: Yeah I think before maybe but now if you look lots of graduate roles do specify it on their job adverts so it does make you think about who they are aiming it towards now- must be good for us younger people in some way.

Participant 2: Yes I think it’s (flexible working) good because it gives you choice and you can adapt it to you and what you prefer.

Participant 3: at the moment in my job I get flexible hours I suppose- well I am contracted a very low number of hours but then they call me when there is extra work. So they called me today to go in this evening- I would not want this from a graduate role! But as for good flexible working like we discussed earlier- it would depend on the work environment I think. I can imagine a modern organisation embracing flexible working, or if managers are very democratic or use a lazes fair approach maybe. I suppose for it to work it would need to fit with the organisation as a whole in that way.

Participant 1: I think I am actually looking forward to set times in work- like 9-5 Monday-Friday.

Participant 2: Yes same that’s what I am looking forward to- a routine and structure to my work.

Participant 4: Yes at the moment in my job- I work in a supermarket and they do a really good graduate scheme. Everyone works all different hours all of the time- no one ever works the same hours or days every week. But with the graduate scheme they do have set hours so they do 9-4 every day- they get priority over everyone else because they are on the graduate scheme and have the access to move up in the company. So I almost envy that they get structure whereas the work that I do at the moment- which you could call flexible- I am very fed up of.

Researcher: Yes linking to that- within it the research it was found that zero-hour contracts also fall under the bracket of flexible working.

Participant 3: Ohh really!

Researcher: So have you has any experiences with zero hour contracts at all. If a job that was on a zero hour contract was offered to you when you graduate would you accept the role?
Participant 1: Is that when they just phone you when they need you?

Participant 3: Yes so because I work in a cinema over Christmas it was getting really busy. So you will have one person I who will be in the bar then you will have a stand by so they are just called when they are needed. Yes they just phone you when they need more assistance then. It’s quite annoying because you cannot plan your day. Just keep you hanging there.

Participant 2: At the moment I am on a zero-hour contract and I find it beneficial because it can work around my responsibilities with university. You can work the rota around you. But because the money is not very stable I would not accept a zero hour contract after university. Too many financial responsibilities after being a student like repaying debts and rent.

Participant 3: I wouldn’t take a zero-hour contract after university no I would rather get a part time job- at least you know that you will have that specific amount of money coming in every week to pay your rent or for your food.

Participant 4: Yes after university I just want a stable routine. I want set hours- it’s taking its toll not knowing what hours I’ve got at the moment. So I am actually surprisingly looking forward to a 9-5 job. At least knowing that you’re working those hours you can still plan your social life around he times that you know that you are in work for.

Researcher: So would you have any reservations about taking the opportunity to work flexibly after you graduate?

Participant 1: Yes I think you would not learn as much as a new graduate if you’re not in the office. Where if you are in the office 9-5 you are always going to be picking up new things.

Participant 3: Yes and I suppose if you are shadowing someone. If you go into a graduate marketing graduate scheme and you are shadowing the marketing manager and they are doing flexible working and you are. If you’re working flexibly the one day and your manager is not you could miss out on key information. You’re not getting the full learning experience. I almost would feel that management may think that I am trying to get out of work by working flexibly.

Participant 2: Well if you have proved to your manager that you are a good worker they should trust that you will get the work done I suppose.

Participant 3: Yes I never thought of that- think what it is as a graduate I think that we are going to be at the bottom of the pile and need to prove that we are worthy of the job I suppose.
Researcher: Is there anything else at all that you would like to add regarding flexible working?

*All participants say no*

Thank you everyone for taking part. You all have my contact details if you have any further questions about the research.

*End of Focus Group C*
Appendix 3- Interview Transcripts

Interview 1

The participant was emailed the participant information sheet and consent form prior to the telephone semi-structured interview. The consent form was then signed electronically and sent back to the researcher before the semi-structured interview took place.

The researcher thanks the participant again for taking part in the study and runs through the key information again in the participant information sheet. Asks if there is any questions before we begin.

Researcher: So my first question is when you hear the term flexible working what key words come to mind for you? How would you describe flexible working?

Participant 1: So, I think mainly about working from home, working from different sites-if you work for an organisation that has multiple sites.

Researcher: Great, so can I ask have you experienced any flexible working at all?

Participant 1: Yes I have in my current organisation

Researcher: So, what types of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you? Would there be any in particular that would appeal to you?

Participant 1: Yes definitely, I think working from home, compressed hours. For example, you have every other Friday off, so you work extra hours throughout the week. So, you almost work ten days of nine hours. It just gives you more flexibility for things like childcare and other commitments so you can just plan your work accordingly.

Researcher: So, why would you say that these particular flexible working initiatives appeal to you? Is it the aspect of the ability to plan your life around work a little more?

Participant 1: Yes that’s right. The key is work-life balance. I think we are moving into a world where there is more stress, more data, a lot more paper work and a big push for productivity and greater efficiency. That in its self means that people tend to do more hours as well. So to make it more comfortable so if employers can make it flexible then that’s a good thing.

Researcher: So, how important is the option for flexible working to you when choosing a job? Is it a priority when looking for a job?

Participant 1: Umm, I guess in isolation I would say yes definitely it is a priority. But if it is against things such as higher reward pay or training and development and a higher
bonus then that could possibly effect that. However, all things being equal then definitely would class flexible working as a priority yes.

**Researcher:** Great, so as you previously mentioned at the moment things are changing in the workplace – there is increased pressure in the workplace. Do you think that our generation’s experiences with technology influence the importance that we give to flexible working?

**Participant 1:** I think so yes, I guess it makes us more- we are always looking for solutions. So we think- ok I have my phone all of the time, or a tablet or a laptop so why can’t I multitask with those devices. I think technology and the way that we use it makes a huge difference (to flexible working). It makes things easier to work remotely, say from home to connect to the work network and work that way.

**Researcher:** Yes I see this with university- lots of things are done online such as assignment submissions and lecture slides.

**Participant 1:** Exactly yes.

**Researcher:** So, would you associate your any of your own values as influential to your views of flexible working? Such as your attitudes to work-life balance and your personal wellbeing?

**Participant 1:** I do yes. For example, if I have a hospital appointment on Monday morning that will mean from a work perspective on that Monday morning I can’t do anything. So because I can work from home I can prioritise- so working in the afternoon and then slightly later into the evening. It gives you more options- work-life balance is important.

**Researcher:** For sure, so when you was in university before you entered employment did you have any expectations of flexible working? If so, what were they?

**Participant 1:** I did yes. I expected to have firstly the ability to work flexibly and secondly in terms of the resources in terms of devices like mobile phones, laptops and cloud computing yes I did.

**Researcher:** And how would you say that you arrive at these expectations? Were they through aspects such as the recruitment process or through just your own expectations that you have gathered through comparing different organisations?

**Participant 1:** A combination I think from a technology point of view things have moved on so much. So it has given employers the ability to offer that flexibility and also through comparing and contrasting organisations to the gold standard organisations such as Google and Facebook. When you see how they operate and how their staff work you expect other organisations to also follow as well.
**Researcher**: Great, so can I ask what your experiences of flexible working have been?

**Participant 1**: My experiences have been very positive. I think it helps when you have a very supportive line manager as well. I think you’re experience is also down to the team that you are in- this can change your experience. So, within the same department different teams can have different experiences. So, it definitely helps when your line manager has the right attitude to flexible working. Without their support it can change the whole dynamic.

**Researcher**: Yes management do have so much influence don’t they. So would you say that there has been any gaps between your initial expectations of flexible working in comparison to your experiences?

**Participant 1**: Umm I think no. From a purely- was I expecting flexible working? Yes. Do I have flexible working? Yes. Maybe the difference comes with the functionality. For example, video conferencing- I cannot do this from home. I can only do that from another site office – so functionality and the quality has been a little different I guess.

**Researcher**: So, as part of my research one interesting thing that I found out were that zero hour contracts were a form of flexible working. Have you experienced any zero hour contracts at all?

**Participant 1**: I did yes, incidentally when I was university. I did not know what they were- I just knew that there were days that I had work and days that I did not have work, so I have experienced flexible working in this way also. But this is very unstable.

**Researcher**: So apart from zero-hour contracts would you say that you have received any negative attitudes towards flexible working at all? Coming from management level or colleagues.

**Participant 1**: Yes, yes again there are two different ways of looking at it. From my team no because we all have flexible working but there are sort of negative connotations from different people. There is the perception that if you’re working from home that you’re not really working. But then it comes with the territory- the whole purpose of working from home is to allow you to do other things as well. I think that it is an education which- it’s not really communicated- you don’t have a working from home policy so to speak. So I suppose that it is open to certain things like negativity. Whereas if it was communicated better- officially say- ok this is what you expect. If you’re working from home I expect you to do at least a few hours or be online for a certain amount of time.

**Researcher**: Yes so would you say that it is quite important for managers to set expectations when you are working flexibly?
Participant 1: No, it’s not important. It gives me the flexibility to be able to plan my day. So, if I had to be logged on for say four hours then it may defeat the whole process of working from home. So for example I may have my phone with me but I am not on email- so I may be able to take calls and limited email usage. But I am still working as I can still take calls. But I may not be able to view certain screens.

Researcher: So do you think that your experiences of flexible working has affected the way that you perform at work or your commitment to the organisation?

Participant 1: Yes, in a good way. It has given me more commitment to my work and to my organisation because when I need time off to do other things I am allowed to do that. So it gives me a sense of purpose and loyalty. So in those days that I do not have to work flexibly I will be more inclined to do extra.

Researcher: So would you say that there anything about your experience of flexible working that stood out for you in particular?

Participant 1: Umm not really- I would say just the independent nature of it. I have colleagues in other organisations who like I was saying are supposed to be logged on for a certain amount of time. But for me it’s completely free rein- if you’re working from home you’re trusted to do your work. They don’t really police it- you didn’t pick up this call or you wasn’t logged on for ‘x’ amount of time. Trust is a big element.

Researcher: So, is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences of flexible working at all?

Participant 1: So just from my experience the correlation between flexible working and a good experience is almost down to the culture and values of the organisation. So if the tone is set from the top and it’s a very family culture where people are independent and are allowed to express themselves then this translates to a more favourable experience. Also, performance as well- evidently we have just released our results last week. And despite all people working different hours through flexible working it’s actually shown a gradual improvement over the last three years- so it shows that something is definitely working.

Researcher: Well thank you again for taking part in this research. Remember if you have any more questions or queries about the research do not hesitate to get in contact.

Participant 1: Thanks and if there is any more information that you need feel free to drop me a call.

*End of Interview 1*
Interview 2

The participant was emailed the participant information sheet and consent form prior to the telephone semi-structured interview. The consent form was then signed electronically and sent back to the researcher before the semi-structured interview took place.

The researcher thanks the participant again for taking part in the study and runs through the key information again in the participant information sheet. Asks if there is any questions before we begin.

Researcher: So my first question is how would you describe flexible working? What does flexible working mean to you?

Participant 2: To me when I think of flexible working I think of- well the key element is work-life balance. I also think of support, being able to work around other commitments like a long commute or family commitments and also I think of an organisation who value their employees.

Researcher: So what types of flexible working initiatives appeal to you in particular?

Participant 2: At the moment in my current role- in my current organisation I do use one of the flexible ways of working that they offer. So I always work four days instead of five- however I still work a full time contracts but work longer hours on the four days that I am in. I generally have a Monday off the one week and a Friday off the following week- I try and keep this pattern consistent so my other colleagues know exactly when I am and am not in work. It’s good for me because I play football on a Saturday- so the extra day that I am not in the office on the Friday or Monday gives me the opportunity to get other things done.

Researcher: So would you say that you choose this initiative because it give you more time outside of work?

Participant 2: Yes, it’s important to me to be able to keep my work and personal life separate. I really do value my job and the work environment but for me personally the balance of four days in work and three days off means that I value my job even more- and I also feel like it works both ways. I have proved to my manager that even only working four days I still manage to get all my work done on time to a good standard. Funny enough in my last appraisal meetings- looking at my performance I said to my line manager how much I like working four days. He then said that he now knows that he can leave me to my own devices because he knows that even if I only worked three days he knows I would still get the job done.
**Researcher:** So do you think that your relationship has changed with your line manager since you have taken up flexible working?

**Participant 2:** Yes I do and for the better too. Well I say this- at the beginning (of the flexible working) I did not get overly positive vibes from my line manager about using the flexible options. But after I had been using it for around 5 months he could see how well it worked for me and he seemed to have changed his attitude about it then. Now I feel like he trusts me to get my work done- I’m comfortable there. The work challenges me the culture is really good. If I was to go into another job or advise my friends I would tell them to at least try flexible working- I’ve noticed a positive impact on my work, how I manage stress and like I just mentioned my relationships in work.

**Researcher:** So is it fair to say that flexible working is important to you and is a priority?

**Participant 2:** Yes 150%. So there are other things that are important too –like pay. You want to be paid a fair salary for the job that you are doing especially when you have paid so much to get your degree. But aside from pay- flexible working and probably a good work environment is really important to me. But yes flexible working is very important to me.

**Researcher:** Great. Our generation have grown up with technology- phone, laptops, iPad. Do you think that our generations experiences with technology influences the importance that we give to technology at all?

**Participant 2:** Umm... yes I think with technology being the way it is- so easy to access and communicate with people it has made people and employers realise that putting flexible working into practice is quite easy. Even if you’re not in the office you can still be a part of meetings through video calls and reply to emails. The only difficulty for me is with my organisation you cannot access all of the files when you are not in the office because of confidentiality issues. But it just means you have to plan a little more to make sure that stuff is done when you’re in the office.

**Researcher:** Yes- prioritising I suppose.

**Participant 2:** Yes when I said that I have a day off from the office every week- I still do have my work phone with me and if it calls I will answer it. So actually, I suppose even though technology is very good for work it can also prevent work-life balance especially if your- say – on holiday and you take your work phone. I suppose with emails and phone calls you always sort of have a line of connection to work. Even if you don’t answer the calls or emails- you still have that there reminding you of stresses or upcoming things at work.

**Researcher:** Yes it can be tricky to know when to switch off your work phone etc I can imagine. So baring this in mind would you associate any of your own values as influential to you views of flexible working at all?
Participant 2: Sorry, I don’t quite understand the question- could you explain a little more?

Researcher: Yes of course. So, do you think any of your values such as- what you touched on earlier with work life balance or your personal well-being effect how you think about flexible working?

Participant 2: Yes as I said earlier both those- work life balance and considering my own health as in stress- is a really important to me. So yes I suppose the way that I look a flexible working is a result of the value I put on those things yes.

Researcher: So I see that you place great value on flexible working now- but before you entered employment did you have any expectations of flexible working at all? What sort of expectations did you have?

Participant 1: Looking back when I was at university I did not place a huge importance on flexible working- I think I only realised how good it would be when I actually began to work. At university I had free time to play football and as you know it’s pretty free rein in university where you yes have to go to lectures but you can choose to do your essays whenever you want- morning, night, weekday or weekend. So flexible working at this point for my future job did not seem like a priority and because of this I didn’t expect to have it. But- this may also have been because I was not very aware of it. I think it’s good to educate students about flexible working before they enter employment to show how much it can impact your experience of work.

Researcher: Yes sure.

Participant 2: However, now as I have experienced flexible working and it’s been so positive for me I would expect flexible working from any potential jobs in the future.

Researcher: So could I ask a little more about your experiences of flexible working in terms of what flexible practices are available to you within the current organisation?

Participant 2: To my knowledge the only two flexible working practices that are available are either flexi time like I sort of do and teleworking- for example using your laptop to do work at home. But apart from that there isn’t anything else available as far as I know. However, the culture is so open I do feel that if you thought you wanted another form of flexible working such as... part-time or something then you could suggest it. That’s something that I really do love about the organisation that I work for.

Researcher: So would you say that management support towards schemes like flexible working make a huge difference to the way it’s used and thought of by colleagues?

Participant 2: Yes I think if an employer offers flexible working then it reflects their style- style of management and how they treat their workers in general. For me personally, being able to work flexibly makes me feel more relaxed in my work
environment. Ideas come from the top. Like I said at first my manager was not too keen but now really encourages flexible working actually and has seen how well it can work. If my manager was not as open to the idea I do not think that all of my colleagues who use it (flexible working) now would use it without his support. So yes management are very influential to all aspects of a culture I think. Even down to how the employee think of the workplace is down to the culture.

**Researcher:** Yes for sure. So would you say that there has been any gaps between your initial expectations of flexible working in comparison to your experiences?

**Participant 2:** Personally the only gap has been how good the experience has been for me. Going into it (flexible working) I was not sure how it was going to work but my experience as I have said has been great.

**Researcher:** So, as part of my research one interesting thing that I found out were that zero hour contracts were a form of flexible working. Have you experienced any zero hour contracts at all?

**Participant 2:** yes it really baffles me that they class zero-hour contracts as working flexible. They say well you can turn work down but if you never know when your next pay cheque is coming in you wouldn’t turn down work even if it clashed with something in your personal life I don’t think. So when I say I regard flexible working as a priority I would not be including zero-hour contracts in this- I am lucky enough not to have worked on a zero-hour contract.

**Researcher:** So it seems like your experiences of flexible working have been very positive. But have you had any negative experiences of flexible working at all?

**Participant 2:** Um let me think. So when I first starting using flexible working it was not a utilised initiative in the organisation. People would always ask- do you have children then is that why you only work four days a week? Or do you care for someone? I’m not saying that this was negative but when I then answered no people did not seem to understand why I was using flexible working. But now it’s completely different within the team- loads of us use it. I would say that attitude towards flexible working are developing but more education needs to be given not only to employers but also to the wider workforce. People need to realise that because you work four days instead of five it does not mean that you don’t do your job as well as someone who is in the office for five days a week.

**Researcher:** Yes so would you say that it is quite important for managers to set expectations when you are working flexibly?

**Participant 2:** No for me working flexibly means that your manager should trust that you not only have the skills to organise your workload but also trust you to be able to set standards for yourself. Obviously there will be expectations of your role but in terms of
expectations of flexible working no I do not think that this is important at all. If you are working from home one day maybe a standard could be- you have to be available to take calls between 8am-5pm but I feel like if the organisation should trust the employee to know this anyway if that is their working hours.

**Researcher:** So would you say that your personal experience of flexible working has affected your levels of performance or commitment to the organisation at all?

**Participant 2:** Yes, yes I do. Because it works so well for me I would not look for another job- well not at the moment. Being able to work the way that I do (flexibly) it makes me feel in general more clear headed and less stressed and less pressure. So I feel like I can enjoy my projects more than if I was over worked and stressed. Also like I said, it means I can play football which also helps me to unwind. My relationship with my manager has also improved because he can see how committed I am to my job. Also, because the organisation are so accommodating for me I would be more likely to do more in return, it’s a two way relationship I think.

**Researcher:** So would you say that there anything about your experience of flexible working that stood out for you in particular?

**Participant 2:** Just how much it can influence how you see work. For example, because I have the option to work flexibly I do not dread going into work. Also, flexible working has to be supported by other elements such as the culture for it to work. Without management support flexible working would probably be really difficult- as you may feel like your causing a conflict between our needs and your employer’s needs- thankfully this is not the case for me. Also like we discussed earlier flexible working gives me the opportunity to look after myself and have a healthy life where I have a good balance between work and my personal life.

**Researcher:** Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences of flexible working at all?

**Participant 2:** Just that knowledge of the benefits of flexible working should be more widespread. Also, life is changing- there is lots of pressure and stress in people’s lives now and I believe that flexible working can help to alleviate stress connected to work a little more. Sometimes the stigma just halts people’s opinions of it.

**Researcher:** When you say stigma what do you mean?

**Participant 2:** So like I experienced people connect flexible working to working mums or carers and it should be like this. I am not a father or a carer and I am young- but I still get so much benefit from working flexibly.
**Researcher:** Thank you so much for taking the time out to take part in this research. If there are any queries about the study or your participation do not hesitate to contact me.

*End of Interview 2*

**Interview 3**

*The participant was emailed the participant information sheet and consent form prior to the telephone semi-structured interview. The consent form was then signed electronically and sent back to the researcher before the semi-structured interview took place.*

*The researcher thanks the participant again for taking part in the study and runs through the key information again in the participant information sheet. Asks if there is any questions before we begin.*

**Researcher:** So my first question is how would you describe flexible working? What would you say that flexible working means to you?

**Participant 3:** I would say that flexible working means that you have more control over your work and then this links to being able to achieve more things outside of work like visit new places or play sport and keep yourself fulfilled and healthy. So to me flexible working is about the balance... work life balance.

**Researcher:** So taking what flexible working means to you into consideration what types of flexible working initiatives appeal to you? Are there any in particular that would help you to achieve work life balance?

**Participant 3:** Yes so for me working from home one or two days a week would help me to achieve this I believe. However, having the ability to also to start work earlier and finish earlier also would be great for me and my commitments and interests outside of work. Like I said these two things would help me to be able to work and use my skills professionally and develop in that sense but also to keep my own interests in the forefront of my life. Ultimately my commitments to keeping fit and being there to help my relatives are the aspects of my life that fulfil me the most and keep me happy.
Participant asks for re-assurance that their name will be kept anonymous and the researcher reassures them through referring back to the participant information sheet.

**Researcher:** So would you say that the opportunity for flexible working is important to you? Would you class it as a priority when you’re looking for a job?

**Participant 3:** Yes it would definitely be an important aspect. As I have learnt from my experiences with the organisation that I currently work for it is important not only to make sure that they offer it but also to look into what sorts of flexible working that they offer. For example, in the organisation that I work for at the moment yes they do offer flexible working but it is only the opportunity to job share and work part time. Financially, that is not realistic for me. So looking for an organisation that offers flexible working... in its full sense would be really important for me.

**Researcher:** Would you say that it would be the defining characteristic between choosing two jobs- if one offered flexible working and one did not? Even if the pay was better in the job that did not offer flexible working?

**Participant 3:** Alone- aside from pay my answer would straight away be yes it would be the defining characteristic. However, in terms of responsibilities such as rent and paying bills money is very important to be able to live the life that you want to have outside of work. So if the salary was three times as much as my currently salary but they did not offer the opportunity to work flexibly- I would still take the job as financially that would change my life. But, if aspects such as salary were relatively equal yes I would consider the option for flexible working as a key benefit.

**Researcher:** So, our generation have grown up with technology- phone, laptops, iPad. Do you think that our generations experiences with technology influences the importance that we give to technology at all?

**Participant 3:** Yes I think it... makes flexible working easier and more accessible through technology. I suppose our generation see technology in the sense of phones, laptops and tables as a norm- everyone has them. So being able to access your work emails outside of work is also a norm, I am guilty of checking my work emails alongside my personal emails- and it drives my girlfriend insane! It can be good and it can be bad- so if I check my work emails when I am taking annual leave and I see that there is a problem it will be on my mind because I know that when I then eventually go back to work I am going to have to deal with that problem. So always being able to access your work emails can affect your work life balance even if you are working flexibly I suppose – because you are actually always connected to work.

**Researcher:** Yes

**Participant 3:** It also makes the option for flexible working easier though- and more accessible.
**Researcher:** Taking into consideration your previous answers do you think any of your own values influence the way that you think of flexible working?

**Participant 3:** I would say that my attitudes to what I constitute as a healthy life definitely impact the way that I look at flexible working. I grew up in a household where my parents worked hard - long manual hours for not a lot of money - just to make sure they could pay their bills. So I think now as I am working I do not want to have to be in that position - as flexible working is now out there as an option I think it’s really positive. It still means that you can have a full time contract/salary but you also do not have to be in work 24/7 to be able to earn a good standard of living. So yes the way that I see my work-life balance actually shapes the way that I look at flexible working.

**Researcher:** I notice that you place great... value on flexible working now - but before you entered employment did you have any expectations of flexible working at all? What sort of expectations did you have?

**Participant 3:** So when I was younger - before I graduated I did not really think about the option of flexible working. I suppose I never associated flexible working with a younger person - I looked at it as something to help working parents or older people with other commitments. But as I joined the workforce it was only then that I began to actually see what flexible working is all about and the positives that it brought. Your life is so different when you are a student that things like work-life balance I don’t think are classed as a priority. I was looking more at the salary and what I could do and achieve with that money after being a student for four years.

**Researcher:** So could I ask a little more about your experiences of flexible working in terms of what flexible practices are available to you within the current organisation?

**Participant 3:** Within the current organisation that I work for the opportunities for flexible working are really very limited. There is currently only the opportunity to work part-time or job share, this works well for a lot of my colleagues as it’s just seen as a second income so it works well for them. But for me this would not financially work for me. The types of flexible working initiatives that I would be looking for such as working from home some days or starting earlier and finishing earlier just are not available. So for me currently I do not actually experience flexible working because what I am actually looking for is not on offer.

**Researcher:** And why do you think that your current organisation only adopt these forms of flexible working?

**Participant 3:** I think it’s just down to the organisation. In sales it’s a very competitive environment so lots of people are actually in work more hours than they need to be to try and get the best possible bonus that they can. Which I can understand. But because
of that I feel like management- even though they know my views- don’t think that there is enough calling for flexible working for it to be successful.

Research: So would you say that management support towards schemes like flexible working makes a difference to the way it’s used and thought of by colleagues?

Participant 3: Yes I think if my managers were too see that it could bring benefits to them as well as the employees they would look into it more I think. But because they are not interested in flexible working I feel that they do not think that it is important. But that also reflects the culture as a whole. It’s very them and us – as in managers and employees. If I have a suggestion I will happily suggest it but I don’t think it’s even taken on board. So to answer your question yes, I think manager have a huge impact on the culture as a whole and everything that’s included in that.

Researcher: So would you say that there has been any gaps between your expectations of flexible working in comparison to your experiences?

Participant 3: Yes, so when I applied for the role it was highlighted that flexible working was available but when I actually looked into this after I had started I then found out how limiting the choices were. This was probably partly my fault- next time I would look into this further before I took the role. But the gap yes would be between what opportunities of flexible working that I want and what is actually available.

Researcher: So, as part of my research one of the thing that I found out were that zero hour contracts were a form of flexible working. Have you experienced any zero hour contracts at all?

Participant 3: Yes I was shocked when I found this out. I thankfully have not had any experiences with zero hour contracts no. This is down to choice though I would say. The reason that I like the idea of flexible working is the control- still earning a full time wage but the security is there financially. Whereas on a zero hour contract there is no control at all on the employees half and no financial security either.

Researcher: So would you say that your personal experience of flexible working has affected your levels of performance or commitment to the organisation at all?

Participant 3: Even though my experiences of flexible working have not been what I wanted them to be I still would not let this effect my performance- not consciously anyway. But as for my commitment yes- I am looking for other roles within other organisations who do offer flexible working. If I was experiencing the flexible working that I wanted then maybe I would not be looking elsewhere so yes my loyalty to the organisation is not particularly strong. If I seen that the organisation were taking into consideration my needs and listening to my ‘voice’ more by even offering the opportunity for another flexible working initiative to be added to the list of what is available- I would feel more engaged with the organisation.
**Researcher:** So would you say that there anything about your experience of flexible working that stood out for you in particular?

**Participant 3:** Just that I think the idea of flexible working is still linked to working parents. I see that some companies are now moving away from this and are even advertising it as part of their graduates benefit packs. So it is moving on- but not in all organisations. That’s why I wanted to be a part of this research- to show that there is a calling for it (flexible working) among the younger generation also.

**Researcher:** Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences of flexible working at all?

**Participant 3:** Just that it needs to be more widely available. I think making businesses aware of how it can also benefit them is a good start to this development.

**Researcher:** Thank you so much for taking the time out to take part in this research. If there are any queries about the study or your participation do not hesitate to contact me.

*End of Interview 3*

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**Interview 4**

The participant was emailed the participant information sheet and consent form prior to the telephone semi-structured interview. The consent form was then signed electronically and sent back to the researcher before the semi-structured interview took place.

The researcher thanks the participant again for taking part in the study and runs through the key information again in the participant information sheet. Asks if there is any questions before we begin.

**Researcher:** So my first question is when you hear the term flexible working what key words come to mind for you? How would you describe flexible working?

**Participant 4:** So an example of flexible working would be when you have a contract of let’s say 30 hours a week but as long as you completed those hours within the week you have flexibility regarding what day and what time you complete those hours. Working
from home also springs to mind when I think of flexible working. Or even working on the commute. So as long as the work set out for you is achieved it doesn’t even have to be within the office environment. I think it all comes down to work-life balance.

Researcher: So, what types of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you? Would there be any in particular that would appeal to you?

Participant 4: Well at the moment I do work on a flexible contract. I have a contract of 37 hours per week and as long I complete those hours within the week it is pretty flexible. I generally have Mondays off from work all together as this was arranged when I first started the role. This works really well for me as I can plan to do other things with that day that I have away from the office. At the moment I don’t think any other forms of flexible working would suit me. For example, part time would not appeal to me because I could not afford to take the drop in pay. But with my job it works well this way. I would also like the opportunity to be able to work from home some days but unfortunately my employer does not offer this at the moment.

Researcher: So would you say that your experience of flexible working works well for you at the moment because you have that extra day off within the week?

Participant 4: Yes with that extra day off it stops me from getting too stressed. Once Friday comes I know that I then have three days out of the office to switch off and do things in my own life. It helps me to get a good balance between working but also having a private life. Some people their lives are work, and nothing but work - I have never wanted this. There is so much pressure for people to work more hours to be the best of the best- for me this just doesn’t work.

Researcher: So, how important is the option for flexible working to you when choosing a job? Is it a priority when looking for a job?

Participant 4: Now it is yes. I have now realised that after working for a few years that I am at my most productive and motivated when I have a good work-life balance. However, I did only realise this when I started working. It wouldn’t have even been have been on my list of top priorities when I first left university. But now it would be something that I look for when I am looking for a job. This would be alongside things such as pay, holiday entitlement and opportunities for development.

Researcher: Do you think that our generation’s experiences with technology influence the importance that we give to flexible working?

Participant 4: I think technology has influenced the way that we think of lots of things. It’s so easy to communicate and I think that we take that for granted really. It does make flexible working easier because you can keep in contact with everyone in your team by just using your phone. However, earlier I mentioned that I have every Monday off but on Monday evenings I still check my work email to know what I have missed out
on that day. Also, so I can prepare for the Tuesday when I go back into work. The technology that we have available is ultimately very useful but it does mean that even when we are not in work we are still connected to work through email access or phone calls in emergency. But in today’s environment I expect nothing less.

**Researcher:** So, would you associate any of your own values as influential to your views of flexible working? Such as maybe your attitudes to work-life balance and your personal wellbeing levels?

**Participant 4:** Yes, so my working week is Tuesday-Friday. I choose to take up the opportunity for flexible working because I knew it worked well for me. I realised that when I was not having time to have a personal life in addition to my working life I got stressed and was not performing as well in work as I know that I could have- this was in my first role as a graduate. Then in my current role when I seen the opportunity for flexible working I knew that it would be good for me to at least try it.

**Researcher:** So did you leave your first role because there was not the opportunity to work flexibly?

**Participant 4:** At the time my reason for leaving was not because they did not offer flexible working but because I found the job too stressful. Sometimes I was working until 8pm in the evenings and it was effecting my relationships outside of work. So I left for this reason but looking back I suppose if they did offer flexible working maybe I would have stayed- because the pay was good and I enjoyed the actual job. So when I then began my current job and realised that I could work a full contract over four days I decided to give it a go. I seen such an improvement in my stress levels... almost immediately.

**Researcher:** So when you was in university before you entered employment did you have any expectations of flexible working? If so, what were they?

**Participant 4:** No when I was at university- if you asked me what flexible working was then I don’t really think I would have been able to give a clear answer. That is all I associated it with really was working Mums. I suppose I did not even look into the option of flexible working because I thought I was too young. Looking back at how I felt then I think there needs to be more education and more communication about flexible working to everyone.

**Researcher:** So how were your experiences of flexible working similar or different to your experiences in the workplace?

**Participant 4:** So they were different but for positive reasons. Like I said, as a new graduate I was not necessarily expecting flexible working but in my second role out of university I managed to have the opportunity to work flexibly. So yes there was a gap but it was not a disappointing gap.
**Researcher**: That’s great. So, how influential would you say that management support to flexible working initiatives are on the whole organisations attitudes to flexible working?

**Participant 4**: Ohh very. My manager at the moment is very understanding about the way that I work. I think an element of that also is that she sometimes works flexibly so she has also had first-hand experience of how beneficial it is as an employee. I have friends who began- this is in a different organisation- who started on a flexible working contract and have felt like their manager did not give them particular projects to complete because of the fact that they wasn’t in the office working five days a week. So she stopped working her previous thee day week at the office and two days at home to full time working on the office. She thought that she was missing out because she worked from home two days a week. With me I think one of the reasons that I think so highly of flexible working is that my manager is so supportive of it. She trusts me to get my work done within the four days that I am in work- this gives me more motivation to also do a good job. I want her to realise that I do appreciate the opportunity and still show that I work just as hard as other colleagues who are in the office five days a week.

**Researcher**: So, one thing that I found out were that zero hour contracts were a form of flexible working. Have you experienced any zero hour contracts at all?

**Participant 4**: I have not no, I have had friends who have and all comment on how unstable they are.

**Researcher**: So aside from zero-hour contracts would you say that you have received any negative attitudes towards flexible working at all? Coming from management level or colleagues.

**Participant 4**: Personally I have not no, but my friend who I was telling you about earlier regarding changing her option to work flexibly because she felt like her manager was not including her in as many interesting projects then she has yes. Going back to how I thought about flexible working before I was employed- thinking of it as only being for working parent’s shows that people who are younger probably do receive negative connotations from working flexibly. People need to be made aware of it more so that sort of stigma is dropped. One small insecurity that I did feel when I first started to work flexibly with my current organisation was- “I hope people don’t think that I am lazy”. Looking back I think that this is normal- because ultimately you are doing something out of normality from the rest of your colleagues. But this was just from me- I did not get this vibe from anyone else.

**Researcher**: So would you say the culture of your current organisation helps regarding the acceptance of employees utilising flexible working?

**Participant 4**: Yes definitely.
**Researcher**: So do you think that your experiences of flexible working has affected the way that you perform at work or your commitment to the organisation?

**Participant 4**: Yes in a positive way for sure. Being able to work flexibly has made me more content with my job so my commitment to the organisation is... strong. I only look to change jobs when I am unhappy with something and a huge element of why I am so happy in my role at the moment is because I can work flexibly and have the support to do so. In terms of my performance - yes I am more likely to- let’s say- return the favour by working to my full potential. Also, like I previously mentioned because I am not so stressed that also helps me to perform to my full potential.

**Researcher**: So would you say that there anything about your experience of flexible working that stood out for you in particular?

**Participant 4**: Probably just how positive it is for me really- I do believe that many more organisations should adopt it. Also adopt it and promote it for all employees to make sure that everyone knows that it can be beneficially for everyone.

**Researcher**: So, is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences of flexible working at all?

**Participant 4**: No I think that I have covered everything important. Thank you for letting me take part in your study!

**Researcher**: Thank you for taking part in this study! If you require any more information or have any other questions about the study at all no not hesitate to contact me or give me a call.

**Participant 4**: If there is any more questions you have do not hesitate to contact me.

*End of Interview 4*

**Interview 5**

The participant was emailed the participant information sheet and consent form prior to the telephone semi-structured interview. The consent form was then signed electronically and sent back to the researcher before the semi-structured interview took place.

The researcher thanks the participant again for taking part in the study and runs through the key information again in the participant information sheet. Asks if there is any questions before we begin.
Researcher: So my first question is what does flexible working mean to you?

Participant 5: It’s one of the best parts of my role for sure! It means I can be trusted, work harder & be more productive and also fit in so much more of a social life.

Researcher: So, what types of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you? For example, condensed hours, teleworking or flexible schedules. Also, why do these particular initiatives appeal to you?

Participant 5: Condensed hours and flexible schedules do appeal to me as I have these initiatives now in my role. They mean every week can be different and when other things “come up” in life, I don’t have to miss out or struggle to change meetings or schedules, I can simply just work an hour longer or less and fit it in another time.

Researcher: How important is the option for flexible working to you when choosing a job? Is it a priority when looking for a job would you say?

Participant 5: It’s definitely priority for me for my work and career. If I was job hunting it would be a top priority when searching for roles and yes, it would be the “selling” point if one role was to offer flexible working and the other didn’t.

Researcher: Do you believe that our generation’s experiences with technology influence the importance of flexible working? E.g. our reliance on technology- email access, skype etc.

Participant 5: I agree. The ability to work from practically anywhere these days and the skills that our generation have with readily available technology have ensured employers are factoring this into their job roles and workplaces. Skype plays a huge part of my current role, as does having my work phone on me as and when I want/need it to be!

Researcher: Would you associate your any of your own values as influential to your views of flexible working?

Participant 5: This is really interesting as I do believe that by working from home and a flexible working approach can be really hard for some people. I do love my job and enjoy getting up every morning to work, however, I know that when speaking to friends and family members they just can’t understand how I would work flexibly and that my employer would trust me to sign in and work my contracted hours. Also, I strongly believe that by working flexibly, I have become fitter, healthier and had a far greater work-life balance as compared to when I worked 9-5 in an office a few years ago. My role now allows me to go to the gym at lunchtime, start a bit later if I’ve been travelling for work late the night before, finish a bit earlier for a social plan, nip to the dentist or hair salon in the day and still fit in my work hours for the day – it’s perfect!
**Researcher**: Before entering employment did you have any expectations of flexible working? If so, what were they?

**Participant 5**: To be honest I didn’t really think many people were even allowed to work from home – or that it was a perk of higher paid and higher level staff in organisations. When I was searching for jobs one day, I happened to stumble across a listing for “home-based” and I thought this was a whole new world that didn’t exist for graduate positions, let alone in the sector I wanted to work in. When I started my flexible work role, I did expect my manager to be checking in on me constantly and was quite nervous about ever going to the toilet or making a cuppa in the afternoon in case someone rang my skype while I was away from my desk, but after almost 2 years I understand that I am trusted and actually I probably work longer hours than people in the office!

I don’t think my expectations were derived from research of my organisation or the recruitment process but I couldn’t quite believe my luck that I had landed a role in such a trusting and forward thinking organisation!

**Researcher**: How were your experiences of flexible working similar or different to your experiences in the workplace?

**Participant 5**: I can go into the office for a day and get hardly any work done, but whilst I am at home I find I have far less distractions. My experience of flexible working is far more positive than my initial expectations. It’s so easy to work from home in my role – all you need is internet and a laptop really! My expectations at the start were that I had to have things like doctors and dentist appointments in my lunch break and would rush back to do this within an hour, but actually it’s quite accepted and ok to simply take a longer lunch and just work a bit later. My expectations were fairly low as I had not worked in a flexible workplace previously, but I will definitely have high expectations of what to expect if I were ever to change roles in the future.

**Researcher**: How influential would you say that management support to flexible working initiatives are on the whole organisations attitudes to flexible working?

**Participant 5**: Within my organisation they are really supportive of flexible working. It may be that we are a health charity, so I believe there are key concerns regarding health and wellbeing and that flexible working can help support and be more inclusive for all employees. Management are really open to us working in the way we do and being in event management, we also accrue time working at weekends and evenings and they ensure that we take this “flexi” time back as soon as possible.

For management to take the lead in terms of working environment is key. Their opinions and attitudes towards a flexible working approach must be in line with lower level employees and feed into initiatives for strategy and growth.

**Researcher**: Would you associate zero-hour contracts with flexible working?
Participant 5: Personally, I wouldn’t associate zero-hour contracts with flexible working as I haven’t ever had any experience with zero-hour contracts so I wouldn’t know much about this.

Researcher: Have you experienced any negative attitudes to flexible working?

Definitely from older family members, and some friends sometimes who think that I do nothing as I work flexibly and from home! They think I don’t do anything all day and that they can just invite themselves over as I’m at home – however, they are so wrong! I definitely work harder since I have worked from home and just because I may wear casual clothes and definitely less make up that I don’t do anything all day!

It may be a consideration of future employees that if someone works from home it has a light stigma attached to them for working flexibly as I feel some people think it’s a lazy way and not a hard working approach. I think it’s also older generations and less current organisations who have this belief.

Researcher: Do you believe that your experiences of flexible working effected your performance and/or commitment to the organisation?

Participant 5: I do believe my experience of flexible working has affected my performance and commitment to the organisation. Trust is a huge factor in the workplace and because I feel trusted to do my role and do my contracted hours even though my manager isn’t sat watching me in an office that has almost made me want to work harder and prove my performance isn’t affected by flexible working.

Researcher: Was there anything about your experience of flexible working that stood out for you in particular? For example, was it widely accepted in the organisations culture or promoted effectively.

Participant 5: My organisation definitely embraces flexible working and I believe are one of the organisations leading the way in the third sector. Giving the core workforce the ability to work flexibly also saves our organisation a huge amount of money in costs of desk space and general costs associated with an office. We have moved to a smaller building and everyone hot-desks if they are in the office and this has allowed for greater collaboration and effectiveness and has a huge positive effect on our culture and values.

Researcher: Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences of flexible working?

Participant 5: I think every work place should consider adopting a flexible working approach!

Researcher: That’s all the questions that I have for this study- thank you for taking part and providing the information that you have! If there is any more questions do not hesitate to contact me.
**Participant 5:** No problem, if there is any other information that you need for the study just contact me!

*End of interview 5*
Appendix 4- Participant Information Sheets

**Participant Information Sheet**

**Ethics reference number:** 2016D0234

*An investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job.*

**Project Summary**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the priority of flexible working to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job. Areas that will be explored within this include; the importance of flexible working and expectation vs experiences of flexible working for new graduates. Your participation will enable the collection of data which will form part of a study being undertaken at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

**Why have you been asked to participate?**

You have been asked to participate as you fit the profile of the population being studied; upcoming graduates who are in their final year at university. As a result will be able to comment on the importance of flexible working practices when choosing a graduate level job and expectations of flexible working.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data will be collected through focus-groups using qualitative data. This will give participants to explain and discuss the importance of flexible working when choosing a graduate level job and expectations of flexible working.

The qualitative data from the focus group will be captured and used to support the aims and objectives of the proposal using immersive techniques.

**Project risks**

The research involves a focus group which will be recorded for later analysis. We are not looking to collect any sensitive data as this study is only investigating the priority of flexible working to new graduates. There are no significant risks associated with this
study. But, if you do feel that any of the questions are inappropriate the interview can be stopped at any time.

*If you decide to join the study you can change your mind and stop at any time, you do not have to give a reason why. Your decision will be respected. There are absolutely no penalties*

**How we protect your privacy**

All the information you provide during the interview will be held in confidence. Full anonymity will be given throughout the research and each focus group will be referred to as Focus Group A, B, C and Participant 1, 2, 3 etc. As a result you cannot be directly identified from the interview. Your personal details, for example your signature on the consent form will be kept in a secure place by the researcher along with the recording of the focus group. When the research has been completed all the information, documentation used to gather the data will be destroyed.

If you require any more information about this research please contact;

Jessie-lea Edwards, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Email:
St20057625@cardiffmet.ac.uk
Participant Information Sheet

Ethics reference number: 2016D0234

*An investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job.*

**Project Summary**

The purpose of this research project is to investigate the priority of flexible working to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job. Areas that will be explored within this include; the importance of flexible working and expectation vs experiences of flexible working for new graduates. Your participation will enable the collection of data which will form part of a study being undertaken at Cardiff Metropolitan University.

**Why have you been asked to participate?**

You have been asked to participate as you fit the profile of the population being studied; graduates who have graduated within the last five years and have experience in the workplace. As a result will be able to comment on the importance of flexible working practices and highlight similarities and differences between expectations of flexible working in comparison to experiences.

**Data Collection Methods**

Data will be collected through semi-structured telephone interviews using qualitative data. This will give participants to explain their opinions, importance and experiences of flexible working.

The qualitative data from the semi-structured interview will be captured and used to support the aims and objectives of the proposal using immersive techniques.

**Project risks**
The research involves a semi-structured interview which will be recorded for later analysis. We are not looking to collect any sensitive data as this study is only investigating the priority of flexible working to new graduates. There are no significant risks associated with this study. But, if you do feel that any of the questions are inappropriate the interview can be stopped at any time.

**If you decide to join the study you can change your mind and stop at any time, you do not have to give a reason why. Your decision will be respected. There are absolutely no penalties**

**How we protect your privacy**

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If you require any more information about this research please contact;

Jessie-lea Edwards, Cardiff Metropolitan University, Email: St20057625@cardiffmet.ac.uk
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Ethics Reference Number: 2016D0234
Participant name or Study ID Number:
Title of Project: An investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job.
Name of Researcher: Jessie-lea Edwards

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

4. I agree to the focus group being audio recorded

5. I agree to the focus group being video recorded

6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

_______________________________________   ___________________
Signature of Participant                     Date

_______________________________________  ___________________
Name of person taking consent                Date

__________________________________________
Signature of person taking consent
PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Ethics Reference Number: 2016D0234
Participant name or Study ID Number:
Title of Project: An investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job.
Name of Researcher: Jessie-lea Edwards

Participant to complete this section: Please initial each box.

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.

3. I agree to take part in the above study.

4. I agree to the interview being audio recorded

5. I agree to the interview being video recorded

6. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications

___________________________________________________________________  
Signature of Participant  ___________________  Date

___________________________________________________________________  
Name of person taking consent  Date

___________________________________________________________________  
Signature of person taking consent
Appendix 6- Focus Group and Interview Question Guides

Focus Group Question Guide

Participant information sheet given to participant before any questions are asked.

1. **What does flexible working mean to you?**

2. **What types of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you?** For example, condensed hours, teleworking or flexible schedules.
   - Why do these particular flexible working initiatives appeal to you?

3. **How important is the option for flexible working to you when choosing a job?**
   - Is it a priority when looking for a job?
     - Would it be the defining characteristic between choosing between two positions?
     - What other elements would you regard as important when choosing a job? E.g. Bonus schemes or healthcare

4. **Do you believe that our generation’s experiences with technology influence the importance of flexible working?**

5. **Would you associate any of your own values as influential to your views of flexible working?**
   - Such as your attitudes to work-life balance, personal wellbeing or personal/social lives?

6. **Do you have any expectations of flexible working from your first job after university?**
   - If so, what sort of expectations do you have?
   - How did you arrive at these expectations? E.g. based on your personal preferences, discussions with others including parents or social groups or public information about flexible working?

7. **Would you associate zero-hour contracts to flexible working?**
   - If your first role out of university was a zero hour contract role would it affect your decision whether to take the job or not?

8. **Would you have any reservations about taking up the opportunity to utilise flexible working initiatives in your future roles?**
   - If so why is this?
• Do you think that an organisation’s culture and support towards flexible working could impact this view?

9. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences of flexible working?
**Interview Question Guide**

Participant information sheet given to participant before any questions are asked.

1. **What does flexible working mean to you?**

2. **What types of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you?** For example, condensed hours, teleworking or flexible schedules.
   - Why do these particular flexible working initiatives appeal to you?

3. **How important is the option for flexible working to you when choosing a job?** Is it a priority when looking for a job?
   - Would it be the defining characteristic between choosing between two positions?

4. **Do you believe that our generation’s experiences with technology influence the importance of flexible working?**

5. **Would you associate any of your own values as influential to your views of flexible working?**
   - Such as your attitudes to work-life balance and your personal wellbeing?

6. **Before entering employment did you have any expectations of flexible working?** If so, what were they?
   - If so what sort of expectations did you have?
   - How did you arrive at your expectations?
   - Were these expectations derived from research of the organisation, initial experience of the organisation such as the recruitment process?

7. **How were your experiences of flexible working similar or different to your experiences in the workplace?**
   - Would you agree that there was an expectation gap between your expectations of flexible working and your experiences of flexible working? Or was your experience more positive than your initial expectations?

8. **How influential would you say that management support to flexible working initiatives are on the whole organisations attitudes to flexible working?**

9. **Would you associate zero-hour contracts with flexible working?**
   - Why?
   - Have you ever had any experiences with zero-hour contracts?
10. Have you experienced any negative attitudes to flexible working?
   • If so what were they?
   • Do you believe that many people do not utilise flexible working initiatives due to stigma or potential hindrances to their career?

11. Do you believe that your experiences of flexible working effected your performance and/or commitment to the organisation?
   • Do you feel this was a result of feeling trusted by management to get your work done through flexible working initiatives?

12. Was there anything about your experience of flexible working that stood out for you in particular? For example, was it widely accepted in the organisation’s culture or promoted effectively.

13. Is there anything else you would like to add regarding your experiences of flexible working?
Appendix 7- Ethics Form

PART ONE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of applicant:</th>
<th>Jessie-lea Edwards</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor (if student project):</td>
<td>Rachel Mason-Jones</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School / Unit:</td>
<td>Cardiff Metropolitan University</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student number (if applicable):</td>
<td>St20057625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme enrolled on (if applicable):</td>
<td>Business and Management with Human Resource Management</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Project Title: | Aim  
An investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job.  
Objectives  
1. Explore the importance graduates give flexible working when applying and choosing a job  
2. An analysis of new graduate’s expectations and experiences of flexible working. |
| Expected start date of data collection: | 16/01/2017 |
| Approximate duration of data collection: | 4 weeks |
| Funding Body (if applicable): | No |
| Other researcher(s) working on the project: | No |
| Will the study involve NHS patients or staff? | No |
| Will the study involve human samples and/or human cell lines? | No |

Does your project fall entirely within one of the following categories:  
- Paper based, involving only documents in the public domain  
- Laboratory based, not involving human participants or human samples  
  - Yes  
  - No

<p>| Paper based, involving only documents in the public domain | No |
| Laboratory based, not involving human participants or human samples | No |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice based not involving human participants (eg curatorial, practice audit)</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compulsory projects in professional practice (eg Initial Teacher Education)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A project for which external approval has been obtained (e.g., NHS)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If you have answered YES to any of these questions, expand on your answer in the non-technical summary. No further information regarding your project is required. If you have answered NO to all of these questions, you must complete Part 2 of this form.

---

In no more than 150 words, give a non-technical summary of the project:

This qualitative research will assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job. Research suggests through a recent study by NUS and Endsleigh that over 95% of 2000 final year students and new graduates highlighted work-life balance as an extremely important factor when looking for a job (Guinness, 2014). However, a study conducted by PWC found that over 28% of new graduate’s expectations of work-life balance were not met at all during employment (PWC, 2014). Areas that will be explored include; the importance of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job and an analysis of new graduates expectations and experiences of flexible working. Secondary data will be analysed to provide a foundation of the development of flexible working, expectations of new graduates and current opportunities of flexible working. This interprevist philosophical approach supports the research objectives through the collection of qualitative data. In addition to this primary research will be carried out through focus groups with upcoming graduates and semi-structured interviews with new graduates. This will result in a discussion of both sets of results though a comparison, highlighting key similarities and differences between the two groups using immersive techniques. A review of the project will then be made to conclude.

---

DECLARATION:
I confirm that this project conforms with the Cardiff Met Research Governance Framework

I confirm that I will abide by the Cardiff Met requirements regarding confidentiality and anonymity when conducting this project.

STUDENTS: I confirm that I will not disclose any information about this project without the prior approval of my supervisor.

Signature of the applicant: J Edwards
Date: 16/11/2016

FOR STUDENT PROJECTS ONLY
Name of supervisor: Rachel Mason Jones
Date:
PART TWO

A RESEARCH DESIGN

A1 Will you be using an approved protocol in your project? *No*

A2 If yes, please state the name and code of the approved protocol to be used

1 N/A

A3 Describe the research design to be used in your project

Research will be collected through two qualitative methods. Taking an interprevisit approach to data collection. These include focus groups and semi-structured interviews to support the following aim and objectives;

**Aim;**

An investigation to assess the priority of flexible working initiatives to new graduates when choosing a graduate level job.

**Objectives;**

1. Explore the importance graduates give flexible working when applying and choosing a job
2. An analysis of new graduate’s expectations and experiences of flexible working.

Outlined below is chosen method, the sample, participants, analysis and consent.

**Focus Groups**

---

1 An Approved Protocol is one which has been approved by Cardiff Met to be used under supervision of designated members of staff; a list of approved protocols can be found on the Cardiff Met website here
• Data will be collected through focus groups of between 6-8 participants
• Smaller groups have been chosen to ensure all participants can actively participate in discussions
• Focus groups will take place in a pre-booked room in Cardiff Metropolitan University
• Key areas of discussion will include; what flexible working means to the participants, the importance of flexible working when choosing a job and why and expectations of flexible working schemes in the workplace

Sample for Focus Group
• A purposive sample will be collected from students in their final year at university. This is because this section of the research requires participants to be upcoming graduates.

Semi-structured Interviews
• Data will be collected through between 10-15 semi-structured interviews
• The interview will include open questions to ensure qualitative data can be captured
• This will ensure that the participant can discuss opinions and thoughts of flexible working
• Participants will be informed prior to the semi-structured interview that will be recorded
• Key areas of discussion will include; what flexible working means to the participant, the importance of flexible working when choosing a job and the similarities and difference of their expectations of flexible working compared to their experiences in the workplace.
• Some examples of questions being asked include;
  ➢ What does flexible working mean to you?
  ➢ What types of flexible working initiatives would appeal to you? For example, condensed hours, teleworking or flexible schedules.
  ➢ How important is the option for flexible working to you when choosing a job? Is it a factor that you actively seek when looking for a job?
  ➢ Before entering employment did you have any expectations of flexible working? If so, what were they?
  ➢ How was this similar or different to your experiences in the workplace?
  ➢ Do you believe that your experiences of flexible working affected your performance and/or commitment to the organisation?
  ➢ Was there anything about your experience of flexible working that stood out for you in particular? For example, was it widely accepted in the organisations culture or promoted effectively.

Sample for Semi-structured Interviews
• A purposeful sample will be collected from the alumni students from Cardiff Metropolitan University. This is because this section of the research requires participants to be newly graduated.

Participants
• All participants will be over the age of 18.
• Anonymity of participants will be kept throughout the research. Focus groups will be referred to as Focus Group A, B, C with participant 1, 2, 3 etc. Interviewees will be referred to as Interviewee A, B, C etc.
• The participants may withdraw their data at any time.
• Participants will be provided with information sheets - providing relevant information about the research.

Analysis
• The qualitative data from both the focus groups and semi-structured interviews collected will be captured and used to support the aims and objectives of the proposal using immersive techniques.
• Data from the focus groups and semi-structured interviews will be compared to highlight similarities and differences to form conclusions.
• A qualitative approach has been chosen as a similar framework was used in research conducted by Shaw and Fairhurst (2008), who also investigated the changing needs of new graduates.
• In addition, a qualitative approach has been chosen for this research as it aligns with the interprevist philosophical underpinning.

Consent
• Consent from each participant will be collected before any focus groups or interviews take place.
• This will be evident through signed consent forms.
• Participant information sheets will also be provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A4 Will the project involve deceptive or covert research?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A5 If yes, give a rationale for the use of deceptive or covert research</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A6 Will the project have security sensitive implications?</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A7 If yes, please explain what they are and the measures that are proposed to address them</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

B PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B1 What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project do you have?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No previous experience.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>B2 Student project only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What previous experience of research involving human participants relevant to this project does your supervisor have?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Click here to enter text.</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>C POTENTIAL RISKS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>C1 What potential risks do you foresee?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
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</table>

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<tr>
<th>C2 How will you deal with the potential risks?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>N/A</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Approved Ethics Number:** 2016D0234