

THE TIMEWISE FLEXIBLE JOBS INDEX 2021

An annual index of the proportion of UK jobs
advertised with flexible working options

RESEARCH PARTNER:

Gartner

SUPPORTED BY:

 **AVIVA**

 **EY** Building a better
working world

 **LLOYDS**
BANKING GROUP

INTRODUCTION

This is Timewise's 7th annual Flexible Jobs Index, and it coincides with a crisis in the recruitment market. Our report's implications for business have never been more pressing.

As the economy accelerates out of the pandemic, job vacancies are at their highest level since official records began in 2001¹, but candidate supply is sluggish. Employers across all sectors are complaining they 'can't get the staff', and in some sectors the situation is becoming a national emergency.

So why, then, are recruiters still failing to use flexible working – known to be a key employee benefit – as a tool to maximise job applications? Only 1 in 4 jobs is advertised with flexible working, which turned on its head means that people who need flexibility can't apply for 3 in 4 jobs. This is an unforgivable waste of talent in the current economic climate.

In particular, recruiters seem to be missing the easy step of clarifying their hybrid working patterns for new office workers, as only 8% of job adverts mention home-working. It's inexplicable – are employers still unsure whether they will offer partial home-working in the long-term? Or has it simply not occurred to them that candidates need to know, and will prioritise those jobs that do offer home-working?

But home-working is just one part of the jigsaw; employers need to think about time-based flexibility too. Part-time work, for example, is the preferred working pattern for 20% of UK employees², but is on offer in only 10% of job adverts. Meanwhile, flexible hours (variable start and finish times, or choice of shift patterns), is even more over-looked – this form of flex is offered in only 3% of job adverts. Yet for many people, having

more autonomy and control over their working hours can make the difference between being able to keep a job or not, and Timewise pilot studies have also evidenced improvements in motivation and well-being.

Flexible working is essential to creating fairer, more inclusive workplaces, because the people who need flex the most tend to be carers, older workers, and those with health concerns. It should need no explanation that inclusivity must start at the point of hire, and not be restricted to existing staff. Timewise therefore supports the recent news of the Government consultation on the 'right to ask for flexible working from day one'. Although, in our view, it would be even more of a game-changer if employers had a duty to consider whether a role can be flexible, and to say so in the job advert. Either way,

when legislation happens, it is likely to shift the dial significantly; but employers should not be waiting – they need to make a move now.

Faster employer action on flexible recruitment is long overdue, but with the current crisis in the market, and legislation coming down the line, it really is a case of 'if not now, when'? We hope our index report will help galvanise employers to consider flexible working as a matter of routine when they advertise jobs, alongside salary, pension and other benefits.



Emma Stewart

Co-Founder and
Development
Director, Timewise

HOW THE INDEX CONTRIBUTES TO JOB MARKET KNOWLEDGE

- The index fills a knowledge gap in job market statistics by reporting on advertised flexible vacancies, where flexible working is offered as a positive benefit to candidates. By updating the index annually, we are tracking progress in flexible recruitment.
- It also enables employers to benchmark their recruitment practices around flexible working against national averages - by salary, role type, region and types of flexibility offered.

CONTENTS

Summary of key findings **05**

Research findings:

- Year on year growth **07**
- Flexible jobs by salary **08**
- Flexibility varies widely by type of role **09**
- Few regional variances **10**
- Which types of flexible working are most common? **11**
- Differences in types of flex by salary level **12**
- What the findings mean for the UK jobs market **13**



METHODOLOGY

The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2021 is based on analysis of over 5 million job adverts from over 450 UK job boards across 2 periods:

- 01 January to 11 April 2021 (referred to throughout the report as Q1 2021, for simplicity). This was a period of national lockdown due to the pandemic, and also a period with seasonality that's consistent with previous years' index reports.
- 12 April to 31 August 2021 (lockdown restrictions were lifted)

The data source is Gartner Talent Neuron, and jobs were filtered using 17 keywords relating to different forms of flexible working. Data adjustments have been made to exclude job adverts where flexible working is mentioned, but not as an employee benefit.

Note on statistical variation: The Gartner Talent Neuron tool has been upgraded in 2021. Testing indicated that data may be up to +1% different, compared to results from the tool used in previous years.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY A 'FLEXIBLE JOB'?

In this report, 'flexible job' means any advertised vacancy that is either part-time or offers home-working, flexible start and finish times, flexible shift patterns, remote working, term-time, or job-share. Additionally, jobs that generically offer 'flexible working' or 'agile working' are tracked; these tend to be full-time jobs where the employer is open to flexible working patterns by arrangement with the candidate.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE OVERALL PICTURE

- The proportion of jobs offering flexible working rose to 24% at the start of 2021. This is a significant jump from 17% a year previously, especially given that the long-term trend had been one of painfully slow year on year increments.
- The reason for the jump is the huge increase in home-working forced by lockdowns during the pandemic (most of the annual increase had already happened by October 2020).
- The rate of increase has been slower since the end of lockdown 2021; in the period April to August 2021, the ratio was 26%.
- So, 3 in 4 jobs still fail to offer flexible working. There is plenty of catching up to do compared to what happens in the workplace, where half of all employees work flexibly³. And flexible recruitment lags even further behind the extremely high demand – 9 in 10 employees want flex⁴.
- Recruiters are missing a trick, as candidates are increasingly looking for flexibility from the point of hire. Failing to offer it means that a proportion of potential candidates will not apply⁵.
- The groups who need flex most are those with caring commitments (mostly women), older workers, and those with health conditions. So failing to offer part-time and flexible options at the point of hire creates particular set-backs to building an inclusive labour market.

DIFFERENCES BY SALARY

- Jobseekers' access to flexible working is highest amongst low paid roles (28%), and drops to its lowest ratio (20%) for roles paid £20k-£34k. This drop creates a pinch point in career progression for low-paid people who need to work flexibly.
- The flex ratio for jobs paid above £35k is fairly even, varying between 22% and 25%.

FLEXIBILITY BY ROLE CATEGORY

- Availability of flexible jobs varies by role category. The pattern is similar to previous years, with medical/health roles and social services leading the way: 1 in 3 of these roles are now advertised with flex.
- Office-based role categories are catching up, because of increased home-working, for example IT (28%), HR (28%) and marketing (27%).
- Other roles which can't easily offer home-working are getting left behind. The ratio remains stubbornly low for engineering (14%), construction (12%), and manufacturing (6%). In addition to barriers to home-working, gender inequality may be at play here.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FLEXIBILITY

- In the period since lockdown restrictions were lifted in April 2021, offers of home-working have settled back a little to 8% (from 10% during lockdown in Q1). This is surprising given that, at the moment, it looks as if hybrid working is the chosen way forward for most employers.
- The other main types of flex offered in job adverts are part-time (10% in the most recent period) and generic flexible working (also 10%). However, generic offers of flexible working are less helpful to candidates, who are usually seeking a specific type of flex.
- There are disparities across salary levels that will be causing blocks in career progression for people who need flexibility. Part-time is common amongst the lowest paid jobs (perpetuating the stigma around

part-time work) but is relatively rare in higher paid roles. Conversely, home-working and flexible working are disproportionately offered at higher salary levels and are rarely offered in low-paid jobs.

WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYERS DO?

- In this time of crisis in the recruitment market, employers can use the offer of flexible working, from the point of hire, to maximise candidate applications for jobs.
- This is particularly true for home-working. Many employers intend to retain hybrid working patterns in the long-term, and it's an easy step for them to explain their position in job adverts; but few are doing so.
- Candidates who want to work flexibly tend to search for the particular type

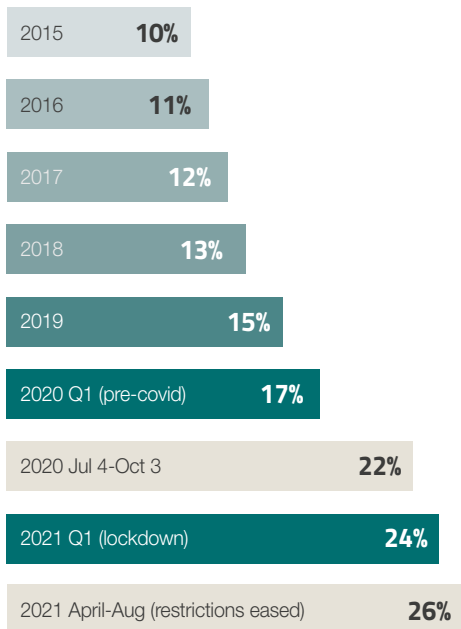
of flex they need, so best practice is for employers to avoid offering 'flexible working' generically⁶. Instead, they should look at the job design, and be clear on which types of flexibility are possible for the role (whether part-time, home-working or flexible hours).

WHAT SHOULD POLICY MAKERS DO?

- BEIS is currently consulting on the right to request flexible work from day one. Whilst this is a welcome move, we believe that the government's proposals should go further. Employers should be required to consider whether a job can be made flexible, and if they feel it can't, to explain why not. And critically, if it can be done flexibly, they should be required to state the flexibility on offer up front in the recruitment process.
- The government should also provide a package of support for employers, to help them create and implement flexible jobs and behaviours, alongside any new legislation. This would include training managers in how to design flexible jobs and manage flexible teams. And in some sectors, in which flexibility is more complex to achieve, it would involve supporting them to test and pilot different approaches.

YEAR ON YEAR GROWTH

PROPORTION OF JOBS ADVERTISED WITH FLEXIBLE WORKING



KEY FINDINGS

- The proportion of jobs offering flexible working as an employee benefit rose to 24% at the start of 2021. This is a significant jump from 17% in the same period in 2020, especially given that the previous trend had been one of painfully slow year on year increments.
- The explanation is of course the huge increase in home-working forced by lockdowns during the pandemic. Most of the jump from Q1 2020 had already happened by October that year.
- The rate of increase since that initial jump has now slowed – the ratio for April-August 2021 is only 2% percentage points higher than Q1 2021, at 26%.

TIMEWISE VIEW

Puzzlingly slow increase in flexible jobs: Given the seismic shift that has happened in many workplaces, with regard to both home-working and flexible hours of work, the proportion of flexibly advertised jobs is not increasing as much as might be expected.

Talent leads and hiring managers are missing a trick: Multiple research studies⁶ provide evidence that the vast majority of people want to work flexibly in some way, and that they are beginning to demand it at the point of hire. Failing to offer flexibility in job adverts means that some candidates will not apply. That's an inexplicable strategy in the current recruitment climate, where jobs are plentiful and candidate applications are sluggish.

Inclusivity failure: The continuing low proportion of flexible jobs causes a block in job mobility for people who are only able to work if they can find a flexible role: 3 in 4 jobs are closed to them. The most disadvantaged groups are those with caring commitments (mostly women), older workers, and those with health conditions. So failing to offer part-time and flexible options at the point of hire creates set-backs to building an inclusive labour market.

FLEXIBLE JOBS BY SALARY

PROPORTION OF JOBS ADVERTISED WITH FLEXIBLE WORKING, BY SALARY LEVEL



KEY FINDINGS

















- As in all previous index reports, jobseekers' access to flexible working is highest amongst low paid roles (28%).
- There is then a significant drop in the availability of flex, for jobs paid £20k-£34k (20%).
- The ratio then begins to climb again, to 24% or more for roles paid above £60k. As will be seen later, this is because home-working is disproportionately offered at higher salaries.
- Even at the highest ratio of 28% for low-paid roles, it's worth remembering that this falls well short of candidate demand for flexible working (9 in 10 people want it⁷).

TIMEWISE VIEW

Timewise has always called for equal access to flexibility for all. On the surface, the availability of flex is now much more even across the salary bands than it was in the early years of this index (when flexibility above £20k was rare). However, the devil is in the detail and our analysis by role category and flex type (to follow on the next few pages) highlights some sharp divisions between office jobs that can be done from home, and frontline jobs that can't.

FLEXIBILITY VARIES WIDELY BY TYPE OF ROLE

PROPORTION OF JOBS ADVERTISED WITH FLEXIBLE WORKING, BY ROLE

ADMINISTRATION/ CLERICAL  22%	CONSTRUCTION/ FACILITIES  12%	EDUCATION/ TRAINING  23%	ENGINEERING/QA  14%
FINANCE/ ACCOUNTING  24%	HOSPITALITY/ SERVICES  26%	HUMAN RESOURCES  28%	INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY  28%
LEGAL  23%	MANUFACTURING/ RESOURCES  6%	MARKETING/PR  27%	MEDICAL/HEALTH  33%
OPERATIONS/ LOGISTICS  13%	SALES/BIZ DEVELOPMENT  21%	SCIENCE/R&D  23%	SOCIAL SERVICES  34%

KEY FINDINGS

- As in all previous index reports, medical/health and social services lead the way: 1 in 3 roles are now advertised with some form of flexible working.
- However, several office-based role categories are catching up, because of increased home-working; notably IT, HR and marketing, which all have ratios well above average.

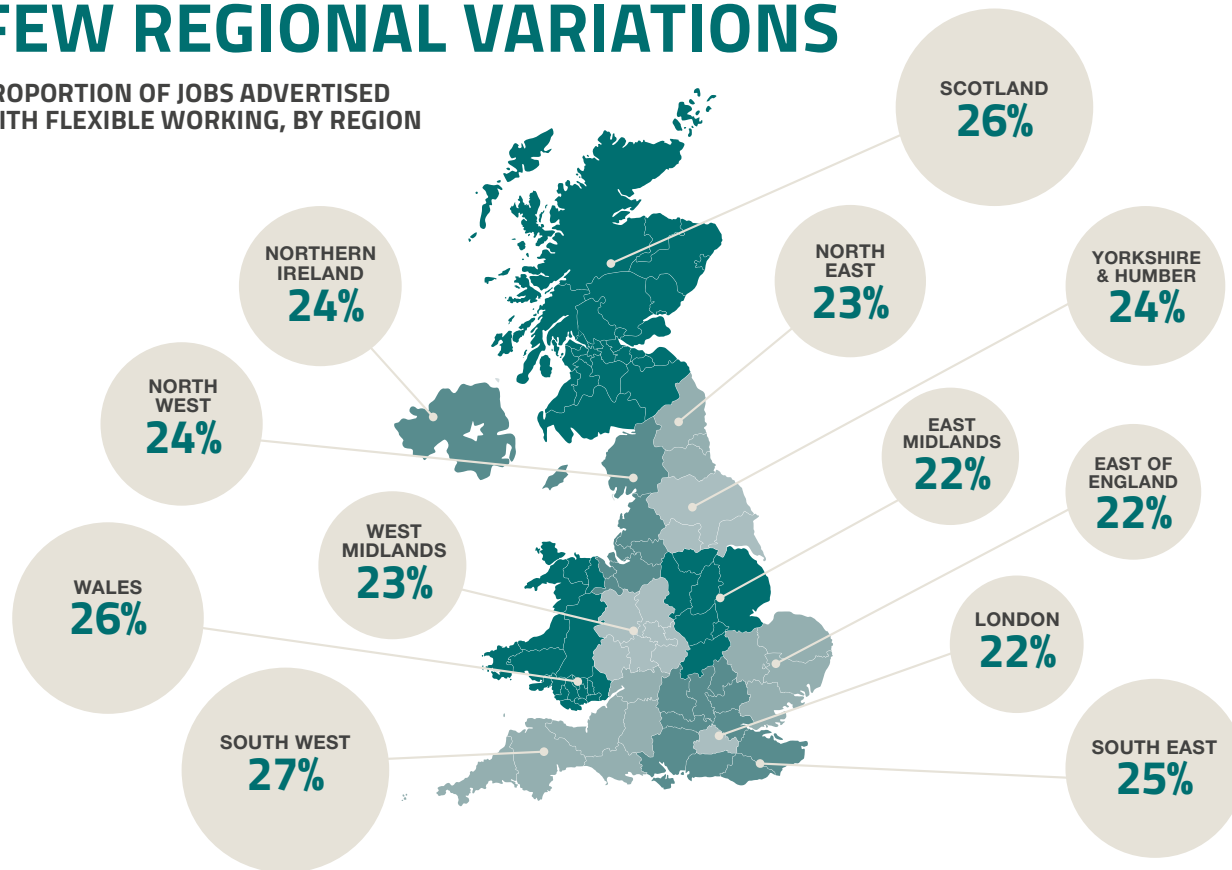
TIMEWISE VIEW

With the exception of medical/health, social services and hospitality, roles which can't easily offer home-working are getting left further and further behind. The ratio remains stubbornly low for four particular role categories: engineering, construction, operations/logistics and manufacturing. In addition to barriers to home-working, gender inequality may be at play here.

To avoid a two-tier flexible workforce, where some roles can have flex and others can't, investment is needed in better job design and in equipping managers with the skills to adapt to new ways of working, taking a fair and consistent approach. Sector based pilots, to explore flexible working patterns that are compatible with the operational requirements of different roles⁸, are also a good way forward.

FEW REGIONAL VARIATIONS

PROPORTION OF JOBS ADVERTISED
WITH FLEXIBLE WORKING, BY REGION



KEY FINDINGS

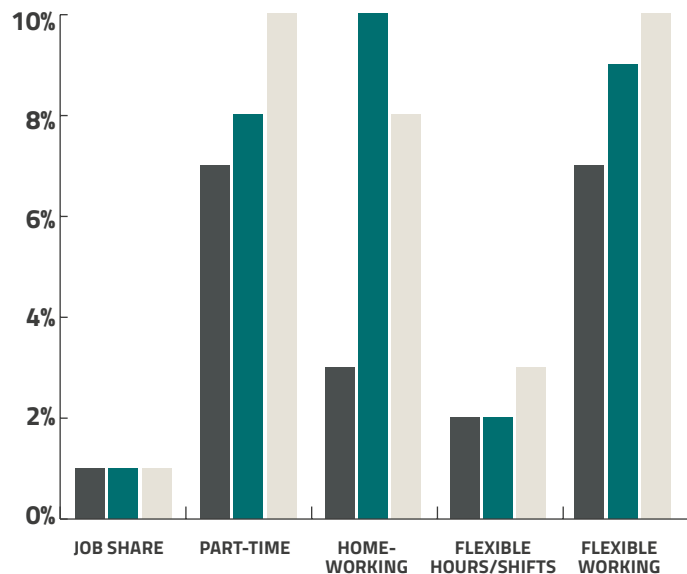
- The availability of flexible jobs is broadly similar across the UK, with the South West slightly ahead of the game (27%).
- As usual, London brings up the rear (22%), but the gap has close significantly compared to the early years of the index.

TIMEWISE VIEW

In early years' index reports, we commented on how significant regional variations in flexible jobs were largely due to localised salary variations (high regional flex ratios were usually linked to a high proportion of lower-paid jobs in that region). Recently, and especially since the pandemic, the flatter variations across regions largely reflect the fact that the ratios are now also much flatter across salary levels, as noted earlier in this report.

WHICH TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARE MOST COMMON?

PROPORTION OF JOB ADVERTS OFFERING SPECIFIC TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING



■ Q1 2020 (PRE-COVID) ■ Q1 2021 ■ APR TO AUG 2021

KEY FINDINGS

- At the start of 2020, as in all previous years' index reports, part-time and generic flexible working were the two most common types of flex, both being offered in 7% of all job adverts. In the most recent period, they have both increased to 10%.
- But the big story is the threefold increase in job adverts offering home-working, which peaked at 10% of all job adverts during the lockdown period in Q1 2021.
- In the period since lockdown restrictions were lifted on 12 April 2021, home-working has fallen back slightly to 8%.

TIMEWISE VIEW

Inaction on home-working: the incidence of home-working is low, given the huge shift that has happened in workplaces. Many employers are missing a trick by not promoting their new hybrid working patterns at the point of hire.

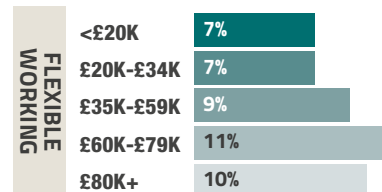
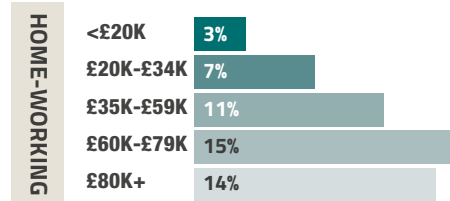
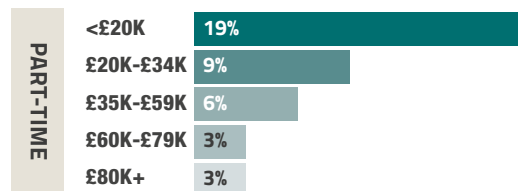
Part-time on the rise: the increase from 8% in Q1 2021 to 10% just a few months later is likely to reflect the types of jobs being advertised as we emerge from lockdown (part-time is relatively common in retail and hospitality roles).

Flexible hours get little attention: time-based flexibility is rarely offered in job adverts, yet it's an important option where home-working isn't possible. Giving workers a sense of greater autonomy over their working hours has benefits for wellbeing and motivation levels⁹.

'Flexible working' lacks clarity: 1 in 10 job adverts now say flexible working is possible, but without clarifying which type. This is much better than not mentioning flex at all, but best practice is to be specific (offering home-working, part-time, flexible hours etc). Recent research¹⁰ suggests that jobseekers find the term 'flexible working' to be too vague, and feel employers are just paying lip-service to having a flexible culture.

DIFFERENCES IN TYPES OF FLEX BY SALARY LEVEL

ANALYSIS BY SALARY LEVEL, FOR KEY FLEX TYPES



KEY FINDINGS

Looking at snapshots of the three main types of flex, a startling picture emerges of disparity across salary levels:

- Part-time is common amongst jobs paid less than £20k (19%), but then falls by more than half (to 9%) and is offered in only 3% of job adverts at £60k or more.
- Conversely, both home-working and flexible working are disproportionately offered at higher salary levels. Home-working is only an option in 3% of job adverts for roles paid less than £20k.

TIMEWISE VIEW

A two-tier jobs market of flexible haves and have-nots is revealed by the differences in types of flex offered by salary level:

- **Part-time stigma:** The continuing association of part-time work with low-paid roles means that the stigma around it will persist. And at higher salaries, people who can only work part-time are excluded from the jobs market, negatively impacting the UK talent pool, workplace inclusivity and the persisting gender pay gap.
- **Home-working for the higher-paid:** Softer forms of flexibility that support work-life balance, without compromising take-home

pay, are available for higher earners, but not for those on low-pay.

- **There is no one-size fits all solution:** Low-paid roles often have fixed working hours and locations, to meet operational demands and because of management reporting lines. Higher-paid roles carry more autonomy, and are more likely to be office-based with home-working possible. So there are valid reasons behind the disparity in flex types by salary level. However, with better job design, some form of flexibility is possible for all roles; finding the type of flex that's compatible with operational demands is the key to creating fairer, more inclusive workplaces.

WHAT THE FINDINGS MEAN FOR THE UK JOBS MARKET

IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS, AND WHAT THEY CAN DO ABOUT IT

- The recruitment market is currently in crisis, with job vacancies out-stripping candidate supply in our post-pandemic, post-Brexit world. Offering flexible working from the point of hire can help attract a wider candidate audience, as many people now expect to be able to work flexibly and are actively seeking employers who will welcome this. Employers need to take immediate action, as failing to offer flex means they are cutting themselves off from a proportion of the candidate market.
- The candidates who are 'lost' through the failure to offer flexibility include many experienced, mature workers who represent some of the very best available talent. They

also tend to be from groups that employers aim to support through equality, diversity and inclusion strategies (women, older workers, people with disabilities and health concerns). Flexible recruitment should therefore feature in inclusion and diversity plans.

- It's important to consider what flexibility is possible for ALL roles, so that no-one is left behind. While there is no one-size-fits-all flexible working pattern, there is always a way to offer employees more input and control – even in roles that are customer-facing or demand long hours. Being open and fair in the process is what matters.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKERS

- Transparency is important in job adverts, around which forms of flexible working are possible for the role: reduced hours (part-time), home-working (or a blend of home-working/workplace), flexible shifts, flexible start and finish times, or other options such as compressed hours or annualised contracts.
- Good job design is critical to getting flexible working right. Especially now that legislation on the 'right to ask for flex from day one' is coming down the line, employers need to implement management training on job design so they can be clear about the scope for flexible working during the recruitment process.
- People who work flexibly, particularly part-time, often get 'stuck' in their current roles, because there aren't suitable flexible jobs for them to move on to. Career progression is difficult even with their current employer, as roles they might move up to seem closed to flexibility. This is one of the key underlying causes of gender inequality, as it is common for part-time workers (who are predominantly women) to trade down to get the flexibility they need, or even abandon their careers entirely.

- For many people, the ability to work flexibly is a wellbeing and health issue. Two million people are not in work due to long term health conditions¹¹, and may never re-enter the jobs market unless roles are advertised with supportive working patterns.
- The problem has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Timewise research earlier this year evidenced that part-time workers were disproportionately affected by furlough¹². And many flexible workers have been made redundant in sectors such as retail, tourism and hospitality. When someone who needs their flexible working arrangement becomes unemployed, how can they find their way back into work, when so few jobs are advertised flexibly?

- Some of these groups have been protected from unemployment through the furlough scheme, while others have been economically inactive for far longer. Many will remain out of work long-term without a focus on flexible recruitment, and this will have a detrimental impact on both welfare budgets and more critically family living standards.

WHAT SHOULD POLICY MAKERS DO?

- BEIS is currently consulting on the right to request flexible work from day one. Whilst this is a welcome move, we believe that the government's proposals should go further. Employers should be required to consider whether a job can be made flexible, and if they feel it can't,

to explain why not. And critically, if it can be done flexibly, they should be required to state the flexibility on offer up front in the recruitment process.

- The government should also provide a package of support for employers, to help them create and implement flexible jobs and behaviours, alongside any new legislation. This would include training managers in how to design flexible jobs and manage flexible teams. And in some sectors, in which flexibility is more complex to achieve, it would involve supporting them to test and pilot different approaches.
- If this support were available, employers would be able to get to a position where hiring managers could proactively think through the

suitable flexible working options of a role, before the recruitment process begins. And hiring managers would see this as an opportunity to attract the best talent, rather than a problem to be solved.

- In the meantime, both national and regional government can signpost employers to guidance and support on how to sustain flexible working as we emerge from the pandemic, to enhance diversity and inclusion and wellbeing strategies, and future talent acquisition. This approach should be embedded into regional good work charters and inclusive growth strategies, alongside the continuing activities of the government's Flexible Working Taskforce.

REFERENCES

1. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/sep/14/uk-payrolls-covid-job-vacancies-hotels-pubs-restaurants-staff>
2. ONS data for May-July 2021
3. <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/flexible-working-impact-covid#gref>
4. https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Flexible_working_Talent_Imperative.pdf
5. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent/>
6. For example: <https://www.onrec.com/news/news-archive/13-million-brits-to-request-permanent-flexible-working-once-lockdown-is-lifted>; <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252498989/More-than-two-thirds-of-staff-want-flexible-working-to-stay>; <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/what-employees-are-saying-about-the-future-of-remote-work>; <http://hrnews.co.uk/not-working-9-5-nine-in-ten-millennials-now-expect-a-flexible-working-week/>
7. https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Flexible_working_Talent_Imperative.pdf
8. For example, <https://timewise.co.uk/article/making-construction-a-great-place-to-work-can-flexible-working-help/>, <https://timewise.co.uk/article/improving-nurses-work-life-balance/> and <https://timewise.co.uk/article/modern-retail-nation-of-part-time-shopkeepers/>
9. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/making-construction-a-great-place-to-work-can-flexible-working-help/> and <https://timewise.co.uk/article/improving-nurses-work-life-balance/>
10. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent/>
11. <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/news/2020/october/over-2-million-people-who-are-long-term-unemployed-result-disabilities-and-health>
12. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/the-impact-of-covid-19-on-part-time-employees/>



Timewise works to unlock the flexible jobs market in the UK. We share market insights on flexible working and flexible hiring, deliver consultancy to help businesses attract and develop the best talent, and conduct research such as this annual Flexible Jobs Index. We also run Timewise Jobs, a jobs board for roles that are part-time or open to flexibility.

CONTACT US ON

0207 633 4444

WWW.TIMEWISE.CO.UK

Timewise Foundation C.I.C. is a limited company registered in England and Wales
Company number: 5274371