

Data After Dark

New Evidence on Night Work in London



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Across London, the night is a time of huge opportunity, but also of stark inequality. The Mayor and I are helping to ensure the capital thrives as a vibrant, safe and inclusive city at all hours, while tackling the challenges that night workers face.

London's 1.3 million night workers are a vital but too often invisible part of the economy. A quarter of the city's workforce is active between 6pm and 6am. Yet our knowledge about the lives, working patterns and experiences of London's night workers has been very limited. *Data After Dark* is an important contribution to our understanding of night workers and recognition of their vital contribution to our economy, culture and communities. It will set the benchmark for much needed further research into the inequalities affecting night workers who keep our cities running around the clock.

The study contains a number of recommendations that all organisations across London who employ workers at night should consider. I also encourage all employers to seek out the Mayor's Good Work Standard, which continues to set the benchmark for employers who exemplify best practice in pay and conditions, workplace wellbeing, diversity and recruitment, and skills and progression.

I look forward to working closely with Londoners, trade unions, employers and others to improve working practices and conditions for all those that keep London running around the clock.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading 'Justine Simons'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Justine' and the last name 'Simons' clearly distinguishable.

Justine Simons OBE

Deputy Mayor for Culture and the Creative Industries

Data After Dark is a transdisciplinary research collaboration that confronts the dearth of data about the 1.32 million people who work between 6pm and 6am in London.

The most impactful research addresses an issue that has generally been overlooked but, when identified, becomes an obvious and urgent problem in need of further investigation. This can be said for creating a richer evidence base for those who work at night. Although night workers make up a little over a quarter of the capital's total workers, they are noticeably under-represented in traditional sources of data and, compared to those who work in the day, overlooked by policymakers, employers and other organisational leaders. Data gathering efforts, such as national censuses, and the policy insights that flow from them, still presume the regular "9 to 5" working day, but this is increasingly unrepresentative of people's lived experiences and is not fit for purpose for the millions who work when many of us are enjoying a night out or sleeping.

For those on the lowest incomes and in the most precarious employment positions, working at night magnifies the challenges they face. Transport options are relatively limited compared to those available during the day, so too is access to key services and basic needs, such as sourcing healthy meals; there are direct negative impacts of night work on physical and emotional wellbeing.

Data After Dark was initiated by the UCL Social Data Institute with collaborators from the UCL Urban Laboratory, The Bartlett School of Architecture, the Geographic Data Service and Didobi. Initially small in scope, it developed into the most comprehensive studies of London's night workers completed to date. The full extent of the research, its methodologies and findings, are set out in the two detailed reports and one data paper that accompany this summary.

To address the research gaps and contribute new knowledge, the approach to data gathering and analysis in *Data After Dark* has been necessarily broad, spanning three pieces of work:

Voices of Night Workers: in-depth, documented, participant-led discussions, where those who work at night were invited to share their insights, experiences and priorities; *Didobi Night Worker Report*: an extensive survey of workers and their employers; and *Mapping Night Work*: the innovative spatial analysis of large datasets.

Some of the findings, particularly the results of the long table discussions, make for challenging reading. But it is imperative that this work continues and that it helps to inform more data-driven policy around night-time working in London. The methodologies deployed, and the insights extracted for the capital, have clear implications for other cities in the UK and internationally.

With a clearer data landscape and deeper engagement with night workers, London can match the economic weight of its night-time economy with the social and political investment that it deserves.

Drawing from the research findings, this summary report first offers the researchers' policy recommendations, informed by the data and new knowledge supported by extensive engagement with night workers. It underscores the urgent need for interventions in policy and practice, for better working conditions, and for heightened public recognition of these workers' contributions.

Following the policy recommendations, there is a brief summary of each of the three strands of work, alongside an executive summary of each component. These should be read in conjunction with the three detailed research papers.



The findings from *Data After Dark* implore a cross-cutting strategy that is data-led, inclusive of lived experience, aware of intersecting inequalities, and structured around justice, safety and dignity at work. The research opens many avenues for policy development that should be subject to frequent in-depth engagement with night workers and night businesses to improve understanding of their issues and the impact of policy on their lives and work. With this in mind, we propose public and private sector bodies prioritise the following evidence-led actions:

1 Fair Work and Pay

- 1.1 Employers to audit and improve safety measures for night workers including: i) provision of adequate rest periods, ii) ensuring duty-of-care responsibilities and policies are being implemented effectively, and iii) that there are adequate systems in place to review and update these regularly.
- 1.2 Promote good night worker employer practices, e.g. access to flexible training opportunities, positive role models, career development support, workplace rights education; dissemination of educational resources on the risks of working at night.
- 1.3 Employers to work with trade unions to get fair conditions and pay for all night workers, including platform workers, in proportion to the risks and impacts of anti-social hours.

- 1.4 Ensure all night workers – including those employed by outsourced contractors – are paid the London Living Wage and above.
- 1.5 Encourage all boroughs to become accredited Living Wage employers.
- 1.6 Through positive policies and practices, support collective bargaining opportunities and enhanced employment protections for night workers.

2 Infrastructure and Safety

- 2.1 Review public transport services in relation to *Data After Dark* data and explore positive changes to mitigate challenges for night workers (e.g. later operating hours and dedicated night routes) and review the evidence on fair travel pricing for night shift workers.
- 2.2 Explore funding opportunities to incentivise pilot night worker hubs to offer safe, staffed rest and welfare spaces near major employment zones.

3 Health

- 3.1 Consider supporting further research into the long-term health impacts of night work.
- 3.2 Raise awareness of the Government's Working Time Regulations (i.e. employers must offer night workers free health assessments).
- 3.3 Explore opportunities to improve night workers' access to mental health support and educational materials on the health and wellbeing impacts of night work.
- 3.4 Encourage the provision of healthy, affordable meals (either directly and/or by vouchers and incentivising local food providers) and access to appropriate workplace facilities, and provide accessible educational information on diet, nutrition and working at night.

A Data Portrait of the Night-Time Workforce: Introducing the Three Executive Summaries

Home to approximately 8.9 million people, around 13% of the UK population, London is a major employment hub. With an economy valued at nearly £520 billion, many businesses operate beyond “standard” working hours, and late-night activity is prevalent across a range of sectors in the capital. In 2023, the size of London’s workforce was approximately 5.3 million people, including both residents and commuters from outside the city. Of these, 1.32 million were classified as night-time workers, representing 16% of the UK’s night workforce.

There has been a growing recognition of the need to shift policy making away from a narrow focus on the ‘Night-Time Economy’ to thinking more widely about the communities, culture, environment and opportunities of cities at night. Intelligence gathering about cities at night has brought together a variety of knowledge-holders across industry, grassroots organisations, policymakers and academia. However, evening and night-work remain an essential but often undervalued component of the economy and many dimensions of night-time activity, nightwork, and night-time communities — including the experiences of often precarious night workers — remain elusive. *Data After Dark* began from the understanding that new evidence, gathered using ambitious and creative approaches to data collection — both quantitative and qualitative — is needed to drive equitable policy.

The following executive summaries explore the motivations, challenges, aspirations and geography of night workers in London, defined as individuals working between 6pm and 6am. Based on extensive engagement with night workers, the findings underscore the urgent need for policy interventions, better working conditions, and public recognition of their contributions.

To create a rich depiction of those who work at night in London, it is clear from our research that we need to rethink how society sees, hears, and counts its night workers. An established analysis from the Labour Force Survey reveals the diversity of sectors and roles that employ night workers. Those who work in hospitality and entertainment are often the most visible, but there are also those who support health and social care, transport and logistics, security and cleaning and retail and warehousing. Central London remains the densest hub of activity, but significant pockets of employment, particularly in transport, logistics, and food delivery, exist across Outer London boroughs such as Newham, Croydon and Brent. More than 220,000-night workers commute from outside the capital, often due to housing affordability constraints.

The number of workers employed in on-demand and gig-economy roles has seen the sharpest growth since 2020. Deliveroo alone doubled its UK rider base to over 50,000 in 2021. These workers often straddle blurred lines between employment and self-employment, complicating rights and protections.

The research described in the three summaries was carried out over a twelve-month period (April 2024–April 2025) and a detailed account of each of the three strands of activities is available in the accompanying papers.

The work comprised three surveys, which sought to capture the views of night workers and the businesses that employ them on issues ranging from transport and pay to safety and workplace conditions, as well as a series of in-depth conversations with night workers at roundtable and long table events, and finally a programme of linkage and clustering secondary data sources (principally from BT). The surveys and participation in discussions were promoted through UCL and the GLA using a wide range of networks that included Business Improvement Districts (BIDs), trade unions, trade bodies and organisations like Citizens UK, among others.

Conclusion: Data for a More Equitable Night-Time City

Night workers keep London's hospitals staffed, streets clean, shelves stocked, and deliveries moving. Yet they remain statistically invisible, geographically peripheral, and economically insecure. By responding to the growing desire for data-led policymaking around night work in London, *Data After Dark's* broad approach marks a step-change in how we understand the people, places and pressures that define the city after dark.

Rather than relying on fragmented datasets, this research integrates geodemographic classification, quantitative survey data, and richly detailed qualitative accounts to offer a layered, human-centred portrayal of night workers.

The triangulated methodology reveals both the structural contours and lived realities of nightwork. The comprehensive survey, and London Night Worker Classification maps of night working hotspots using mobile phone footfall and employment data at a granular level, situate night work within the geography of inequality, highlighting zones where employment intensity, transport access, and economic precarity intersect.

The participatory long tables and surveys expose systemic undervaluation and the disproportionate exposure to harm that many night workers face. They speak of invisible labour, erratic shifts, lack of basic welfare facilities, and heightened vulnerability. Yet, these same accounts show the adaptive strategies workers employ to survive and find meaning in their roles.

Night workers are disproportionately from the Global Majority, have recent migration backgrounds and/or were not born in the UK. Many are women and LGBTQ+. Understanding their experiences requires an intersectional awareness of the barriers faced by protected minorities.

What makes the *Data After Dark* approach powerful is its capacity to hold the macro and micro in view. Policymakers gain both the spatial intelligence to target interventions and the narrative evidence to inform just and inclusive policy frameworks.

Crucially, the research foregrounds night workers not simply as data points but as contributors to a more equitable and resilient 24-hour city. In short, it calls for a city that sees, supports and safeguards its night-time workforce.

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Voices of Night Workers engaged night workers through a survey (98 respondents) which led to detailed participant-led long table discussions with a diverse sample of 20 individuals working in a range of inner and outer London boroughs.

Prioritising evidence from lived experiences, this strand of *Data After Dark* aimed to better understand the challenges night workers face from their perspectives. Through systematic coding and analysis of the evidence, the project provides a basis for night workers’ insights to be recognised and to productively inform urban policy and governance and organisational policy. The participants brought a rich composition of lived experiences and perspectives to the long tables, reflecting a wide range of personal and professional backgrounds.

Motivations for Night Work

Workers are drawn to night-time employment for a variety of reasons. These may include financial necessity, the higher wages (or perceived higher wages) offered compared with equivalent daytime work, or personal circumstances that require flexibility. Some choose nightwork to balance caregiving responsibilities or studies, while others work nights due to sectoral requirements, particularly in healthcare, retail, and security. Despite these benefits, night work is frequently perceived as a necessity rather than a choice due to the limited availability of alternative employment options. Night workers with especially precarious employment arrangements have struggled to stay afloat during recent economic challenges such as the pandemic and cost-of-living crisis.

“I think night workers have huge challenges, and we often undermine [ourselves] because we have our circumstances, like to fulfil our family needs, our financial circumstances, or maybe some other kind of situations we are in, and we compromise our health. We compromise our well-being. We compromise the sense of security and all these things. And I think it needs to come out, it needs to be debated, discussed, so that there should be some policy decisions which are based on evidence.”

Ravi, age 35-44, Male, Asian Indian, Retail, 3-5 years

Challenges Faced by Night Workers

Workplace harassment and safety: Night workers often experience a controlling work culture in their interactions with management, and harassment through negative experiences with customers, particularly in the nightlife sector and emergency services. Limited support structures exacerbate these challenges and hamper the workers’ ability to perform their duties effectively.

Lack of food provision: Inadequate and unhealthy food options are a persistent issue, with workers relying on vending machines, takeaways, or home-prepared meals due to a lack of late-night food outlets. For some participants, the absence of nutritious meals has had a negative effect on their health and well-being and has exacerbated the other negative health consequences of working at night. When refreshments are provided, for example employees in clubs and bars, these can often be unhealthy options, such as tokens for discounted or free alcoholic drinks. Night workers question the unavailability of nutritious food, especially given the physical demands of working at night.

Exhaustion and work life balance: Many night workers face back-to-back shifts, and long shifts, with insufficient rest periods, leading to exhaustion, social isolation, and long-term health problems. The dominance of the daytime economy restricts their access to leisure and social activities and to essential services. The unconventional hours of night work mean that night workers can struggle to find a suitable work-life balance.

Financial precarity: Despite the demanding nature of their jobs, night workers report stagnant wages, financial rewards that are out of proportion with the arduous commitments required, a lack of collective bargaining power that might be needed to improve their working conditions, and a general financial strain exacerbated by the cost-of-living crisis. Many work under precarious employment conditions, including freelance arrangements with limited legal protections.

Health risks: Night work disrupts sleep patterns and contributes to chronic health conditions such as insomnia, migraines, and Type 2 diabetes. Exhaustion suffered because of late-night commuting, stress, social isolation, and the difficulty of accessing healthcare further compound these issues. Switching between shift patterns can take its toll on physical and emotional health. Night workers are disproportionately exposed to the risk-taking behaviours of others (such as drug and alcohol misuse) and/or situations which encourage them to take risks themselves: e.g. tiredness may lead to driving faster, long shifts might lead to eating unhealthily. Night workers report not being made aware of the correlations between night work and illness, only realising these connections after experiencing health issues which require life adjustments.

Inequalities and discrimination: Night workers are disproportionately from the Global Majority. They also often have recent migration backgrounds and/or were not born in the UK. The types of work are often lower-paid positions, have limited career progression opportunities, or are

otherwise precarious, exacerbating gendered and racialised inequalities. In this study, participants reported numerous incidences of harassment and discrimination based on ethnicity, sex or gender, both at work and while commuting.

Positive Aspects of Night Work

Despite these challenges, night work does in some contexts foster strong community bonds, particularly among creative and marginalised groups. Some employers offer a supportive workplace, for example by providing transport and prioritising employee welfare. Workers also value the flexibility, the higher pay compared with day wages in some roles, and the unique social possibilities of night-time employment environments.

Voices of *Night Workers* demonstrated how night work is essential for London and the wider economy but remains undervalued and under-supported. Addressing the challenges faced by night workers requires a holistic approach that incorporates policy interventions, employer responsibility, and public engagement. A commitment to improving working conditions, fair pay, and social recognition will work towards a more sustainable and equitable night-time economy for all.



[Read Voices of Night Workers](#)



This work contributes to the most detailed picture of night workers' experiences and the conditions they face. Based on two extensive surveys and a range of interviews, the findings reveal serious inequalities in pay, security, health, and dignity at work that demand urgent policy attention.

There is a diverse but fragmented workforce that spans multiple sectors. While some public sector workers (e.g. in transport or health) benefit from stable pay and union protection, the majority of private sector night workers — especially those in hospitality, food delivery, and cleaning — face precarious conditions, insecure hours, and low pay. Nearly a third of surveyed night workers are not paid the London Living Wage, and many struggle with unpredictable schedules and lack of access to workplace benefits such as rest facilities, hot meals, or even toilets.

The overriding theme of Didobi's interviews with night workers was that of insecurity. Workers reported being scheduled for less than 16 hours a week, with last-minute shift cancellations and pressure to accept inconvenient hours or risk losing future work. Many juggle multiple jobs to survive, leading to sleep deprivation and stress. Workload intensity is high: cleaners described being expected to clean multiple office floors in four-hour shifts without breaks, while food delivery drivers spoke of handling 70+ deliveries per night without time for basic needs.

The emotional toll is evident. Young workers (25–29) and over-50s report the highest levels of stress and burnout. This is compounded by long commutes — many workers take two or more forms of transport to reach jobs in Central London — with journey times of 90 minutes or more. Bus routes, often the only affordable option, were widely considered unsafe, especially at night.

Safety was a pressing concern. Riders working for on-demand (food delivery) platforms described having their bikes stolen and facing physical assaults. Some felt unsupported by employers or the police, reporting that crime numbers were issued but no follow-up action taken.

Cleaners similarly reported abusive treatment, including being denied maternity or holiday pay, forced to unblock toilets without adequate equipment, or refused adjustments following surgery or family emergencies. In focus groups, single mothers broke down in tears as they described leaving young children with learning difficulties home alone, forced to take last-minute shifts or risk losing future work.

Business survey responses revealed a significant knowledge gap among employers. Over half of respondents were unaware of the Mayor's Good Work Standard, and only 11% were accredited. While some businesses provided welfare facilities or paid for late-night transport, many did not pay the London Living Wage. Despite being a key engine of London's economy, the night-time workforce remains under-protected in policy and practice.

Finally, this report urges the GLA to lead a new era of progressive, data-driven policymaking that puts the capital's invisible workers at the heart of London's night-time future.

29% of night workers reported being paid less than the London Living Wage



In this paper we detail a geodemographic classification tailored to night workers in the Greater London area. We first set out the methodological approach taken to the classification, which blends both commercial mobile phone activity data with more traditional employment statistics.

The input variables to the classification were selected based on findings from the commissioned survey of night workers and their employers and the outcomes were tested by consultation with key policymakers within the Greater London area. We argue that integrating open and commercial datasets presents a valuable opportunity to develop a granular and transparent data resource. In addition, we believe that this approach offers a means to reconcile the limitations of both open survey data and commercial mobile phone location data, thereby generating timely, data-rich outputs that remain sufficiently detailed and open to peer scrutiny to offer a more comprehensive understanding of night-time employment in London.

Whilst the geographic extent of this research is London, we have developed an approach that could be scaled to other cities not just in the UK but globally. For that reason, we regard this research as a useful basis for a much-needed expansion in the availability of detailed policy relevant data for the significant proportion of the population who work during night-time hours.

The BT data facilitated the creation of an innovative geodemographic classification of London's night workers. Every Lower Super Output Area in London (these are commonly used census units that for London encapsulate between 1,000 and 4,300 residents) was mapped based on an estimate of the number of night workers employed there and an approximate characterisation of the industries they are working in. It combines the mobile phone data (which BT has processed to estimate the number of workers in an area in three-hour intervals) with data from the Directory of London Businesses, available through the London Datastore.

The dataset includes a comprehensive list of businesses with detailed information on their locations and their Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) codes. We used a specific subset of SIC categories to define night-time industries, which was informed by the comprehensive survey of both night workers and their employers, conducted by Didobi as part of the *Data After Dark* project. Full details of the final business selections can be seen in the accompanying paper.

Understanding the spatial dynamics of night work across London is essential to designing policies that reflect the true complexity of the capital's 24-hour economy. We have identified seven distinct geodemographic clusters that reveal where night workers are most prevalent and where additional support may be targeted. In summary:

1. **Thriving Night Worker Central Hubs** are the economic heart of night-time London. These central areas (e.g. Soho, Shoreditch) see consistently high levels of night worker activity, supported by a dense mix of hospitality, arts, and retail businesses operating well into the night.
2. **Night worker inner suburbs with high business concentration** are areas that fringe the centre with elevated numbers of night workers across most sectors, minus security and public services. They bridge Central London to the outer boroughs.
3. **Night worker inner suburbs with low night business concentration** have higher than average night worker footfall, but these areas — like those near Heathrow — house workplaces not typically captured in night-time economy categories, such as logistics and cleaning operations in large infrastructure or commercial sites.

4. **Suburban night-time business locations with average night worker activity** exhibit a balanced mix of activity and business types, especially hospitality and security.

5. **Suburban transport, storage and health business locations with low night worker activity** are areas with fewer night workers despite the presence of sectors like health and logistics.

6. **Low night worker activity suburban zones** host fewer night-time workers and businesses. These are residential in nature and have limited engagement with the night-time economy.

7. **Night worker periphery** represents London's outer edges, where both night worker numbers and businesses are minimal. Unsurprisingly, these areas offer the greatest contrast to London's vibrant night-time core.

It is hoped that by mapping London this way, these clusters will provide a template for more targeted interventions, helping to shape a fairer, safer and more efficient city at night.

The *Data After Dark* team extend our thanks to the hundreds of night workers and the tens of employers who completed the surveys and joined our discussions. The quality of the findings from the research underpins the value of these contributions, but also the sacrifices needed by many to spare the time alongside busy working lives.

In addition, our thanks to those from the GLA, TfL, London boroughs, data suppliers and employers who attended the associated workshops with this research and offered feedback on the early findings of this work.

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