

Part-time Work and Part-time Workers: Keeping Women In or Out?

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This paper gives a selective review of recent economic and statistical research which has considered the organisation of work on a part-time relative to a full-time basis. The intention is to present a contextual overview of our current understanding of the status of part-time work, particularly with respect to the role of part-time working as a mechanism for keeping women in the labour force. It reviews research which relates to trends in part-time employment in Great Britain, particularly those studies which have analysed data at a national level.

The issues raised in this review are relevant to this conference because, in Great Britain, part-time work appears to be a mechanism which has kept women in. The question posed in this paper is, at what price? Has it provided women with flexibility in a work regime that they have demanded, boosted family incomes and otherwise maintained the stock of skills and experience in the population? Or, in contrast, has it contributed to the genderised ghetto of the occupational structure, relegating many women to work which is well below their potential.

Six 'facts' reviewed

At a conference organised by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1982, slightly more than six years ago, we were considering these very

same issues. I produced a paper for that conference in collaboration with Brian Main. It was a short, unpublished paper, entitled 'Six facts about part-time work'.

Taking these so-called 'facts', it is useful to review the progress that has been made over the last six years in respect of our knowledge about part-time jobs and part-time workers. To what extent were they 'facts'? To what extent were we stretching the interpretation of information that we had at that point in time and what have we learned subsequently?

The first 'fact' we presented related to part-time workers. We claimed that part-time workers are virtually all women returners. Secondly, we stated that part-time jobs are service sector jobs. Thirdly, that part-time work is low-paid. Fourthly, that part-time working means stepping down the job ladder. Fifth, part-time work is found predominantly in smaller organisations and enterprises. Finally, that part-time workers are under-represented in terms of their membership of trade unions.

Starting with the first of these statements – the assertion that part-time workers are women returners. This was an ambiguous statement, because the great majority of women in Britain who are in the labour market and aged thirty and over are likely to have returned to employment at some earlier stage, following a break for family formation. What we were trying to get across with this statement is the idea that part-time working is often the first job after a women has returned from a significant break associated with childbearing. While this may appear relatively unprovocative, we did not have sufficient information at the time to be able to make this statement. Subsequent information, derived from the Women and Employment Survey (Roberts and Martin, 1984) shows that this is indeed the case for the majority of women in part-time jobs. Some may be first time returners, others may be second time returners, but in each case part-time working was the method by which they have returned after a break for childbearing. What we failed to say at that time is that there is a significant amount of male part-time employment.

Figure 1 shows the age distribution of men in part-time employment. There are well over three-quarters of a million men in this country who are working part-time. Taking those who have defined themselves as in part-time employment as opposed to those who said they were in a full-time job but were in fact working less

than thirty hours a week, they are predominantly men under the age of twenty or over the age of sixty-five. Figure 1 is derived from the 1981 Labour Force Survey. The situation for 1986 is little different. It can be seen that the men working part-time are those working predominantly at the margins of the labour force; that is, they are filling in for some other activity such as being in further or higher education, or have retired, possibly with an occupational pension, and have returned to part-time employment after the age of sixty.

Figure 1 Age distribution of males (pt)

Figure 2 shows some additional information derived from the Women and Employment Survey (Main, 1988a). These graphs plot the change in the labour force participation of women for different age groups. Labour force participation is split into part-time employment and full-time employment. The upper graph shows that the relationship between full-time working and the life-cycle has remained virtually unchanged over the twenty-five year period spanned by the oldest age group in that survey and the 30-34 year olds. There has been a reduction in participation among 16-19 year olds, simply because more women are now staying on in higher education. But after age 25 and onwards, the proportions moving into full-time

Figure 2 Labour force participation of women, for seven five-year age group cohorts

Source: Main, B.G.M. (1988a)

employment are very similar to the employment path taken by women some twenty five years earlier. The lower graph indicates that the increase in labour force participation has arisen because women who are returning to the labour market are returning to part time jobs in

greater numbers and more frequently than previously. We know also that they are returning after a shorter interval than they did previously and that they are returning more frequently than they did previously (Main, 1988a). On the basis of this evidence, it is reasonable to assert that when we refer to part-time employment, we are referring predominantly to women returning after a period of family formation.

The second assertion made in 1982 was that part-time jobs are service sector jobs. It is obviously still the case that part-time jobs are service sector jobs, more so now in 1988 than was the situation in 1980/81. Table 1 shows the latest estimates we have prepared for 1986. From this table it is quite clear that there is a continued decline in part-time employment in the manufacturing sector and a continued growth of part-time employment in the services. The 1970s was the decade that one can characterise as a growth in part-time employment in the public sector, matched by slightly less growth but still significant

Table 1 Sectoral changes in full-time and part-time employees in employment, Great Britain, 1971-81 and 1981-86

Sector		Number of employees (thousands)			Percentage change per annum	
		1971	1981	1986	1971-81	1981-86
Primary sector	PT	88.2	80.7	75.7	-0.9	-1.3
	FT	1123.2	981.4	763.2	-1.3	-4.9
Manufacturing	PT	549.5	463.7	355.8	-1.7	-5.2
	FT	7340.8	5594.2	4780.7	-3.7	-3.1
Construction	PT	30.1	64.1	65.9	7.9	0.6
	FT	1128.6	1015.4	902.3	-1.1	-2.3
Distribution, hotels, catering, transport, communications	PT	1100.8	1582.2	1763.5	3.7	2.2
	FT	4045.2	3919.0	3881.1	-0.3	-0.2
Business and misc services	PT	523.7	905.5	1155.4	5.6	5.0
	FT	1868.7	2298.0	2772.6	2.1	3.8
Health, education and public administration	PT	1049.6	1403.2	1577.4	2.9	2.4
	FT	2979.6	2298.7	3010.6	0.7	-
Other employees	PT	0.1	0.2	0.0		
	FT	2.3	2.7	0.0		
All sectors	PT	3342.0			3.0	2.1
	FT	18306.4	16809.3	16110.5	-0.8	-0.8

Source: Elias, P. (1988b)

growth in part-time employment in the private sector. That situation now seems to have turned around in the 1980s which exhibits strong growth of part-time employment in the private services sector, although there is still some growth in publicly-provided services. Currently it is predominantly in areas like hotels, catering, miscellaneous services, business services where we see continued rapid growth in part-time employment.

The third assertion that was made was that part-time jobs are low-paid. This was a particularly misleading statement. What was meant, and what should have been said, is that part-time jobs are concentrated in those occupations which are low-paid occupations. Figure 3 shows the distribution of women in part-time and full-time jobs according to a special occupational classification we developed with the Equal Opportunities Commission (Elias, 1988a). This classification has the advantage of identifying all low status, low paid jobs in one occupational category 'other personal services' (category 17 in Figure 3). If the typical training period for jobs in an occupational category is less than one month, then we have classified those occupations into the 'other personal service' category. This category consists of cleaning and low-level catering occupations; not waitressing, but occupations like kitchen assistant and counter-hand. The remarkable difference between these two histograms requires little description. Obviously, for women in full-time jobs and women in part-time jobs there is a tremendous amount of occupational segmentation at work compared with this similar histogram for men which shows much more evenness across the distribution. But for the part-timers in particular, their concentration in the low status, low paid category is remarkable.

We have indicated that part-time jobs are low-paid but are part-timers low-paid? To answer this question we need to look at evidence which compares the educational background and the amount of work experience that part-timers have as opposed to full-timers. If we can 'adjust' for these differences, it becomes possible to compare the pay received by a woman working part-time with the pay she would receive if paid as if she were a full-timer. Through such an adjustment process, we can see if it is the case that those women who are working as part-timers in that category 'other personal services' are low-paid because they are those women who are the lowest in terms of their qualifications and work experience.

**Figure 3 Occupational distribution of female employment 1981,
by full-time/part-time status and whether working part-time
one year earlier**

Source: Elias, P. (1988a)

There are three studies which have done this, all fairly recent. The first was undertaken by Main (1988b) again using the Women in Employment Survey data. The second was undertaken by Ermisch and Wright (1988) and the third by Heather Joshi and Marie-Louise Newell (1985). The study by Joshi and Newell is interesting because it used a completely different source of data from that used by the Ermisch/Wright and the Main studies. All of these studies come to the conclusion that there is what you might call a 'part-time discount'. If you take two women who are equally well qualified, equal in terms of their age, their work experience, equal in every respect that the information at our disposal allows us to make them equal, you find that, for those who are working part-time, there is an unexplained difference of between eight and ten per cent in their rates of pay. Part-timers receive eight to ten per cent less in terms of their pro-rated earnings than the full-timers. It is most interesting that Joshi and Newell develop a similar conclusion from the major cohort study that they have been investigating.

We have better evidence now that part-time work is low-paid. I find this quite intriguing. If one argues that part-time work and full-time work are good substitutes, and that this 'discount' is static in the long term, then what does this part-time discount mean? A neo-classical economist would argue that it could reflect supply side differences in productivity, something that was unmeasured in the studies undertaken comparing the full-timers and the part-timers but something that can be recognised by employers. Alternatively, it could derive from differences in the quasi-fixed costs of hiring, training and supervising part-timers as opposed to full-timers.

On the issue of supply-side differences in productivity, I would argue that part-timers are likely to be more productive than full-timers. For example, part-timers are more likely to be sick in their own time. Part-timers often have a condensed number of hours in which to get a particular task done, whereas full-timers have a little bit more latitude in the organisation of their day. So I cannot buy arguments that part-timers are ten per cent less productive than full-timers. Turning instead to the issue of quasi-fixed labour costs, if those are fixed in terms of the individuals and not in terms of the hours the individual works then yes, there is an argument here that part-timers are more costly than full-timers. However, any such costs have to be offset against what I believe are higher levels of productivity from

part-timers. Secondly, I don't believe that there are significantly different costs anyway, because the majority of the part-timers are in occupations for which there is little training and for which there is a relatively low cost of hiring and firing. Essentially then, neither of these arguments hold up. This is where we have to look at the case study work to find out why employers pay part-timers less than full-timers. I was very interested to read the fascinating study by Walsh (1988), looking at part-time work in the hotels and catering sector. The evidence that he comes up with, albeit from a few establishments but fairly consistently, is that employers are making assumptions about the relative importance of the income to the family unit. They are making the assumption that a woman working part-time has got other forms of income support or she would not be looking for part-time employment. In other words, equity is viewed as more important here than efficiency, but it is an employer's view of equity and it may not reflect the household structure as we know it today which is no longer typified by a man working full-time and a woman at home looking after the kids and working for pin money. So, going back to the original assertion, that part-timer workers are low-paid, we confirm the assertion. We know a lot more about what low-paid, means and how those mechanisms work and I think we are beginning to build a picture now of how empty many of the economic arguments are in this area. But to exhaust them we must pursue them as fully as possible.

Fourthly, it was asserted that part-time working means stepping down the job ladder. When I look back on it this was the broadest assumption that we made at that time, made in the light of a bit of evidence that we had from work histories in the 1975/6 National Training Survey, and a bit of evidence that we had from the Labour Force surveys which were just becoming available at that time (Elias and Main, 1982). We were examining women with particular vocational qualifications, like a teaching qualification or a nursing qualification, and finding them in part-time employment in areas such as catering, cleaning and so on. What we could not assert at that time was the extent to which this was a temporary phenomenon in each woman's lifecycle. In other words, there could be a trade-off for the flexibility of part-time working that British women have to accept. The trade-off is that if you take a part-time job, it's a crummy job but it will contribute some income to the household and give you

Figure 4 The occupational and employment status of three cohorts of women who have had children

Source: Elias, P. (1988a)

something to do. When you want to, you can take a full-time job and jump back on to your career ladder again. Again using evidence from the Women and Employment Survey, Figure 4 examines the occupational histories of three age groups of women. Looking first at the diagram in the top left corner of this figure, this shows the proportion of women in full-time employment who were in above average earnings occupations at a particular point in their life. Each diagram shows the evolution of the occupational histories of three age groups of women, those who were 35-39 years old in 1980, 45-49 year olds and 55-59 year olds. It might not be very clear from these lines but it is the case that as the younger women, that is the 35-39 year olds, entered employment, which was a more recent event obviously than

the entry into employment of the older women, a much higher proportion of them entered into occupations with higher than average earnings. There is a tendency nowadays for young women to enter better jobs than was the case in the 1960s. Detailed examination of this graph indicates what happens to them subsequently. Everything goes fine for the first five to ten years or so, with an increasing proportion of the age group entering better paid jobs. Then suddenly, between the ages of 23 and 30 years, the proportion of the age group working in well paid jobs drops dramatically. The counterpart of this decline is shown in the diagram in the bottom right corner, which plots the proportion of each age group who are working part-time in below average earnings occupations. Remarkably, there is an equal proportion of women moving into part-time employment in below average paid jobs at the age of thirty in 1981 as was the case in 1951.

As an aside, it could be argued that these graphs, constructed from the work history information in the 1980 Women and Employment Survey are somewhat out of date. Recent research has updated these graphs (Elias, 1988c). It is from a different source, different because it's focused upon six towns in England and Scotland, four in England and two in Scotland, but better than the Women in Employment Survey data in one respect because it collected information for men as well as women. It is weaker than the Women in Employment Survey because it is not a nationally represented picture. But when we plot out and undertake statistical analysis of these skill trajectories, again we find that the most significant determinants of downward occupational mobility were whether or not we were studying the occupational trajectory of a woman or a man, and whether or not the woman had children. The picture is essentially the same in 1986 as in 1980.

On the assertions about part-time employment being concentrated within small firms, part-time work and trade unions; we can only report that there has not been a lot of research undertaken in these areas. There has been some research undertaken and financed by trade unions, studying members who were part-timers as opposed to full timers. There is also some research being undertaken within the study of these six town referenced above, on the decline in trade union membership. This work indicates that one of the significant factors which has contributed to the decline in trade union membership is the growth of part-time employment. All we can say with confidence is

that we have confirmed that there is a negative correlation between part-time working and trade union membership. Despite attempts by many trade unions to encourage higher levels of membership among their part-timers, I remain to be convinced that they are backing the trend. When it comes to the link between small firms and part-time work, again there is little research to report on in this area. Evidence provided to the House of Lords Select Committee on the European Communities (Elias, 1982), derived from the 1975/6 National Training Survey, shows that part-timers tend to be concentrated within smaller firms in all occupational groups.

So what are these processes at work which have led to the growth of part-time working in the service sector? Obviously it is predominantly a process associated with the structural change in employment in the British economy; the growth in employment in areas where part-time jobs will have been created. However, if we start looking at employment on a sectoral basis and concentrate on the proportion of employment which is part-time in each sector, than we can abstract from the process of industrial structural change to determine whether or not there is something going on within the industry sectors.

In a recent study (Elias, 1988b), we have undertaken this task, using a detailed classification of employment by industries and removing some of the problems associated with changing classifications. What we find is that within virtually every part of the manufacturing sector there is a declining proportion of part-time employment. In other words, part-timers are now being used less within the industry even though employment in most of these sectors is declining generally, part-time employment is declining at a faster rate than full-time employment. Consequently, when we discuss the rise in part-time employment, it must be borne in mind that this is a net growth, net of the decline in part-time employment in the manufacturing sector. Because there has been such a significant growth in part-time employment in the service sector, with the proportion of part-time employment increasing, this has overshadowed the decline in the manufacturing sector.

Through an examination of two sectors, one sector in which there has been a very significant decline in the proportion of part-timers (electrical engineering), and another sector where there has been significant growth in the proportion of part-timers (hotels and

catering), we have examined these counteracting trends in more detail. Table 2 shows the trends in the 1970s versus the trends in the 1980s.

Table 2 Employment growth rates 1971 and 1981-86. Employees in employment, by gender and full-time/part-time status for whole economy, electrical engineering and hotels and catering

% p.a.

	Employment growth rate (employees only)					
	Electrical engineering		Hotels and catering		Whole economy	
	1971-81	1981-86	1971-81	1981-86	1971-81	1981-86
All employees	-1.7	-3.5	2.8	2.6	-0.1	-0.3
of which:						
part-time	-4.1	-9.4	5.6	2.9	3.1	1.5
full-time	-1.5	-3.5	0.1	2.3	-0.8	-0.8
Male employees	-1.0	-3.0	1.7	3.0	-0.9	-1.1
of which:						
part-time	3.4	-6.0	3.9	4.6	2.1	2.9
full-time	-1.0	-3.0	0.6	2.0	-1.0	-1.4
Female employees	-3.1	-4.4	3.4	2.5	1.0	0.8
of which:						
part-time	-4.7	-9.9	6.1	2.4	3.3	1.2
full-time	-2.6	-3.4	-0.5	2.7	-0.3	0.4

Source: Elias, P. (1986b)

These are rates of change per annum. Looking first at the columns headed 'electrical engineering' then you see that in the period 1981-1986, when employment in that sector fell at an average rate of 3.5 per cent per annum, it was falling at over 9 per cent per annum for part-timers. And of course that is predominantly a decline in part-time employment among women as can be seen from the bottom row of the table. Contrast that with the second set of rows labelled 'hotels and catering'. Although employment grew at just over 2.5 per cent in the period 1981-1986, it was growing at about three per cent for part-timers. One of the problems that we have encountered in the analysis of such trends is that the more you try to focus on a sector, the more exacting are the data requirements. In this study we made use of the Census Longitudinal Study to overcome this problem. It is in effect is a census public use sample. We have the ability with the Longitudinal Study to pick out the particular sectors we are interested in and to focus on specific occupations in these sectors. What we

wanted to find out was whether or not part-time employment in electrical engineering had been declining more rapidly than full-time employment, and to investigate related changes in that sector. We examined the changing distribution of employment in that sector by part-time and full-time status, for males and females in particular occupational groups. The results of this analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 Changes in female employment, 1971-81, by main occupational categories within sectors and by full-time/part-time status

Sector/occupation		Sample size 1971	Rate of growth (% p.a.)	Sample size 1981
Electrical engineering				
All occupations	FT	2400	-2.6	1836
	PT	751	-5.0	449
of which:				
junior non-manual occupations	FT	632	-1.4	548
	PT	122	-1.1	109
semi-skilled manual occupations	FT	1138	-2.5	883
	PT	386	-6.4	200
skilled manual workers	FT	359	-7.4	166
	PT	125	-8.6	51
Hotels and catering				
All occupations	FT	2164	1.5	2508
	PT	1956	7.2	3914
of which:				
personal service occupations	FT	1043	1.1	1162
	PT	1179	7.4	2405
unskilled occupations	FT	122	3.1	166
	PT	550	6.8	1065

Source: Elias, P. (1988b)

The key figures that stand out in this table are the figures of 6.4 per cent per annum and 8.6 per cent per annum, in the middle of the table under the rows labelled 'semi-skilled manual occupations' and 'skilled manual workers'. What we have done in effect is to isolate those occupational groups within electrical engineering which have borne the brunt of the decline in female part-time employment. From further examination of these occupational groups, we determined that

it was skilled and semi-skilled assembly workers in electrical engineering who have declined most rapidly. Why has that happened? At this point we have to turn to local case study information. Purcell (1988) has been looking at the decline in part-time employment in electrical engineering firms in and around the Coventry area. She shows that it is a combination of international competition and technical change. Much of the routine assembly work carried out by women on a part-time basis has now been automated. Why were those jobs part-time in the first instance? This, we think, has much to do with the historical evolution of labour supply and recruitment in the locality. We know from other studies, such as the study done by Blanchflower and Corry (1987), that the utilisation of part-time labour in organisations is correlated with a few other factors. It is correlated, of course, with the organisational structure of the organisation but as to which establishments use part-time labour and which do not, there seems to be little pattern, other than a remarkable association between organisations that use part-time labour and those that use other forms of what might be termed flexible labour. Organisations that have adopted policies where they have attempted to match more closely between labour supply requirements and labour demand requirements have taken the part-time route. Those organisations in the manufacturing sector which recruited part-timers because they were keen to gain access to a 'pool' of women who would undertake routine assembly/checking tasks, now have a declining demand for such labour.

In hotel and catering we see the same process at work in reverse. We find that the growth of part-time employment in hotel and catering is predominantly associated with occupations like bar work, low-skilled restaurant work, chambermaid and the like; areas where it is difficult to envisage that there could be any kind of mechanisation without a dehumanisation of the service, where the demand for labour is a part-time demand, usually outside regular working hours, and where it is traditional to organise jobs on a part-time basis. So I would conclude from this review that we must gain more understanding of the relationship between occupational segregation and full-time versus part-time working.

Where does all this take us in terms of the topic of the conference – Keeping Women In? If we look forward, forecasting the likely changes in part-time working associated with the changes in

occupational and industrial structures in the economy, it appears that we are in for more of the same. Also, part-time employment is associated with employment in small organisations, and we are likely to see continued growth in this area. So we will without doubt see more part-time jobs. We made that forecast in 1981/82 and we said that we would probably see part-time working rise from 4.5 million jobs in the country to 5 million jobs. What we under-estimated was the extent to which full-time employment would decline in the same period. As it turns out, our prediction for part-time employment was right, but there has been an associated fall of 700,000 jobs in full-time employment. From now to the end of this decade and on into the 1990s we do not anticipate such a large decline in full-time employment; but we do anticipate continued growth in part-time employment, perhaps reaching 5.3 or 5.4 million by the mid-1990s. If this is the case, then does this provide the vehicle for keeping women in? And the answer must be: yes, it does, because part-time jobs are women's jobs. Does it provide them with the opportunities to advance in terms of careers? The answer is an unreserved no, unless steps are taken by organisations, whether that is government organisations, political organisations; whether it is trade unions or whether it is employers. What we have is a widening of the expectations gap – the gap between the kinds of career that women are trained for and the kinds of job that they will end up in in their late thirties and early forties. We seem so far to have got away, is the only way I can describe it, without there being too much clamour. Certainly there is not the clamour at the political level to do something about that, but I wonder how long that situation will go on. I hope not for too long.

Discussion

Heather Joshi

On this question of updating statistics – the 1987 Labour Force Survey suggests that the employment of women full-time has started to rise again, and I wondered if you've had more time than I have had to find out where these extra jobs are coming from?

Peter Elias

That's interesting. We do a lot of forecasting work at the Institute and we did in fact forecast last year that 1987/88 would be the time when full-time employment would start to rise again. What we were projecting at the time was that the decline in full-time employment in the manufacturing sector would cease, would begin to level out and in some areas would increase and that there would be further growth in the service sector which is full-time and part-time. But on balance, the rate of growth of part-time employment will still remain significantly higher than the rate of growth of full-time employment.

Nigel Meager

On the question of part-time jobs and low-paid jobs, it's important to separate the structural changes from the changes within sectors. There's a danger that they're actually masking some structural changes occurring within the sector; so, for example, how much of the growth of part-time work in proportion to the work that's part-time in hotel and catering say, is due to individual firms changing their labour-use strategy and using part-time workers; and how much of it is due to there being more hotel and catering firms around of the type who had an occupational structure such that they could use a lot of part-time workers. How much is done to structural change and how much is sectoral change? Even if we had a sector which consisted of hotels, say, and every hotel was identical in terms of size, number of rooms and so on, then the question would be well, what about those new hotels that are opening with new methods of working and so on and organise their workforce in a particular way versus those that already exist. Is the change occurring in organisations that exist, is it through growth of existing organisations, or the opening of new organisations?

Peter Elias

I'm only quoting Tim Walsh's work on this, and I don't know how he chose his sample which is a key factor here, but the impression I got was that many organisations had responded – often as a consequence of the 1979/80/81 recession which had been a real shake up to their profits particularly – they'd introduced methods of cutting labour costs. The cutting of labour costs and the introduction of part-time work go together, but it wasn't because they could pay part-time

workers less; that didn't figure at that stage. That wasn't the reason, i.e. that part-time workers are ten per cent cheaper than full-time workers. It was because when they were organised on a full-time basis that they had variations in their daily demand for services. They were under-utilising some of their full-time staff and they could make a better match between the services demanded from the organisation and their labour utilisation by bringing in part-timers at the appropriate point in the day, week, month, year or whatever.

Rosemary Crompton

I've actually done some work in hotel and catering and a series of case studies. The most important one, a major hotel chain, won't tell me anything because they've been subject to a series of industrial tribunals about their use of casual labour and so on, so it's very difficult to get things from them. But I did get figures from a local, fairly large, organisation that had three hotels in the East Anglian area and their data they did actually have very good figures. Comparing it between 1980 and 1987 shows a massive increase in part-time working. It showed quite clearly a cut in full-timers, both male and female, and an increase in male and female part-timers. In a way, the really striking thing about the figures was the increase in young male part-timers in this particular organisation. In the same area, because it was in the same sector, we also looked at the schools meals service and in fact the school meals service has gone exactly the same way: you've got a clear recorded switch from female full-timers, but of course in this case, it is a switch to female part-timers.

Peter Elias

What surprises me is the complimentary nature of the evidence that we're receiving from so many different ways of looking at the problem, from the details of the various statistical analyses, through the national trends, right down to the local labour market studies, and then at case study level. We're now beginning to synthesise a picture from all these different sources and I think gaining more understanding in the process. We're still a long way obviously and it begs the question: why was the labour force organised in a particular way in the first instance? How did it all start off? What were the key factors then? The trouble is organisations don't have good records, and so you rely on key informants and then you've get some pretty shaky

data usually. But we are now in a situation where we can observe change. In fact, I would classify what's happened over the last ten years as a sort of labour statistician's laboratory. The greatest experiment that could have been conducted on the British labour market has been conducted, whether you classify it as a political experiment or an economic experiment or whatever. It has taken place and the variations that have taken place are so extreme now that we can gain much more insight as to how these things have occurred.

Shirley Dex

I want to inject an international comparison, not that I could replicate the detail of this. Mary Shoreline looked at comparisons between Britain and the United States and there is evidence of similar comparisons between France and Britain in other people's work. Sectorally there isn't a lot of difference between them and services dominated in all these economies and I suspect if one went into the details of the pressures that are on service industries in Britain and in other countries too, you'd find that the evidence there seems to suggest that there aren't 'inherently' part-time jobs. You suggested at one point that there is a growth of 'inherently' part-time jobs, bar work, for example, but in fact you can structure part-time work or rather part-time jobs can be structured, to constitute full-time jobs if you so choose; and it's not a foregone conclusion that the sectors that are growing need to grow in part-time work, unless there's some strong incentives.

Peter Elias

In terms of the traditional way in which labour is organised in particular sectors and if we're saying that in hotel and catering it's typically been the case that 50 per cent of all employment is on a part-time basis and yet they were expecting employment in that area to grow by 100,000, then we would say if nothing else changed and they continued to organise labour in the same way, we'd expect 50,000 of those jobs to be part-time. That's all I meant by tradition.

Shirley Dex

I just think from a policy point of view, we shouldn't accept that something is necessarily inherently part-time job because it can be that the contract agency can put people together and make three part-time

jobs into one full-time job for somebody. That happens in the United States in a highly organised way.

Peter Elias

There's evidence coming through from our case studies in the Coventry area that where an employer for one reason or another has wanted to employ men on what are traditionally part-time jobs, the jobs have just been reorganised and tasks analysed and re-bundled and they've become full-time jobs. These tasks have become bundled up with other tasks, whereas if they want women they'll organise it on a part-time basis. When you start asking why, that's where it begins to slip through your fingers again. The logic, the rationale, I find very difficult to deal with. As a trained economist I was always taught to look for the wage relationships, the hidden costs and all the rest of it.

Susan Gompels

Finding the logic, the rationale might be important because you might be able to send it up the ladder and get them to break top-level full-time jobs into two part-time jobs.

Richard Scase

There is a number of factors that come in here. There is the employer's strategy but there is also the contextual factors, i.e. the bond strength between labour and capital; unionism can often stipulate what the bundles look like. Again I am thinking of Sweden rather than the UK – you just can't create part-time jobs in Sweden as you can in the UK for a variety of reasons.

Susan Gompels

My point is more general, because I'm hearing (and it's perhaps right) that you're seeing part-timers as a fairly negative thing. At the same time, there seems to be something of a tone of regret about the use of part-timers, that it is somehow a second best option, that we have it if we can't do better. I wondered if there was something rude in the way that we're looking at it rather than saying that one can actually look at it as a positive thing.

Peter Elias

I'm sorry if I gave that impression. I would like part-time work to operate in a positive way so that women can retain an attachment to the labour force, on the assumption that not a lot is going to change in terms of the domestic division of labour and child care responsibility. I see part-time work and job-sharing as ways in which women could obtain access to better occupations. At the moment it's the bump down the occupational ladder that's the problem. The real issue is the occupational structure of part-time employment and the way in which employers organise particular jobs as part-time, usually because they're at the bottom of the occupational hierarchy with no other rationale for it.

One interesting issue relates to this – in Coventry the National Union of Teachers has been implementing a policy of equal opportunities on a variety of different fronts. They took the issue of part-time employment and job-sharing very seriously indeed and through local negotiations, they got the city council, the local authority employer, to agree to implement a policy of job-sharing across all occupations in teaching in Coventry. It's quite an advanced package they have put together. When it came to implementation, the teachers responsible argued that it was very important that job-sharing started at the top among the head teachers. But it became quite clear that the majority of women head teachers were against the job-sharing proposals. Most of them were in their late forties, early fifties, most of them had children but had toughed it out and had become head teachers. It's the same problem that we were referring to with the doctors. The closest that they came to an explanation was one woman who summed it up when she said, 'It reduces my status'. Somehow she felt that somebody who would be sharing a job, even if it wasn't her job, would lessen the status attached to her job, and her pay.

Patrick Walker

We know of organisations who are thinking of putting part-time work in, and one of the problems that they are encountering is the actual balance of part-time work. At the lowest level, part-time work is very easy to manage, but the higher up the ladder you go, the more difficult it becomes to manage part-time work. There is an attitudinal problem which may be part of the rationale in terms of how part-time work is used or not used.

Keeping women in

Fiona Devine

About your case study data, do you have any indication of the benefits of part-time for the employers? Are there any trends towards perhaps employers offering employees more benefits?

Peter Elias

Absolutely not.

Anne Gibson

There are in some areas and it's nothing to do with altruistic reasons. It's to do with necessity for bodies in seats and that's in the finance sector. Employment is increasing in the finance sector, much of it part-time. And in the finance sector there have been some significant breakthroughs. The unions have been pushing for childcare facilities and for mortgage facilities being extended to part-time workers. It's just the beginning, but I think it is something that will continue certainly in the immediate future because there is a shortage of people and it seems they just need more bodies. Their motives are economic. We're busy writing things like if you're a faithful equal opportunities employer, then we'll spread the word that you're good to work for.