

RETAIL SECTOR

DEVELOPING CAREER PROGRESSION PATHWAYS AND ENHANCING PRODUCTIVITY

Project at a glance:

- Innovative pilot programme developed by Timewise to aid the career progression of women in low paid part-time jobs in retail
- Programme takes a job design approach to build flexible career pathways

Research by Timewise highlights that there are 1.5million low paid workers in the UK trapped in part-time jobs but who have the skills to earn a quality wage. The biggest barrier to progression for these workers is not a lack of skills – but the fact that they cannot take the flexibility they have in entry level part-time roles, into management roles. This is most pronounced in sectors with a high proportion of entry level part-time roles such as retail, hospitality and care.

The lack of flexibility is a barrier, for those who need it, to career progression across the jobs market. Timewise research found that of all openly advertised vacancies in the UK offering £20,000 or more (full time equivalent) just 8.7 per cent offer some degree of flexibility¹.

Timewise has identified an opportunity to test a new approach to progressing the careers of women trapped on the ‘sticky floor’ of retail by designing assistant manager roles to be available on a part-time and flexible basis. This involves trialling a job design rather than skills solution to tackling low pay in retail, through which low wage employees will be able to increase their earnings.

Critically, the business case for this is that retailers will be able to better optimise the skills and engagement of their low paid workers, and in doing so address the costly retention, recruitment and skills gaps they face and ultimately increase their productivity.

¹ Source: Timewise Flexible Jobs Index, 2016. Research is based on original analysis of data from over 5 million job advertisements, across 80 national jobs boards, in the period September to December 2015.

Pets at Home, the UK's largest pets retailer, is working with Timewise to trial this approach. Pets at Home employs nearly 5,000 store-based staff, of whom 65% are women. The company is growing fast and is a highly regarded brand having won many awards as an employer of choice. However Pets at Home's attrition rates for women is high, so they asked Timewise to understand what was going on. Our analysis highlighted that while many women do stay and move on within the company, the ratio of men moving off the shop floor into assistant manager roles is double that of women. Our interviews with staff and management found that the lack of flexibility in a management role is a major contributing factor.

So Timewise is working with Pets at Home to re-design their assistant manager roles, so they can be made available on a job share or a part-time basis. This approach included:

- Initial data mapping and qualitative research with HR, managers and colleagues to identify the challenges and opportunities within the business.
- A series of workshops with senior HR and operational teams on flexible job design.
- The development of a support programme for managers, to help them to understand flexible job design, identify and on-board colleagues into these roles, and facilitate this new approach to work within teams in stores.

The programme will be cascaded out nationally through Pets at Home's regional HR and operational teams, and the roles will be launched in April 2016 through Pets at Home's annual roadshow for colleagues.

Timewise will be working with Pets at Home throughout 2016 to track the impact of this approach both on stimulating progression opportunities for low paid workers and in enhancing retention rates, employee engagement and performance.

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