

## Learning from UK Nonstandard Work Projects



[www.UKFlexi.org](http://www.UKFlexi.org)

"[Slivers-of-Time Working](#)" ran from 2005 until it was [absorbed into the Universal Credit](#) from late 2010 on. Launch in multiple regions, plus independent assessments, proved (a) huge public demand (b) support from large employers (c) reduced government overheads (d) lowered benefits costs. This history shares specifics. (Links below can be searched for "Slivers" for details from an array of public bodies.)

### PHASE 1: First Movers (2005-2008)

Following Accenture [research](#) showing 14m Brits needing nonstandard employment, our catalytic funder was Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. The platform developed with partners was then leased by [four non-London councils](#). These were [Liverpool](#) (then [Merseyside](#) through the SLR charity), [Cambridgeshire](#) County, Hull (served by [Probe](#) Employment), and [Leeds Council](#) (who also sparked press [coverage](#)).

Through these launches, we were cautiously [embraced](#) by employers in retail, hospitality, service delivery, care, and tourism. [Housing associations](#) realized the value. Our platform's ability to enable [volunteering](#) was exploited. But public sector demand that we [now know is vital](#) was slow coming.

Our initiative spread to [eight London boroughs](#) including [Newham](#), [Hillingdon](#), [Hounslow](#), Harrow (who started us [in schools](#) then worked to [integrate](#) us into tourism plans) and [Hammersmith & Fulham](#). [Westminster](#) commissioned us, but progress dragged, [Kensington & Chelsea](#) planned to use us but had no budget, [Tower Hamlets](#) got close but we moved into DWP before they concluded.

Elsewhere, our Cambridgeshire County Council launch spread to [Cambridge](#) City Council, Fenland, and [South Cambridgeshire](#) councils. Other later customers included [Hertfordshire](#) ([focused](#) on carers), [Bristol](#), [Kent](#) (later [expanded](#)), [Windsor & Maidenhead](#), and [Warwickshire](#).

### PHASE 2: Private Sector Acceleration (2008-2011)

**Tesco** (the UK's biggest private sector employer) started booking top-up workers in our Liverpool market as a trial. That led to national adoption as they allowed their staff to [pick their own hours](#) through us. They called the initiative "Extra Overtime" and focused on enabling a worker at one store to be available for additional hours at other Tesco shops around their home.

Many people working through 'Slivers-of-Time' had not worked for many years, and working through Slivers-of-Time allows them to get into the workplace on their own terms.

**National Audit Office:** Jul. 2007

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/ukgwa/20170207052351/https://www.nao.org>

The Tesco trade union (USDAW) believe that [Slivers-of-Time] has been particularly important in improving work-life balance as staff can plan up to six weeks ahead, rather than being asked to work overtime hours at short notice, which often does not suit the workers

**European Trade Union Confederation:** Fact Sheet

[https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/A\\_TT\\_secteur\\_com\\_E\\_N-2\\_1.pdf](https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/A_TT_secteur_com_E_N-2_1.pdf) (page 3)

### PHASE 3: Coverage and Assessment (2008 - 2010)

We appeared in countless **press articles** [including one](#) by Labour's Financial Secretary. The FT [wrote of us](#) "*Microjobs have a massive potential*". We featured as a case study in one central government [white paper](#) on employment policy, then [another](#) on volunteering.

The **Local Government Association's** [paper](#) on moving to a "*Big Society*" agenda offered us as a key example of a project they would support. We appeared in a **European Commission** [paper](#) on driving social inclusion. A book from **Conservative Councils** included an entire chapter about us in their inaugural "*Big Ideas*". We were also cited in another [set of policy ideas](#) for extending working lives.

By using 'slivers of time' staff councils are saving money on agency staff costs.

**Local Government Chronicle:**  
Sept. 25, 2008

<https://www.lgcplus.com/archive/a-stitch-in-time-25-09-2008/>

### PHASE 4: DWP's U-turn and Problems (2010-2013)

Throughout the above phases, DWP (Britain's Ministry of Labour) remained [opposed](#) to our work, discouraging local authorities from launching the platform. Their rationale? Government should focus on getting everyone into a traditional job, not "*bits of work*".

In response to officials who clearly believed they should shoehorn Brits with complex lives into a 9-to-5, we persuaded a small group of workers in three of our North of England markets to allow us to write up their life circumstances and achievements through us. These were laminated, to be spread across officials' desks as we asked "*How will you get each of these **actual people** into a job, and why when they are thriving with us?*"

Our case studies included the parent of a disabled child who found no job would tolerate her need to rush to pick him up from school during a fit. We had former soldiers with PTSD, enterprising lower-skilled people painstakingly building a home business and needing **extra work** as it grew, retirees unwilling to exit the labour market completely, and the partially employed.

This approach, and [agitation](#) by local government leaders, led to the incoming Cameron government making us a [key component](#) of their plan to transform the UK welfare regime, the Universal Credit. Existing operations were wound down.



While planning for the Universal Credit, DWP's Labour Market Interventions team worked with us in East London. A body of work developed around **tapered payments**, to avoid the so called "*benefits cliff*" where a person can suddenly lose all their income from the state for accidentally doing 30 minutes too much work, and other features supporting personalized steps into full time.

## Final Analysis

Slivers-of-Time Working demonstrated huge **public demand** for infrastructure supporting nonstandard work-seekers. We have seen the same phenomenon in the US; every region where we launch is massively oversubscribed on the supply side. So many people seek an alternative to exploitative apps or unprotected work in the shadow economy for personalized employment.

It took time for us to understand the path to successful launch in any area. There has to be a "[market making](#)" project that identifies **catalytic demand** for nonstandard labour. That is most easily found in public sector, or public sector adjacent, bodies: councils, housing associations, parts of the NHS, conference centers, airports, schools, and so on. Once that demand for vetted, qualified, workers gets a regional market to critical mass, purely private sector firms will come in.

But our first iteration in Britain generated around £8m of wages and protected employment for breadwinners who couldn't fit traditional labour market pigeonholes. At our peak we had around 70,000 workers registered, far, far, more than we could quickly access demand for. It all just scratched the surface of a desperate **societal need**; labour market infrastructure that systemically, sustainably, scalably empowers individuals not blessed with regular availability for employment.

Scale of need, and our impact for those served, was captured in a range of independent assessments:

- **2005:** Accenture (for the Prime Minister's Policy Unit): [Scoping Slivers-of-Time Working](#)
- **2006:** Oxford Economic Forecasting: [Slivers of Time, Making the Labour Market Work Better](#)
- **2006:** Middlesex University, School of Health and Social Sciences: [Research into the Potential Take Up of Slivers of Time Working](#)
- **2007:** National Audit Office: [Helping people from workless households into work](#) (p33)
- **2010:** Strategic Transformation Ltd. for City of London & LB Hounslow: [Strategic Outline Business Case, Slivers of Time Working](#)
- **2011:** European Trade Union Confederation: [Working Time in the Commerce Sector](#) (p 3)
- **2014:** Eurofound, the **European Union's** operation focused on improving living conditions: [Slivers of Time Case Study](#).

Both case studies [of Slivers-of-Time launches] highlighted the improved potential for people ordinarily excluded from the mainstream labour market to access work.

### Eurofound Research Paper

<https://assets.eurofound.europa.eu/f/279033/cf9fb6f6bc/wpef15046.pdf>

[Slivers of Time Working] allows employees to monitor hours worked and income earned to preserve their benefits. Reduced administration overhead lowers the agency mark-up thereby saving the employer money.

### Independent Business Case Analysis for City of London

[http://modernmarketsforall.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ESD03336k-esd-DI-Business-case-Slivers-of-time\\_op.pdf](http://modernmarketsforall.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/ESD03336k-esd-DI-Business-case-Slivers-of-time_op.pdf)