PART-TIME WORK AND ISSUES OF EQUALITY

Report for Fair Play South West

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1. DEFINITIONS OF PART-TIME WORK

In some European countries part-time employment is defined in law. In France, for example, it is anyone working four-fifths or less of the working week, and in the Netherlands it is anyone working less than 35 hours (Hegewisch, 1996). In the UK, however, there is no statutory definition of either full-time or part-time work. Legal regulation of working-time in general has been relatively restricted in this country. Working hours in most instances have been set either by the employer or through collective bargaining, and the former method has increased in importance as the coverage of the latter has declined in the 1980s and 1990s. The Working Time Regulations introduced in October 1998, to give effect to the European Union (EU) Working Time Directive, set a maximum limit on the average weekly hours which employees can be required to work. They do not, however, prescribe 'standard' hours, or indeed minimum hours of work.

The two main methods of defining part-time employment used in UK government databases are self-assessment and persons working not more than 30 hours per week. The Labour Force Survey (LFS) uses the former. The Office for National Statistics (ONS) provides the 30 hours 'cut-off' as guidance for respondents participating in employer surveys. Analysis of the returns, however, suggests that many employers apply their own definition and may include as part-time any employee working other than full-time (Laux, 1998).

Other definitions apply to employment rights and to social security and benefits. Up until recently, access to the main statutory employment rights was confined to employees working 16 hours or more a week and who had accrued two years continuous service with an employer. Employees working between 8 and 16 hours a week required five years continuous service to become eligible. Many employers took 16 hours as the threshold at which employees became eligible for company benefits (holiday pay, sick pay, inclusion in company pension schemes and

so on). In 1993, however, the House of Lords ruled that UK unfair dismissal and redundancy payments legislation breached EU equality law. The hours thresholds were judged to amount to indirect discrimination against women, who are the most likely to work part-time. Legislation in 1995 removed these thresholds. The need for two years continuous service and for employee status nevertheless remain as obstacles, in particular for temporary and casual workers, many of whom work part-time (IDS Brief 578, 1996; Purcell, 1997).

Many part-time workers are defined out of government New Earnings Survey (NES) data by virtue of their failure to meet the Lower Earnings Limit (LEL) which triggers National Insurance contributions (currently £64 per week). It is estimated that between a fifth and a third of all part-timers fall through this statistical net (Hegewisch, 1996).

Among those classed as working part-time (by self- or employer-assessment) hours of work vary enormously; from one or two to thirty or upwards a week. On average, however, part-timers' hours are rather shorter in the UK than in the EU as a whole (while full-timers on average work longer hours than their European counterparts). The average hours usually worked by male and by female part-timers in the UK in 1996 were 16.2 and 18.0 respectively, compared with EU averages of 19.3 and 19.8 (Social Trends 28, 1998: 83).

A further factor setting the UK apart is the wide range of working time patterns. In most other European countries part-time working is 'usually done in the morning, and tends to last at least 20 to 25 hours per week'. In the UK, such regularities have disappeared and it is 'hard to discern a typical pattern of part-time work' (Hegewisch, 1996). Thus while particular variants of part-time working have been identified - job-sharing, term-time only working, Saturday only working, twilight shifts, zero hours contracts - each forms a small proportion of all part-time employment and may in turn embrace a wide variety of practices.

In short, part-time employment is not an homogeneous category. It is often interpreted as a form of 'non standard' employment, and certainly overlaps with the categories of temporary

work, self-employment and homeworking (Purcell, 1997). Yet it has been a fairly standard contractual form for some groups of labour market participants. For, the differences in working hours and working time patterns aside, part-time workers tend to share some common characteristics. The great majority are women. Most are employed in the service industries. Some are employed in professional and managerial occupations. But the large majority are in jobs which are located towards the lower end of the occupational hierarchy.

2.THE GROWTH OF PART-TIME WORK IN EUROPE AND THE UK

Part-time employment has become more significant across the EU countries over the 1980s and 1990s. Researchers at the Cranfield School of Management estimate that one in seven people in the EU now work part-time, and that part-time employment has contributed largely to the 'growth' that has taken place over the past decade. Total employment rose by 1 million between 1983 and 1994, while the number of hours worked remained constant (Clifford et al, 1997).

This growth in part-time working, however, has been distributed unevenly as between the EU member states (Rubery and Fagan, 1995; Dex and McCulloch, 1995). A number of patterns can be discerned. Some countries which favoured full-time employment in the early 1980s have continued to do so; part-time employment has risen but not markedly as a share of all employment. Into this group fall the 'southern' states of Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, although Austria and Finland might be included also. At the opposite end of the scale, Denmark, Norway and Sweden had the highest ratios of part-time to all employment in the early 1980s and in each the level of part-time employment subsequently has remained fairly constant. The UK and the Netherlands had relatively high levels of part-time working at the beginning of the 1980s and in each of these part-time working has continued to grow in absolute and in relative terms. In 1994 the Netherlands had the highest, and the UK the third highest, ratio of part-time to all employment (a third and a quarter respectively).

Table 1. Part-time employment as a percentage of total employment, EU member states, 1990-4.

	1990	1994
Austria +	8.4	8.7
Belgium	10.9	12.8
Denmark	23.3	21.2
Finland +	6.7	8.4
France	11.9	14.9
Germany *	14.1	15.8
Greece	4.1	4.8
Ireland	8.1	10.8
Italy	4.9	6.2
Luxembourg	6.9	7.9
Netherlands	31.7	36.4
Portugal	6.0	8.0
Spain	4.9	6.9
Sweden	23.5	24.9
United Kingdom	21.3	23.8

Source: European Commission (1996) Employment in Europe.

* Figures for 1991-4
+ Figures for 1990-3

Across the EU, women form the majority of part-time workers. Those states with a higher than average representation of part-time employment tend to be those with the highest rates of female labour market participation. However, Finland, France and Portugal each have a high female activity rate and in each full-time employment is more than averagely the norm for women (Hegewisch, 1996; Rubery and Fagan, 1995).

Labour Force Survey data for the UK (table 2) suggest that the number of people in part-time employment increased by 1.7 million (35 per cent) in the period 1984-97, from 4.96 to 6.69 million, and that part-time employment rose from 21 to 25 per cent of all in employment. This

growth has attracted a good deal of academic and media attention. This is not least because public policy in the period has emphasised the need for employment contracts which offer employers 'flexibility' and encourage a higher rate of labour market participation among groups formerly under-represented in the labour market Part-time work has been seen as capable of meeting both sets of requirements. Yet the expansion of part-time working in the UK over the past twenty years continues a longer-term trend. And most analyses identify the 1960s as the period of most vigorous growth in the ratio of part-time to total employment (Beatson, 1995; Bruegel and Perrons, 1998).

Table 2. Full and part-time employment, by gender, UK, Spring 11997.*

	Males				**Females**			
	All in employment (000s)	Full-time (000s)	Part-time (000s)	Part-time as % all	All in employment (000s)	Full-time (000s)	Part-time (000s)	Part-time as % all
1984	14,083	13,408	610	4.3	9,936	5,543	4,356	43.8
1985	14,217	13,357	670	4.7	10,173	5,697	4,465	43.9
1986	14,174	13,450	707	5.0	10,371	5,834	4,523	43.6
1987	14,309	13,488	798	5.6	10,621	5,953	4,651	43.8
1988	14,824	13,941	852	5.7	11,036	6,276	4,739	42.9
1989	15,219	14,347	846	5.6	11,470	6,493	4,964	43.5
1990	15,318	14,387	920	6.0	11,617	6,643	4,968	42.7
1991	14,887	13,958	919	6.2	11,512	6,541	4,966	43.1
1992	14,321	13,304	1,009	7.0	11,491	6,445	5,040	43.9
1993	14,035	12,990	1,037	7.4	11,476	6,383	5,085	44.3
1994	14,171	13,050	1,115	7.9	11,526	6,354	5,163	44.8
1995	14,374	13,200	1,171	8.1	11,599	6,440	5,153	44.4
1996	14,446	13,197	1,224	8.6	11,773	6,464	5,305	45.0
1997	14,720	13,386	1,328	9.0	11,962	6,592	5,367	44.9

Source: Labour Force Survey. In Social Trends 28, 1998: 80.

* Includes employees, self-employed, those on government employment and training schemes and, from 1982, unpaid family workers. Full/part-time

In the period 1984-97, the total number of people in employment in the UK grew, faltered, and grew again. Setting these cyclical fluctuations to one side, a development distinguishing this from

earlier periods has been the growth in male part-time employment. Female full-time employment rose by 1 million, to 6.59 million; an increase of 19 per cent. The numerical increase in female part-time employment was equivalent, but the proportionate rise was slightly higher (23 per cent). The number of men in employment rose, but to a lesser extent (0.6 million, or 4.5 per cent) while full-time male employment fell by 0.2 million.

Male part-time employment rose by 118 per cent, to 0.7 million and currently (1997) 1,322,000 men currently work part time This growth accounted for the entire increase in male employment over the period 1984-97 and for two-fifths of the increase in all part-time employment. Male part-time employment rose in a number of other EU countries, but the rise in the UK was relatively strong.The small but relatively increasing number of men who work part time can generally be divided into three groups. First, there are those men who have lost permanent full time jobs or formerly unemployed men who are now working part time because they could not find a full time job. Approximately one quarter (c317,000 in 1997) fall into this group. Second, there are those men who are in skilled professional occupations undertaking highly paid and highly valued jobs in administration or work associated with the introduction of new technology. The proportion of such men in part time work has been increasing (LFS Autumn 1996), reflecting both employer demand and the financial ability of such higher paid men to choose to work fewer paid working hours. Part time self employment of men has also been increasing (by 18000 alone in the second quarter of 1998 - LFS May 1998).Third, there are men who choose to combine family care with part time work. The numbers of men caring for dependents who are economically inactive but who *want* to work is small, totalling just 76,000 in the UK in 1997. More than half of men in caring roles at home are caring for a dependent adult rather than child (compared to one tenth of women), and only one in six are caring for children (LFS Autumn 1997 in Labour Market Trends June 1998).

3.THE COMPOSITION OF PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT IN THE UK

Part-time employment and gender

In the UK, as in the EU more broadly, women and men remain segregated in the labour market. Part-time employment is perhaps the most extreme expression of this gender segregation. In the EU over two-thirds of part-timers are women (Rubery and Fagan, 1995), and in the UK the proportion is currently four-fifths. Forty-five per cent of employed women in this country worked part-time in 1997. Male part-time employment has increased but in 1997 nine in ten employed males worked full-time.

*Age distribution of male and of female part-time worker*s

The age distribution of male part-time employment is heavily skewed. Over 70 per cent of men identifying themselves as working part-time in 1997 were aged under 25 years or over 50. Two-fifths of those in the younger age range reported their reason for working part-time as being a student or at school. The reduction in the value of student grants and introduction of tuition fees have opened up an increasing supply of young people (men and women) available for part-time work. But youth unemployment has contributed too, and the inability to find a full-time job was cited as the reason for working part-time by a significant proportion of male respondents (see section 4 below). The age distribution of women working part-time in 1997 was more even. Nevertheless, part-time employment among women has a distinctive age-related pattern.

As table 3 suggests, female economic activity rates increase with age and peak in the 40-9 year range. Part-time employment is higher among women over 25 years than under, and highest among women in their forties. This distribution, which conforms with the idea of women returning to (or switching to) work on a part-time basis after child-birth and child-rearing, has remained fairly stable over the past 20 to 30 years. What has changed, however, is the age profile of women in full-time employment. Up until the 1970s, women under 25 years were the most likely to work full-time. But full-time employment has declined among this group, partly because participation in higher education has risen. At the same time, the incidence of full-time employment among women in the 25-49 age range has increased (Harkness, 1998).

Table 3. Employment status by gender and age, UK, Spring 1997

	Women in the ages of				Men in the ages of			
	16-24	25-39	40-49	50-59	16-24	25-39	40-49	50-64
Percentages								
Economically active	66.1	73.8	78.3	63.4	74.6	93.3	91.3	72.2
In Employment	58.8	69.6	75.3	60.7	63.0	86.6	85.7	67.2
Full-time	35.2	41.2	41.2	30.1	47.5	83.3	82.7	60.6
Part-time	23.6	28.4	34.1	30.5	15.4	3.3	3.0	6.5
Employees	55.7	64.3	68.2	54.4	56.8	73.7	68.3	50.7
Self-employed	0.9	4.7	6.6	5.6	3.1	12.4	17.1	16.1
Govt.supported training and employment programmes	1.9	0.2	**	**	2.8	0.4	**	0.2
Unpaid family worker	**	0.4	0.4	0.5	**	**	**	0.2
ILO Unemployed	7.3	4.2	3.1	2.7	11.6	6.7	5.6	5.0
Economically Inactive	33.9	26.2	21.7	36.6	25.4	6.7	8.7	27.8
Looking after family/home	8.9	19.3	10.8	11.9	**	0.8	1.3	1.0

Source: Labour Force Survey. In Sly et al, 1998: 111

** samples too small for reliable estimates

Marital Status and Dependents

Statistical analysis suggests that the main factors which influence the extent to which women participate in employment and participate on a full-time or part-time basis are the age of the youngest dependent child and marital status. Thus, calculations based on 1998 LFS data show that the employment rate is lowest among women with very young children and rises as the age of the youngest dependent child increases. Among women whose youngest child is between 16 and 18 years the employment rate is higher than among those without dependent children, although this may be a function of the average age of the two groups of women.

Table 4. Full and Part-time Employment Among Employed Women, By Family Status UK, Summer 1998, not seasonally adjusted.

	All in employment	Employment rate	Full-time as % All in	Part-time as % all

	(000s)		employment	in employment
All women (16-59 years)	11,667	68.3	57.2	42.7
Women with dependent children by age of youngest dependent child				
All 0-18	4,593	62.4	40.6	59.3
0- 4	1,536	50.2	35.8	64.0
5-10	1,519	67.4	32.2	63.7
11-15	1,135	74.1	48.0	51.9
16-18	402	78.9	54.9	45.0
No dependent children	7,074	72.8	67.9	32.0
All men	14,849	79.2	92.2	7.6

Source: Labour Force Survey. In Labour Market Trends, November 1998:545

Significantly perhaps, the most rapid increase in the rate of women's labour market participation in the past ten years has been among mothers with children under five (Sly et al, 1998: 80). Statutory and employers' maternity pay and leave provision have enabled more women to remain in employment during the period of child-birth. But it would appear that there is an increasing incentive for women to return to, or take up, work before their children have reached school age. The ability to return to work is nevertheless dependent on the availability of affordable childcare. The UK, and also the Netherlands, are distinguished in Europe by their relatively poor provision of state supported childcare (Rubery and Fagan, 1995). This, together with more universal social attitudes about women's and men's domestic roles, has been identified as a key factor behind both countries high rates of part-time employment (see section 4 below).

Women without dependent children are more likely to work full-time than those with (table 4). However, the return to work of married (or cohabiting) women with dependent children has increased significantly in the UK over recent decades, and more married/co-habiting mothers are working full-time than was the case a decade or more ago. At the same time, General Household Survey data show that the proportion of lone mothers in employment has fallen since

the early 1980s and among those in employment fewer are now working full-time (Social Trends 1998: 80). Two-parent households in which both parents work are better placed to arrange and, crucially, pay for childcare than lone parents. The latter have to weigh up the net advantage of the employment available to them, taking into account the possible loss of state benefit and outlay for child-minding - should a relative not be available for the purposes (Meadows, 1996). The household income of lone parents has been falling progressively behind other groups in the last decade, and it would appear that this has been a disincentive to employment and, in particular, to full-time work; levels of part-time working among this group have remained stable in the past decade.

Ethnic Origin and Part-time Work

Part-time working has typically been seen as a means whereby women can combine work and family roles. Yet it is significantly more common among White women than among Black-Carribean, Black African, Indian, Pakistani, Chinese and other Asian women (Dex and McCulloch, 1995; Holdsworth and Dale, 1997). Although mothers among these ethnic groups obviously face child-care problems too, they find different 'solutions' or rather, as Holdsworth and Dale suggest, are presented with different employment options (see section 7 below). Regardless of marital status, full-time 'permanent' employment - often in manual occupations - is more common among Black and Asian than among White women, as too is full-time temporary employment.

Level of Qualification and Part-time Work

Young women's participation in further and higher education has increased steadily over the past 20 or 30 years, and Harkness (1998) shows that the 'qualifications gap' between men and women in full-time work has narrowed, to the point of disappearing among those under 35 years. However, her analysis suggests that on average female part-timers continue to lag behind men and that, while in the past there was little difference among employed women, a 'qualifications gap' has now opened up between women in full- and in part-time work. This gap

is not easily explained as a function of age (the relatively older profile of women in part-time work). Competing interpretations of it are considered in section 7 below.

It is evident, however, that many women in part-time work are well-qualified. Harkness's data for 1990/2 show that while among all female part-timers, a third had no qualifications, a similar proportion were qualified to A-level (or equivalent) or above. There is some variation with age; fifty per cent of women under 25 were qualified to A-level or above, compared with 32 per cent in the 35-49 year range and 23 per cent of those between 50 and 59 years of age. The figures are nevertheless impressive, given that a majority of part-timers report being recruited to jobs which require no qualifications (Gallie et al, 1998).

4.DISTRIBUTION OF PART-TIME WORK BY INDUSTRY AND OCCUPATION

Industry Distribution

Across the EU countries part-time employment is concentrated in the service sector. In the UK in 1997, 94 per cent of all part-timers were located in the service industries (public and private taken together). Within the services, part-time employment is more common in some industries than others. In the UK in 1997, part-time jobs formed two-fifths or more of all employee jobs in each of wholesale, retail and repairs; hotels and restaurants; education; and health and social work.

Table 5. Female and Part-time Jobs as a Proportion of All Employee Jobs, By Industry, UK, June 1998, not seasonally adjusted.

	All employee Jobs (000s)	Female as % all	Part-time as % all	Female part-time as % all part-time
Agriculture, hunting & forestry	266.0	23.4	26.0	41.0
Fishing	5.7	29.8	21.0	58.0
Mining & Quarrying	50.1	12.6	2.4	84.2
Energy & Water Supply	222.0	19.7	3.7	87.8
Manufacturing	4,075.9	28.0	6.4	77.3
Construction	1,003.1	12.5	4.5	75.6
Services	17,664.1	57.6	36.6	80.1
Wholesale, retail & repairs	4,036.7	52.7	39.6	78.9
Hotels & restaurants	1,315.7	66.7	59.7	75.2
Transport, storage & communication	1,388.9	26.3	11.3	55.1
Financial Intermediation	1,063.6	55.5	15.5	92.4
Real estate, renting & other business activities	3,006.9	52.8	35.7	77.1
Public Administration and Defence; social security	1,349.9	49.4	18.0	81.5
Education	1,895.6	71.4	46.2	84.7
Health & Social Work	2,582.4	79.3	44.9	89.1
Other community, social & personal services	1,0241	39.1	39.1	71.1
All Sections	23,2367	49.7	29.4	79.6

Source: Earnings & Employment Division, ONS. In Labour Market Trends, October 1998: 521.

The relative expansion of many of these services industries in the UK dates from the 1950s and 1960s and was made possible, in the generally tight labour markets of the time, by drawing on female 'labour reserves'. Bruegel and Perrons (1998) suggest that 'prevailing stereotypes meant that part-time jobs were offered in typically female areas. This becomes a self-reinforcing process, for example in retail, locking part-time workers and "women's work" tightly together'. Amid the accelerated decline of manufacturing employment in the 1980s and 1990s, employment growth has been largely concentrated on the private services. Thus, Beatson's (1995) shift-share analysis suggests that much of the growth of part-time employment in this period can be attributed to the 'shift' - or structural - component; that is, the relative growth of industries which have 'traditionally' made use of female part-time labour.

Table 6. Employment by occupation, UK, Spring 1997, not seasonally adjusted.

	All Persons (000s)	Female full-timers as % all	Female part-timers as % all	Males as % all
Managers & administrators	4,150	29.0	5.6	67.6
Professional occupations	2,632	29.0	11.1	60.0
Associate professional and technical occupations	2,629	33.1	16.8	50.1
Clerical & Secretarial occupations	3,856	48.2	26.4	25.4
Craft & related occupations	3,263	6.0	2.5	91.5
Personal & protective service occupations	2,759	27.6	38.7	33.6
Sales occupations	2,081	17.1	44.9	38.0
Plant & machine operatives	2,434	13.9	5.1	81.0
Other occupations	1,999	9.7	38.1	52.2
Manual occupations	10,212	13.6	18.5	67.8
Non-manual occupations	15,472	32.6	19.8	47.8

Source: Labour Force Survey. In Sly et al, 1997: 116

Occupational Distribution

The occupational segregation of women's employment, and of women's part-time employment in particular, is equally, if not more, pronounced than its industrial segregation. Three groups - clerical and secretarial, personal and protective services, and sales - accounted for over half (53 per cent) of women in employment in the UK in 1997, compared with less than a fifth (19 per cent) of men, and for nearly two-thirds (61 per cent) of female part-time employment (Sly et al, 1998). And it would appear that this pattern has become more deeply entrenched during the 1980s and 1990s. Bruegel and Perron's shift-share analysis of occupational data suggests that female full-timers have made 'inroads' into the growth occupations of the period, including

managerial and professional jobs. Yet the growth of female part-time employment by and large has been concentrated in 'traditional' occupations.

5.PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT IN SOUTH WEST ENGLAND

There are regional variations within the UK in the extent of part-time working. Of the 12 UK regions, the South West of England has the highest proportion of part-time to all employment. It ranks first also in terms of the proportion of self-employment to all regional employment (South West Economy Centre, 1998: 17).

Table 7. Part-time Employees, by Gender, UK Regions, Spring 1996*

Percentages

	Males			Females		
	Manual	Non-manual	All	Manual	Non-manual	All
UK	8.4	7.1	7.7	58.7	38.4	44.5
North East	7.1	7.2	7.2	61.6	38.5	46.2
North West (GOR) & Merseyside	7.9	6.9	7.4	59.1	39.0	45.4
Yorkshire & Humberside						
East Midlands	6.6	7.7	7.1	54.9	41.2	46.1
West Midlands	6.2	5.8	6.1	58.2	39.7	46.1

Eastern	9.3	6.4	7.6	61.0	40.2	46.2
London	11.6	7.9	9.2	52.7	28.0	33.0
South East (GOR)	10.0	7.0	8.1	61.8	38.9	45.2
South West	11.7	7.8	9.3	61.8	45.5	50.2
England	8.6	7.2	7.8	59.3	38.4	44.7
Wales	7.9	7.2	7.7	59.9	42.2	48.7
Scotland	7.2	7.0	7.1	54.2	36.9	42.2
Northern Ireland	6.5	4.1	5.3	52.7	36.0	40.5

Source: Labour Force Survey. In Regional Trends, vol. 32, 1997: 67

* Part-time employees as percentage all employees.

Table 7 summarises Spring 1996 LFS data on part-time employment among employees (ie excluding the self-employed) in the UK regions. It shows that the South West ranks first in terms of the percentage share of part-time employment among male as well as among female employees. Among male employees, part-time employment is especially high - in comparison with other UK regions - among manual workers. The percentage of non-manual male employees working part-time is above the UK average, but the South West comes third, after Yorkshire and Humberside, and London, on this 'ranking'. Of the twelve UK regions, the South West has the highest percentage of part-time working among female non-manual employees, and (with the South East) the second highest percentage of part-time employment among female employees in manual occupations.

The most obvious explanation for the South West's high rate of part-time to all employment is its industrial structure. Tourism-related services and also those areas of the public services which, in the UK as a whole, have a high proportion of part-time working, are proportionately over-represented in the region's employment (table 8). Most commentators project that the first of these industry groupings will continue to increase its share of regional employment over coming years (eg Wilson, 1997). Its current contribution to regional GDP, however, is slightly lower than might be anticipated given the groupings contribution to UK GDP.

Table 8. Employees in Employment, by Industry and Gender, UK and South West, 1995

Percentages

	UK		South West	
	Males	Females	Males	Females
Agriculture, hunting, forestry, fishing	2.1	0.6	3.3	1.0
Mining & Quarrying	0.5	0.1	0.6	0.1
Manufacturing	25.7	10.9	25.3	9.3
Electricity, gas & water supply	1.2	0.4	1.6	0.5
Construction	6.3	1.2	5.6	1.2
Distribution, hotels & catering, repairs	20.0	25.0	21.6	27.0
Transport, storage, communication	8.7	3.0	7.3	2.4
Financial & business services	15.9	17.7	14.6	16.5
Public administration & defence	6.6	6.2	7.5	5.9
Education, social work & health services	8.9	30.3	9.1	31.8
Other	4.0	4.7	3.4	4.3
Whole Economy (000s)	11,158	10,856	865	877

Source: ONS. In Regional Trends 32, 1997: 68-9

Table 9 shows part-time employment by broad industry grouping in the South West. The pattern is much as might be anticipated, given the industry distribution of part-time employment in the UK economy as a whole. But it suggests that part-time working in the financial services in the South West is somewhat higher than the rate found nationally. This may reflect the greater proportion of routinised clerical and administrative jobs that exists in the South West finance sector, as opposed to the higher proportion of specialist and professional jobs that occurs in London and the South East.

Table 9. Employees in Employment, by Industry, South West, September 1996

	Total (000s)	All part-time as % total	Males as % total	Male part-time as % all males	Females as % total	Female part-time as % all females
Agrigulture, forestry, fishing	37.8	22.8	73.8	16.8	26.2	39.4
Energy & water supply	21.3	3.8	80.8	0.6	19.2	17.1
Manufacturing	300.5	6.7	74.2	2.1	25.8	19.9
Construction	53.7	5.4	84.6	1.3	15.6	27.4
Distribution, hotels &						

restaurants	437.0	47.6	42.5	24.8	57.4	67.4
Transport & communication	86.2	13.7	75.5	8.1	24.5	30.8
Banking, finance,insurance	274.5	31.0	43.9	12.9	56.1	45.1
Public administration, education & health	480.4	42.5	30.7	18.2	69.3	53.2
Other service industries	76.2	40.7	45.5	26.5	54.6	52.4
All industries	1,767.6	32.4	49.1	13.1	50.1	50.9

Source: Annual Employment Survey. ONS.

6. PAY AND EARNINGS

In 1997, female full-time workers on average earned 80.2 per cent of the gross hourly earnings (excluding overtime) of their male counterparts, in comparison with 74.8 per cent a decade earlier. The average gross weekly pay of women full-timers was £297.20 in comparison with £408.70 for men (EOR, 1997: 35).

The 'gender pay gap' has narrowed but it has not disappeared; indeed, it widened slightly in 1997/8 (*Financial Times*, 16/10/1998). And the improvement relative to male full-time hourly earnings has been confined largely to female full-timers. Indeed, an 'intra-gender pay gap' has opened up and has widened progressively over the 1980s and 1990s.

Harkness (1998) notes that in the early 1970s the average hourly earnings of female full- and part-time workers were much the same, and amounted to approximately 60 per cent of those of male full-time staff. Following the introduction of the Equal Pay and Sex Discrimination Acts in 1975, both full-time and part-time women workers improved their hourly earnings relative to those of male full-timers. However, the gains for female part-timers had been reversed by the mid-1980s, and have not been recouped subsequently. Thus while female full-timers continued to narrow the gap with male full-timers (until 1997/8 at least) the earnings of female part-timers fell behind. In 1994/5 women working part-time on average earned 69 per cent of the hourly earnings of women working full-time. The former were, and remain, disproportionately

represented among the UK's low paid workers. They have been joined by a growing number of lower paid men who, over the same period, have seen their hourly earnings deteriorate in comparison with the male median (Bruegel and Perrons, 1998).

Thus averages can be misleading. Harkness estimates that a fifth of female part-timers earned considerably more than female full-timers in the early 1970s, and that a similar proportion have hourly earnings at least comparable with those of the best-paid full-time female workers in the late 1990s. However, the hourly earnings position of the large majority of women working part-time has deteriorated in comparison with that of women working full-time, and this appears to owe largely to two factors. First, differences in the occupational structure of the two groups have widened (as discussed in section ** above). Second, women working full-time, like many full-timers in the UK, tend to work relatively long hours while those on part-time contracts often work 'short hours' and indeed, fewer hours per week than many would ideally like.

7. FULL- AND PART-TIME EMPLOYMENT: A MATTER OF CHOICE?

Part-time work potentially holds a number of advantages for men and for women. It may permit a satisfactory trade-off between work and other interests. Given that the majority of part-time jobs are relatively low grade and low paid, however, the question that has interested academics is why people opt for, or are relegated, to them.

The Labour Force Survey asks people in part-time work to give their reasons for working part-time. The questionnaire permits only a limited range of responses. Among male, as among female part-timers, the responses tend to vary with age. Taking all male part-timers together, however, the principal reasons given for working part-time are being a student/still at school, and the inability to find a full-time job. Among female part-timers, a majority state they do not

want a full-time job. These findings have been taken by many commentators as evidence that, in general, women opt for part-time work while men are 'reduced to it' by force of circumstance.

Elaborating on this interpretation, Hakim (1996) suggests that women working part-time have made the conscious decision to maximise their preference for domestic as opposed to career, paid employment roles. They are 'willing slaves' to lower paid, part-time work, and this is exemplified by their failure to invest in the education and training that would equip them for better paid jobs, with promotion and pay prospects.

Hakim's critics argue that she ignores the influences of gender relations and class on women's preferences, and also the employment opportunities available to them. And Harkness (1998) identifies a range of survey data which suggest that the preferences of neither full-time nor part-time women workers are being met adequately at present.

LFS data show a rise in the 1980s and 1990s in the proportion of women working part-time who are doing so because they could not find a full-time job, and a rise in the proportion of those who would like to work longer hours than those currently on offer. Other survey data reveal an upward trend also in the proportion of women working full-time who would like to work shorter hours. This increase is especially marked among women working in professional and managerial jobs. There is evidence that 'qualified' women who have moved to a part-time or job-sharing contract after child-birth have experienced a significant down-grading of their conditions and career prospects (Wacjman, cited in Purcell, 1997). Thus, as Harkness suggests, 'it's hard to avoid the conclusion that part-time women are crowded into low skill occupations because part-time employment is not available in more highly skilled jobs' (1998:26; see also Wacjman).

8. EMPLOYERS' REASONS FOR USING PART-TIME CONTRACTS

In surveys of employers in the UK the reason most commonly cited for using or creating part-time contracts is to secure greater flexibility (eg IRS 1997). The retention of skilled staff is also cited by many organisations, although the frequency with which this rationale is reported tends to fluctuate with broader labour market conditions.

Labour flexibility comes in a variety of shapes and forms. Functional flexibility is the ability to allocate and reallocate employees between a range of functions and tasks. Numerical flexibility is the ability to adjust the number of workers employed in line with fluctuations in sales or demand. As Gallie et al (1998) suggest, there are good reasons to doubt that part-time employees deliver more of these types of flexibility than their colleagues employed on full-time contracts.

Part-timers are likely to have fewer skills, and fewer opportunities to develop the skills required to deliver functional flexibility, than full-timers. UK employment protection legislation currently does not discriminate between employees on the basis of hours worked per week or year. Part-timers' hours may be cut back to meet output or sales fluctuations (Dickens, 1991). But like full-time employees, part-timers require two years continuous service to accrue the right to claim unfair dismissal, and up until this point - and after - they are as 'disposable' as their full-time colleagues.

Working-time flexibility - the ability to adjust the pattern or timing of staff hours worked over a day or week, to meet production or sales rhythms - is a main attraction of part-time contracts for employers. This is especially the case in private services such as banking and retail where efforts to extend opening hours, and reduce costs, has been a key component of companies' competitive strategies in the 1980s and 1990s (Neathey and Hurstfield, 1995). The limited legal regulation of working time in the UK has afforded much scope for employers to construct contracts towards these ends. Yet the attempts to tailor part-timers' hours and work patterns to peak sales periods has created its own problems, for employers and employees. Zero hours contracts, for example, under which employees are 'on call' rather than having regular (or

indeed, any guaranteed working hours) have attracted a good deal of criticism. They are said to be problematic to manage and to do little to attract into 'front-line' customer service roles staff whose loyalty is to corporate objectives and goals (Financial Times, 29/1/1997). Annualised hours, twilight shifts and other arrangements designed to secure working time flexibility for employers have been criticised equally for creating new inflexibilities for employees (Blyton, 1993).

Working-time and financial (or cost) flexibility are difficult to separate as employers' objectives; the tailoring of part-timers' hours to meet peak sales periods may be designed to secure both. Part-timers have in the past been seen as offering employers a relatively cheap labour resource by virtue of their failure to qualify for shift or overtime premia and company benefits (such as non-statutory sick pay, maternity leave and pay, pensions and so on). However, the 'freedom' of employers to discriminate against employees on the basis of part-time status has been challenged increasingly in recent years by European Court of Justice interpretations of EU equality legislation. And the UK government has now made a commitment to adopt the EU Part-time Workers' Directive, the broad thrust of which is the harmonisation of non-wage benefits as between full- and part-time employees.

9. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

There are three areas where further progress can be made in employers' policies towards part time employment. First, is the issue of parity of treatment and equal opportunities in terms and conditions, second is the introduction and enhancement of family friendly and enabling measures in general, third is the issue of training initiatives directed at the potential supply of part timers.

a] Parity of Treatment

Non wage benefits, such as maternity provision and payment, occupational pensions, sick pay and holiday entitlement are now subject to provisions of the EU's Part Time Workers' Directive. Access to such non-wage benefits, irrespective of legal requirements, and apart from the social justice and equality arguments, must be an important consideration for employers as a

safeguard against retention problems of women wishing to revert from full time to part time employment after the birth of a baby. In the 1997 IRS Survey the demand of such women to go part time was the second most quoted reason from employers for the use of part time workers. Sympathetic response to this demand is likely to be concentrated in administrative and professional occupations where alternative recruitment is more difficult and costly. Many employers continue to stipulate that the provision of many non-wage benefits, even for part timers, is subject to minimum hours requirements. Such requirements need to be reconsidered to ensure total equal treatment.

Training provision has been identified to be a problem area for part timers where access has been restricted. In addition the subject of parity of training provision for part timers falls outside existing legislation. Particular problems might exist where training time occurs outside set part time hours. The provision of training within set part time hours would thus increase the likelihood of take-up.

The problem of the association of low pay with part time work, and the continuing differential between the earnings of part time and full time workers is more difficult to address, reflecting wider problems of gendered and segmented labour markets in the whole economy. The introduction of the National Minimum Wage in April 1999 will disproportionately benefit part timers, and go some way to adjusting the differential. Improved access to performance pay schemes (where they exist), bonus and commission schemes would also increase the relative earnings of part timers. Recognition of part timers skills and qualifications within pay systems would also be of considerable benefit to large numbers of part timers, particularly those in administrative and professional occupations.

b] Family Friendly and Best Fit Policies

Examples exist of the organisational benefits of introducing 'family friendly' policies such as career breaks for women, workplace creches, and the option for returning mothers to transfer from full time to part time contracts. In cases where such policies are introduced staff turnover is

reduced and the morale of staff improves (for an example from the South West see, 'The Sun Life workplace nursery' in *IRS Employment Trends 627,* March 1997). Many organisations affiliated to Opportunity 2000 also provide examples of a range of policies designed to create equal opprotunities in general, which spin off to address some of the problems of part timers. However, critics of some of these policies question the 'business priority' approach of many of the initiatives whereby schemes are introduced primarily for operational rather than EO reasons and run the risk of retrenchment or withdrawal in periods of recession (K. Purcell, 1997). There is, therefore, a potential problem of the degree of 'embeddedness' of family friendliness within organisation culture, which needs to be addressed at senior management level.

Less common within organisations, particularly those dependent on banks of part time staff to cover operational needs, is a 'best fit' policy which adjusts the time demands from employers for part time workers with the availability of the part timers themselves. The process of rota preparation (areas such as health and social care, hotel and catering would be examples) often is employer controlled and driven and scheduled 'just-in-time' . More careful planning and involvement from part timers themselves, allowing workers to specify in advance their availability and preference would ease operational difficulties and take more account of family and domestic responsibilities.

c] Externalised Training

Finally, employers might have a role in the wider community in examining ways in which access to work and training may be organised for potential part timers (e.g mothers at home with dependent children). Liaison and joint work with other employers, local agencies, community organisations, trade unions, local authorities and colleges might prove fruitful in organising successful funding bids for community and work based schemes.

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