

A QUESTION OF TIME:

Experiences and
perceptions of
part-time working



*Covid has changed things. People want to pursue interests
beyond work. Part-time shouldn't just be for parents.*

YOUNGER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

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FOREWORD

For nearly 20 years, Timewise has championed part-time and flexible working. This report uncovers significant disparities in the perception and experience of part-time work that need addressing to ensure greater equality. For some, working fewer hours is a route to greater wellbeing, but for others the trade-off for greater flexibility or reduced hours is work below their skill level and a lack of progression.

The world of flexible working more generally has changed rapidly since the pandemic in terms of hybrid working, but the dial has hardly shifted for frontline or part-time workers. Our annual Flexible Jobs Index shows an increase over time in the proportion of vacancies advertised with flexible working options, but only 12% offer part-time and these are still primarily in lower paid jobs.

Our Power List campaign, run for 10 years, helped showcase that it's possible to perform senior roles part-time, busting the myth that 'part time = part committed'. We're proud of having changed minds with that campaign but wanted to ensure that we also create space to tell a more comprehensive story – hearing views on part-time working from people from different backgrounds from across the UK with a range of working patterns.

So the aim of this new research, A Question of Time, has been to capture the whole picture of part-time working in the UK right now. We're excited to share these voices. It's not a simple story. Reasons for part-time working are varied, for some it's an active choice whereas for others it's a necessity. But it's clear that we still have a long way to go to overcome some of the prejudices and barriers which remain in place simply because some people work fewer hours than others.

The recent and growing interest in the four-day week demonstrates the demand for opportunities to work fewer hours. However, ironically, it has tended to focus on the needs of full-time employees at the exclusion of those who work part-time. Until the four-day week becomes widely available across industries and organisations, part-time work holds a strategic role in tackling key economic and societal challenges: from labour shortages to managing health and wellbeing to promoting social mobility and cohesion.

We hope this report encourages employers to look carefully at how they design roles and support part-timers within their organisations. It also provides rich data and insight for those interested in good work and progressing people in low paid employment. We'll continue to champion this workforce – and popular working arrangement – until the availability of quality part-time jobs catches up with the demand.



Claire Campbell
CEO, Timewise

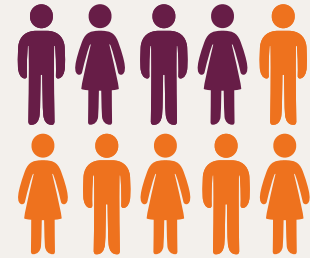
INTRODUCTION



The reasons people give for working part-time are highly gendered. Women predominantly work part-time to manage their caring responsibilities, whereas men do so to better manage their mental and physical health.



Satisfaction with working hours is strongly associated with pay and security. More respondents from high income households report satisfaction with their hours than those from low income households. And those in permanent employment are more likely to say they are satisfied with their hours than those working in more insecure employment.



Over a third of full-time workers report that they would consider working part-time in the future (37%). This rises to 41% among women and 43% in high income households.

Nearly a quarter of UK employees worked part-time in 2023 – that's over eight million people. Part-time work is especially prevalent among women (38% of female employees work part-time versus 14% of men). However, part-time work remains stubbornly associated with low-skilled and low-paid work. It's relatively uncommon among managers and professionals, and progression opportunities for people wanting to work reduced hours are limited.

Because of the importance of part-time work in opening jobs to people who otherwise wouldn't be able to participate in the labour market – reducing economic inactivity and unemployment – it's key to tackling economic and societal challenges, from labour shortages to helping people manage their health, wellbeing and caring responsibilities.

Yet, while the pandemic had a seismic effect on some groups of workers' access to flexible working arrangements (predominantly those in office-based roles), it did little to alter trends in the take up of part-time work. The pandemic may have prompted reflection on the future of work and how it's organised and managed, but too often this has excluded consideration of reduced hours working, which continues to be in high demand and to which access is poor for many groups of workers.

In this report, we shine a spotlight onto people's experiences and perceptions of part-time working to contribute much needed new insight into labour market inequalities. By gathering a deeper understanding of the realities of part-time work, and differing attitudes towards it, we're better able to direct action to deliver change, improving the lives of workers by granting them greater flexibility and choice.

In partnership with Opinium, we surveyed 4,001 workers (both full-time and part-time) and additionally undertook focus groups to gain a deeper understanding of people's experiences and views of part-time working.

What's clear from our research is that while many people want the option to work reduced hours, and see it as central to managing their life and mental and physical health, there are distinct cultural and economic barriers to accessing it and to maintaining career development opportunities. Part-time work is perceived to limit career progression, particularly among the 'gatekeepers' of career success: managers. Yet, ironically, managers and professionals are the most likely occupational group to express an interest in working part-time in the future.

We share practical recommendations for employers and policymakers, underpinned by our new findings, to promote culture change in organisations and stimulate greater career mobility to reduce inequality.

KEY FINDINGS

WHO WORKS PART-TIME AND WHY?

- A quarter of our survey respondents work part-time. Among those working part-time, 76% are women and 24% are men, and 43% are aged 50+.
- Among women who work part-time, the most cited reason was to manage caring responsibilities (32% rising to 45% among women aged 35-49). In contrast, only 13% of men who work part-time said they did so to manage caring responsibilities.
- More men than women reported working part-time to better manage their mental or physical health (25% versus 20%).
- Health related problems are reported to be a more common reason for part-time work among lower income groups, regardless of gender, ethnicity or education, than among mid- and high-income groups.
- The proportion of people working part-time is similar across education levels but there is variation by income: 45% of low-income respondents work part-time in contrast to 12% of those with the highest household incomes.

HOW SATISFIED ARE PEOPLE WITH THEIR WORKING HOURS?

- More full-time workers than part-time workers say they are satisfied with their working hours (71% versus 63%) and household income and job security have strong effects in this context.
- Respondents with the highest household income are 14 percentage points more likely to be satisfied with their hours than those with the lowest household income. And those in permanent employment are 13 percentage points more likely to be satisfied with their hours than those working in more insecure employment (fixed-term, agency or variable hours).
- Being a female worker, working part-time and being on a low income are all factors contributing to feeling less satisfied with working hours.

INTEREST OF FULL-TIME WORKERS IN WORKING PART-TIME

- Over a third of full-time workers would consider working part-time in the future (37%). This rises to 41% among women and 43% in high income households.
- Considering occupations, those in managerial and professional roles are more likely to say they'd consider working part-time in the future (40%) than any other group. Yet they are currently the least represented in part-time roles.
- The primary reasons given for considering part-time options in the future are to spend time with family (42%) and to manage stress and mental health (41%).
- Almost half of workers over 50 said they would consider working part-time to supplement their income once retired.
- Younger workers spoke of the appeal of working reduced hours, giving a variety of reasons including to pursue personal interests or to be able to develop a portfolio career. While they saw part-time as a working arrangement that is currently strongly associated with parents and carers, they felt that it did not need to be and could be more accessible to all.
- Among those who would not consider working part-time in the future, reduced income is the main reason (58%, rising to 63% among women working in routine occupations).

ATTITUDES TOWARDS PART-TIME WORKING

- Almost half of all respondents (46%) consider part-time working to limit career progression. Age, gender, ethnicity and social class are factors that influence attitudes towards part-time working.
- More younger workers reported part-time work as limiting career development than older workers (52% versus 37%). This pattern was reinforced in focus groups where younger workers expressed concern over part-time working in the context of their career development.

- More Asian respondents agreed with the statement ‘part-time working limits career progression’ than those from white ethnic groups (58% versus 45%).
- More respondents disagreed than agreed with the statement ‘part-time working is not a barrier for progression into management (36% versus 32%). Notably, more managers than those in routine occupations (40% versus 29%) disagreed with the statement.
- Men are 16 percentage points more likely than women to report seeing part-time workers as less ambitious than full-time workers.
- In focus groups, the majority perceived part-time working to be an arrangement primarily for parents and carers, not as an option available to all.
- Likewise, workers from minority ethnic backgrounds stated that they are less comfortable than their white counterparts to talk with their employers about their working arrangements (37% versus 28%). And, notably, they expressed more interest in utilising the new right to request flexible options (61% versus 48%). Groups less comfortable with having informal conversations over their working arrangements are more likely to leverage the new rights and pursue formal options.

WORKPLACE EMPOWERMENT

- A third of workers (33%) have kept the flexible working arrangements they gained during the pandemic. However, there are significant occupational and income differences. While 41% of people in managerial and professional occupations gained flexible options, only 8% of people in routine occupations did.
- A third of workers have varied working hours (34%) in comparison to half (52%) who report having a working schedule that rarely or never changes. Part-time workers were among those less likely to have control over their working hours and a secure working pattern, alongside those working in routine occupations and those with temporary contracts.
- Younger workers reported feeling less comfortable to speak to their employers about changing their working arrangements and more reported that they would consider using the new day one right to request flexible working than other age groups. 34% of younger workers said they would not feel comfortable to speak to their employer about changing their working pattern in comparison to 23% of older workers (50+).

RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EMPLOYERS

- **A range of flexible working arrangements should be available to all roles.** This would enable people to reduce or increase their working hours if they choose to do so, giving more choice and control. Compressed hours, term-time hours, annualised hours and flexi-time can be particularly valuable to those juggling work with caring commitments.
- **Performance objectives should focus on outcomes.** Where workplace cultures associate performance closely with hours worked there are considerable challenges for part-time workers in the context of value, inclusion and belonging. Employers need to place greater emphasis on outputs and outcomes in relation to hours worked. This will allow roles to be valued for tangible achievements rather than hours worked.
- **Showcasing the possibilities of working part-time in a wide range of roles, including senior ones, can help bust the myth that part-time is a barrier to progression.** Presenteeism can be a barrier to progression for part-time workers and deter employees from requesting reduced hours options. In some businesses with an entrenched 'always on' culture, it may pose a particular barrier for early career talent.
- **Part-time work needs to be considered in the context of equality, diversity and inclusion strategy.** Part-time and flexible working data should be intersected with workforce diversity data to track and monitor the take-up of different working arrangements and ensure fairness. Inclusion training for employees at all levels should address prejudices against part-time workers. More broadly, part-time should be available for all workers who would like to work fewer hours.

- **Adopt a gender- and reason-neutral approach in defining and enabling part-time options and develop a communications plan so they are clearly available to all and not just to parents and carers.** Workers should not be required to provide a 'reason' for working part-time. Managers should take a proactive approach to discussing working hours with employees and avoid full-time working being seen as the default.
- **Job share should be seen as a key solution to making part-time an option in senior roles and enabling career development.** Increased training and support for HR teams may be required to build internal expertise in designing roles with part-time and job share options.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT AND POLICYMAKERS

- **Government should remove barriers for SMEs to employ people on a part-time basis.** Small employers may be deterred from offering part-time contracts because of increased costs, such as National Insurance. Government should therefore work in partnership with representative organisations to explore how to reduce the administrative and financial burden of employing staff on a part-time basis.
- **Sector-level action needs to be taken to improve progression routes for part-time workers.** Case studies and learnings should be shared within and across sectors to demonstrate how to open access to part-time roles at mid- and senior levels to enable career progression and social mobility. This should be seen as critically important to attracting and retaining workers but also to 'skills for growth' agendas.
- **Good Youth Employment Standards need to include best practices to support part-time and flexible working options from day one in a role, regardless of age or experience.** Young people are less likely to have the confidence to talk to their manager about their working arrangements, and a proactive approach is key to workplace inclusion and belonging.

OUR APPROACH

Timewise adopted a mixed methods approach to this research.

Firstly, we undertook analysis of the UK's largest study on employment circumstances, the Labour Force Survey (LFS), looking at trends in part-time work from 2018 to 2022 to provide the context for our primary research.

In partnership with Opinium, we undertook an online survey among 4001 workers in the UK. The sample was representative of all workers in employment, including permanent and temporary (zero-hours, fixed-term). We gathered demographic information including: gender, age, ethnicity, caring responsibilities, disability and long-term health condition, occupation (NS-SEC) and household income.¹ Full details of the research sample can be found in the appendix.

Building on the findings from the survey, which showed age to be a strong factor determining perceptions of part-time working, we ran two focus groups composed of early career workers and two for older and experienced workers. There were 34 participants in total across the four groups.

UK LABOUR MARKET CONTEXT

There is a wealth of literature on the part-time labour market in the UK and issues relating to low pay, gender inequality and underemployment.² There is a pay and progression penalty associated with part-time work that can be acute during a cost-of-living crisis. This is particularly the case for those who are working on a part-time basis involuntarily, for example if they are unable to increase their hours, find full-time work or are constrained by health or caring responsibilities.

Other research has sought to better understand employers' views on part-time work and the barriers to offering it, especially at mid- and senior levels to support progression. Data derived from the UK's flexible furlough scheme introduced during the pandemic shows that an expansion of part-time work would have a positive impact on the economy.³ Many organisations developed new practices during the scheme that have left a strong legacy, with managers reporting feeling better equipped to manage part-time workers effectively. De-stigmatising part-time work and widening access to it, at all levels, is widely regarded as key to increasing workforce diversity and reducing inequality.

As a helpful backdrop to our survey and focus groups, we undertook analysis of the UK's largest study on employment circumstances, the Labour Force Survey (LFS) to examine trends from 2018 to 2022. This shows who works part-time and why and considers the impact of the pandemic on part-time employment rates.

WHO IS IN PART-TIME WORK?

Part-time employment is prevalent in the UK, especially among women. However, there has been a slow decrease in women's participation in part-time work, and a slight increase in men's.

FIGURE 1: WORKERS IN A PART-TIME JOB BY GENDER

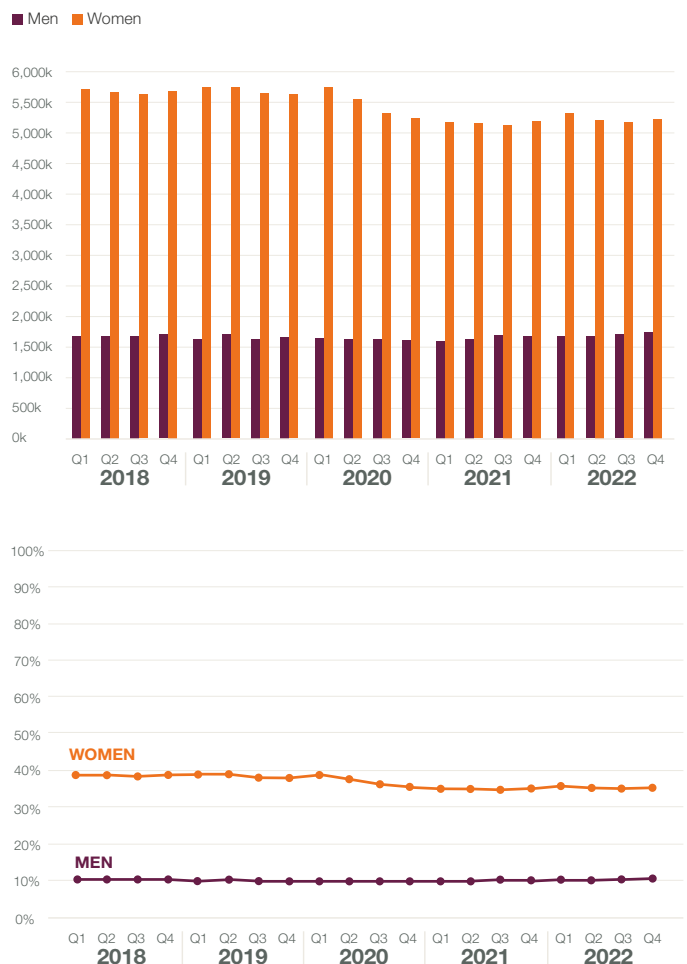
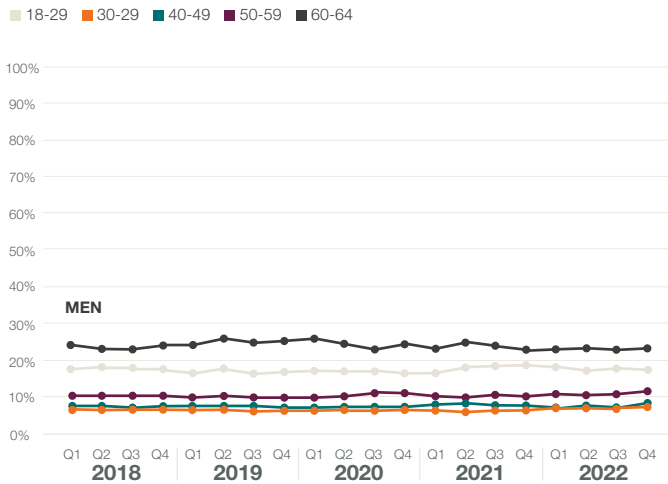
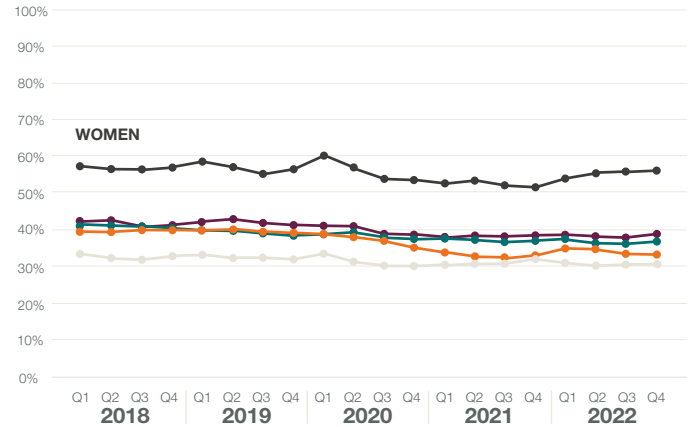


FIGURE 2: PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS IN A PART-TIME JOB BY AGE


Age is a significant factor determining who works part-time. Male and female workers between 60 and 64 are more likely to find themselves in a part-time job. Meanwhile, there are gender differences in part-time work among younger workers aged 18 to 29: among male workers, this group is the second most represented as part-timers, while among female workers, 18-29 year olds are the least represented.

During the pandemic, the small part-time gap between minority-ethnic and white workers narrowed further. This was caused by a slight decline in part-time working among female workers from minority-ethnic groups after the summer of 2020, taking their level below that of the white majority. However, male workers from minority-ethnic groups are over-represented in part-time jobs compared to their white counterparts.



OCCUPATION, EDUCATION AND PART-TIME WORK

Part-time jobs are heavily concentrated in routine and semi-routine occupations but are also a feature of self-employment (see Figure 3).⁴ The self-employed (small employers and own account workers) have experienced a progressive rise in part-time working in the last two years. In contrast, far fewer senior staff work part-time (management and professionals).

The pandemic did little to alter this picture, with trends remaining virtually unchanged across the occupational groupings in 2020.

Male and female workers without formal qualifications are more likely to be in part-time work. Conversely, those with degrees are less likely to work part-time. This trend is more acute among women.

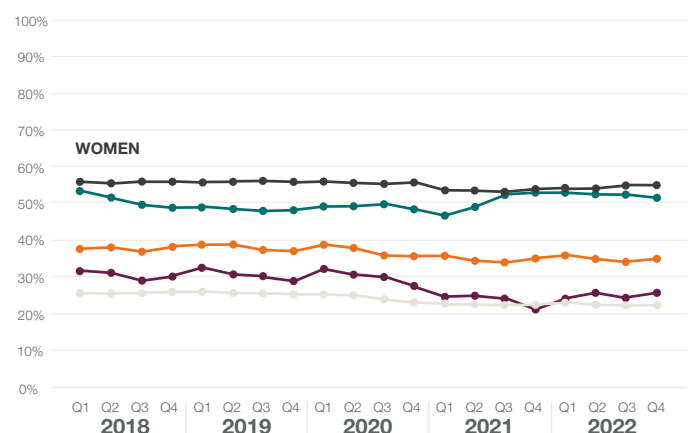
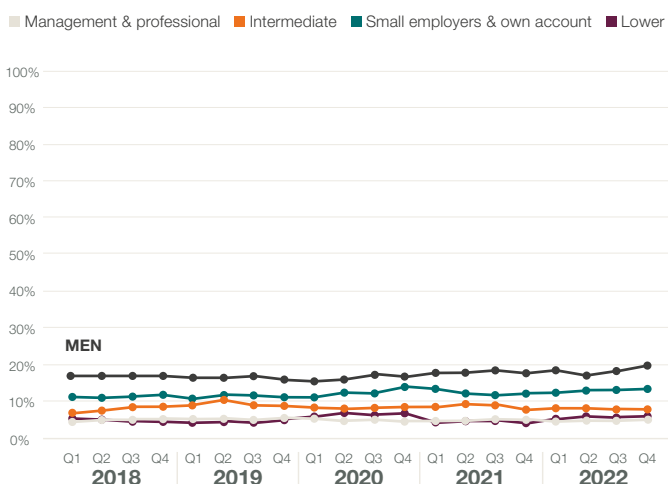
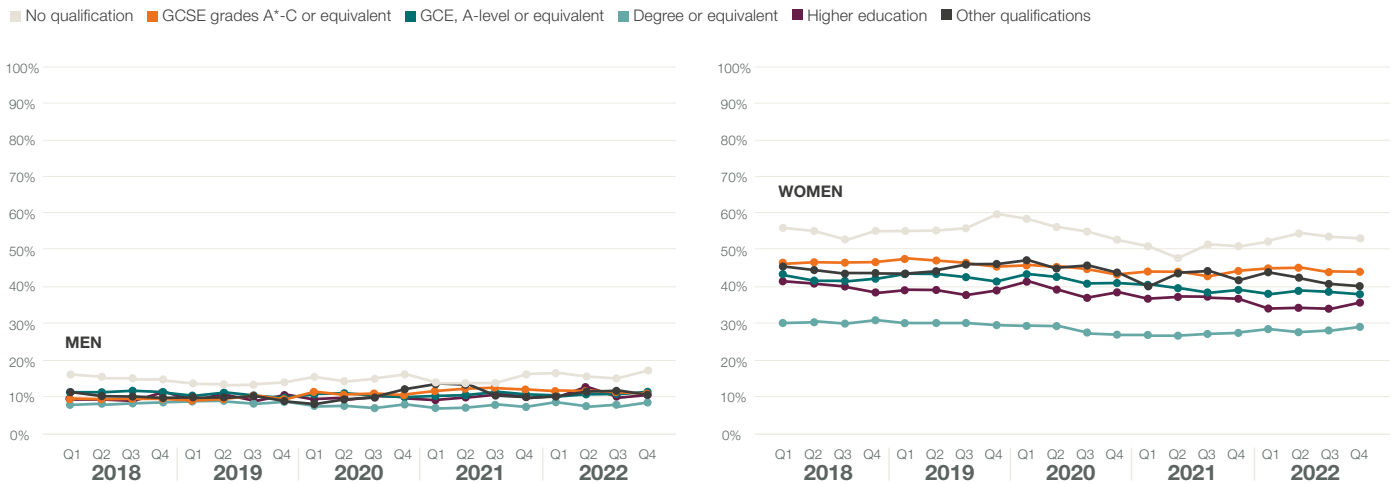
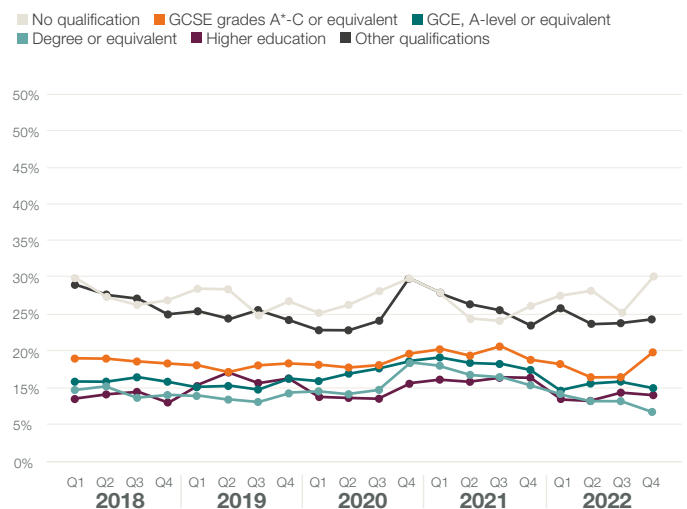
FIGURE 3: PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS IN A PART-TIME JOB BY GENDER AND OCCUPATION


FIGURE 4: PERCENTAGE OF WORKERS IN A PART-TIME JOB BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

ARE PEOPLE WORKING PART-TIME OUT OF CHOICE?

Most female part-timers say that they don't want a full-time job (close to 80%). This is because more women than men work part-time to manage other roles and responsibilities. Other than students and older workers approaching retirement age, men who work part-time in the UK are largely doing so involuntarily. This means that they are looking for full-time work but cannot find it.

Education and occupation are strong determinants of involuntary part-time working. Workers in semi-routine and routine occupations are four times more likely to struggle to find full-time employment than those in management and professional occupations. Notably, the most educated struggle least to find full-time work.

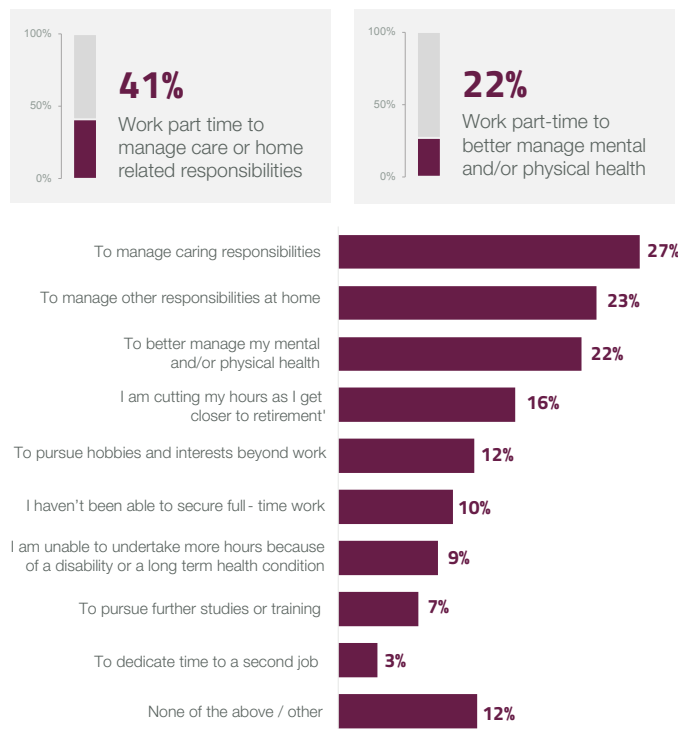
FIGURE 5: PART-TIME WORKERS WHO COULD NOT FIND A FULL-TIME JOB BY EDUCATIONAL LEVEL

Analysis of the Labour Force Survey shows the highly gendered and classed nature of part-time working, and the limited impact the pandemic has had on its distribution. It's in this context that we consider how workers perceive it and set out the steps required to foster more agile and inclusive workplaces where people can dial-up and down their working hours in response to their changing life circumstances, regardless of occupation.

REASONS FOR WORKING PART-TIME

Among our Opinium survey respondents, the primary reason given for working part-time is to manage caring responsibilities (27%). When you combine the reasons managing caring responsibilities and managing other responsibilities at home, the figure rises to 41%. This reinforces what we know from existing research about the importance of part-time work for parents and carers. However, what's less discussed is the value of part-time work for managing mental and physical health. Almost a quarter of respondents (22%) work part-time to better manage their mental and/or physical health.

FIGURE 6: REASONS FOR WORKING PART-TIME



The reasons given for working part-time are highly gendered. Female part-time workers are significantly more likely than their male counterparts to report caring responsibilities as a reason (32% versus 13%). This rises to 45% among women aged 35-49. More male than female part-time workers cite 'better managing mental and/or physical health' as a reason (25% versus 20%).

These findings highlight the gender inequality associated with caring responsibilities, yet they also draw attention to the health crisis. Notably, there was little difference between age groups among those who stated managing their health as a reason for working part-time. There was only a two-percentage point gap between older (50+) and younger (18-34) workers.

Our survey shows that workers, especially men, are attracted to reduced hours to pursue hobbies and interests beyond work. More men who work part-time say they do so to pursue hobbies than to undertake caring responsibilities (20% versus 13%), although this figure fell to 6% among those aged 35-49. Participants in focus groups also said they'd like to be able to reduce or compress their working hours to pursue wider interests:

“ Covid has changed things. People want to pursue interests beyond work. Part-time shouldn't just be for parents.

YOUNGER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

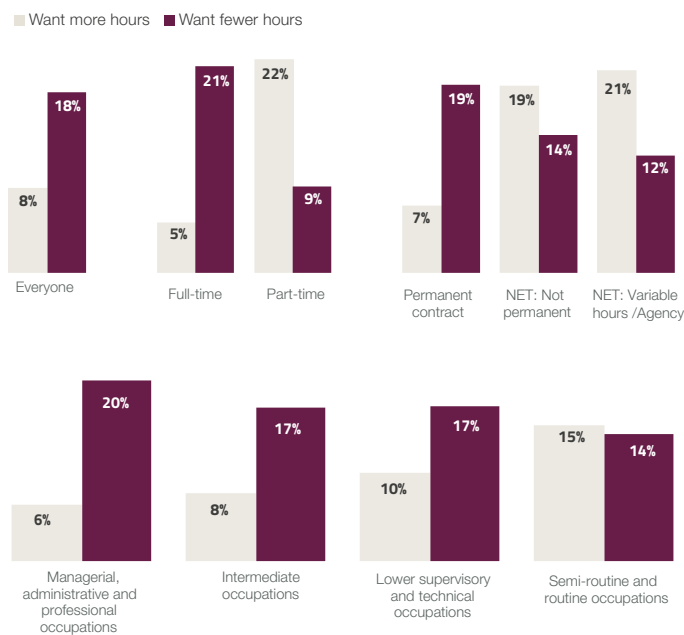
In focus groups, while most female older workers spoke of working part-time earlier in their careers to manage caring for young children, their male counterparts hadn't. Several male participants spoke of the fact that the option just wasn't available to them in the past. They would have considered it if they could. Some participants recognised that the binary opposition between part-time and full-time employment was less prominent in a flexible workplace, and a marked distinction from previous ways of working where reduced hours was the only available option for parents. For instance, participants who worked full-time recognised and valued the flexible working arrangements they had to enable them to undertake their caring responsibilities.⁵

Our survey revealed the strong role that age plays in determining reasons for working part-time – young people are more likely to be pursuing studies and older workers are cutting hours in their transition to retirement. This demonstrates the importance of employers adopting an agile approach to working hours, recognising the need to reduce hours for various reasons at different life stages.

PART-TIME WORK: NECESSITY OR ASPIRATION?

Our survey analysis reveals that working hours satisfaction is higher among full-time workers than among part-time workers. While 71% of full-time respondents say they are satisfied with their working hours, only 63% of their part-time counterparts are. Gender and income are both factors influencing responses, with women and those in the lowest income group more likely to express dissatisfaction with the hours they're currently working.

FIGURE 7: PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE WHO ARE UNSATISFIED WITH THEIR WORKING HOURS, ACROSS DEMOGRAPHICS



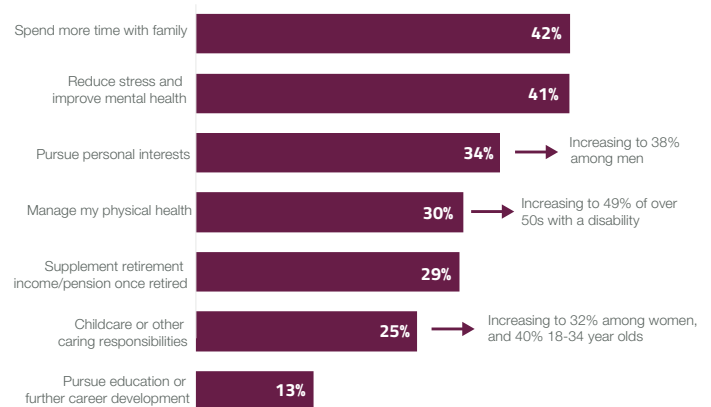
Dissatisfaction with the number of working hours is greater for women than for men – 29% of female workers would like to increase their hours in comparison to 25% of men. This indicates the importance of having more open conversations with employees about the hours they want to work, and the need to include a range of flexible working options in all roles. One focus group participant articulated this clearly and spoke of the need for ‘fluidity’ in addition to flexibility.

“ There needs to be a flexible approach to flexibility – a rethinking of it so that working arrangements can be adjusted more easily. (...) Jobs need to be designed more flexibly and fluidly to respond to people’s needs and changing life circumstances.

OLDER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Our analysis shows that over a third of full-time workers would consider or expect to work part-time in the future, mainly to spend more time with family or to manage their mental health. More workers in managerial occupations (40%) would consider part-time working in the future than those in semi-routine and routine occupations (34%).

FIGURE 8: REASONS GIVEN FOR CONSIDERING OR EXPECTING TO WANT TO WORK PART-TIME IN THE FUTURE



The main reason respondents give for not considering working reduced hours in the future is financial – to avoid a reduction in income (58%). More women than men report this (60% versus 50%). Among focus group participants, there was a marked difference between older and younger workers regarding their reasons for full-time working. Younger workers spoke of the economic imperative to work full-time, especially in a cost-of-living crisis. In contrast, older workers were more attracted to reduced hours and almost all said they would do so if the option was available to them in their roles.

PART-TIME WORKING AND CAREER PROGRESSION

Almost half of all survey respondents perceive part-time working to limit career progression (46%). Although, there's a high level of uncertainty with one in three workers saying they "don't know". And over a third of workers consider part-time working to be primarily for parents and carers, rising to 40% among those in the managerial occupational group.

FIGURE 9: VIEWS OF PART-TIME WORK AND PROGRESSION

"Part-time working limits career progression."



"Part-time working is not a barrier for progression into management roles."



"Part-time working is primarily for parents and informal carers."



"Part-time workers are less ambitious than full-time workers."



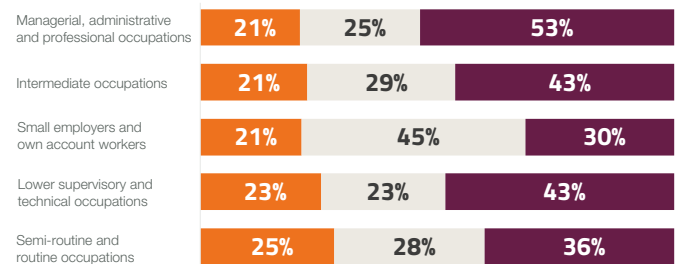
Our analysis uncovered differences in the perception of the status of part-time work by age, ethnicity, education and occupation.

- While 51% of younger workers (18-35) agree with the statement that 'part-time working limits career progression', only 37% of workers over 50 do.
- Asian workers are more likely to say that part-time work limits career progression than workers from white backgrounds (58% versus 45%).
- People in managerial and professional occupations hold a more negative view of part-time working than those in routine occupations (53% versus 36%). This finding is significant given that many managers are the 'gatekeepers' of part-time and flexible options. And ironically, as reported in the previous section, it's people in this occupational group that are more likely to say that they would consider working part-time in the future.

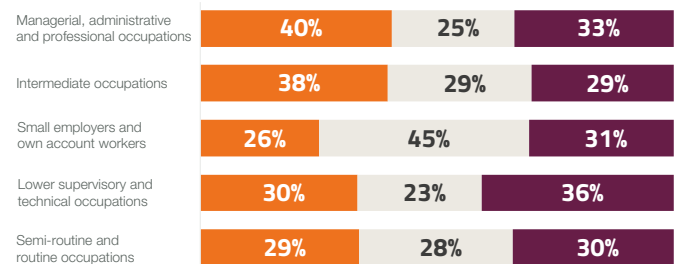
FIGURE 10: THE EFFECT OF SOCIAL CLASS ON ATTITUDES TO PART-TIME WORK AND PROGRESSION

NET: Disagree ■ Neither agree nor disagree / Don't know ■ NET: Agree

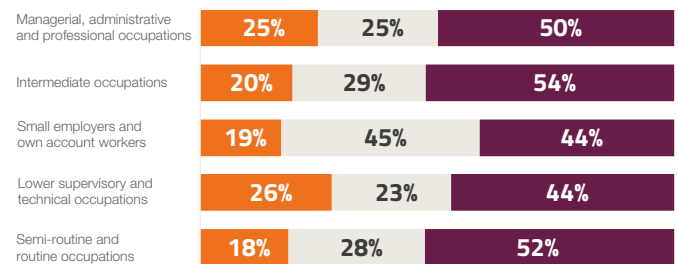
"Part-time working limits career progression."



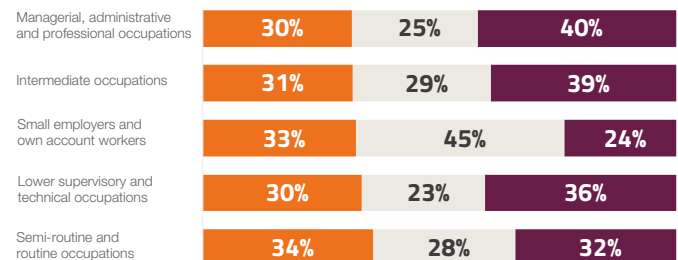
"Part-time working is not a barrier for progression into management roles."



"Part-time workers are less ambitious than full-time workers."



"Part-time working is primarily for parents and informal carers."



Our survey analysis shows the strength of negative cultural attitudes associated with reduced hours working. Such views play a part in restricting access to it, particularly for those without children, and contribute to some part-time workers feeling less valued in comparison to their full-time colleagues.

Some participants in focus groups observed a distinction between the way that full-time and part-time workers are perceived and treated in the workplace due to a focus on hours worked. For instance, several spoke of an assumption that part-time workers “have it easy” as they don’t work such long hours. They were aware that some part-time workers spoke of themselves in apologetic terms, as though they were less involved in the team and wider organisation. For instance, saying they “only” work part-time which “sort of diminishes their contribution”. However, others challenged these views and highlighted team members who worked part-time, including managers, who they regarded as productive. Their experience meant that they didn’t perceive a distinction between part-time and full-time colleagues.

Nevertheless, most participants recognised the barrier to career progression for reduced hours workers. This was particularly true among younger workers, who had limited exposure to role models in senior positions to show how it might work.

“Reduced hours is popular, but mainly among women in lower grade roles. I can’t think of a senior person in a part-time role unless it’s a job share – and there are few of those.

YOUNGER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

One participant was also hesitant about the idea of working reduced hours because of the impact it would have on pension savings. They recognised the long-term financial implications associated with part-time working.

Some older workers in the focus groups saw part-time as being incompatible with career progression – and fulfilment – primarily because of the nature of their work and the size of their role.

“Every time I’ve worked part-time, the job has never fitted into the hours.

OLDER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

“As a part-time worker, you always feel on the backfoot. Now I work full-time I don’t feel so continually behind. I was basically doing five days but being paid for four.

OLDER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

There was a general sense among this group of workers that working full-time was necessary to manage their workload and undertake their role effectively. While the majority were attracted to the idea of working reduced hours, they didn’t consider it to be practicable. One participant who worked in a job share said that her client-facing role wouldn’t be feasible on a part-time basis without someone to cover the other days in the week.

Several participants spoke of the challenges for part-time workers in long-hours working cultures, not simply because of the difficulty of making roles “fit” reduced hours, but because of the way that performance is closely associated with hours worked – impacting on the calculation of bonus pay.

“The ‘always on’ culture creates tensions with those who work reduced hours.

YOUNGER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

However, despite the perceived operational and cultural challenges associated with part-time working and career development, it was widely seen as attractive and an option they’d like to have extended to them.

“Culturally it’s an issue as so few roles are advertised as part-time or job share.

OLDER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

“How do you access part-time work? I think you go into a full-time role and then you have to ask for part-time.

YOUNGER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Notably, for younger workers there was a sense that part-time options would become more attractive given the rising popularity of portfolio careers. But overall, there was a sense of wanting more time to be able to manage “life admin” and to support wellbeing. Hence, they wanted part-time options to be disassociated from parents and carers and to be available to all.

DO WORKERS FEEL EMPOWERED TO CHANGE THEIR WORKING ARRANGEMENTS?

Around a half of survey respondents feel comfortable and confident speaking to their employer about changing their working arrangements. However, a third agreed with the statement "I would not feel comfortable to speak to my employer about reducing my hours".

FIGURE 11: LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK TO EMPLOYER ABOUT CHANGING WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

"If my life circumstances change, I feel confident I could work out new working arrangements with my employer."



"I would not feel comfortable to speak to my employer about reducing my hours."

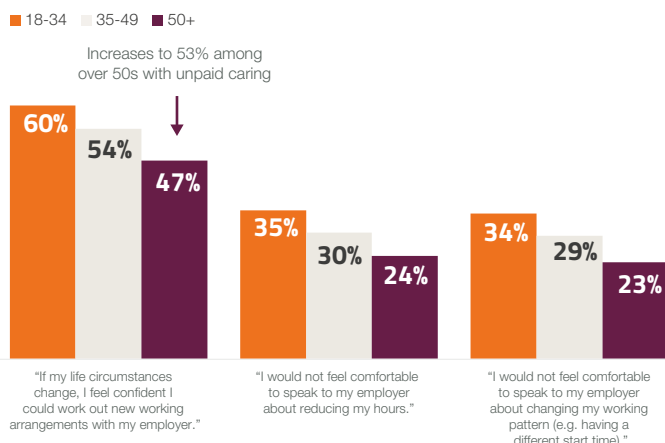


"I would not feel comfortable to speak to my employer about changing my working pattern (e.g. having a different start time)."



Our analysis found that respondents with dependent children reported feeling more comfortable talking about their working arrangements with their employer than any other group. Younger workers and those with temporary contracts were among those who stated that they felt least comfortable doing so.

FIGURE 12: LEVEL OF CONFIDENCE TO SPEAK TO EMPLOYER ABOUT CHANGING WORKING ARRANGEMENTS, BY AGE

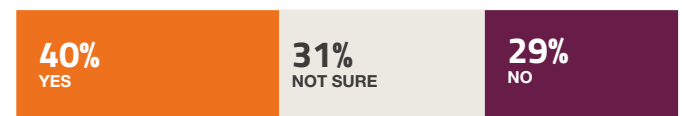


Our survey gathers new insights into the relationship between informal and formal processes regarding access to different working arrangements, including reduced hours. Significantly, although younger workers were among those reporting feeling least comfortable with having informal conversations with their managers about their working pattern, they were among the most likely to say they would consider taking advantage of the new day one right to request flexible working in a future role.⁶

It's clear that some groups of workers feel less empowered than others to ask for flexibility, and this could account for them showing a greater level of interest in leveraging the new rights to access flexible options. These findings have important implications for employers looking to ensure that their flexible working policies and procedures align with their inclusion strategy.

FIGURE 13: LIKELIHOOD OF TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE NEW DAY ONE RIGHT TO REQUEST

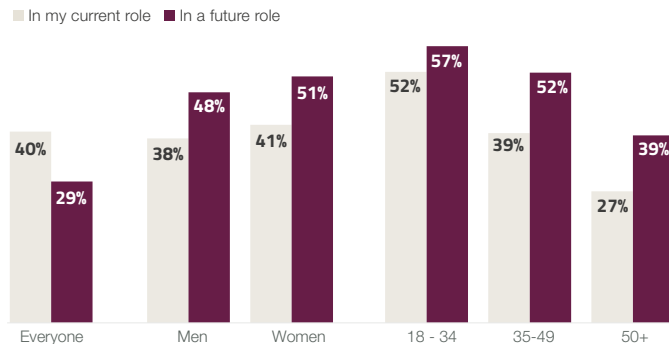
Would you consider taking advantage of the new day one right to request in your existing role?



Would you consider taking advantage of the new day one right to request if you applied for a new role?



FIGURE 14: LIKELIHOOD OF TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THE NEW DAY ONE RIGHT TO REQUEST, BY GENDER AND AGE



Ethnicity is a strong factor determining responses to questions on the new day one right to request flexibility. Significantly more respondents from black minority ethnic groups report that they would consider taking advantage of this right if they applied for a new role in comparison to their white counterparts (71% versus 48%). The attractiveness of this formal vehicle to pursue greater control over when, where or how they work indicates the need for earlier, proactive interventions by employers to respond to demand and address disparities.

Findings from focus groups support those uncovered through the survey, with more younger workers than older saying that they feel less confident about discussing their working arrangements with their manager. This is indicative of the way that flexible working arrangements are so often contingent on trust, which is seen as something that is acquired over time.

“At junior level, it’s difficult to discuss flex but as you become more senior and gain trust and respect, it’s easier to pursue it. The ‘right to flex’ is seen as a reward for good work and being trusted. It’s something you earn and isn’t something you automatically have.

OLDER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Several female older workers said they felt more empowered than ever to pursue the working pattern that best suits them. This was partly a feature of their experience, but also a product of post-pandemic working practices.

“Times have changed and the culture of flex is evolving. Now I feel I can talk to managers about my life circumstances.”

OLDER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Participants disliked the requirement for employees to “make a case” for changing working arrangements. Younger workers especially felt that employees would need to give a “compelling reason to reduce hours”, such as childcare, despite policies suggesting otherwise.

“There’s a want versus need culture. You would need a strong excuse to have flexible working. You have to need it and not just want it.

YOUNGER WORKER, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Our findings showing differences in workers’ levels of confidence to discuss changing their working arrangements with their manager, and sense of entitlement to ask for reduced hours or flexible options, highlights the importance of shifting responsibility away from individuals and onto organisations. In our survey, we asked respondents to consider who should be responsible for raising the availability of flexible working options. Three in five consider it to be the employer’s responsibility (63%), and only 20% regard it to be the that of the individual. We also asked at what point people expected to see flexible working options raised. Strikingly, three in four stated that they should be raised before starting a role, in a job advert (36%) or during the interview process (29%). And these views were consistent regardless of age, gender, ethnicity or occupation.



CONCLUSION

Our new findings show the need for urgent and joined-up action by employers, policymakers and government to tackle inequalities in the part-time labour market and create more inclusive workplaces where employees can thrive. There's a strong demand for part-time working, regardless of gender, occupation and income, and it has a key part to play in tackling societal challenges such as managing health and wellbeing and the increased burden of social care.

We need to challenge cultural perceptions that part-time is for mothers and widen access to it for all, regardless of reason, to reduce gender and pay disparities.

Employers will need to take a lead on this, and proactively raise the possibility of flexible working (including reduced hours) with their employees, rather than leaving them with the burden of requesting it. Job shares will be an important part of the solution to increase access to part-time at senior levels and enable career progression.

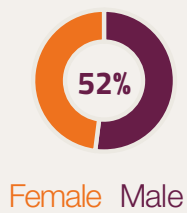
These shifts in attitudes and approach may take time, but action needs to start right now. The stigma around part-time work has been allowed to fester for too long, as change will address gender and class inequality and foster more inclusive and healthier workplaces.

APPENDIX

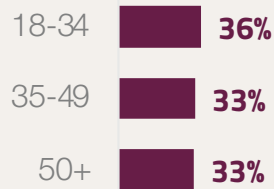
An online survey conducted among 4,001 workers in the UK.

4,000 UK ADULTS IN EMPLOYMENT

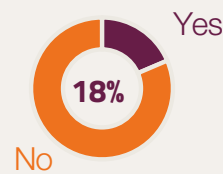
Gender



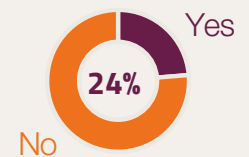
Age



Disability



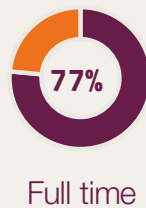
Unpaid Caring responsibilities



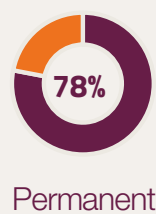
Household Income



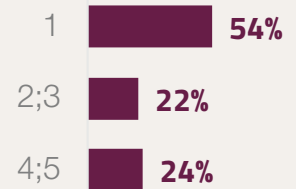
Employment



Contract



NS -SEC



1. ONS [The National Statistics Socio-economic classification](#).
2. See Timewise. (2022) [Can a more flexible jobs market raise the status and pay of part time workers?](#); Resolution Foundation. (2022) [Constrained choices: Understanding the prevalence of part-time work among low-paid workers in the UK](#); Young Women's Trust. (2023) [The income gap: the scale and causes of pay inequality for young women in the UK](#); Centre for Progressive Policy. (2022) [What women want: tackling gender inequality in unpaid care and in the workplace](#).
3. Cranfield School of Management. (2023) [Part-time working after the pandemic: the impact of the flexible furlough scheme](#).
4. Semi-routine and routine occupations include jobs such as machine operative, postal worker, security guard, caretaker, farm worker, catering assistant, sales assistant, cleaner, porter, packer, waiter/waitress, and bar staff, among others.
5. For example, flexitime and compressed hours.
6. See Department for Business and Trade (2023). [Press release: Millions to benefit from new flexible working measures](#).



We're a social enterprise with commercial expertise, working with employers, policymakers and influencers to create stronger, more inclusive workplaces, powered by flexible working.

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