



**We need to talk about ... hours**

**Job Advertising in the Civil Service:  
An Analysis by Working Families**

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**Summary**

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## **Summary**

### **Background**

Part-time work “plays a significant part in women’s lifetime patterns of employment.”<sup>1</sup> In 2004, 42% of women in employment worked part-time.<sup>2</sup> However, research has identified that the lack of good quality part-time work is a barrier to women working to their potential and is a contributor to the gender pay gap.

Opportunities to seek new or more responsible jobs, or to build up experience across a range of organisations, are much more limited than full-time workers. The lack of good quality part-time roles is frustrating for the individual and a personal financial cost. It is also not using the full potential of the workforce and represents an under use of experience and skills for the economy.

### **Gender Equality Duty in the Civil Service**

Since April 2007 the Government has given the Public Sector, including the Civil Service, a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity between men and women, including in its recruitment policies.<sup>3</sup> Working Families wanted to know whether this duty was translating into practical measures to encourage part-time work in the Civil Service.

### **Methodology and Key Findings**

We decided to undertake a “secret shopper” exercise to see what it is was like for an individual wanting to apply for work on a part-time basis either three days a week or as a job-share in the Civil Service. In the middle of September 2008 Working Families looked at the 70 jobs advertised over a five day period on the Civil Service Gateway.

- 50 of the jobs were advertised as full-time only;
- 18 of the jobs were advertised as being available either to full-time workers or on a part-time or job-share basis; and
- 2 jobs were advertised as part-time only.

Working Families then undertook an analysis of the 50 jobs that were advertised full-time (without any mention of the possibility of being available for part-time

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Miller, Tess Ridge and Fran Bennett (May 2006). Part-time work and Social Security: Increasing the Options. Research Report Number 351 Carried out by the Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy University of Bath on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions.

<sup>2</sup>Office for National Statistics (Spring 2005) Labour Force Survey.

<sup>3</sup> See Appendices A.

workers) to see whether the employer would in fact consider employing someone looking for part-time hours.

We also contacted the smaller group of departments that had advertised their jobs as being available to full-time workers but also as being suitable for job-sharing. We wanted to see whether we could identify good practice in this area that would be useful to disseminate to other potential employers in the public and private sectors.

In response to our enquiries we discovered that of the 50 jobs advertised as full-time, 12 (24%) could also be available for a part-time applicant. In these cases the departments responding to our enquiries were able to tell us how a part-time application would work in practice and were prepared to accept responsibility for filling the remaining part of the vacancy. 33 posts (66%) were still only available to those willing to work full-time. Mostly this was stated explicitly, sometimes it was a clear consequence of the potential employer not being able to provide a basic assurance that they would be able to take forward a part-time or job-share for an individual application. For example, saying that an individual would need to apply as an established job-share before an application would be considered. For a further five posts no response to our enquiries was given before the application deadline.

## **Conclusions from Key Findings**

- The first impression was that the Civil Service has a predominantly full-time hour's culture for new recruits (71% of the jobs were advertised on the Gateway as full-time). Of interest here is the range of jobs that fell into this category. While there may be reasons for some types of jobs being restricted to full-time hours, the jobs that we looked at ranged widely from administrative to managerial roles.
- There was little evidence that the departments had looked at the business needs for posts before advertising and seeking full-time employees for the role. This might suggest that the 'comfort zone' for most departments was to seek full-time applications for full-time posts without asking themselves whether it would be possible in practical terms for someone to do the job part-time.
- The fact that some of the 'full-time' jobs were on further enquiry available to part-time workers might be positive news. However, potential candidates with the right skills and experience may have been dissuaded from applying because of the way that the jobs were initially advertised. This will also have represented a disappointing outcome for the employer, who in effect was turning away part-time talent that when questioned they professed to be willing to employ.

- We did identify some good practice albeit in a minority of departments. 18 jobs were advertised as being open to full-time as well as either part-time or a job-share (although 10 of these jobs were from a single department). Two jobs were advertised as for part-time applicants only.
- The second part of our analysis was to look at those departments that offered job-shares, our aim here was to see if we could identify good practice. However, even in this group where the job-share option was explicitly offered, we found a limited understanding of job-sharing or how it would work for an individual applicant.
- The statutory Gender Equality Duty has not translated into consistent recruitment practice for individuals applying for part-time or job-share roles in the Civil Service. Current practices do not always encourage employees who want to work part-time to apply and thus may reduce women's chances of employment, as well as failing to maximise the employers' chances of finding the best person for the job.
- The difficulty faced by perspective new employees to seek a part-time role when they have no right to request flexibility in hours until they have worked for an organisation for 26 weeks.

## **Recommendations**

- Clear and consistent job advertising that reflects departmental equality aims.
- More external civil service jobs should be available part-time.
- A more imaginative approach to job design with clear business needs and outputs thought through before a post is advertised.
- A greater understanding and encouragement of job-sharing.
- Departments that advertise a range of posts on a part-time basis should be rewarded and their good practice should be shared.
- Greater scrutiny of the Gender Equality Duty in relation to promoting part-time work.
- The Civil Service considers extending the right to request flexible working to their new employees as well as those who are already established with twenty six weeks service.
- Protection of the Gender Equality Duty when the Public Sector Duties are combined in the new Equalities Bill.

## **Conclusion**

Working Families undertook the analysis to better understand the experience of someone seeking to work part-time in the Civil Service and to look at the effectiveness of the Gender Equality Public Sector Duty. These issues are inextricably linked. The Gender Equality Duty is there to prevent discrimination from happening in the first place. Increasing the availability of good quality jobs on a part-time basis is a vital step towards encouraging more women, particularly those with parental or caring responsibilities to apply. For an individual seeking a part-time role the good will or good practice of some departments, whilst encouraging, will only be of real value if it can be adopted on a wholly different scale across the Civil Service.

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