

FAIR FLEXIBLE FUTURES #1

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON PART-TIME EMPLOYEES

How they've been affected and why they
must be included in the jobs recovery

June 2021

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Our working practices are changing. From the homeworking revolution to the increase in hybrid working, the debate on productivity and flexibility is likely to rage on for some time. These changes have also exposed and amplified existing inequalities, especially for part-time employees, who often work on the frontline in low-paid jobs.

Early in the pandemic, it immediately became clear that people in these roles were facing the brunt of job losses and changes in working hours.¹ In this work, we present new analysis on how part-time employees are faring, and explore what more needs to be done to support them.

KEY FINDINGS

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on unemployment is well-documented, with women, young people, members of minority ethnic groups and frontline employees all disproportionately affected. However, one demographic that hasn't been subject to the same level of scrutiny is part-time employees – for whom the experience and outlook appears particularly bleak.

Although furlough has been effective in keeping millions of employees in work, and protecting them from unemployment, it is masking significant challenges, especially for part-timers. Compared to full-time employees, part-timers have been disproportionately impacted, facing higher levels of reduced hours and redundancy. They have also been less likely to return to normal working hours, and less likely to hang on to roles during lockdowns, than full-timers.

To date, this group has not been prioritised in the government's recovery plans. Flexible and hybrid working are at the heart of the newly evolved Flexible Working Taskforce – of which Timewise Development Director Emma Stewart is a member – but part-time is not currently on the agenda. We believe it is vital that opportunities for those who want or need to work part-time are included in future employment strategies – and our new analysis shows why:

- The impact of furlough has left many part-timers clinging onto work. Half of the part-time workforce who were working normally at the beginning of 2020 were either working reduced hours, or temporarily away from work, by the first lockdown period (April-June 2020). For full-timers, two-thirds remained working normally during the first lockdown.
- There is evidence from throughout 2020 of a pattern of full-time employees returning to their normal hours at a higher proportion than part-time employees. When part-timers are temporarily out of work in one quarter, they are more likely than full-timers to be temporarily out of work in the next. Forty-four percent of part-time employees who were away from work during the first lockdown continued to be away from work between July-September 2020, when restrictions began to temporarily ease. The comparable figure for full-time employees was about a third (33.6%). Full-timers are returning to their normal hours at higher rates compared to part-timers.

- When asked, 80% of part-time workers (approximately 5.8 million part-timers) do not want to work more hours. There will be many reasons for this, including wanting to better balance work and care, the lack of available quality part-time jobs, the high cost of childcare, or being satisfied with their current role. In other work, we have found that this group often want to remain part-time.

With only 8% of jobs advertised as part-time², this is not good news – especially for the millions who want to work part-time and flexibly. It is simply too big a problem to ignore.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is an opportunity to harness the momentum of the flexible work revolution to influence change. But that change has to be systemic, with policymakers and employers all playing a role, and all forms of flexible work considered, including part-time.

Our recommendations call on these actors to be the changemakers for an inclusive and fair flexible future. We are calling on the government to include the right to request flexible work from day one in their long-awaited Employment Bill, and to offer incentives to support flexible job creation and progression opportunities, in publicly funded job creation and support schemes across national, regional and local governments. And we are calling on employers to embed fair flexible work across their organisations, leading change.

CONCLUSION

The two-tier labour market between flexible ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ existed before COVID-19. The flexible ‘haves’ were able to work flexibly and part-time, often in professional roles, with autonomy over their time. The flex ‘have-nots’ were often in poor quality and poorly paid part-time work, with little autonomy over

working times or locations. However, as a result of the pandemic, this gulf is widening.

We are therefore facing an opportunity – and indeed, a social necessity – to create flexible jobs as part of the recovery. This is especially important for women who have lost their jobs or been forced to quit because of increased caring responsibilities, and for those who have remained in work, but may now be trapped with few opportunities to progress.

If we fail, we will return to a jobs market which locks out talent and opportunities for so many, and risks preventing those who cannot work full-time from working at all. If we fail, we will continue to ask too much of those working in everyday jobs on the frontline, who we have relied on during this time, and deny them a better balance between work and care. We believe that, as a society, we cannot afford to fail, and that Timewise’s long-held mission to create Fair Flexible Futures is more important than ever.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Timewise Foundation would like to thank James Cockett and De-Jon Ebanks Silvera at the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) for their analysis of the Labour Force Survey and comments on drafting this report.

IES is an independent, apolitical, international centre of research and consultancy in public employment policy and HR management. It works closely with employers in all sectors, government departments, agencies, professional bodies and associations. IES is a focus of knowledge and practical experience in employment and training policy, the operation of labour markets, and HR planning and development. IES is a not-for-profit organisation. www.employment-studies.co.uk/ We would also like to thank Dalia Ben-Galim for her contribution to this report.

01 INTRODUCTION

Part-time working is often used as an effective way to balance work and care.³ There has certainly been a shift to more people working part-time, especially in more senior roles, showing how creative flexibility can work in practice,⁴ but it is still far from the norm.

As our most recent Index showed, most jobs are still advertised as full-time. And too often the part-time jobs which are available are within low-paid and highly female-dominated areas, in which trade-offs between hours, pay and progression remain. With many part-time jobs being on the frontline, there is often a lack of control over both where and how part-timers work. As a result, too many part-timers continue to face a persistent struggle to achieve the balance they seek.

Flex ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’: widening the gap in an existing two-tier workplace

Long before COVID-19, a two-tier workplace of flexible working ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ existed.⁵ The flexible ‘haves’ were often working flexibly in professional services, in a combination of home and office work, and had control over their working hours. Importantly, they also often worked in companies with the resources – of time and money – to invest in change programmes.

In contrast, the flexible ‘have-nots’ tended to be those working on the frontline in the everyday jobs that we rely on – from social care to retail, hospitality to leisure – and concentrated in low-paid work. Working part-time hours did not guarantee the desired flexibility; for some, the hours or shift patterns were rigid and fixed, while others could be called to attend work with little notice. Few part-time frontline employees had much autonomy or control over their hours.

As in so many other areas, COVID-19 has exposed a fault line that already existed, and made it more visible. Homeworking has become the shorthand for flexible work, especially for the flex ‘haves’ – almost overnight enabling people, mostly professionals, to work from home and connect to their colleagues. That is not to say that there are not challenges – such as remote working intensifying working hours for many homeworkers⁶ – but homeworking has been accepted and legitimised for office employees. Hybrid working between home and the office is set to become standard practice across many organisations.

The challenges facing the flex ‘have-nots’ are very different. From the early days of the pandemic, it was clear that part-time employees (who are predominately women, young people and minority ethnic employees) were facing the brunt of job losses and changes in working hours.⁷ Unable to work from home, it was the low-paid employees – often working on the frontline – who were losing out.

Eighty percent of high earners (in the top quintile) were able to work from home; for low paid employees in the bottom quintile, it was less than half.⁸ And the typical pay for a shutdown employee, at £348 a week, sits in stark contrast to £707 – the weekly earnings of someone able to work from home.⁹ Many of the former are likely to have relied on family, friends, charities and benefits to make ends meet. In short, the gap between the flex ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’ was widening.

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Left unchecked, this will lead to a two-tier workplace in which only the lucky ones get to balance their work with the rest of their lives – or to work at all.¹⁰

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Despite the breadth and depth of the crisis, employment rates have so far mostly held up. We have not (yet) seen mass unemployment, nor significant wage cuts. To a large degree, this can be explained by the government’s Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme – otherwise known as furlough – which has effectively been paying and subsidising millions of wages across the country, protecting businesses, supporting families and curbing a sharp rise in unemployment.¹¹

But in the same way that homeworking is not a silver bullet, neither is furlough. As we tentatively progress with a roadmap out of lockdown, and with the furlough scheme scheduled to end in September, many cracks are starting to emerge. And part-time employees are clinging on in a volatile labour market.

The Timewise Foundation commissioned IES to explore this in more detail. The resulting robust analysis will help stakeholders understand the impact on part-time employees in a fragile labour market – and decide next steps.

METHODOLOGY

- The analysis presented here draws on both the two-quarter longitudinal Labour Force Survey and the standard quarterly Labour Force Survey.
- The longitudinal survey data helps to explain the impact of COVID-19 on part-time employees by looking at the flows between quarters by work status – of whether someone was working normally, working temporarily reduced hours, or temporarily away from work. It also allows comparison between part-time and full-time employees. In a rapidly changing labour market, it has been beneficial to look at the impact of furlough, especially for part-time employees.
- Standard quarterly Labour Force Survey data looks at a single point of time and provides useful benchmarks.
- Q1 refers to January-March 2020; Q2 refers to April-June 2020; Q3 refers to July-September 2020 and Q4 refers to October-December 2020. The changes between Q1 and Q2 2020 reflect changes associated with the first lockdown imposed on March 23rd 2020.
- The Labour Force Survey does not ask specifically about furlough, but people on furlough are mostly likely to appear in the data as being temporarily away from paid work. However, not all individuals who were temporarily away from paid work during the pandemic would be furloughed employees, and there will be a minority of people temporarily away from paid work for other reasons.

Interpretation of IES’ analysis remains our own.

02 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

This report is based on new analysis of part-time and full-time employees during the pandemic. It shows that part-time employees have faced, and continue to face, a disproportionate impact on working hours and job losses, compared to full-timers. It also indicates that demand for part-time work from existing part-timers remains high.

FURLOUGH IS PROTECTING PART-TIME EMPLOYEES (BUT NOT FOR LONG)

Furlough – the bold and radical subsidised jobs scheme – is credited for keeping unemployment rates relatively stable during the pandemic. The scheme has been extended and adjusted at different points, offering increased protection and security to both employees and employers.

But underneath these headlines, our findings are worrying for part-time employees, especially as the furlough scheme is due to end in September 2021. Our analysis suggests that, rather than offering employment protection, furlough may instead be acting as a stepping-stone to unemployment.

Of the seven million part-time employees in the UK, about half were working their normal hours during the first national lockdown. On the surface, this sounds like a good news story – for many part-timers, especially those working in shutdown sectors like retail and hospitality, furlough was keeping them in work and offering protection.

However, what this also means is that half of part-time employees were NOT working their normal hours; and on drilling down into the data, it appears that this might have been a step towards further periods out of

work. This presents a much more worrying picture for part-time employees, especially when compared to full-timers.

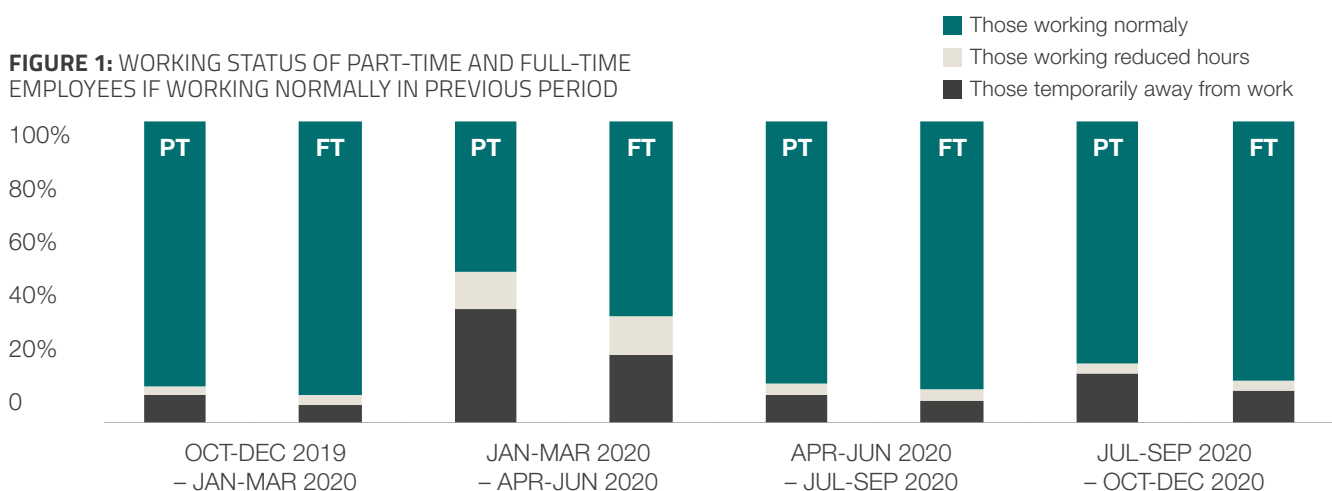
Almost 4 in 10 (38%) of part-time employees who were working normally prior to the first lockdown were temporarily away from work in April-June 2020 – approximately 2.3 million part-timers. In 2019, this figure was about 1 in 10 part-timers. Additionally, about 725,000 part-time employees were working fewer than their normal hours – representing a ten-fold increase compared to the previous year (see Figure 1, overleaf). With flexible furlough only starting in July 2020¹², many in this cohort had already had their hours and pay cut.

The impact on part-time employees is even more acute when set in contrast to full-time employees. Although the number of full-timers on furlough was high, it was a significantly smaller proportion of the workforce compared to part-timers. At the same time, while only half the part-time workforce were working their normal hours, two-thirds of full-timers were working normally. Of those full-timers not working normally, 23% were away from work temporarily and 13% working reduced hours.

Through the ins and outs of national lockdowns, part-time employees were time and time again disproportionately affected compared to full-time employees. In Q3-Q4, with the second national lockdown of November 2020, the proportion of part-timers temporarily out of work (if they had been working normally the previous period) was 16%, compared to 11% for full-timers (again, see Figure 1 overleaf).



FIGURE 1: WORKING STATUS OF PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES IF WORKING NORMALLY IN PREVIOUS PERIOD



Based on these patterns it would be reasonable to suggest that part-timers will have struggled through the third national lockdown in early 2021 too.

Additionally, within the part-time cohort, the impact has been more significant on women, young employees and those from a minority ethnic background. This again mirrors other published work.¹³

Our analysis highlights that the part-time penalty is exacerbated for women. Between the first lockdown (April-June 2020) and the summer of 2020 (July-September 2020) 263,000 female part-time employees became inactive (4.6%). This was far higher when compared to female full-time employees (1.3%); for male part-time employees, there were no marked changes.

Many of these part-time working women are likely to be mothers, who are more likely to be in poorly paid part-time roles, and not able to access the flexibility needed to progress. And while the numbers may be new, the trend of mothers working in precarious part-time work is not. For many, this may have delayed their increased exposure to redundancy; for most it is likely to impact their future job prospects and earning potential.¹⁴

None of this should be a surprise; throughout the pandemic, there has been a constant and steady flow of reports on mothers reducing their working hours, leaving their jobs or being made redundant to balance home schooling, work and other caring responsibilities.¹⁵ For fathers, it seems that only “supply shocks” have led to substantial changes in childcare responsibilities. There has been little response from fathers to the increased demands on the home front unless their employment status changed and they were furloughed / unemployed which, as we have seen, was less common for men compared to women. For mothers, the juggle persisted, irrespective of changes to employment patterns. Mothers are still left with a lot of childcare responsibilities.¹⁶

For minority ethnic employees – a cohort also often associated with poor quality part-time work – the analysis similarly shows a disproportionate impact. In 2019, between 5.6% and 8.3% of part-time employees from a minority ethnic background would be out of work even if working in the previous quarter; this rose each quarter in 2020, to 9.7% by the end of the year.

THE PART-TIME PENALTY IS GATHERING PACE

The data is clear that furlough is offering different levels of protection; and that it largely depends on pre-existing work status. Part-timers with little autonomy and control over working hours, and already in precarious work, are either just about hanging on, or falling away from work.

This precariousness – of being temporarily out of work, or having had hours reduced – is quickly becoming an indicator of future work status. And as with other trends, the impact on part-timers is even more severe when compared to full-timers, something which was especially noticeable in Summer 2020 during the temporary easing of lockdown.

Table 1 explores what happened to people in the following quarter **when their hours had been temporarily reduced** (most likely to be on flexible furlough from July 2020) in the previous quarter. It presents a fragile outlook for many part-timers.

- 39% of part-time employees who were working reduced hours in January-March 2020, were temporarily away from work in April-June 2020. And a further 20% continued to work reduced hours.

- When looking at the period from the first lockdown to the temporary easing of lockdowns over the summer, 21% of part-time employees who were working reduced hours in April-June 2020 were temporarily away from work in July-September 2020. The proportion working reduced hours who could now be on flexible furlough was similar to the previous period.
- The proportion temporarily away from work then rose again between July-September 2020 and October-December 2020 to 26%, which included local lockdowns and the national lockdown in November.
- By looking at the flows between different time periods, these data show that, for part-time employees, having hours reduced seemed to be an indicator of either being temporarily away from the workforce, or having reduced hours, in the next quarter. For full-time employees, the impact was greater on reduced hours (rather than temporarily being away), suggesting that flexible furlough was being used by employers.
- Across 2020, full-time employees were returning to their normal hours – from having had their hours reduced – in greater proportions to part-time employees.

TABLE 1: WORKING STATUS IF HAD BEEN WORKING REDUCED HOURS IN PREVIOUS PERIOD

	Temporarily away from work		Working reduced hours		Working normally	
	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT
JAN-MAR 2020 – APR-JUN 2020	39.1%	26.2%	20.2%	26.5%	40.8%	47.2%
APR-JUN 2020 – JUL-SEP 2020	20.9%	14.7%	18.1%	15.7%	61.0%	69.6%
JUL-SEP 2020 – OCT-DEC 2020	26.0%	16.7%	15.3%	16.9%	58.7%	66.4%



Table 2 explores what happened to people in the following quarter **when they had been temporarily away from work** in the previous quarter, and again, the impact on part-timers is pronounced compared to full-timers.

- 44% of part-time employees who were away from work during the first lockdown continued to be away from work between July-September 2020. The comparable figure for full-time employees was about a third (33.6%).
- For the next time period – between the summer and October-December, which included the second national lockdown – the difference remains stark.

- Almost two in five (38.7%) part-time employees who were temporarily away from work remained away from work, compared to 28.4% for full-time employees.

The pattern of full-time employees returning to their normal working hours at a higher proportion to part-time employees, which we saw following reduced hours, therefore persists following a temporary period away from work.

Those temporarily away from work in any period are likely to have benefitted from the Job Retention Scheme (JRS).

TABLE 2: WORKING STATUS IF HAD BEEN TEMPORARILY AWAY FROM WORK IN PREVIOUS PERIOD

	Temporarily away from work		Working reduced hours		Working normally	
	PT	FT	PT	FT	PT	FT
JAN-MAR 2020 – APR-JUN 2020	64.1%	44.0%	8.9%	13.3%	27.0%	42.7%
APR-JUN 2020 – JUL-SEP 2020	44.4%	33.6%	10.6%	11.8%	45.0%	54.7%
JUL-SEP 2020 – OCT-DEC 2020	38.7%	28.4%	6.5%	7.9%	54.8%	63.7%



CONSISTENTLY HIGH DEMAND FOR PART-TIME WORKING FROM PART-TIME EMPLOYEES

Time and time again, Timewise’s work has shown the gap between the need for part-time work and its availability. Part-time has long been the preferred option for more than four in five part-time employees,¹⁷ who are often seeking to balance paid employment with unpaid work, caring responsibilities and / or retirement.

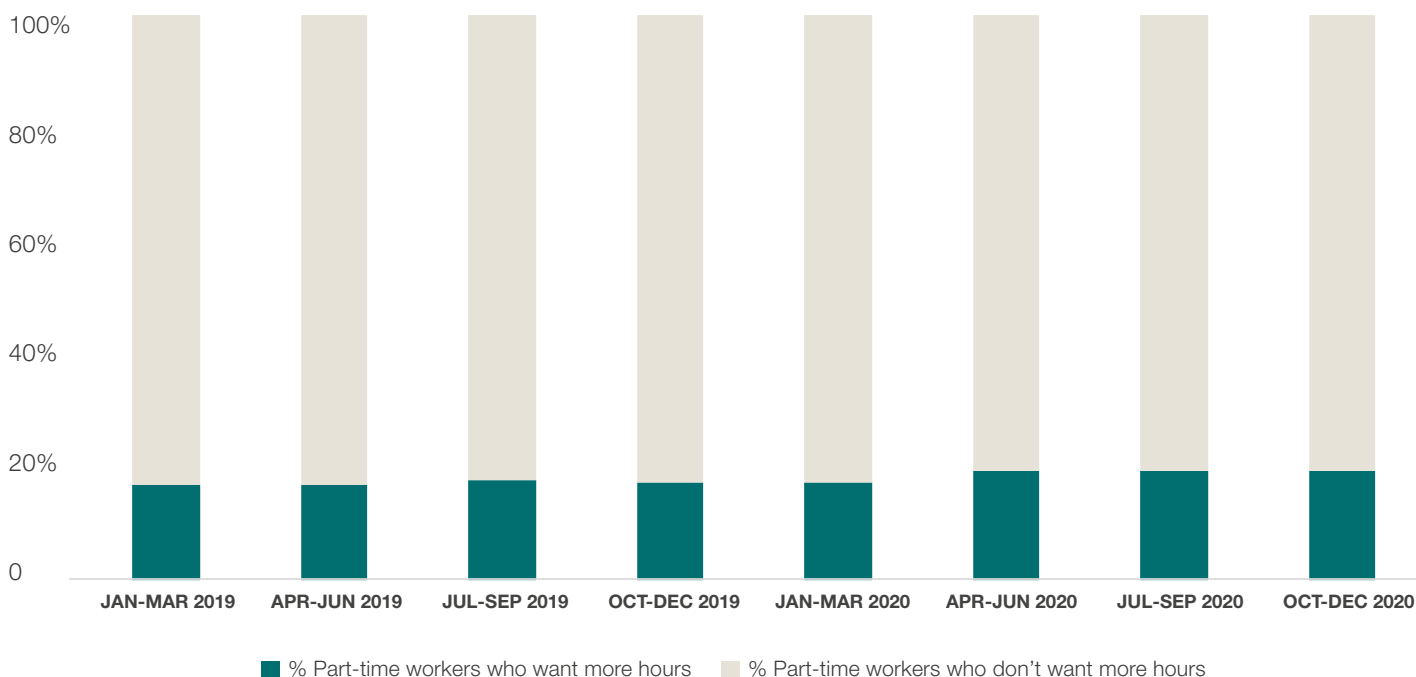
A significant minority – just under two in 10 part-timers – are looking to work more hours, but often face barriers due to the lack of flexible working opportunities available. And this doesn’t seem to have

changed considerably, despite all the uncertainty of the last two years. (Figure 2)

80% – the vast majority of part-time employees – therefore do not want to work more hours than they currently do. In numerical terms, this equates to approximately 5.8 million part-time employees.

“ It’s not a huge leap to suggest that a significant proportion of these employees can only work if they have a flexible role. They will not only need retraining to find jobs in other industries; they will also need those jobs to incorporate part-time or flexible options.¹⁸ ”

FIGURE 2: WHETHER PART TIME EMPLOYEES DO OR DON'T WANT MORE HOURS



03 CONTEXT AND PROSPECTS FOR THOSE SEEKING PART-TIME WORK

So, what does work look like for the millions of people seeking part-time work – and how likely are they to find a suitable role?

Overall, prospects for jobseekers looking for flexible work are poor, and even more so for those who want or need to work part-time. There is a disconnect between the number of people who want to work part-time and the availability of part-time jobs.¹⁹ And once again, this is not a new problem.

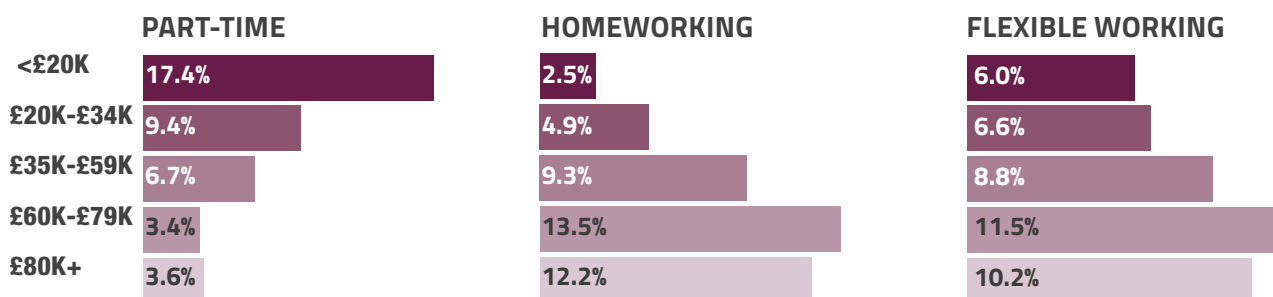
Over the past 10 years, Timewise’s Flexible Jobs Index has shown a steady increase in the number of roles advertised as flexible,²⁰ from 10% in 2011 to 17% in 2020 (pre-COVID) and to 22% throughout 2020.²¹ However this falls a long way behind the demand for flexible jobs; our research suggests that 87% of people either work flexibly or would like to.²²

And when it comes to part-time in particular, the picture is even worse; the Index shows that only 8% of vacancies are advertised specifically as part-time. It also fails to recognise the increased demand in homeworking that will fuel demand for more flexibility.

Even when roles are advertised as specifically part-time, they tend to be low-paid, with little autonomy over hours or options to work from home, whereas those which are advertised with access to homeworking or flexible working are in the higher salary bands. This cements the two-tier system between flex ‘haves’ and ‘have-nots’. (Figure 3).

Furthermore, the lack of quality part-time roles limits job mobility for flexible workers, both in terms of progressing up within their organisations or up and out into other ones. Pre-2020, part-time employees commonly faced a part-time penalty on pay and progression.²³ There is little to suggest that this penalty has been eroded in any way.

FIGURE 3: ANALYSIS BY SALARY LEVEL, FOR KEY FLEX TYPES, IN LOCKDOWN EASING PHASE



04 FAIR FLEXIBLE FUTURES: A CAMPAIGN FOR CHANGE

This new analysis shows that furlough has been effective in keeping many part-time employees in employment in the short term, but that the labour market attachment is weak, and the risk of reduced hours or job loss is strong.

The penalty for part-time employees is especially harsh when compared to full-time employees. It is layered on top of pre-existing inequalities which have constrained employment opportunities for those trying to balance work and caring responsibilities.

Without significant changes to flexible work opportunities, economic recovery will continue to be hampered for both employers and employees. And work – especially flexible work – will remain exclusive, rather than part of an inclusive recovery.

However, like many other gaps exposed or amplified throughout the pandemic, the lack of flexible work opportunities is not inevitable. Fair Flexible Futures is a campaign for change which sets out to reverse the trend.

Timewise has long been supporting organisations across the UK to adopt and embed flexible work, whilst simultaneously campaigning for policy change. We will continue to do this, but we know that it is not enough, even with a growing lobby of other campaigners/actors.

Systemic change, from employers and policymakers across national, regional and local government, is required to achieve fair access to flexible work and respond to the challenges, especially those faced by part-time employees. With flexible working on the agenda, and numerous publicly-funded programmes aimed at stimulating economic recovery, there is a renewed window of opportunity in which to take action. If not now, during the so-called flex working revolution, then when?

In response to the analysis in this report, we have set out our vision for change, and highlighted a series of practical steps which the government and employers can take to make it happen.

OUR VISION

Our vision for Fair Flexible Futures is focused on ensuring that the quality of existing part-time work is improved to support progression, that more flexible working opportunities are created, and that the bridge between job creation and progression is effective.

As we recover, renew and rebuild, we must therefore create a fair and flexible labour market, which will:

- support those in everyday jobs to access flexibility
- help the millions of people who want or need to work flexibly to find flexible opportunities
- remove some of the barriers to support those trapped in low-paid work and unable to progress.

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Our recommendations are targeted primarily at governments – central, regional and local – working alongside employers. Properly implemented, they will enable people to balance their work with caring commitments, provide for their families and avoid unemployment. They will also support businesses to cautiously manage growth during further uncertainty.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT

i. We are calling on central government to extend the right to request flexible working from day 1 as part of their long-awaited Employment Bill.

This something we first highlighted in 2011 with our Flexible Jobs Index, and was the reason behind our Hire Me My Way campaign; we have continued to argue for it within our role on the government's Flexible Working Taskforce. It would create a legal right for employees to ask for flexible work without having to wait 26 weeks. However, as we know, simply relying on legislative change is not enough.

ii. We also maintain that flexible work should be incentivised in job creation schemes which are being developed across the UK and across sectors.

We are already doing this through our Fair Flexible Work programme with the Scottish government; for example, by supporting skilled advisers from Scottish Enterprise to help employers offer flexible working as part of wider support grants for start-ups. Designing flexible working should be the norm in job creation schemes spanning diverse sectors, such as green jobs and social care.

iii. Additionally, recovery programmes such as the government's flagship Restart programme²⁴ should ringfence funding for flexible work job brokerage, so jobseekers who need flexible working patterns are better supported to find them.

This would not only better match employer supply with jobseeker demand, but also enhance progression opportunities for people trapped in low-paid part-time work. Our previous work with the DWP has shown the effectiveness of support and training to broker opportunities between employers and employees, enabling those working flexibly to progress.²⁵

iv. Finally, we are calling on the government to fund job design innovation to catalyse change in hard-to-flex sectors through a Challenge Fund.

This should be targeted at frontline sectors in which designing better quality part-time and flexible roles is more operationally complex. The fund should be used to pilot new ways of working and provide clear roadmaps for employers to adopt. It should initially prioritise sectors where skills shortages persist and therefore the business case for change is strong, such as health and social care.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

i. For change to happen on the ground, employers must support their employees to work in mutually beneficial ways.

This means embedding flexible work policies, such as advertising jobs as flexible from day one, in governance structures. It also means offering all staff genuine flexibility that works with their needs and those of the organisation (and not just limiting the offer to remote working). We have set out more detailed recommendations for how employers can drive this change in our most recent Flexible Jobs Index.²⁶

ii. Larger corporate firms, who have embraced flex for their existing workforce, could influence others to do the same.

The homeworking revolution has created the appetite for change; early adopters have a role to play in spreading its implementation more widely. We suggest that advocating for fair flexible work, for example through supply chains and procurement procedures, should become part of employers' ESG commitments.

Timewise has many years' experience in supporting employers to navigate the challenges of designing flexible jobs and offering progression opportunities, and we will continue to share our insights and advice as we come out of the pandemic and into a more flexible future of work.

We have a proven process in place for helping employers to: recognise the problem; take an active approach to incorporating greater flexibility; equip managers with the right capabilities; test and iterate what works, and embed it at all levels through working practices, behaviour and guidance.

But we know that there is a limit to what we can achieve on our own; and if we are to create the systemic change that low-paid and frontline employees need, we have to translate what works across a wide range of sectors and industries. The risks of not acting are serious: without significant change, we face increased unemployment and underemployment in the labour market; increased levels of stress and poverty for individuals and families; and businesses not being able to attract and retain people.

That is why we need to see stakeholders from across the board getting behind our Fair Flexible Futures campaign, and committing to taking action.

CONCLUSION

There remains much uncertainty about the future of flexible work; from the concept and implementation of hybrid working to the best way to restore confidence in the sectors that have been hardest hit. But what is no longer uncertain is that part-time employees, who have just managed to hang onto their jobs because of furlough, are now facing higher risks of unemployment.

And beneath the data, there are real people with real lives who are feeling the impact every day. Struggling to make ends meet, worrying about how to provide financially, trying to balance their much-needed jobs with providing the care their families need. That is the harsh reality for so many on the frontline, and if we fail to act, it will only get worse.

The recovery responses to previous recessions and economic downturns have failed to respond to this challenge. By working together, government, employers and other stakeholders such as Timewise can create Fair Flexible Futures, and ensure that this time, things are different.

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