

The Liminal Space

Night Club input to London at Night

Analysis by The [Liminal Space](#) and [Cornish + Grey](#), provided October 2023 to GLA 24 Hour London team as a source material for the London at Night publication.

Context

[Night Club](#) is a unique initiative that brings sleep experts into the workplace to help workers and employers create a better and healthier experience of working at night.

The programme was designed by [The Liminal Space](#) in close partnership with nighttime workers themselves, and is underpinned by rigorous academic research from Oxford University's Sleep and Circadian Neuroscience Institute. Our aim is to empower individuals and organisations with the knowledge and tools needed to effect change.

Night Club adopts a holistic approach to the issue of nighttime working, addressing it on three crucial fronts: individual action, organisational change, and broader policy-level recommendations.

Our London data

Night Club supports individual nighttime workers to access and engage with evidence-based sleep health information during their shifts. We deliver an immersive training, and undertake a feedback survey with participants at the end of each delivery. Occasionally we carry out more in-depth or follow-up engagement with workers.

Principle data set

Night Club has undertaken 14 deliveries within London Boroughs between 2021 and 2023, with the following employers: Network Rail, Stagecoach, Veolia, British Airways and workers in 3 NHS Trusts (note this includes staff working in services companies in these Trusts, as well as clinical staff, at Guy's and St Thomas' Trust, Lewisham and Greenwich Trust, and Kingston Hospital Foundation Trust).

We have compiled the data from the feedback surveys across these deliveries, ensuring the data is properly matched and ensured that for each question the answers are directly comparable (i.e. responding to a question with the same wording).

The total number of respondents is 801, but N for each data point varies depending on how many respondents completed that question on the feedback form, and the need to provide comparable data (meaning if some older surveys used a different question formulation / had incomparable response options, this has been cleaned up).

Additional data sources for qualitative insights

We interviewed night workers in London for our [2020 Manifesto](#), and have also carried out further in-depth interviews with night workers in London as part of individual employer evaluations/projects. These are included as case studies/ worker portraits.

Liminal Space Associates Limited.

Registered in England No. 08024470

Registered Office: St Bride Foundation, 14 Bride Lane, Fleet Street, London, EC4Y 8EQ

VAT number: 138 3651 06

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Summary findings

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| Q1 Night Worker changes | <p>The answers to this question highlight the huge variety of changes that individual night workers want to make to improve their sleep. There is no one size suits all answer/ no quick fix</p> <p><i>See Appendix 1 for a categorised list of common changes workers plan to make after their Night Club experience</i></p> |
| Q2 Employer changes | <p>Our sample called for employer changes over multiple areas - including calls for more communication and consultation between employers and employees, and increasing individual flexibility. At the same time, there were calls for more consistent shift patterns. Also calls for better facilities, amenities and more specific health and wellbeing support for night workers.</p> <p><i>See Appendix 2 for a categorised list of common suggestions of changes employers should undertake to better support night workers.</i></p> |
| Q3 Quality of sleep | <p>Only 29% of the Night Club London night worker sample say they have good/excellent sleep</p> |
| Q4 Number of hours slept | <p>86% sleep less than the recommended 7 hours in a 24 hour period</p> |
| Q5 propensity to have long term health condition | <p>27% say they have a long term health condition eg. anxiety, depression, chronic pain, breathing problem, diabetes, heart condition, high blood pressure, or other long term condition</p> |
| Q6 Life satisfaction | <p>15% have low life satisfaction (they give score between 0 and 4 to the question “Overall, on a scale of 1-10, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?”) compared with 5% ONS life satisfaction monitor 2021-2023</p> |
| Q7 Gender | <p>Our sample includes more people who identify as male than female (around three quarters of those who described their gender said they were male) - this is likely a result of the industries covered refuse/ recycling/ maintenance/ engineering/ transport/ porters/ security - though our sample also includes HCPs and cleaners which are skewed towards women. ONS data shows in 2022, almost 4.9 million (56%) night-time workers were male and almost 3.9 million were female (44%) across the whole UK.</p> |
| Q8 Age | <p>Our sample contains fewer under 30 (14% vs ONS data which shows 25% of night workers are under 30) - this reflects the fact that our sample does not include any hospitality/ entertainment</p> |

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| | employees which are skewed towards younger people. |
| Q9 Ethnicity | Two thirds of our sample of night workers identify as non-white - compared to ONS data showing 46% of whole London population identify as non-white |
| Q10 Recommend Night Club? | 91% would recommend Night Club to their night worker colleagues - potentially indicating desire for more support on sleep for night workers |

Case studies / worker portraits

We conducted qualitative research with night workers in a number of key worker sectors including the police, logistics and retail, health care and care homes. Here are three case studies describing the lived experience of working nights in 2020 - all of these are London Night workers. Later we share mini case studies and snippets in a different format from some more recent work (again all London participants). Note all names have been changed.

2020 Health care case study

Janet is a Senior Support Officer working in a Mental Health Trust. She tends to work 4 night shifts a week. Janet has been working the night shift for 8 years.

Janet finds the night shift particularly challenging as it is particularly important at her work to be continuously alert – working with mental health patients something could kick off at any moment. Janet says it is grueling to keep up this level of alertness at 3am.

Janet does not think her employers empathise with the difficulties associated with working nights. She is not paid extra and there is a monthly mandatory training session during the day for all staff which means it is not uncommon for Janet to go two shifts without a proper sleep. Janet says this is always a horrible experience and ultimately pointless because you can't concentrate during the training because you are so shattered.

Janet says she is lonelier as a result of working nights - the strange hours make it hard to see friends which can be extremely isolating. She's also missed out on numerous Christmases, New Year's Eves and Birthdays due to her work pattern. Janet says that although on paper it might look like night workers have a decent amount of time off, in reality she feels so exhausted on her days off that it's impossible to be constructive or have fun.

Over time working nights has led to her feeling miserable and often argumentative at home. *'I am 90% sure that my marriage broke down as a direct result of working nights.'* Overall, Janet believes that the exhaustion resulting from working nights can have huge knock on effect on a person's life and this impact needs to be taken into account by employers.

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2020 Police case study

Paul is a Police Officer in the Met Police. He has been working the night shift since 2006. These consist of 12-hour shifts Monday through Friday.

Working the night shift impacts all areas of Paul's life. Prior to starting the working week, he has to alter his eating and sleeping patterns to get ready for the week ahead. As a result, he feels detached from what he calls the '*world of the living*'. These lifestyle changes lead to mood swings and irritation. These mood swings are particularly bad in the winter months when Paul often won't see sunlight for days at a time. He says this '*messes with his body clock*'.

Working nights also impacts the way Paul feels at work - his brain feels cloudy, it's so bad sometimes that he feels like a zombie. He tries to overcome this feeling by consuming excessive amounts of caffeine, particularly energy drinks. Paul describes hitting a wall of tiredness at 3am, he says overcoming this wall is like climbing a mountain. Because of the nature of his job there is no opportunity for a break or rest during his shift.

Paul thinks working nights leaves him feeling constantly sluggish and believes the mood swings he experiences as a result of the exhaustion played a significant role in ending his previous relationship. Paul says as a police officer working nights is an unavoidable part of his job. He believes his employers share this view and as a result do not offer additional support (or pay) to those working the night shift. There is no understanding or attempt to understand the difficulties of working nights - '*It's just seen as something we have to do*'.

2020 Care home case study

Monique has worked several different night-shift jobs in the last 3 years. Pre-Covid she was working as a shelf stacker in the retail sector, she now works in a residential care home where she tends to do a 12-hour night shift 3 times a week. She is a single mum living with her family.

Coronavirus has impacted Monique's ability to work in a big way. Prior to Coronavirus Monique was working night shifts in a supermarket, however, a reduction in shifts due to social distancing measures meant there were significantly less shifts to go around and Monique was made redundant. It was particularly frustrating for Monique as even allocated shifts were taken away.

As a result, Monique made the decision to return to her previous job in a residential care home. The care home she is working in has had a number of Covid-related deaths but working the night shift has the benefit for Monique of being more anti-social, therefore making it less likely that she will get ill.

Monique also described the negative impact that working nights has had on relationships with other members of her family. Although she chooses to work nights to make things easier at home, particularly with regards to childcare, she experiences mood swings and often feels agitated. She tries to get 6 hours sleep after her shifts, but

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more often than not she doesn't manage it. She doesn't think any of her previous employers have understood the complications associated with working the night shift, she feels that it is very much down to the individual to look after themselves - *'They don't know how hard it is'*.

2020 Midwife case study

We interviewed a midwife about her experience working nights. She told us she can typically fit in four to six hours of sleep after a night shift, but soon needs to be present to look after her child. She struggles to achieve a deep sleep, rarely feeling well when she wakes up and remaining in a kind of fog throughout the day. But she said that her experience at work overnight was very fulfilling - with a smaller staff team, people band closely together and have a lot of mutual understanding between colleagues, as they all feel 'in it together'.

2023 employee story

After experiencing Night Club in his workplace, one participant decided to speak to his manager and supervisor about how lack of sleep was affecting their health. They have adjusted their shift pattern to finish in the early hours of the morning, rather than at sunrise - before 4am in the summer, later in the winter. In that case they have found that they can get 6 to 7 hours of sleep per 24 hours, spend more time with their child and no longer suffer from headaches. However, they felt very lucky and felt this might not be a universal experience for all staff who made a similar request.

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Appendix 1: Changes Night Workers Plan to Make to Improve Sleep Health and Wellbeing

Feedback survey question: “What changes, if any, do you think you will make/ try to make after your visit to the Night Club?”

| Light and Electronic Devices: | Sleep Schedule and Routine: | Diet and Food Habits: | Sleep Environment: | Mental Techniques: | Personal Habits: | Shift Work and Work-Related Changes: | General Lifestyle and Habit Changes: |
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| Try orange light in the morning after a night shift. | Balance sleep patterns. | Eat better and reduce caffeine intake, especially in the evening. | Use blackout blinds and earplugs. | Try to empty the mind before sleeping. | Stop watching TV and using the phone before bed. | Leave work early if tasks are completed. | Get regular exercise. |
| Avoid blue light and electronic devices before bedtime. | Set a regular sleep schedule. | Avoid caffeine after 3 pm. | Ensure a quiet place to sleep. | Implement a 5- to 20-minute rule for getting out of bed if unable to sleep. | Limit phone use, especially before sleep. | Change shift patterns. | Improve overall health and wellbeing. |
| Use blackout curtains and white noise. | Implement a five-step sleep process. | Change the type of food eaten. | Optimise the sleeping environment. | Develop relaxation techniques. | Make time to relax before sleep. | Get employer support for night shift workers. | |
| Program blue light settings to one's advantage. | Establish a specific time for worrying. | Consider what you eat in the night. | Make the bed more comfortable. | Engage in meditation and diversional therapy. | Focus on quality of sleep, not just hours. | Shorten working hours on night shifts. | |
| Avoid using electronic devices in bed. | Try to get more sleep. | Try fasting and eating at specific times. | Adjust the lighting and noise level in the bedroom. | Write down thoughts before sleep. | Try different sleep patterns. | | |
| Use blue light to set off the body clock. | Create a bedtime routine. | Use natural energy drinks. | | Keep busy if unable to sleep. | | | |

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| Light and Electronic Devices: | Sleep Schedule and Routine: | Diet and Food Habits: | Sleep Environment: | Mental Techniques: | Personal Habits: | Shift Work and Work-Related Changes: | General Lifestyle and Habit Changes: |
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| Use sunglasses to minimize light exposure. | Prepare the mind for sleep by switching off devices and meditating. | Experiment with foods that help sleep. | | | | | |
| Try blue light filtering glasses during shifts. | Take power naps. | | | | | | |

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Appendix 2: Changes Night Workers would like Employers to make to support them

Feedback survey question “What other ideas / initiatives would you want your employer to explore in relation to supporting night workers?”

| Facilities and Amenities: | Food and Nutrition: | Support and Wellbeing: | Communication and Engagement: | Employee Autonomy: | Shift patterns: | Pay related: |
|---|---|--|---|--|--|--|
| Provide sleep pods or rest areas at work. | Offer healthier food options and natural juices. | Provide mental health and stress management programs. | Listen to employees' preferences and concerns regarding shifts. | Allow employees to choose their shift patterns through self-rostering. | Allow more time between shifts. | Increase pay for night shifts. |
| Offer a dedicated rest area with sleeping quarters. | Provide salads and clean, healthy food in vending machines. | Offer wellness workshops and programs like the Night Club. | Involve employees in planning their shift patterns. | Provide flexibility in shift timings and transition periods. | Create consistent shift patterns. | Increase night shift wages and allowances. |
| Enhance break areas with comfortable seating and sleeping facilities. | Stock better nighttime food options. | Increase awareness of the effects of shift patterns on health. | Provide regular communication and support for night workers. | Enable employees to have a say in their shift preferences. | Reduce consecutive night shifts and provide more days off. | |
| Offer a quiet area for napping/power naps | Increase the availability of healthy food options. | Ensure adequate rest time between day and night shifts. | Encourage peer support and open discussions. | | Offer permanent day or night shifts. | |
| Ensure a comfortable and quiet staff room. | Consider a night shift cafe with healthy snacks and drinks. | Provide longer breaks or more rest time between shifts. | | | Reduce weekend shifts. | |

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| Facilities and Amenities: | Food and Nutrition: | Support and Wellbeing: | Communication and Engagement: | Employee Autonomy: | Shift patterns: | Pay related: |
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| Consider sensory deprivation or relaxation techniques. | | Encourage longer breaks. | | | Adjust shift lengths and transition times between shifts. | |
| Provide a dedicated restroom for night workers. | | Consider employees' chronotypes when assigning shifts. | | | Improve shift schedules to minimise shift changes. | |