

GREATER MANCHESTER FLEXIBLE JOBS INDEX 2021

A report on the proportion of jobs
advertised with flexible working options

Commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA)
and the Inclusive Growth Network (IGN), and funded by the IGN

Research partner:



INTRODUCTION

THE CONTEXT FOR THE INDEX

This report, commissioned by the Greater Manchester Combined Authority, examines the proportion of jobs in the region that are offered with flexible working at the point of hire. Just to clarify – our focus is on ‘good’ flexibility, which supports people’s needs for improved work-life balance without compromising on job security. Zero hours jobs are not included in the analysis.

The Greater Manchester [Good Employment Charter](#) already provides a range of support and guidance to employers to help ensure workers don’t have to choose between flexibility and security in work, thereby enhancing diversity and inclusion and encouraging fair pay. The guidance advocates clarity in all job adverts on the possibility of job flexibility from the outset.

The Greater Manchester Flexible Jobs Index 2021 provides new insight into the extent to which this is happening in practice, and how open employers really are to flexible working at the point of hire.

WHY FLEXIBLE HIRING MATTERS

Flexible hiring is a key factor in driving structural change in regional jobs markets in order to build an inclusive economic recovery.

It is of huge importance to workers. Without access to flexibility from day one in a job, many people (particularly women, older workers and those with health and disability issues) are unable to progress their careers; instead they stay either locked out of work or stuck in low paid part-time jobs they are overqualified for.

And, increasingly, it matters to businesses. In August 2021, as the economy accelerated out of the pandemic, UK job vacancies reached their highest level since official records began in 2001¹, but candidate supply remained sluggish. Employers across all sectors are still struggling to deliver core services, let alone factor in growth, due to lack of access to skills and talent.

So, to what extent are Greater Manchester employers offering flexible working to attract a wider talent pool? In short, not enough.

SUPPLY OF FLEXIBLE JOBS FALLS WELL SHORT OF CANDIDATE DEMAND

Findings from this research highlight that only 27% of job vacancies in Greater Manchester are advertised with flexible working, which means that people who need flexibility may be deterred from applying to many jobs.

It's concerning that so few employers are adapting their recruitment strategies to reflect today's workplace practices (such as remote working and hybrid arrangements). Perhaps part of the problem is not realising the need to be clear about flexible working options in their job adverts? Research by the CIPD indicates that most employers agree with flexible hiring in principle², but they may not be aware that many candidates simply won't apply for jobs that don't overtly offer flex³. This is a serious waste of talent in the current economic climate.

In particular, employers seem to be missing the easy step of clarifying their hybrid working patterns for new office workers, as only 11% of job adverts mention home-working. Either employers are still unsure whether they will offer partial home-working in the long-term or, again, it has simply not occurred to them that candidates need to know.

THERE'S MORE TO FLEX THAN HOME-WORKING

Employers need to think about time-based flexibility as well as location (hybrid) working, which has dominated the debate over the last year. Part-time work, for example, is the preferred working pattern for 20% of UK employees⁴, but is on offer in only 9% of the region's job adverts. Meanwhile, flexible hours (variable start and finish times, or choice of shift patterns), is even more overlooked – this form of flex is offered in only 3% of job adverts.

This is a major concern, as frontline workers in sectors such as health, social care, retail and hospitality have benefitted little from the home-working revolution. 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. If home-working for office-based roles continues to grow, we face the risk that the workforce will become divided into flexible working 'haves and have nots', with those in frontline roles being left behind and inequalities widening even more.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR POLICY MAKERS AND EMPLOYERS TO GAIN ADVANTAGE

Flexible working is essential to creating fairer, more inclusive workplaces; it should need no explanation that inclusivity must start at the point of hire, and not be restricted to existing staff. Faster employer action on flexible recruitment is long overdue, but with the current crisis in the market, and legislation coming down the line on 'the right to ask for flex from day one', it really is a case of 'if not now, when'?

We hope our index report will inspire the region's key anchor institutions to work with regional policy makers, and in particular the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter, to champion flexible hiring as part of wider inclusive growth strategies. We also hope that it will galvanise Greater Manchester employers to consider flexible working as a matter of routine when they advertise jobs - alongside salary, pension and other benefits.

With Manchester's economy forecast to grow faster than the UK average⁵, there is a real opportunity to ensure that access to good jobs and progression opportunities are shared by all.



Emma Stewart

Co-Founder and Development Director,
Timewise

FOREWORD

Here in Greater Manchester, we are committed to better employment standards for all our residents through our Good Employment Charter, with the aim to ensure that everyone has the pay and the security of hours to live fully, the right working culture where their voice can be heard, and importantly, the flexibility to find work which fits with their lives. Offering better, more secure, and more flexible working practices is not only the right thing to do by employees but also benefits their employers, creating a happier, healthier, and more productive workforce.

This report from Timewise, funded by and in collaboration with the Inclusive Growth Network (IGN), shows that we are making progress on flexible working across the city region, but with the clear message that there is still a long way to go. It is encouraging to see that we are better than the national average, but there is a pressing need to address all types of flexible work for everyone, not just for the highest paid and those able to work remotely.

The 62.5% of Greater Manchester's workforce who operate in the foundational, frontline sectors of our economy have continued to put themselves at risk over the last 2 years and many do not have the luxury to work from home as they provide care to our elderly and vulnerable, stack our shop shelves, and deliver our essentials. The findings are a clear reminder that flexibility does not start and end at home-working. All forms, including hours and part-time, should be integrated into recruitment practices and jobs from day one if we are to avoid a two-tier system in which our desk-based employees in the regional centre exclusively enjoy the benefits of flexible work.

This is a call to action for all employers in Greater Manchester to tap into the pool of workers that aren't currently being offered the flexibility they want and need and who are having to trade down due to a lack of options, placing artificial barriers to progress in their careers. Through our Good Employment Charter, we will be continuing to work with Timewise to show employers how they can offer flexible working and the clear benefits from doing so, both for the workers themselves and for the businesses and organisations that employ them.

The demand for flexibility is there across Greater Manchester and we need to cater for it. Timewise provides a set of clear recommendations for us to implement, starting with ourselves and other anchor institutions in the region to lead by example, and working through the ever-growing network of the Good Employment Charter. Together, let's make flexible work, work for everyone.



Andy Burnham

Mayor of Greater Manchester



Cllr Elise Wilson

Leader of Stockport Council and GM Economy, Business, & International Relations Portfolio Lead

OBJECTIVES, APPROACH AND DEFINITIONS

OBJECTIVES OF THE INDEX

- To fill a knowledge gap on the state of the flexible hiring market in Greater Manchester
- To use this insight to build a business and social case for employers, to encourage change in recruitment practices
- To enable the Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter to target existing support on creating and implementing flexible jobs and behaviours at specific sectors and locales across the city region.

APPROACH

The Greater Manchester Flexible Jobs Index 2021 is based on analysis of over 175k job adverts from over 450 job boards. 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.

ANALYSIS PERIODS

Job adverts have been analysed across 2 periods, to identify any differences to the flexible jobs market during national lockdown (differences were to be expected, for example in the proportion of job adverts offering home-working):

- 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.
- 12 April to 30 September 2021 (lockdown restrictions were lifted).

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.

A NOTE ON SALARIES

Whenever a salary is mentioned in this report, it means the full-time equivalent salary. So, for part-time jobs, it means the salary that would be earned if the role were full-time, and not the actual part-time salary.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE OVERALL PICTURE

- The proportion of online job adverts offering flexible working in Greater Manchester was 24% during lockdown in Q1 2021, and has risen to 27% since then. The region's proportion is now slightly ahead of the UK average (which was 26% in the post-lockdown period of 2021).
- So, 73% of job adverts in Greater Manchester in this time period failed to offer flexible working. This lack of supply fails to match candidate demand - more than half of all employees already work flexibly⁶ and 9 in 10 employees want flex⁷.
- Candidates are increasingly looking for flexibility from the point of hire⁸, so failing to offer it means that a proportion of potential candidates will not apply⁹. This is of particular concern for Greater Manchester's growth sectors, from technology to construction. The groups who most need flexible work are those with caring commitments (mostly women), older workers, and those with health conditions. Failing to offer part-time and flexible options at the point of hire therefore limits employers' potential to attract a more diverse candidate pool and contribute to a more inclusive economic recovery in Greater Manchester.

FLEXIBILITY BY SALARY

- Jobseekers' access to flexible working, in Greater Manchester, is highest amongst roles paid more than £60k (30% of job adverts offer flex). This is markedly different from the UK pattern, where flex is most readily available in the lowest paid roles. It is the first instance of the Timewise Flexible Jobs Index recording highest flexibility in highly paid roles, and is undoubtedly due to the rise of home-working, aligned to the prevalence of growth industries within technology and innovation.
- Roles paid less than £20k fare next best (at 25%), as part-time jobs are in relatively good supply at this level.

- There is a squeezed middle, with the lowest proportion of flexible jobs being in the £20k-£34k range (at 19%). This drop creates a pinch point in career progression for low-paid people who need to work flexibly.

FLEXIBILITY BY ROLE TYPE

- Availability of flexible jobs varies significantly by role category. The roles that now offer the greatest access to flexibility in Greater Manchester, all with rates above 30%, are: education, HR, IT, legal, marketing, science/R&D and social services.
- While office-based roles are seeing the greatest growth in the availability of flex, many roles which can't easily offer home-working are getting left further and further behind. The following role categories persist in offering particularly poor access to flexible jobs: construction (13%), manufacturing (7%) and operations/logistics (15%). A two-tier workforce of flexible haves and have-nots is emerging, with inequalities rising for many people in frontline roles.
- Most role categories in Greater Manchester have slightly higher rates of flexible jobs than across the UK as a whole. A significant exception is the medical/health category, where the proportion of flexible jobs in Greater Manchester is 28%, considerably lower than the UK average of 34%.

FLEXIBILITY BY REGION WITHIN GREATER MANCHESTER

- Access to flexible jobs is greatest in the city of Manchester (29%) and Salford (30%); in Tameside, the rate matches the Greater Manchester average (27%).
- All other areas have below-average ratios of flexible jobs, with little or no increase since lockdown ended.
- The differences between the regional areas are likely to reflect the density of professional office-based roles. Again, the two-tier flexible workforce is

apparent and investment in job design is needed to support more equal access to flex, for all workers.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF FLEXIBILITY

- The three most common forms of flexible working are part-time (offered in 9% of job adverts in Greater Manchester), home-working (11%) and generic 'flexible working' (14%).
- There are some notable differences between incidence in Greater Manchester and the UK as a whole: part-time is offered in fewer jobs in Greater Manchester, while home-working and generic flexible working are both more prevalent. It's important for employers to consider that part-time work is the most needed form of flexibility by many people (parents and carers in particular), and that generic offers of 'flexible working' are less helpful to candidates than specifying the type of flex.
- While home-working fell back across the UK following the end of lockdown in April, this did not happen in Greater Manchester. A contributory factor may be the prolonged lockdown periods in the region, which may have made business adaptation to home-working more entrenched than elsewhere.
- There are disparities across salary levels that will be causing blocks in career progression for people who need flexibility. Part-time is more 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 rarely in low-paid jobs.

WHAT SHOULD EMPLOYERS DO?

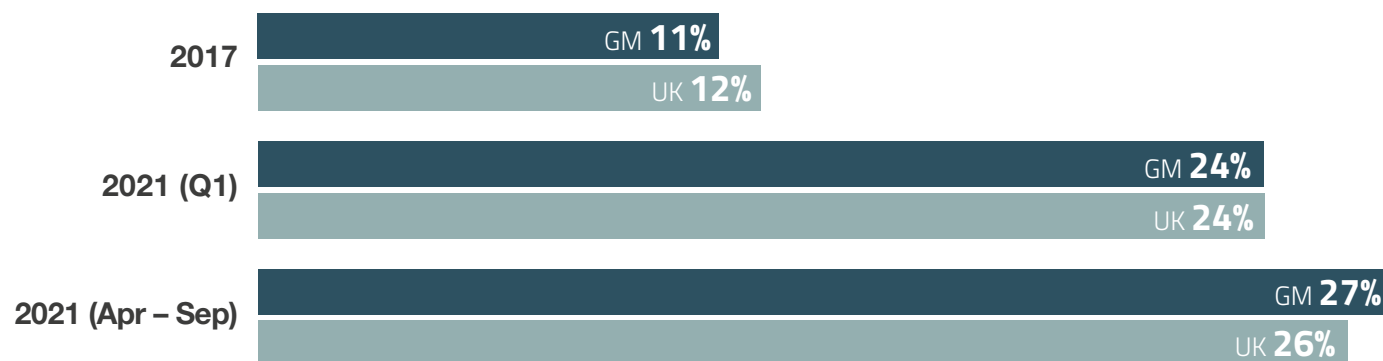
- Employers can use the offer of flexible working in job adverts to maximise candidate applications. This is acutely relevant at a time of renewed economic activity in Greater Manchester, a labour shortage in many sectors, a continuing shortage of skills in some occupations, and an untapped pool of economically inactive people (above the UK average).
- 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.
- Employers should also consider time-based flexibility alongside location-based flex wherever possible, to attract a more diverse candidate pool. Jobseekers who want to work flexibly tend to search for the particular type of flex they need, with part-time work being the preferred choice of many.

WHAT SHOULD POLICY MAKERS DO?

- BEIS is currently consulting on the right to request (which is not a right to be granted) 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 upfront in the recruitment process.
- The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter already provides a range of support for employers, to help them create and implement flexible jobs and behaviours. This could be extended to target additional support at specific sectors, to encourage a fairer and more consistent approach to flexible working for those in frontline roles as well as office-based ones.
- To drive wider systemic change, Greater Manchester Combined Authority could provide training for employment and skills intermediaries on flexible job design principles. This could stimulate wider action by employers, and better support jobseekers needing flexibility into work.
- And the GMCA could use soft leverage through its network of anchor institutions across the region, encouraging employers to adopt flexible hiring through procurement and commissioning processes.

OVERVIEW

PROPORTION OF JOB ADVERTS THAT OFFER FLEXIBLE WORKING, IN GREATER MANCHESTER COMPARED TO THE UK



KEY FINDINGS

- In the Greater Manchester area, as across the UK, the proportion of job adverts which offer flexible working has more than doubled since 2017 (when Timewise published its previous Flexible Jobs Index for the region).
- The bulk of this significant jump actually occurred during 2020, and the explanation is the huge increase in home-working forced by lockdowns during the pandemic, with remote or home-working being mentioned in job adverts.
- Flexible recruitment has continued to increase further since the last lockdown ended in early April 2021 – the rate in Greater Manchester is now 3 percentage points higher than it was in Q1 2021, at 27% (the national average is now 26%).
- It's interesting to note that Greater Manchester has improved its proportion of flexible jobs against the national average. In 2017 the region was slightly behind (11% compared to 12% nationally); in 2021 it has nudged slightly ahead (27% compared to 26% nationally, in the most recent period).

TIMEWISE VIEW

- Although the increases in flexible jobs are encouraging, a proportion of 27% is simply not high enough to support an inclusive recruitment strategy that matches jobseeker expectations, especially in this time of hiring crisis.
- And while Greater Manchester is ahead of the national average, the analysis in the rest of this report reveals uneven access to flex across different salary bands and role types. There is a need for a more consistent and fairer approach.

SUPPLY LAGS BEHIND DEMAND



9 in 10 people want flex



6 in 10 people work flex



3 in 10 jobs offer flex

Even before the pandemic, back in Q1 2020, 9 in 10 people wanted to work flexibly¹⁰, and 6 in 10 UK employees were lucky enough to do so¹¹. One research study at that time found that Manchester was ahead of UK practice on flexible working, with 71% of office staff in Manchester being offered at least partial home-working¹². All of this will only have increased further since then, with the explosion of home-working during lockdown periods. And indeed, multiple recent research studies¹³ indicate that flexible working is becoming an expectation rather than a wish, and that many people now seek it at the point of hire.

Yet against this high demand for flexible working, our Index shows that fewer than 3 in 10 jobs (27% in Greater Manchester) are being advertised with options to work flexibly.

TIMEWISE VIEW

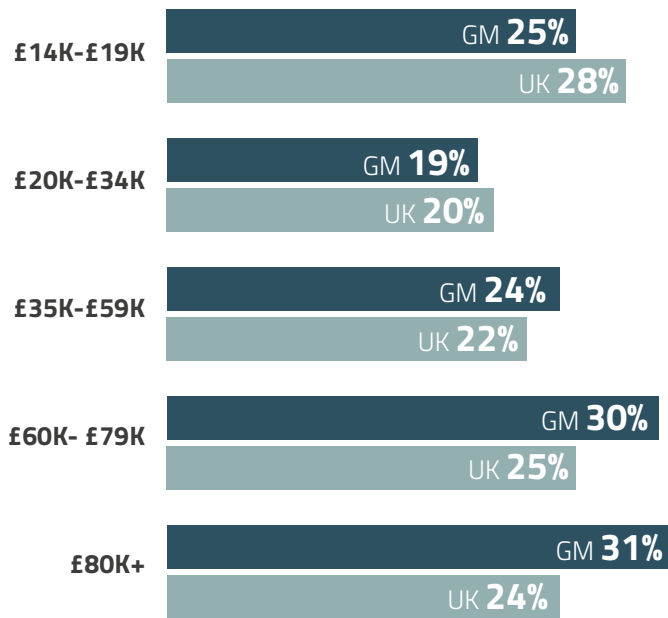
Talent leads and hiring managers are missing

a trick: Research by Timewise has shown that failing to offer flexibility in job adverts means that some candidates will not apply¹⁴. 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: at least 7 in 10 jobs are closed to them. So, failing to offer part-time and flexible options at the point of hire creates set-backs to building an inclusive labour market. The most disadvantaged groups are those with caring commitments, older workers, and those with health conditions. Women are disproportionately affected, as they take on the greatest share of caring responsibilities. This has been accentuated during the pandemic by home-schooling, with women more likely than men to have lost work or hours, and is particularly the case for communities facing racial inequality¹⁵.

FLEXIBLE JOBS BY SALARY

PROPORTION OF JOB ADVERTS THAT OFFER FLEX, BY SALARY



KEY FINDINGS

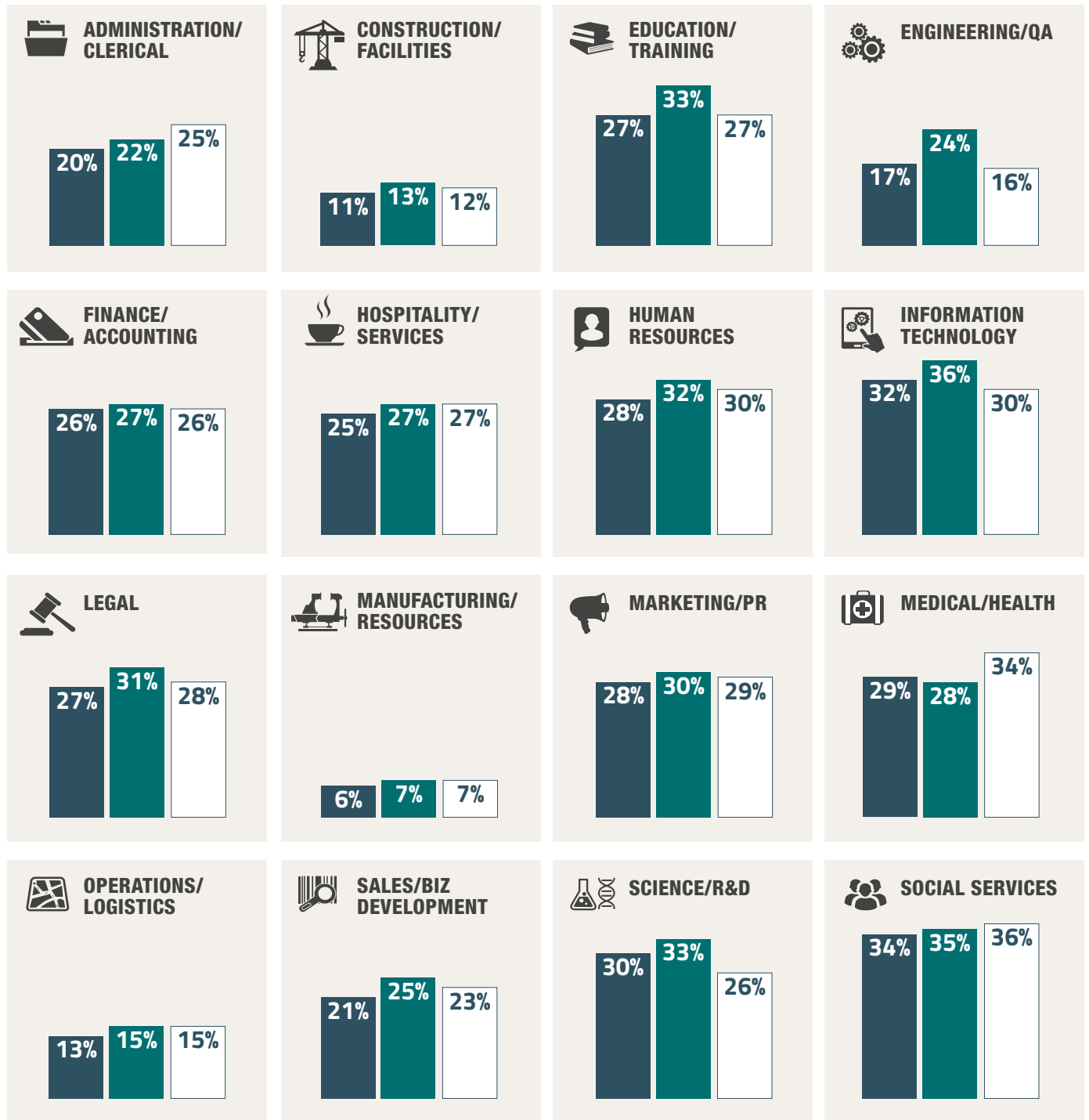
- Across the UK, the salary pattern for the availability of flexible jobs is the same in 2021 as it has been for the last few years: it's at its highest for the lowest paid roles (at 28%), then plummets at the £20k salary point (to 20%), then slowly begins to rise again. As will be seen later, this is because home-working is disproportionately offered at higher salaries.
- But the pattern in Greater Manchester is strikingly different: jobseekers' access to flexibility is higher for roles paid over £60k than it is for the lowest paid. This is highly unusual – it is the only instance in the UK where Timewise has come across this pattern.
- In Greater Manchester (as across the UK) there is a squeezed middle, with availability of flexible jobs at its lowest for roles paid £20k-£34k.

TIMEWISE VIEW

- The reason why the proportion of flexible jobs in Greater Manchester is at its highest for salaries above £60k may be the region's explosion of professional and tech jobs (which can more easily be worked from home). Another contributory factor may be the prolonged lockdown periods in the region, which may have made business' adaptation to home-working more entrenched than elsewhere in the UK.
- Greater Manchester's lower than average proportion of flexible jobs at low salary levels is a concern. 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. To avoid swathes of workers being left behind in the hybrid working revolution, a stronger focus is needed on supporting other forms of flexible working such as part-time, flexible shifts and variable hours of work. This is particularly important for rebuilding key service industries post pandemic, such as hospitality and retail; it's also critical to the region's infrastructure, for example in the social care and construction sectors.
- It's worth remembering that, even at the highest rate of 31% for the top-paid roles, the availability of flexible jobs falls well short of candidate demand (9 in 10 people want to work flexibly¹⁶).

FLEXIBILITY VARIES WIDELY BY TYPE OF ROLE

PROPORTION OF JOB ADVERTS THAT OFFER FLEX, BY ROLE TYPE



- Greater Manchester Q1 2021
- Greater Manchester April-Sep 2021
- UK April-Sep 2021

FLEXIBILITY VARIES WIDELY BY TYPE OF ROLE

KEY FINDINGS

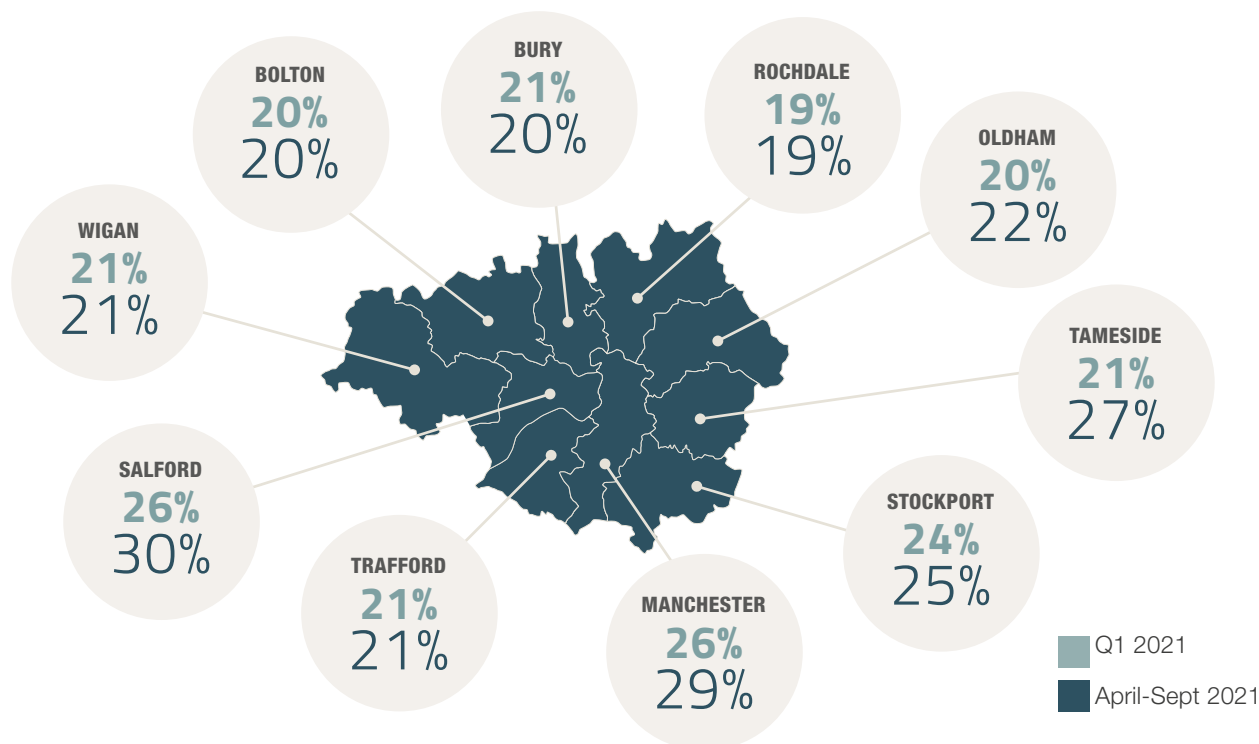
- Following the end of lockdown in April, flexible jobs in Greater Manchester increased across all role categories, with the sole exception of medical/health (where the proportion reduced slightly).
- During the most recent period (April-Sept 2021), the role categories with the greatest access to flexible jobs in Greater Manchester, (all with proportions above 30%) were: IT, social services, education, science and R&D, HR, law and marketing. Several of these are of course office-based roles which adapt easily to home-working.
- Engineering is worth a mention – across the UK this category has always shown sluggish rates of flexible jobs (16% in April-Sept); but in Greater Manchester there has been quite a leap during 2021, and the proportion is now 24%.
- Several role categories persist in offering poor access to flexible jobs in the region: construction (13%), manufacturing (7%) and operations/logistics (15%).
- Compared to the UK average, most role categories in Greater Manchester have the same or higher rates of flexible job adverts – the exceptions are medical/health (with only 28% of jobs offering flex in the region, compared to 34% across the UK), social services (35% versus 36%) and admin (22% versus 25%).

TIMEWISE VIEW

- While office-based roles are seeing a growth in the availability of flex, many roles which can't easily offer home-working are getting left further and further behind. The proportion remains stubbornly low for three particular role categories: construction, operations/logistics and manufacturing.
- 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.
- In challenging sectors, a good way forward is to run pilots such as those undertaken by Timewise's Innovation Unit (in construction, retail, education and the NHS¹⁷). Such projects can explore flexible working patterns that are compatible with the operational requirements of different roles.

REGIONAL VARIANCES WITHIN GREATER MANCHESTER

PROPORTION OF JOB ADVERTS THAT OFFER FLEX, BY REGION



KEY FINDINGS

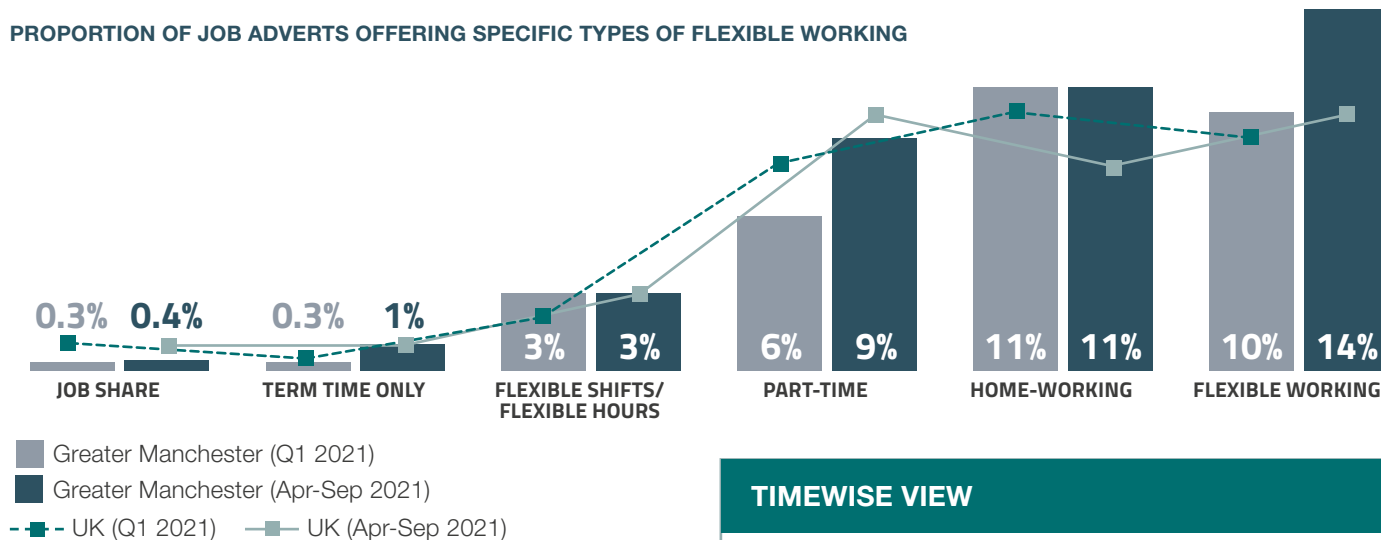
- Access to flexible jobs is greatest in the central areas of the city of Manchester (29% in the most recent period) and Salford (30%); in Tameside, the proportion matches the Greater Manchester average (27%).
- The gains in flexibility during the recent period of pandemic-recovery, compared to Q1 lockdown, have mostly occurred in these same areas.
- Other areas have below-average rates of flexible jobs, and (with the exception of Stockport and Oldham) have seen no increase since lockdown ended. In Bury there was a slight decline.

TIMEWISE VIEW

- The differences in access to flexible jobs between the regional areas of Greater Manchester are likely to reflect the density of professional office-based roles.
- Again, the two-tier flexible workforce is apparent; investment in job design is needed to support more even access to flex, for all workers across the region. This may be more difficult to achieve in SMEs and economically weaker businesses away from the prosperous town centres. There is a need to invest in more localised support services on flexible hiring through employment and skills intermediaries, so that employers of all sizes and across all sectors can maximise their access to local talent, and jobseekers across the region get fair access to good flexible work.

WHICH TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARE MOST COMMON, IN GREATER MANCHESTER?

PROPORTION OF JOB ADVERTS OFFERING SPECIFIC TYPES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING



KEY FINDINGS

- In Greater Manchester, as across the UK, the three most commonly offered forms of flexible working are part-time, home-working and the catch-all term ‘flexible working’. It’s worth noting that home-working has only been so prevalent since the start of the pandemic in 2020.
- There are slight differences, however: compared to the UK as a whole, part-time is offered in fewer job adverts in Greater Manchester (which may simply reflect the lower labour market prevalence of part-time work in the region¹⁸), while home-working and generic flexible working are both more prevalent in Greater Manchester.
- The availability of home-working in Greater Manchester has continued to increase since the end of lockdown in April (albeit very slightly, from 11% to 11.3%). This is in contrast to the UK as a whole, which saw a decline in home-working (from 9.9% to 8.4%).
- All other forms of flexibility have seen increases following lockdown, both in Greater Manchester and across the UK.

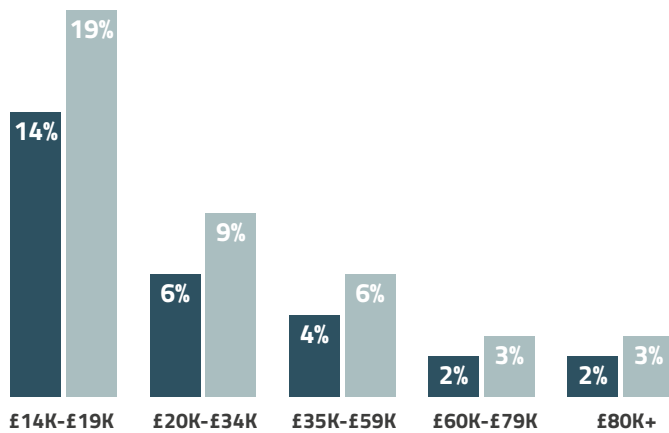
TIMESWISE VIEW

- **Inaction on home-working:** The incidence of home-working is actually low, given the huge shift that has happened in workplaces. Many employers are missing a trick by not promoting their new hybrid working patterns.
- **Low availability of part-time:** It’s concerning that access to part-time jobs in Greater Manchester is below the UK average, as this form of flexible work is critical to addressing wider regional issues such as child poverty and reducing the gender pay gap.
- **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 levels¹⁹.
- **‘Flexible working’ lacks clarity:** The most-offered form of ‘flexible working’ doesn’t clarify 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 research suggests that jobseekers find the term ‘flexible working’ to be too vague²⁰, and feel employers are just paying lip-service to having a flexible culture.

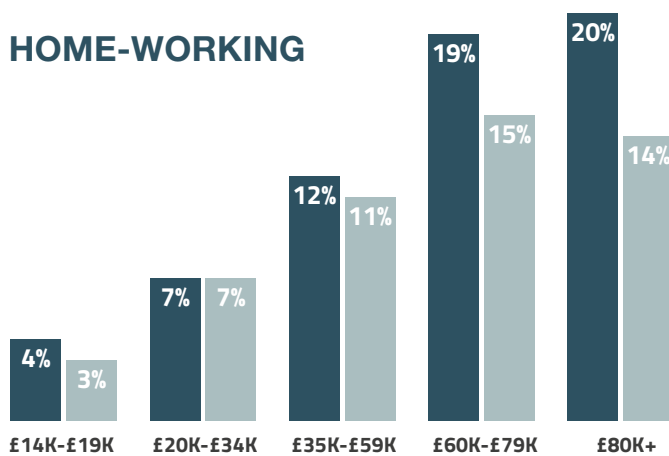
TYPES OF FLEX BY SALARY LEVEL, IN GREATER MANCHESTER JOBS MARKET

ANALYSIS BY SALARY LEVEL, FOR KEY FLEX TYPES

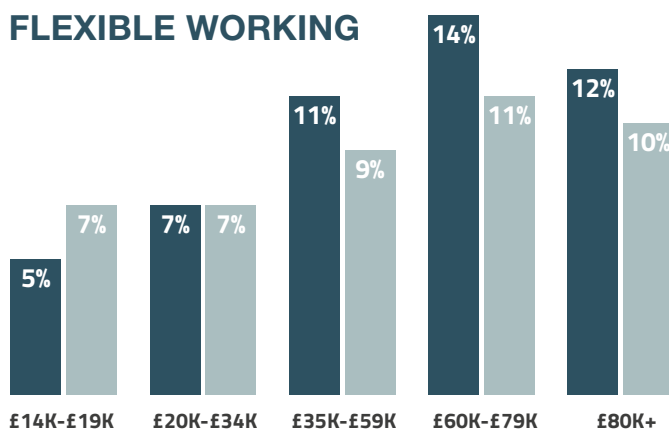
PART-TIME



HOME-WORKING



FLEXIBLE WORKING



KEY FINDINGS

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

- Part-time is relatively common amongst jobs paid less than £20k (at 14% in Greater Manchester), but then falls by more than half (to 6%) and is offered in only 2% of job adverts at £60k or more.
- Conversely, both home-working and flexible working are disproportionately offered at higher salary levels. In Greater Manchester, home-working is only an option in 4% of job adverts for roles paid less than £20k.
- The UK follows the same overall pattern, but in two instances the trend for Greater Manchester is exaggerated:
 - » Part-time is offered significantly less often in jobs paid less than £20k (14% in Greater Manchester versus 19% for the UK)
 - » Home-working is offered significantly more frequently in jobs paid over £60k (peaking at 20% in Greater Manchester, compared to 15% in the UK as a whole).

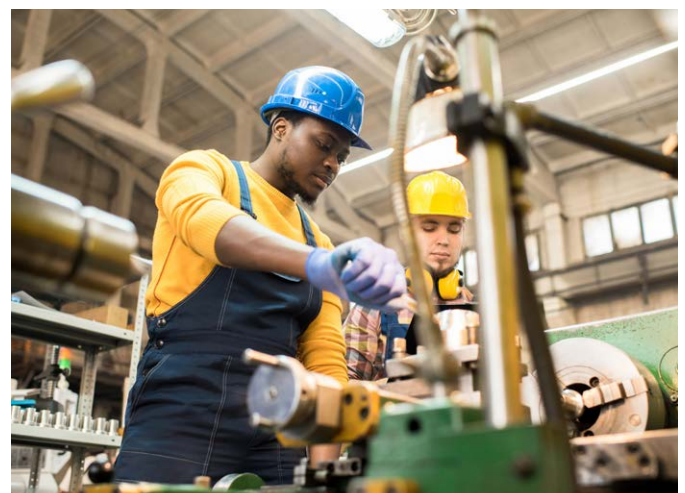
Greater Manchester
UK

TYPES OF FLEX BY SALARY LEVEL, IN GREATER MANCHESTER JOBS MARKET

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. Linked to this, strong anecdotal evidence (for example, in response from the public to [Timewise's Power List awards](#)) highlights a lingering perception that part-time work is incompatible with senior level jobs. At higher salaries, people who can only work part-time are therefore 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, while 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 GREATER MANCHESTER JOBS MARKET

IMPLICATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS, AND WHAT THEY CAN DO ABOUT IT

- Employers can use the offer of flexible working in job adverts to maximise candidate applications. This is particularly relevant at a time of renewed economic activity in Greater Manchester, a labour shortage in many sectors, a continuing shortage of skills in some occupations, and an untapped pool of economically inactive people (above the UK average).
- Employers can also become supporters of the Greater Manchester [Good Employment Charter](#), to access helpful resources and join a network of employers across the City Region who are working to make employment better.
- Failing to offer flex means that employers are cutting themselves off from a proportion of the candidate market. Many candidates now expect to be able to work flexibly and are actively seeking employers who will welcome this.
- It's a particularly easy step for employers to explain their position on hybrid working in their job adverts; but few are doing so, even though many intend to retain hybrid in the long-term.
- Employers should also look at time-based flexibility alongside location-based flex wherever possible, to attract a more diverse candidate pool. It's important to consider what types of flexibility are 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.
- Clarity 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. Jobseekers who want to work flexibly tend to search for the particular type of flex they need, and offers of unspecified 'flexible working' are less helpful.
- 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.
- Employers in Greater Manchester who are looking to enhance their approach to equality, diversity and inclusion, and also social mobility, should ensure that flexible recruitment features in these plans. The cohort of people who most need flexibility include many women, older workers and people with disabilities and health concerns; many of whom are experienced, mature workers who add huge value in the workplace.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKERS

- The impact of Covid has been unequal and unfair, highlighting starkly the inequalities that have existed for many years for those needing flexible work in Greater Manchester. Those living in more deprived areas have experienced both health and economic inequalities²¹, such as greater risk of exposure to Covid during the course of work, and higher rates of furlough and redundancy.
- People who work flexibly, particularly part-time, are evidenced to get trapped in low pay and struggle to progress in work, not always due to a lack of skills but rather to a lack of better quality flexible roles to move into. This is one of the key underlying causes of in-work poverty and 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 people with health conditions, flexible work is key to remaining connected to the labour market. The GM Working Well programme has been exploring how to support those in the region through addressing skills gaps linked to jobs.

But there is also a need to overcome structural barriers and provide working patterns that support the needs of this group of people - even more so after the longer term health shocks caused by the pandemic.

- One in 5 vacancies in Greater Manchester is linked to skills shortages, but a third of workers have skills that are higher than their job requires²². Previous research from Timewise highlights that many people needing flexibility compromise on pay for flex²³. For workers to maximise their earnings, they need better support and access to better quality flexible jobs, so they no longer have to trade pay for their need to balance work with care or health.
- Many people have been protected from unemployment through the furlough scheme, while others have been economically inactive for far longer. As the economy recovers, there is a risk that certain groups 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, on family living standards.

WHAT SHOULD POLICY MAKERS DO?

- BEIS is currently consulting on the right to request (which is not a right to be granted) 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 upfront in the recruitment process.
- The Greater Manchester Good Employment Charter already provides a range of support for employers, to help them create and implement flexible jobs and behaviours. This could be extended to target additional support at specific sectors, to encourage a fairer and more consistent approach to flexible working for those in frontline roles as well as office based ones.
- Local authorities and anchor institutions can lead by example to champion flexible working and hiring, by promoting their own case studies of employees working flexibly at senior levels.
- To drive wider systemic change, Greater Manchester Combined Authority could provide training for employment and skills intermediaries on flexible job design principles. This could stimulate wider action by employers, and better support jobseekers needing flexibility into work.
- And the GMCA could use soft leverage through its network of anchor institutions across the region, encouraging employers to adopt flexible hiring through procurement and commissioning processes.



1. ONS, August 2021
2. <https://www.cipd.co.uk/about/media/press/021221flexible-working-consultation-response>
3. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent/>
4. ONS, May-July 2021
5. <https://alliance-investments.com/news/manchester-one-of-the-fastest-growing-cities-in-europe/>
6. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/flexible-working_tcm18-58746.pdf
7. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/flexible-working-talent-imperative>
8. Seen, for example, in research studies by McKinsey, Microsoft and Workthere
9. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent>
10. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/flexible-working-talent-imperative>
11. https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/flexible-working_tcm18-58746.pdf
12. <https://www.getliving.com/press/manchester-office-workers-have-the-most-flexible-hours-in-the-uk>
13. Seen, for example, in research studies by McKinsey, Microsoft, and Direct Line
14. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent>
15. Refs: See, for example: ONS 2020, Xue and McMunn 2020, Chandola et al 2020, Fawcett Society 2020
16. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/flexible-working-talent-imperative>
17. Timewise undertook pilots in construction, retail and the NHS
18. Annual Population Survey (ONS)
19. As seen, for example, in Timewise pilots in construction and the NHS
20. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/gaining-an-edge-in-the-fight-for-talent>
21. https://www.gmhsc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Executive-report_GM_final.pdf
22. <https://www.greatermanchester-ca.gov.uk/media/4388/greater-manchester-local-skills-report-and-labour-market-plan-march-2021.pdf>
23. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/the-flexibility-trap/>



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 Flexible Jobs Index for Greater Manchester. We also run Timewise Jobs, a jobs board for roles that are part-time or open to flexibility.

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