

# PART-TIME WORK: THE EXCLUSION ZONE?

How working part-time can  
make employees feel isolated

# INTRODUCTION

In the 12 years that we have been focusing on the flexible jobs market, we have researched the impact of working part-time and flexibly on headline issues such as pay and progression. But we have also heard anecdotal evidence of a less obvious barrier facing many part-time employees. They have spoken of not feeling fully part of the team, and of feeling they miss out on key meetings, professional development events and training, networking and other opportunities, because the structure of the traditional working week doesn't take theirs into account.

This research was commissioned to investigate the issue further – and the results clearly demonstrate the effect that this isolation can have. They suggest that being unable to take part in professional opportunities can have a serious impact on part-time employees' ability to deliver their role successfully, and to progress as they should. And that's equally serious for their employers, who are failing to get the best from their part-time employees.

The demand for part-time and flexible working has never been so high; it cuts across all ages and life stages. And given the positive impact these ways of working have on productivity, retention and diversity, and the role they can play in closing the gender pay gap, the business case is no longer in doubt. But if employers really want to reap the benefits of a part-time workforce, they need to start thinking differently about the best way to support them.



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## METHODOLOGY

**This report is based on the responses of 1,700 current or recent part-time workers. An online research survey was sent in May 2018 to candidates who have registered with Timewise Jobs to seek flexible work.**

## KEY FINDINGS

Among the part-time workers who responded to our survey:



**59%** FEEL THEIR SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE HAVE FALLEN BEHIND THOSE OF THEIR FULL-TIME COLLEAGUES



**61%** FEEL LESS UP-TO-DATE WITH TEAM DEVELOPMENTS



**65%** FEEL LESS CONNECTED TO THEIR TEAM DUE TO MISSING OUT ON SOCIAL TIME



**59%** FEEL THEY ARE MISSING OUT ON NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES AND HAVE LOST CONNECTIONS



**68%** FEEL SO GRATEFUL TO BE ALLOWED TO WORK PART-TIME THAT THEY ACCEPT CAREER COMPROMISES



# THE IMPACT ON KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Working part-time affects employees' confidence in their knowledge and skills. 59% of our respondents said they feel they have fallen behind in both areas compared to their full-time colleagues.

This may be because training isn't prioritised for part-time workers, or because their workload or working pattern precludes them from taking part in it.



**59%** OF PART-TIME WORKERS FEEL THEIR SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE HAVE FALLEN BEHIND COMPARED TO THEIR FULL-TIME COLLEAGUES

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

If part-time workers are missing out on training and development opportunities, they are unlikely to progress as well as their full-time colleagues. Not only is this a waste of their potential, it could also have a negative impact on their organisation's gender pay gap.

## WHAT WOULD HELP?

"Being offered the opportunity to upskill along with full-time staff."

"Equal access to training budgets."

"Being invited to important group meetings, knowing more about the team's obstacles, achievements and plans."

"Part-time workers need CPD too!"

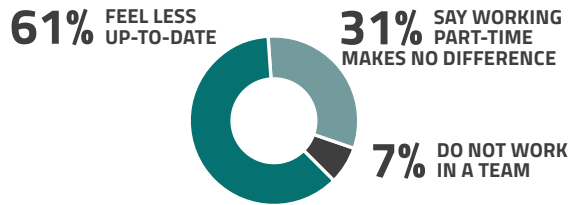
"I have been allocated less challenging projects, and not been given training, because of being part-time. As a result I have fallen behind while colleagues have progressed."

# KEEPING UP-TO-DATE WITH TEAM DEVELOPMENTS

Working part-time also has an impact on employees' ability to stay in touch with what is going on in their team. 61% of our respondents noted that they feel less up-to-date, due to missing team meetings and other work events.

Inevitably, part-time workers will be unable to be present for every workplace briefing. However, more flexible scheduling and the smart use of technology, along with the willingness of part-time employees to be flexible in return, could improve their participation.

## DO PART-TIME WORKERS FEEL LESS UP-TO-DATE WITH THE WORK OF THEIR TEAM?



## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

By failing to take part-time workers' schedules into account when planning important meetings and events, employers are missing out on potentially valuable input from a core part of their team. They are also making it harder for these employees to deliver their role to the highest standards, and creating operational inefficiencies.

## WHAT WOULD HELP?

"My company has put in place lots of tactics to help us remain connected as a group. We have weekly catch-up Skype calls, a WhatsApp group and a 'buddy tree'."

"Recordings or podcasts of team meetings would help part-timers feel more included and part of the bigger team."

"My team schedules a lot of team meetings on one of my non-working days; if they could sometimes be scheduled on different days of the week, everyone might have a chance to attend."

# COLLEAGUES' PERCEPTION OF PART-TIME WORKERS

A significant proportion of part-time workers feel their contribution is valued less highly because they work part-time. 45% of respondents believe that their input is taken less notice of, due to a perception that they are less committed than full-timers or are not up-to-speed.

This perception also has an impact on their feelings of isolation, with 56% of respondents saying that they feel left out, because colleagues do not consider them as a full member of the team.



**45%** FEEL THEIR INPUT IS VALUED LESS HIGHLY BECAUSE THEY WORK PART-TIME



**56%** FEEL LEFT OUT DUE TO COLLEAGUES NOT CONSIDERING THEM AS A FULL MEMBER OF THE TEAM

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

With a substantial minority of part-time workers feeling their input is underappreciated, and a majority feeling that they are not considered full members of the team, it is unsurprising that they can feel isolated. Developing a workplace culture which champions part-time and flexible working is a key way to ensure that all members of the team are equally valued.

## WHAT WOULD HELP?

“Education throughout the company that people who leave early or work fewer days are still valuable and work hard.”

“Being appreciated for what I can bring to the workplace, rather than being seen as a problem.”

“Workplace cultures need to fundamentally change to fully support part-time workers.”

“I feel there is a negative attitude that those working part-time are less productive, though I often work harder than colleagues to keep pace and stay ahead. I do think working part-time is limiting my career, because of others’ attitudes.”

# SOCIAL ISOLATION AMONG PART-TIME WORKERS

The simple fact of only being at work for some of the week also has an effect on part-time workers' social interaction. 65% of respondents said that they feel less connected to the team, because they miss out on social time due to being in the office less often.

This isn't just about not being able to attend organised team events. Spontaneous lunches or after work drinks can be tricky for part-time workers to accommodate. And on a more everyday level, part-timers miss out on some of the watercooler chat and general banter which brings a team closer together.

## DO PART-TIME WORKERS FEEL LESS CONNECTED TO THE TEAM DUE TO MISSING OUT ON SOCIAL TIME?



## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

Positive team dynamics are central to making a company work at its best. So if part-time workers feel isolated, it is not simply a wellbeing issue; it will also affect their performance and that of the rest of the team. Employers who want to get the best from their workforce as a whole need to ensure that part-time workers are fully included.

## WHAT WOULD HELP?

"Social events being on different days of the week to maximise opportunities for flexible workers to attend."

"Being included on team social emails, even if they don't think I'll be able to come."

"The reason I'm isolated is because I work so hard, taking no time out for chatting or other stuff that full-timers can do. I barely look up from my computer!"

# NETWORKING AND MAINTAINING CONNECTIONS

Networking, whether formal or informal, is an important part of any career; but it presents particular challenges for part-time workers. 59% of respondents said they have lost professional connections because it is hard for them to network.

Unfortunately, the 'normal' working week still dominates many workplace systems and structures. As networking and client events often take place after work, they are likely to be less accessible to people who have caring responsibilities, many of whom work part-time.



**59%** OF PART-TIME WORKERS SAY THEY HAVE MISSED OUT ON NETWORKING AND LOST WORK CONNECTIONS

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

Networking is a fantastic business tool, which benefits both individual employees and the companies they work for. If part-time workers are not able to make and develop connections in this way, both they and their employers will be at a disadvantage. Forward-looking employers should reassess how these opportunities are approached, rather than sticking to the status quo.

## WHAT WOULD HELP?

“Arranging client lunches for when part-time staff are there.”

“To have some networking events taking place during the daytime, maybe over breakfast or lunch.”

“I’m frequently told I need to make more ‘corporate contribution’ with cross-cutting projects beyond my day job. That is the key to promotion. But I do a full-time role in 4 days. Where am I supposed to find the time?”



# THE BENEFIT OF CONNECTING WITH OTHER PART-TIME WORKERS

Unsurprisingly, given the isolation and networking issues highlighted previously, the ability to build relationships with peers and role models is seen as particularly important by part-time workers.

Among those respondents who already have friends who work part-time, 68% said that this helps their confidence and enjoyment at work. And of those who do not already have these connections, 70% said it would be beneficial.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

The value that part-time workers place on building relationships with other part-timers suggests that employers should focus on improving peer-to-peer networking, mentoring and social opportunities for these employees. This will not only help reduce their risk of isolation, but will also connect them with role models who can support and encourage their career development.

## WHAT WOULD HELP?

“A part-time workers’ network, so we could connect with others in our situation, share experiences and learn about other part-time roles and careers.”

“I definitely feel less connected now I’m part-time.”

## DO PART-TIME WORKERS FEEL IT HELPS TO HAVE CONNECTIONS WITH OTHERS WHO WORK PART-TIME?



**68%** OF THOSE WHO ALREADY HAVE THESE CONNECTIONS SAY THAT IT IS HELPFUL



**70%** OF THOSE WHO DO NOT HAVE THESE CONNECTIONS SAY IT WOULD BE HELPFUL

# CAREER COMPROMISES MADE BY PART-TIME WORKERS

Taken as a whole, the responses to this survey suggest that part-time workers have to compromise on a range of issues, from team interaction and involvement to career development.

Indeed, when asked specifically about this issue, 68% of respondents said that they are so grateful to be able to work part-time that they accept career compromises as fair or inevitable. This may be partly due to the fact that part-time work is still seen in some organisations as a deviation from the norm, or as special treatment that has to be earned.



**68%** OF PART-TIME WORKERS SAY THEY FEEL SO GRATEFUL TO WORK PART-TIME THAT THEY ACCEPT CAREER COMPROMISES

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EMPLOYERS?

With 1 in 4 full-time employees specifically saying they would prefer to work part-time for part-time wages<sup>1</sup>, employers who want to recruit and keep the best talent need to move from a 'request-response' model to one in which part-time is just another, equally valid way of working. This will help raise part-time workers' career expectations to match their full-time colleagues, with positive repercussions for all.

## WHAT WOULD HELP?

"Having the message about flexible working communicated from the top down, so all layers of management are on board. Fostering this culture takes time but is worth it."

"If more senior people worked part-time, it would be treated with more respect."

"I've never known a part-time employee to be promoted at my company."

1. Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative, Timewise, 2017

## CONCLUSION

There are many different aspects of the working week that add up to a sense of inclusion. Formal events such as networking or client entertaining; team get-togethers, meetings and training; informal chats in the kitchen; these are all important elements in a fulfilling, focused career.

But too often, part-time workers' access to such events is limited. As a result, so is their potential, their progression and their ability to deliver for their employer.

So what should employers do? In simple terms, they need to think differently. They need to challenge the assumption that, just because something has always been done a certain way – such as entertaining clients after work, or having team meetings on the same day and time each week – that's the only way to do it.

Employees increasingly want to work part-time or flexibly; they also want to have successful, enjoyable careers. By thinking creatively and innovatively about how things are done, employers can deliver a workplace culture and working week that is as inclusive of part-time workers as their full-time colleagues – and benefit from the results.

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TALENT THROUGH FLEXIBILITY

Timewise is a multi-award winning social business and leading change agent that works to unlock the flexible jobs market in the UK. We share market insights on flexible working, job design and flexible hiring; deliver training and consultancy to help employers attract and develop the best talent; and conduct research such as our annual Flexible Jobs Index. We also run Timewise Jobs, a jobs board for roles that are part-time or open to flexibility.

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