

# THE FLEXIBILITY TRAP



The influence of part time workers within our economy is growing. More than a quarter<sup>1</sup> of British workers – 1 in 4 - now work 30 hours a week or less, with more than 80 per cent (or 5,214,000) giving their reason for doing so as: “I did not want full time”<sup>2</sup>.

And yet, to date, no research has explored what happens to people’s careers, after they first begin working part time / flexibly<sup>3</sup>.

This **first-of-its-kind** report<sup>4</sup>, conducted by **Timewise**, explores what barriers part time workers face as they attempt to progress their careers – whether in their current

jobs, or by finding new ones. Based on interviews with 1,000 workers working less than 30 hours a week, and earning full time equivalent salaries of more than £20,000 pa it finds that when it comes to part time and progression: Britain still has far to go.

1. Data is taken from the labour market data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) on June 12 2013, available via [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk). 8,064,000 people work part time hours in the UK, accounting for 27 per cent, or 1 in 4, of the UK’s 29,756,000 total workers

2. Data is again taken from the labour market data published by the ONS on June 12 2013, available via [www.statistics.gov.uk](http://www.statistics.gov.uk). When asked for reason for working part time, 5,214,000 part time workers, or 80 per cent of all asked, said they ‘did not want a full time job’.

3. The ONS defines part time as ‘30 paid hours or less per week’

4. Research was conducted by Vanson Bourne in May 2013 on behalf of the Timewise Foundation amongst 1,000 £20,000+FTE workers, based in the UK

## Breakdown of those interviewed

- 1,000 part time workers were interviewed by an independent research agency in May 2013, from a cross section of industries
- Respondents earn between £20,000 and £100,000 FTE, with the vast majority falling between the £20,000 and £50,000 bracket
- 71 per cent of respondents were female and 29 per cent male

## A note on salaries

Please note that all salaries mentioned in this report are full time equivalent (FTE). Eg the FTE salary of a person working 2.5 days/wk in a £50,000 role, is still £50,000 (£25,000 is the actual)

## KEY FINDINGS

- More than three quarters of respondents (77 per cent) say they feel **'trapped'** in their current part time jobs, because of the perceived lack of good quality part time vacancies to move into<sup>5</sup>.
- 81 per cent say the part time job they are currently in is **at least a step down**, or **at the same level**, as the last full time job they held.
- More than a quarter say they are **overqualified** or **overskilled** for the job they are currently in (29 per cent).
- Around two fifths (41 per cent) of respondents have **'traded down'**, ie taken jobs beneath their skill and full time equivalent pay level.
- A **small but significant** number of respondents - 16 per cent - said their current part time role was 'at least one step up' from their last full time job.
- Virtually all respondents (99 per cent) said they wished employers would make it clear when a job can be worked part time or flexibly, **at point of advertising the role**.

Figure 1:

### Why do you work part time?

To fit work with looking after my children



I choose to work part time, just because



To fit work with a particular hobby or charitable commitment



To fit work with my own disability or illness



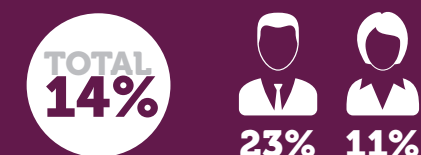
I work more than one job



To fit work with the care of older family member/s



Other



<sup>5</sup> Research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Women Like Us in March 2012 found that just 3 per cent of all advertised vacancies on the jobs market are for part time jobs paying £20,000 FTE or more

# PART TIME AND THE PLATEAU

Many respondents reported reaching a 'plateau' in their career, since deciding to work part time. While 74 per cent rate their employer's flexible working policies as 'good, very good or excellent', the near same amount, nearly 3 in 4 respondents (73 per cent) say they **haven't been promoted once** since they started working fewer hours.

77 per cent<sup>6</sup>, or more than 3 in 4 respondents reported that the additional difficulties of finding good quality, **openly advertised** part time vacancies **makes them feel 'trapped'** in their current roles, with more people feeling "trapped" in the lowest salary band (£20,000-£30,000FTE) than any other.

Nearly two thirds of all respondents (63 per cent) say they believe that promotion with their current employer would only be possible by increasing their hours. More than a fifth say they: "wouldn't even expect to be promoted" while working part time (22 per cent).

Just over half of respondents say they feel **as valued** as full time colleagues in their office (54 per cent). However, a significant portion, just over a third (34 per cent) do not, with around 1 in 10 going as far as to say they feel **"invisible"** in their company (11 per cent).

More than a quarter of respondents (28 per cent) **have thought about leaving their job** because of difficulties they have experienced in trying to work flexibly, with a further 10 per cent **having done so already**.

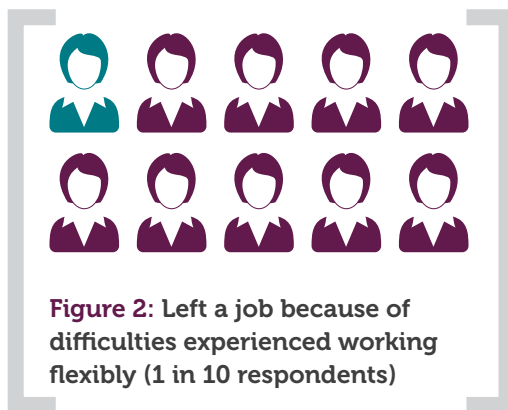
# JOB SEARCHING AND 'BACKSLIDING'

7 in 10 respondents say that if they were looking for a new job with part time hours now they would downgrade their expectations of salary and level of seniority.

Of this group, nearly a third expect that they would have to backslide by 2 or more levels. Furthermore, of the 70 per cent of respondents expecting to have to accept a salary cut, the average sacrifice is £6,730 FTE, with people with children expecting to take home £436 less than those without.

The belief that you have to 'backslide' in terms of both position and salary, was highest among those in the lowest salary bracket (73 per cent of those earning between £20,000 and £30,000 FTE).

41 per cent of all respondents said they had already lived this process, having, at some point in their career, taken a job that was beneath them in terms of skill and pay.



6. Research conducted by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Women Like Us in March 2012 found that just 3 per cent of all advertised vacancies on the jobs market are for part time jobs paying £20,000 FTE or more

7. Only asked of respondents who said they would expect to have to downgrade their salary and level of seniority, when looking for new work (70 per cent)

## CONFUSION OVER 'WHEN TO ASK'

Our research highlighted real confusion over the process of asking for flexibility when applying for / accepting a new job. Nearly 2 in 5 respondents **worry about 'when to ask'**, with 52 per cent saying that doing so makes them feel nervous or very nervous. 42 per cent **fear that even asking the question will damage their chances of getting the job**. The most nervous respondents in this instance were parents, looking to fit work with family.

Virtually **all** surveyed (99 per cent) would like employers to **openly state** whether they would be open to part time or flexible working hours, for the right candidate – at the point when the role is advertised. Our research also identified that part time workers would like to see more visible role models of successful senior level flexible working, to help counter the perception that 'it cannot be done'.

## CASE STUDY

# "My dream part time job became its own trap"



**Helen Reid is 34 and lives in Hertfordshire\*. She has a son who is 4 and an 18-month-old daughter.**

I have worked for the same major UK financial services company for more than 10 years. I joined on the graduate programme, and enjoyed swift and steady progress until I went on maternity leave with my first child.

Before this time I headed up a number of successful deals. I was promoted 3 times and my last few moves resulted from being headhunted internally

by another team. At the time of my first maternity leave I was an Assistant Vice Principal and knocking on the door of my next promotion to Vice Principal.

After returning, I requested a 4 day week. I was told I could not return to my original team on this basis, but that a new team was being created where I would be able to use the same skills effectively.

I was moved away from a client facing team, working on all the major deals, to a secondary role – essentially supporting the deal leaders. I had inadvertently placed myself in a team that had a ceiling on it in terms of promotion, i.e. no one above Assistant Vice Principal. And of course, I was already at that level, from the start. I have been at that level for 6 years now.

I believe I achieve as much in 4 days as some people do on my team in 5. I am very organised, so

my work is always complete, on time and done to a good standard. I know I am doing a good job. The lack of opportunity to progress is very frustrating.

Sometimes I feel that my career has bottomed out when I have really only just begun – I could be working for another 30 years! I am doing the work, and just want to be recognised for it.

I have given up hope of progression in my current team and am starting to look elsewhere. My worry now, is finding something at the right level, that can accommodate me four days a week. I have been externally headhunted for a role – but with full time hours. At what point in the process do I say that I want to work part time? There is no clarity and I know that my dilemma is that of people seeking part time work across the country.

\*Not her real name

## ABOUT THE TIMEWISE FOUNDATION

The Timewise Foundation's vision is for everyone to be able to find the flexibility they need in their careers, without reducing their value in the workplace.

We are a Community Interest Company – any profits we make are reinvested to achieve our social aim.

Our approach is to effect practical change for individual people – one job at a time. We work in three ways:

- We operate a jobsite and a recruitment agency, **Timewise Jobs** and **Timewise Recruitment**, specialising in quality part time and flexible vacancies, for anyone needing to fit work around their other commitments.
- We run **Women Like Us**, a service that offers career support to women who want to find quality work they can fit around their family responsibilities. There is a particular focus on women from low income households, who can access free support.
- We also share our learnings policy makers, opinion formers and employer networks. This **public affairs work** promotes the social and business benefits of quality part time and flexible work, aiming to influence both the mainstream recruitment market and public policy.

## BUILDING THE NEXT POWER PART TIME LIST

Off the back of this research, the Timewise Foundation is building the UK's second ever Power Part Time list: a roll call of 50 men and women, who work at the top of their profession on less than 5 full days a week, 'busting the myth' that meaningful roles cannot work on a part time basis, even at the most senior levels. These leaders make their own patterns of work 'work' and in doing so, trailblaze a path for others.

You can showcase your organisation's positive approach to flexible working, by nominating senior level employees for the 2013 list.

For more information:

Visit: [www.timewise.co.uk/power-50](http://www.timewise.co.uk/power-50)

to find out more,  
call 020 7633 4444

or email  
[timewisepower50@timewise.co.uk](mailto:timewisepower50@timewise.co.uk)



**Steve Varley**  
Ernst & Young (EY)  
Managing Partner  
UK & Ireland



**Katie Bickerstaffe**  
Dixons Retail plc  
CEO  
UK & Ireland



**Andrew Saunders**  
Management Today  
Deputy Editor



**Lynn Rattigan**  
Ernst & Young (EY)  
Deputy Chief  
Operating Officer  
UK & Ireland



**Karen Mattison**  
Timewise Foundation  
Founder and Director