

Women's working experience in France and England

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Shirley Dex and Patricia Walters

French women's patterns of working over their lifetime contrast with those of British women. We present some of those contrasts in this paper to underline the socially structured nature of women's life-time patterns of work.

Our picture is of the early 1980s and is based on comparisons between the *Women and Employment Survey* (1984) in Britain carried out in 1980 and a survey of French women, *Vie Familiale et Vie Professionnelle* (1981) undertaken by the Centre d'Etudes des Revenus et des Coûts (Paris). There were some differences between the two survey populations, but they had sufficient overlap for us to be able to select two similar samples of women. The analysis that we made was based on a comparison of British and French mothers aged between 18 and 54 with at least one child under 16 at the interview.

One adjustment was made to the French sample, in that we decided to exclude most of the group of farm and family workers and the self-employed. A comparison by Dale and Glover (1987) of the Labour Force Survey findings revealed that since these groups are far more predominant in France than in Britain, for historical and cultural reasons, they tend to be the predominant differences visible in comparisons. By excluding these groups from the French sample, we were restricting our comparisons to groups of women who are more directly comparable; one could call them the women of the modern industrial sector of each economy.

The research project that we are reporting in this paper (Dex, Walters and Alden, 1988) considered the working patterns of French and British mothers in substantial detail, and how these employment patterns may be influenced by the framework of socio-economic policies operating in the two countries.

Overall French women's rate of participation is slightly lower than that of British women: in 1983 58.8 per cent of women of working age in Britain were in the labour force, in France the equivalent rate was 56.1 per cent. What is most striking about French mothers overall, compared with British mothers, is that many more of the French work continuously over their child-bearing and child-rearing years *and* that this continuity is in full-time work. French mothers' greater continuity of employment does not lead to very different overall participation rates compared with that of British mothers, but the very similar overall participation rates between France and Britain are allied with very different patterns of lifetime working in the two countries. These employment characteristics of French and British mothers are presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Employment indicators of British and French mothers

	British 1980	French 1981
% employed of total sample of mothers	51.4	51.2
% employed part-time of total sample of mothers	34.6	8.8
% who have always worked* of total sample of mothers	3.4	31.6

* 'Always worked' means that a woman has not had any breaks from employment lasting more than six months.

Source: Dex, Walters and Alden, 1988

French women's experience of working continuously through marriage and through child-rearing is a well-established pattern evident in all groups. Tables 2, 3 and 4 highlight this point.

Thus, Table 2 shows that there is a substantial amount of continuous working, defined as having no breaks in employment longer than six months duration, amongst women of all ages: over a

third of mothers in their twenties have always worked, but what is more notable is that over a quarter of mothers in their forties have always worked.

Table 2 Percentage of mothers continuously employed, by age

	British	French
20-29 years	4.6	36.2
30-39 years	3.4	33.8
40-49 years	2.2	25.1

Samples: Total samples of mothers
Source: Dex, Walters and Alden, 1988

Table 3 shows that continuous working is engaged in by mothers with different sizes of family. Thus almost half of all French women with one child have always worked, but so too have a third of mothers with two children and one out of eight of all French mothers with three children.

Table 3 Percentage of mothers continuously employed, by number of children

	British	French
1 child	8.0	47.9
2 children	2.3	33.7
3 children	1.1	15.5

Samples: Total samples of mothers
Source: Dex, Walters and Alden, 1988

Table 4 shows that there is a substantial amount of continuous working by French mothers at all socio-economic levels in France. In our comparative analysis we re-classified the occupational categories of the French data into the occupational categories of the *Women and Employment Survey* (WES) and in so doing collapsed the original twelve WES categories to ten (see Appendix I). Table 4 shows that

even in those occupations whose conditions of employment, for example, limited contracts, are most likely to generate intermittent employment, a fifth of all French mothers have maintained continuous employment.

Table 4 Continuous employment, by woman's occupation

Occupational category	<i>percentages</i>	
	British	French
Professional	6.7	66.3
Teacher	9.0	60.4
Nursing	1.8	52.9
Intermediate non-manual	8.9	45.9
Clerical	4.0	42.3
Sales	1.4	24.4
Skilled manual	3.6	34.3
Child care	0.0	37.1
Semi-skilled, factory	2.5	21.8
Other semi-skilled, unskilled	2.6	22.1

Samples: All mothers' current or most recent occupation

Source: Dex, Walters and Alden, 1988

These tables show some of the social factors creating variation in continuous working amongst French women. Increasing age increases exposure to the possibility of interruptions of work: the lower figures for continuous working amongst French women in their forties (and even more in their fifties which we do not show) may be related to generational differences but we were unable to unravel these effects. The effect of increasing family size is greater than that of age in causing discontinuity of work amongst French women. It is having three or more children that has the biggest effect on their continuity. It is not the case, however, that increasing the number of children creates highly intermittent employment patterns among French women. What is more the case is that French women who stop being continuous workers leave the labour force altogether. We think that two factors contribute to this, one is the scarcity of part-time work, and the other is the amount of family allowance paid to families with three or more children.

Child benefit payments can act as a disincentive to mothers to engage in paid work because they provide a degree of substitute income: the higher the level of benefits relative to average earnings, the greater the disincentive to mothers' employment that is likely. Comparison of the levels of non-income-related child benefit at different levels of family size and for children at different ages show that at higher levels of family size, especially where children are older, benefits are considerably higher in France than in Britain and are likely, all other things being equal, to constitute a greater disincentive to mothers' employment. The really strong contrast between the two countries occurs in families larger than two children. Levels of benefit in France move up with three and more children much more than they do in Britain: age premia for children over ten and then again over fifteen in France enlarge the difference between the two countries even more.

Finally, to complete our review of features of social structure affecting the distribution of continuous working amongst French mothers, there is the effect of occupational differences. Here the variation by occupation is what one would expect. Greater continuity of employment exists amongst higher grade occupations where internal career structures are more prominent than in lower level, and often higher turnover, occupations.

It is certainly *not* the case that one can explain the differences between French and British women's continuity in terms of the French having smaller families, a markedly different occupational structure, or being younger overall than British women, nor indeed of French women being more educated. The difference in the amount of work continuity between French and British women is something that exists as a national pattern beyond any socio-demographic differences.

French and British women also have different overall patterns of life-time working experience. As we show in Table 5, French mothers' life-time working experience is much more polarised than is that of British women. There is a polarisation between French mothers who either work fairly continuously, often for the same employer, and those who leave the labour force and do not work at all. In Britain intermediate points on the spectrum between the extremes appears to be more common – most mothers intermittently combine not working activity and paid work, often with a range of employers.

Table 5 Summary of women's employment patterns

Lifetime working pattern	<i>percentages</i>	
	British	French
Never worked*	1.2	1.8
Always worked	3.4	31.6
Not worked in last 10 years*	11.0	22.5
Intermittent working: less than or equal to 50% of time spent working	27.1	18.3
Intermittent working: more than 50% of time spent working	57.3	25.8
Total	100.0	100.0
N =	2,361	3,977

* Mutually exclusive categories. Included in 'never worked' first and 'not worked in last 10 years' second. 'Always worked' means that a woman has not had any breaks from employment lasting more than six months.

Source: Dex, Walters and Alden, 1988

Compared with Britain there appear to be stronger forces operating on French women in two contrary directions – continuity of work and continuity of *not* working. The structure of incentives acting upon French women, in comparison with those in Britain, could be argued to encourage either a continuous working career, or the stopping of work altogether. British women's more intermittent pattern of working (for 50 per cent or more of their time, but rarely for 90 per cent or more of their time) can be attributed to the lack of strong incentives, in comparison with France, either to work continuously, or to give up work altogether.

If we are seeking explanations of French women's high levels of continuity there are a number of factors interacting. Social policies very clearly play their part in developing a pattern of continuous working amongst French women. French maternity leave and pay provisions are more generous and have less restrictive eligibility conditions than in Britain. The effect of French child care provisions and nursery school provisions is shown through the way in which the age of the youngest child has relatively little influence on French women's participation in contrast to that of British women. It was the

case that the majority of working mothers in France did not appear to have child-care facilities nearby and that the majority of working mothers in France used childminders for pre-school children. What is also very clear from our analysis of policies and survey data is the strong pull from French women's earnings that encourages their employment continuity. As a French colleague put it, 'work is so very interesting to French women' – he meant financially profitable. This derives from a number of aspects. First, the work is full-time and the contrast between working and not-working financially is very marked indeed: second, compared with Britain, more of the jobs are amongst the higher occupational categories, and, finally, there is the very marked effect of the French income tax system on women's earnings. Full-time working women in France retain much more of their earnings after tax than do British women.

In Britain women who work continuously are a very small minority of mothers with children: they tend to be women with one child, in their twenties and early thirties, working full-time rather than part-time at age of interview and working in professional and higher status occupations. One can say just the same about French mothers who have worked continuously. The point is, however, that in France national employment and social policies and possibly employer-based policies magnify the size of the overall group of continuous workers. As a consequence, younger professional women with one child in France are very unlikely to have ever stopped being employed. In Britain up to the time of our data the overwhelming result of having a first child was for every women, including professionals, a break from employment with a subsequent return to part-time work.

French women sustain their continuous working without extensive part-time working. Indeed, paradoxical as it might seem, the absence of part-time work partly accounts for the higher levels of continuity amongst French mothers compared with British mothers. Whenever French women experience great strain in combining full-time work and looking after children they are faced with a somewhat stark choice – full-time work or not working. In Britain, whilst a large amount of part-time work is low status work, part-time work is available and obtainable. Between the two societies there have been greater cost incentives for British employers to provide fairly low-hour packages of part-time employment. Tax incentives for women to take part-time

work operate in Britain and they also operate in France, particularly at the lower and higher levels of income.

The work that British women do after a career break is from many points of view one of the most problematic features of British women's work experience. The British part-time configuration, where a large proportion of mothers work for low hours in routine service jobs, for relatively low earnings, is a bad deal for many women individually and for women generally. It begins to seem a bad deal to employers facing shortages of educated, experienced personnel. Looking at British and French women's experience comparatively leads us to ask the following question: if change is desired in British women's work experience, where will it come from? Can we assume that action at employer level, or the play of market forces will achieve significant changes? Our analysis of the work experience of British and French women shows how it has been shaped and influenced by national level policies and we would argue that policies at this level have to be addressed in deliberate attempts to change. Assuming for instance that employers are becoming more committed to creating part-time work opportunities that do not of themselves 'cool-out' or 'de-rail' those who move into them, but which enable workers to translate from full-time work and back, then we would argue that, as is not being attempted in France, there is a need for national levels of action which statutorily and juridically establish part-time work on a basis that is not inherently disadvantageous to the part-time employee.

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Appendix 1 Reclassification of Women's Occupations

New occupational classification	British WES original categories	French CERC original categories
1. Professional	1. Professional	30. Professions, libérales 32. Professeurs, professions littéraires et scientifiques 33. Ingénieurs 34. Cadres administratifs supérieurs
2. Teachers	2. Teachers	41. Instituteurs, professions intellectuelles, diverses 80. Artistes
3. Nursing etc.	3. Nursing etc.	42. Services médicaux et sociaux 43. Techniciens
4. Intermediate non-manual	4. Intermediate non-manual	44. Cadres administratifs moyens 80. Clergé
5. Clerical	5. Clerical	51. Employés de bureau
6. Sales	6. Sales	53. Employés de commerce
7. Skilled manual	7. Skilled	60. Contremaîtres 61. Ouvriers qualifiés 72. Autres personnels de service 82. Armée et police
8. Child care	8. Child care	72. Nurice
9. Semi-skilled factory	9. Semi-skilled factory	63. Ouvriers spécialisés
10. Other semi-skilled	10. Semi-skilled domestic 11. Other semi-skilled 12. Unskilled	68. Manoeuvres 70. Gens de maison 71. Femmes de ménage

Appendix 2 The French System of Taxation

The present French income tax system was introduced in 1945 and aggregates incomes of husband, wife and dependent children for purposes of tax (Atkinson, 1987; Atkinson et al, 1987a). Income subject to tax includes wages and salaries, certain fringe benefits (such as houses provided by employers, career cars for employees provided by employers, etc), interest, pensions, unemployment and sickness compensations and alimony and maintenance payments. It also includes certain short-term and long-term capital gains. The income subject to tax does not include imputed income from home ownership, payments made under life assurance policies and family allowances. The taxpayer then makes deductions from income in order to arrive at taxable income:

- (i) social security contributions
- (ii) 80 per cent of pensions premiums
- (iii) unemployment contributions

After deducting the above, taxpayers are entitled to deduct an allowance for expenses of business or employment. This may be either the actual vouched expenditure or a standard 10 per cent of earnings up to a maximum varying over the years. Between 1981 and 1983 it was 50,999 francs. Employees as opposed to self-employed are then able to deduct, after the employment allowance, 30 per cent of the remaining income. This is intended to equalise the treatment of employees and the self-employed who are assumed to under-report their true income. For employees the overall reduction of taxable income is 28 per cent.

Taxable income is divided into a number of parts set by the 'quotient familial' which accords a coefficient to members of the taxable unit according to social status, thus:

	Number of children					
	0	1	2	3	4	per child over 4
2 parent family	2	2.5	3.	4	4.5	0.5
1 parent family	1	2	2.5	3.5	4	0.5

Keeping women in

For each disabled child the coefficient is increased by 0.5. Each part of taxable income is then taxed at the following rates (1981 figures):

	francs		
0%	0	-	11,230
5%	11,230	-	11,740
10%	11,740	-	13,930
15%	13,930	-	22,060
20%	22,060	-	28,320
25%	28,320	-	33,740
30%	33,740	-	43,040
35%	43,040	-	44,680
40%	44,680	-	82,790
45%	82,790	-	113,860
50%	113,860	-	134,680
55%	134,860	-	153,200
60%		over	153,200

In 1982 the marginal tax rate was extended to 65 per cent. Tax liability is calculated by multiplying tax on each 'part' of income by the coefficient. Income tax is payable in arrears but taxpayers can opt to pay a monthly levy on their tax liability in the previous year. In France there is no wife's earned income allowance, or possibility of a wife (as opposed to a cohabitee) opting for separate assessment of income.

Discussion

Heather Joshi

There's a remarkable contrast in the prevalence of the career break as a part of British culture and British women's lives and it not necessarily being something that French women think they have to undertake. Do you think that one of the outcomes of this difference is that you have more women in top jobs in the French sample, and is there any way in which you can link that to the fact that French women don't leave their jobs to look after children to the extent to which

British women do? Secondly, about the French women who stop work altogether: I think you said that they were over-represented amongst the mothers with three children. Do you know whether they left the labour force at their first child or at their third?

Shirley Dex

On the first point, the outcome of the career break, the implications of that in Britain and France – yes, there are more women in the top jobs in France but the numbers aren't huge. However, other work by David Marsden which has looked at organisational structures in France and Britain, suggests that there are more top jobs in France. They've suggested that there are more labour market or career structures in general in France than in Britain. We can't really answer why, whether that helps women to have continuity in their career or whether it's partly a product of the fact that they do have continuity already. But then, at the end of the day, they're not jumping up to the top of the organisational structure that much really. Perhaps I should add the definition of what we call continuous working in this research is not that French women or the equivalent British women have never had any break at all from work. They've probably had maternity leave. What they certainly haven't had is a break of more than six months: that was the definition that the French survey used and we imposed on the British. Those who stopped work altogether, whether they stopped after their first or third child – we haven't looked specifically at that. What we do know is that, if you look at the women and their continuity in their current status, they're not working. How long is it since they last worked? Over half the group have not been working for the last ten years. That's the basis on which we're making this trend about the polarisation. But just where they stopped we haven't actually looked at and in fact, we couldn't do that through systematically with the French survey.

Rosemary Crompton

Work I've read does suggest in fact that the proportion of top-level jobs in France is greater than the proportion of the top-level jobs in any of the European countries. But this would add to your first point, the problem of comparability of occupational structures, that different nations seem to generate rather different occupational structures, so there is a problem here.

Andrea Spurling

We're very much looking at occupational structures, but there seems to be a basic cultural difference and I wondered when you looked at this, or if there's any way of reporting on it. There seems to be a fundamental difference in the attitude to pre-school and infant education between France and the British tradition of experiential and expressive learning in the early years which runs quite counter to the French tradition. In France the idea is that you must hand the infant over to the expert and it seems that this may be influential among the middle class parents, very influential in the choice to either stay at home and bring up your own child or not.

Shirley Dex

I would like perhaps to throw back the fact that, while we can establish norms, they can be related to the sorts of provisions that exist which is where we left the paper at the end – how much British attitudes towards child-rearing might change if the state suddenly said, 'Right, education starts at three now'. What I'm saying is that there are attitudinal components in people and in society, and they interact with each other. But I can't say more than that.

Richard Scase

Legislation and fiscal policies can be seen to be the outcome and the expression of various forces within the society, various attitudes and cultural values. At the same time, however, legislation can change and shape attitudes, so how one breaks into that cycle is, I think, a very important issue and a difficult issue for policy.

Peter Moss

It's interesting that, in most countries, including France, as you provide public childcare it's the women in higher status jobs who are most likely to benefit. This is quite significant. Also, it seems that France is in line with virtually every other developed country and the UK is out of line with every other developed country and this is significant and important for national prosperity. Other governments act to provide a leadership function for developing policies to support households with women who are wishing to remain in employment while they have children, while the UK is out of line with I think almost every country in Europe and North America.

Patricia Walters

Whenever you come across French/British comparisons, the question of different cultures and attitudes comes up. People are very forcibly struck by those differences of attitudes. They tend very often to be most remarked upon by British people rather than by French people. But within the French society, people do experience the difficulties of nursery environments for children. There is a great deal of hesitation very often about sending the children but, at the same time, there is this supportive framework that well, 'everybody does it', so that, although people do go through quite a lot of individual doubt and anxiety, the general framework of action on the whole reassures them. That's not to say that people don't have their doubts and express them. But one of the other things that came up from our survey is that when French women work full-time, and, indeed, when they work part-time, their recorded hours of work are much higher than those of British women, both full-time and part-time. The most favoured mode of part-time working that's emerging in France is not the small package of hours that's still very prevalent in Britain, 15 hours a week. It is a four-day week.

Linda Hantrais

What is also happening within the public sector in France is that it has been made possible for women to have their Wednesdays free (a day when the children are not at school) and that is called part-time. In fact, the concept of part-time can be very diverse and if you get a figure which is quite high for professional women, it's not because they're moving into what might be considered as lower status part-time employment. What they're doing is taking advantage of the flexibility which is being offered to them without any loss of status in terms of their career progression. There are patterns of part-time employment which are very different in France depending upon whether you're in the situation where you're freely choosing to do part-time, or whether you're really caught in imposed part-time, which is the case normally in the lower status employment and where women in fact, if questioned, would rather be working full-time but they can't find a full-time job. So, although the figures might look similar when you look at the top and the bottom of the hierarchy, the reasons for taking part-time employment are very different from those in this country.

Shirley Dex

Well, they don't look so similar actually. In Britain the numbers in professional jobs are very small.

Patricia Walters

I think the flexibility idea in general is a very important one because it came out very clearly in our research that French women were able to adapt their working hours much more than British women, and that might well be something that employers in Britain could take on board if they want to encourage women to return to work.

Rosemary Crompton

Many of these highly qualified women are in fact in occupations where they are state employees: teachers, medical, para-medics of various kinds. And indeed, using a sociological term, the service class is divided along the lines of gender in that women service class members tend to be in public sector employment whereas male members of the service class tend to be in private sector employment. There seems to be a relationship between educated female labour and the state, whereby the state doesn't only get more educated female labour (which it doesn't actually over-pay) but it also facilitates it by creating working conditions which keep the family going as well. We're told that the French state is important in facilitating the retention of French women as permanent members of the labour force. What I'm suggesting in fact, is that the English state also facilitates the retention of educated women as its own employees, but does it in a different way.

Patricia Walters

Though obviously if we're talking about retention on a continuous basis, yes, we have said that, in the end, collectively you're getting the same amount of work out of women distributed rather differently. That's pushing it a bit too far but...

Shirley Dex

What we found is that, when you add up people's lifetime working, not making any difference between full-time and part-time work, then British women are working about 80 per cent of the time over their lifetime, whereas with the French there's a lot of women working 90

per cent of their time. Ten per cent is not a big difference. But that's not taking into account any difference in part-time work. If you added that in, it would start to look a lot less. French women would appear as working more.

Patricia Walters

The state sector, the public sector in France, has been the leader in introducing schemes which will improve working conditions with better arrangements for flexible working hours, leave, and so on. So it has acted as a model employer and therefore it's not surprising that women were attracted towards it. Certainly I found that women would change from the private to the public sector when they had the choice, because they were going to have more flexible working hours than they would in the private sector.

Rosemary Crompton

That's something I found in my experience of Sweden, where the Democratic Party uses the state as a model employer and therefore as a leader in the occupations as a whole and what you're suggesting is that France does a similar thing, where it's not the case in the UK really.

Isobel Allen

I'm concerned about the age of the data. It was 1980, the British side, and 1981 for the French. I suspect that the pattern now would be different. That's why I was going to ask you whether you'd broken it down in fact to see whether the younger women had different patterns. My suspicion is that today it's just sheer economic necessity for women to keep working; I would have thought that the choice of having a break is simply not there. If you've got a bloody great mortgage, there's no way in which you can stop.

Julia Brannen

Women still take time away, longer than statutory maternity leave. They're back quicker, true. So that wouldn't change the continuous interrupted pattern very much.

Patricia Walters

But it does change the jobs that they come back to. I think the evidence that we have today is that we know that, if you've had a break, you'll fall off the ladder if you're not careful. The professional and any other ladder. You see, you don't have to be a highly qualified person to fall off the ladder.

Shirley Dex

If that's where the part-time jobs are and you go for a part-time job – that's the feature of the dropping off the ladder. It's not going to change overnight.

Isobel Allen

What I'm wondering is how long you have to be out to fall off the ladder?

Julia Brannen

We found that, when a women took maternity leave and then went back and then stopped and went to another job, something like 60 per cent experienced downward mobility whereas for the continuously employed the rate was 20 per cent experiencing upward mobility.

Susan Gompels

You mentioned that the French model had a greater level of women in the public sector and that the government, the state, was a trailblazer in terms of the employment of women. I was curious when you said that this was not the pattern here. I had understood that in fact, in a lot of Civil Service employment, there had been a certain amount of opportunity and career break facilities and so on for some time.

Barbara Ballard

It's a variable picture. If one is talking about the national Civil Service, I do remember distinctly about ten years ago the Civil Service in its national policy documents saying, 'We do not aim to be a model employer but that role is very often thrust on us and it may have been there historically, but we don't see why we should have to carry that particular burden'. And it was very explicitly rejected in the discussions leading up to their documents on the employment of

women. We will be as good as, but we don't necessarily want to be better than.

Anne Gibson

I think it's probably changing. The Civil Service goes through great agonies with equal opportunities and we did some special research a little while ago looking at the way women got from one grade to another. I think probably what's happening is that opportunities for part-time work etc are improving if you're at a fairly junior grade but if you're at a fairly senior level, they find it difficult to actually define a job that can be done part-time, which is the same thing that Isobel Allen found with the doctors. That somehow the definition of a high-flying senior job in the Civil Service involves being on-call and working very long hours. The Civil Service trade union certainly recognises this as the case because they're now saying that it's totally wrong for jobs to be defined like that because it excludes women who can't do that kind of thing. So I think it's patchy with the Civil Service, but then there are other bits within the public sector which aren't as good as the Civil Service.

Susan McRae

Just to add to what Barbara said about the Civil Service: flexi-time in the Civil Service is – informally, of course – for secretaries. It's not for Grade Seven and above. It's not for the high-flyers, it's frowned upon, so you don't do it. So it doesn't help women at all up the ladder. And that's a hidden convention. It's not written down that it's for secretaries, but it's just simply a hidden rule.

Anne Gibson

The equal opportunities policy of the Civil Service on paper is indeed second to none. Job-sharing is fine as long as you can keep it lower down, but don't let's talk about the higher echelons job-sharing. That would stop them doing what we were talking about this morning, inbuilt overtime, the element that seems to have to be done to be seen as a high-flyer and carry on up the ladder.

Richard Scase

Nicholson and West, in their study published at the beginning of the year, said that there are more women in senior and middle management

positions in the public sector than in private sector organisations, which would suggest that there is something different about the work experience.

Anne Gibson

If you compare the statistics now with, say, fifteen years ago, there's been movement. All I'm saying is that, like so many equal opportunities policies, written on paper they're super, but they not translated into action.

Patrick Walker

To the best of my knowledge, responsibility for equal opportunities in the Civil Service has been transferred to the Treasury. They like to think that they have changed their policy, that they are leaders, that they are as good as, if not better than, most of the private sector. And to a certain extent, on the basis of the monitoring exercise which they carry out on a regular basis, progress is showing up. Progress at the top end. One of the things that struck me, though, in terms of the comparison between Britain and France, was the ramifications behind the policy regarding part-time/full-time work. If you think of the British situation and look at the Employment Act and all the rest of it, they (part-timers) are really non-people. They do not have employment rights and there's a whole range of things that they can lose out on. Presumably that is not the same in France.

Patricia Walters

There are three kinds of contracts in France. You can be on an indefinite permanent contract, or on a contract which is of limited duration, and according to which one you are on, you have different benefits and statuses. They have now created nationally a part-time contract, which can either be one of indefinite or of definite duration. But in this part-time contract, they have specified all of the kind of rights that a part-time employee has and these will be the same as for a full-time employee. For instance, they have the same voting rights for the works councils. They have the same length of holidays but their holidays depend on the length of time that they have been employed with the company. They have specified all kinds of things like that. To an English eye, and I'm not expert in industrial relations, it's a very different way of seeking to regulate industrial relations. It's

trying to think of all eventualities and to create a particular category of provision that will deal with them, rather than leaving it to be established by subsequent case-law. For instance, they have specified that it is possible for people to accumulate part-time work in order to have the equivalent of full-time rights, whereas my understanding of a recent case of a British teacher employed by an authority on three different kinds of part-time contracts was that this didn't accumulate in any kind of way to give her full-time rights in terms of redundancy. So it is a very different system and it is culturally and institutionally different from that which prevails in Britain.

Anne Gibson

There isn't a definition of hours in relation to part-time work in Britain?

Patricia Walters

At the moment if you work 16 hours and less, then you're not protected by law and it may soon be 20 hours and less. That isn't written into the French law. It's not written in in terms of employment protection. Within part-time contracts the specification of part-time work is anything that is four-fifths and below full-time hours and there is obviously national legislation over working hours.

Linda Hantrais

The latest stage that you're talking about in France came in 1982 which is in fact after your survey took place, but I don't think it's had a very great effect on the attractiveness of part-time. Perhaps to employers because it just might be because the regulations are so strict that part-time hasn't developed because it's not going to be to the advantage of employers. The demand is not that great for it and what's happened in fact is that most of the part-time jobs that have been created since 1982 have been taken up by people who are unemployed, usually young people who see that as a way of biding time until they can find a full-time job. So it hasn't led to the increased attractiveness.

Shirley Dex

There was also a change in financial insurance or social security contributions at that time too. Prior to that it was a disadvantage to employ two part-timers instead of one full-timer in France because

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you pay social security on someone's earnings up to a ceiling, so you'd end up paying more for two part-timers because you'd passed the ceiling for one full-timer.