



**SWP 19/92 FLEXIBILISATION AND PART-TIME WORK
IN EUROPE**

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FLEXIBILISATION AND PART TIME WORK IN EUROPE

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Introduction

The growth in part time employment in the face of high unemployment is one of the more distinctive features of labour market change in Western European over the last decade. It is readily associated with increasing participation of women in the labour market and with the rise of the service sector. More recently, international institutions, the EEC included, as well as academics have linked it to more general trends towards 'flexibilisation'. With this discussion of part time employment has tended to be subsumed within analysis of precarious work (Rodgers and Rodgers 1989) and the 'flexible firm', though this is open to challenge (Rubery 1989).

Whatever the common trends, varying systems of labour market regulation, of contract law, of social reproduction and income maintenance have fostered important differences both in the construction of part time labour as a specific form of employment and in the utilisation of part time workers across the different economies of Western Europe (Rubery 1989, Hakim 1991).

Whilst part time work can broadly be described as a specifically gendered form of numerically flexible labour (Beechey and Perkins 1988), such institutional structures imply that it is also differentially delineated from 'standard' or 'normal' employment in different nation states, and that its development cannot be understood outside a societal framework (Michon 1990). At the same time institutions are not immovable. Even the domestic division of labour can be dented: the rising demand for more flexible working arrangements can be seen to have altered regulatory frameworks in

many countries (Kravaritou-Manitakis 1988) and the feminisation of the labour force has itself had at least some effects on the system of social reproduction. The pattern of utilisation of part time labour may not then, we suggest, simply be the outcome of the conjuncture of economic forces and institutional forms: the specific form of differentiation of the part time workers from the rest, or more accurately, the gradations across part time and full time workers may itself act as a societal effect, influencing wider forms of labour market differentiation.

Part time work as flexible

Much of the debate on the increase in part time labour has hinged on whether this is the result of an underlying change in employers' labour use strategies (implicit as well as explicit) or stems from more 'traditional' forces. These would include sectoral and/or occupational shifts in the economy and traditional short term responses to economic uncertainty. While empirical evidence for Britain points in the direction of 'tradition' and a limited applicability of the core-periphery model of the flexible firm (Pollert 1988, Wood and Smith 1989, McGregor and Sproull 1991, Marginson 1991), comparative studies of employer behaviour are rare.

In this paper we seek to examine the broader European picture. Here we use material from the EC Labour Force survey and the Price Waterhouse Cranfield Project ¹(PWCS), a survey of 5,500 employers across 10 countries, in the public and private sectors as well as services and manufacturing. This allows us to compare data collected from individual employees with information from employers and thus to consider two questions. First we examine how far sector differences crosscut national differences. The second section looks more specifically at the conjunction and trade offs in the way medium and large organisations use different categories of 'non-standard' labour. In both we look at the degree to which employers in different circumstances make use of part time and other types of non-standard labour and at

how the patterns of their use of such employment has changed over recent years in the context of changes in overall demand.

Our starting point is then a recognition that the nature of part time work and the flexibility it can offer varies with the gender and domestic circumstance of the part time worker and with the history and system of labour market regulation of different countries. The first question to address is how far part time work can justifiably be described as flexible labour. It can be argued that part time work was originally designed to tap a labour force constrained by domestic duties, such that women, rather than employers, gained the flexibility needed to fulfil their 'double burden'. Traditionally any flexibility that part time work offered employers was, in the main, of a very specific kind. The constraints operating on women who seek part time work leave employers with no more than the flexibility to cover *regular and anticipated* variations in demand through the day or the week (Robinson and Wallace 1984), since the variability in hours of most part time workers is restricted (Dale and Bamford 1988).

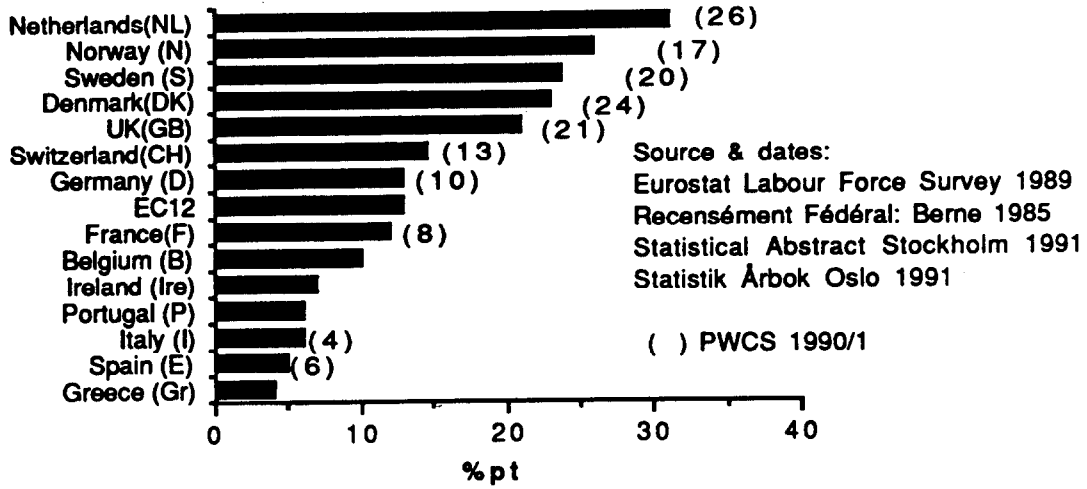
However, that model is specific in time and place, even if women remain responsible for domestic work. Increases in unemployment and reductions in union strength have enhanced employer-centred flexibility in Britain, with part timers increasingly working to hours determined by employers (Walsh 1991, McGregor and Sproull 1991). This is less clear elsewhere. To take an example: whilst the majority of part time workers throughout Europe are permanent workers, there is a significant overlap between temporary workers and part-time workers. The extent of the overlap varies quite markedly between countries (Casey et al 1989, Marshall 1991.) At the same time the particular demographic structure of the part time workforce will also influence the potential for flexibility and the form it will take. Paradoxically perhaps, the aging of the part time workforce in Britain which has resulted in a majority of the part time workforce being without children (below 16 years), may

itself have fuelled an increased employer-centred flexibilisation. This will of course depend on the degree to which these older women are constrained by other homecare responsibilities.

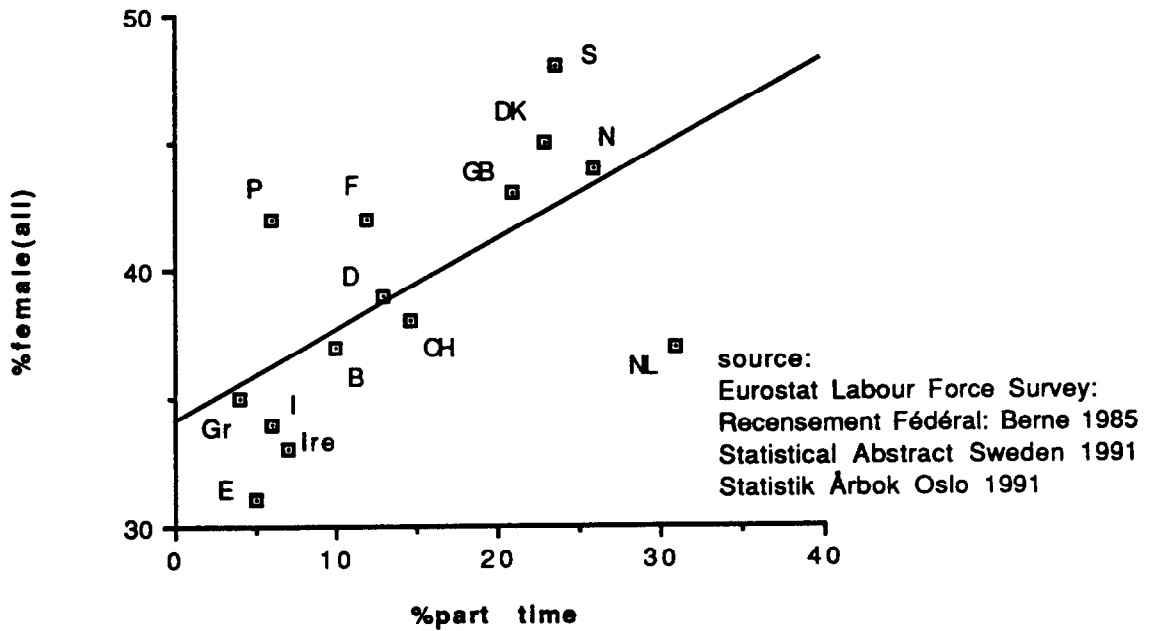
In sum the potential flexibility of part time workers from the viewpoint of the employer will turn on a complex of societal factors structuring the part time workforce. The relative position of part time workers will also depend on how flexibility for other workers, including full time workers, is constructed. Indeed Horrell and Rubery note that male full time workers may bear the brunt of new contractual requirements for (numerical) flexibility, quite apart from their vulnerability to functional flexibilisation (Horrell and Rubery 1991). It is possible to see part time contracts as a substitute to other means of achieving greater flexibilisation, and as in Italy, other types of flexibilisation may restrain the development of part time employment (del Boca 1988). Despite the specific form of flexibility offered by part time work, this remains an open question.

The difficulties of undertaking a comparative analysis over such a wide range of circumstances is well documented (Hakim 1991, Michon 1990): part time work has very different characteristics, connotations and implications across the various countries in our study; even if the definition² of part time work (employment at less than the normal working week) is relatively unproblematic, it can in principle vary from a casual couple of hours a week, to work that is full time in all but name. This study looks at the employment patterns for part time workers in larger, well established workplaces. This enables us to concentrate more on elucidating the 'societal effects' on the utilisation of part time labour across a rather more homogeneous set of employers than would be the case, had smaller firms been included.

**Figure 1: Proportion of labour force working part time, by country.
National/EC statistics and PWCS**



**Figure 2: Proportion of labour force working part time
by proportion female 1987/9 by country**



Differences in the utilisation of part time workers across European economies

The degree to which labour is employed on a part time basis, at less than a standard working week varies across Europe (fig 1), broadly relating to the degree of feminisation of the labour force (fig 2) and the degree of service sector employment.(fig 3), though exceptions are common. Fig 1 gives both the Labour Force Survey/census information and the ratios in the PWCS. Differences between the two relate both to differences of definition (part timers in the PWCS are as defined by the firms themselves) and coverage.

Grouping countries by the level of part time work in the late 1980's, three groups can be distinguished:

i.The 'high' group, North West Europe (UK, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Denmark). Here part time work accounts for over 20% of the labour force; between 43% (UK) and 48% (Sweden) of all employees are women (apart, that is, from the special case of Netherlands); and service sector employment accounts for between 66% (UK) and 69% (Norway) of total employment;

ii.The 'middle' group, roughly Central Western Europe, where part time employment lies between 10 and 20 % of total employment; here women's employment accounts for between 37% (Belgium) and 42% (France) of all employment; between 54% (Switzerland) and 64% (Belgium) of the workforce are employed in the service sector;

iii The 'low' group mainly in the South ; (Ireland, Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece:), where, despite some growth, part time employment remains below 10%. Women's share of the labour force ranges between 31% (Spain) and 35% (Greece),

Figure 3: Proportion of labour force working part time by proportion in service sector by country

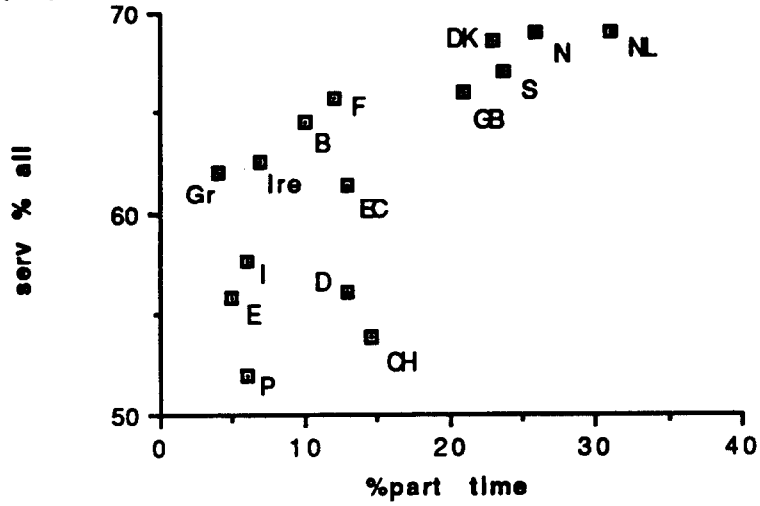


Figure 4: Proportion of mothers with primary age children in full and part time employment



Source: Moss 1991
from LFS

except for Portugal. In these countries service employment levels are on a par with the more central countries, at between 52% for Portugal and 63% for Ireland.

As figures 2 & 3 show, our broad grouping into a high, medium and low group of countries on each of the measures of part time work, feminisation and service economies still leaves a fair variation between countries in each group. There are also some important differences between countries in each group in the composition of the part time labour force and in the legal status and employment rights for part time workers.

Among the 'high' group countries like Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Britain, to a lesser extent, part time work has for long been an important component of women's employment; in the Netherlands by contrast the importance of part time work in the economy has increased rather more recently. This growth has been attributed to specific measures taken by the Dutch government to counter growing unemployment (Neubourg 1985) As a result part time employment is rather less concentrated on women than in Sweden, Norway and Britain. Indeed almost a third of part time workers in the Netherlands are men, as are one fifth of Danish part timers. Reductions in standard working hours in the public sector have also generated a demand for part time cover in traditionally male as well as female jobs (Thurman and Trah 1990).

There are also important differences within the 'High' group of countries in the status of part time work, and in the scale of the differential between part time and full time work. In Sweden, Maier suggests workers have far more control over whether they do their job on a full or part time basis and as a result part time work is spread across a much wider range of occupation groups than elsewhere (Maier 1990). Parents of children under the age of eight there for the last decade have had the right to reduce their working hours to 75% of normal working time (generally

resulting in a 6-hour day) (Sundström 1991). In general part time workers in Denmark and Norway also appear to be working rather longer hours than is the norm in Britain and the Netherlands (Thurman and Trah 1990). Indeed the growth of employment at regular but short hours seems to be a feature of these two labour markets alone.

In the medium' group of Western European countries part time employment increased particularly fast over recent years. There are still important difference between Germany and Belgium in the degree to which part time work is voluntary; Marshall suggests that as many as 35% of part time workers in Belgium want full time jobs, but only 10% in Germany (Marshall 1989). In both Germany and Belgium part time work is highly concentrated on married women, especially when compared with France. As figure 4 shows relatively few mothers in France work part time, though part time work is attractive for tax reasons to higher paid married women (Dex and Walters 1989)

In the more southern economies, part time work is both rare and tends to be spread rather more evenly between men and women, with married women accounting for less than half of part time employees. It may well be that a high proportion of part time work remains hidden in family based employment. Moreover Kravaritou-Manitakis (1988) maintains that in both Greece and Portugal most of the registered part time workers are in second jobs. In these countries, the sector distribution of part time work is less skewed towards services, even ignoring part time family employment.

Explanatory frameworks for variation in the use of part time labour

Although much of the early British literature posed supply side (gender based) and demand side explanations against one another, taking the institutional framework

largely as given, comparative studies have tended to concentrate on institutional differences, taking the structure of supply and demand rather more as given.

The degree to which the expansion of women's paid employment has relied on the growth of part time work varies considerably between countries. Some economies operate with a far higher proportion of women working part time than others, even allowing for demographic differences. Thus women's overall participation in paid work is far higher in Portugal than can be expected from the level of part time employment. Conversely, part time employment in the Netherlands is higher than that expected from women's relatively low participation. One factor accounting for these variations are differences in the system of childcare provision and family structure which influence the scope of women's choices. These are reflected in the substantial differences in the pattern of employment of mothers of young school age children (fig 4, calculated from Moss 1991).

Arguments from the demand side alone, relating differences in part time employment to differences in the industrial structure are also insufficient to explain country wide differences in part time work as a proportion of total employment. Within both manufacturing and service industries there is considerable variation across countries in the scale of part time work. This should not be surprising given the variation between firms in individual sectors in Britain in the degree to which part time labour is employed (Walsh 1991 Horrell and Rubery 1991) which suggests that there is in principle a considerable margin for substitution between full and part time work even if the gendered nature of part time work limits actual substitution. In retailing in particular earlier studies showed that the very widespread use of women as part time workers found in Britain is not replicated across France (Gregory 1992) or Germany (Schoer 1987).

Figure 5 shows the proportion of employers in the PWCS who are part time users (whose workforce is over 10% part time³) in manufacturing, retail and finance by country ranked by the overall proportion of part time employment. Figure 6 shows the differences in high part use (employers with over 20% part timers) between the private and the public sector⁴, ranked similarly. (Italy and Spain are excluded because there were insufficient public sector employers using part timers for analysis). In both cases, and in the analysis of *employees* from the LFS, it is clear that differences between countries in part time employment cannot be explained statistically by the relative sizes of different sectors (Fig 7).

At the organisational level we found a wide variation on the spread of part time work between firms: though the proportion of the total Dutch workforce in the study working part time was high (26%), the proportion of organisations with over 20% part timers was relatively low (14%): Sweden, Denmark and Norway with lower overall levels of part time work had higher degrees of concentration, with a much higher proportion of firms employing more than 20% as part time workers (26%, 21% & 21% respectively). This would suggest that there is scope for deepening the utilisation of part timers in Dutch establishments and for widening the utilisation of part timers across a wider range of organisations, even in countries with high overall levels of part time work.

While part time work has grown particularly fast in the public sector in a number of countries (see below, Fig 8), Fig 6 shows that there are still quite stark country differences in the utilisation of part time workers, reflecting very much the employment norms operating within public administration systems.

Such country differences may reflect employers preferences for part time as against full time work and for part time as against other non-standard forms of employment. Clearly such choices will be structured by the type of flexibility sought, as well as

Figure 5: Proportion of part time user (11%+) organisations by industry by country, PWCS

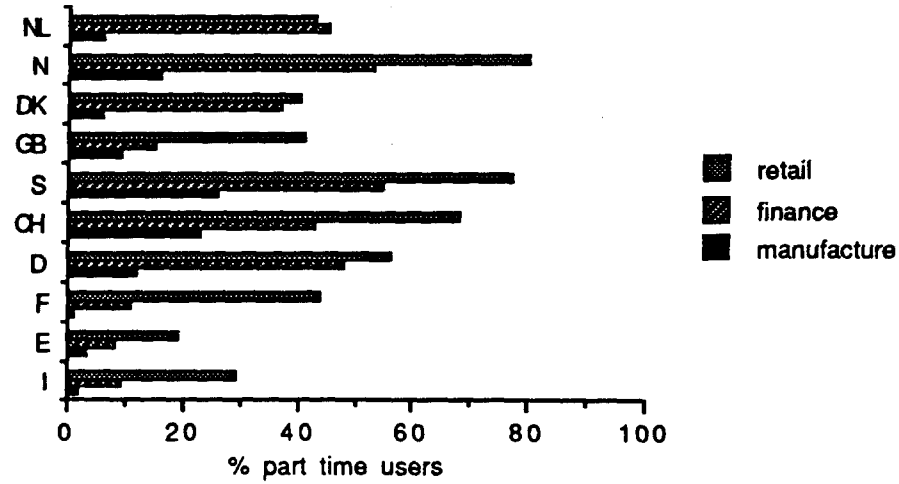


Figure 6: Proportion of high part time user (20%+) organisations by sector by country, PWCS

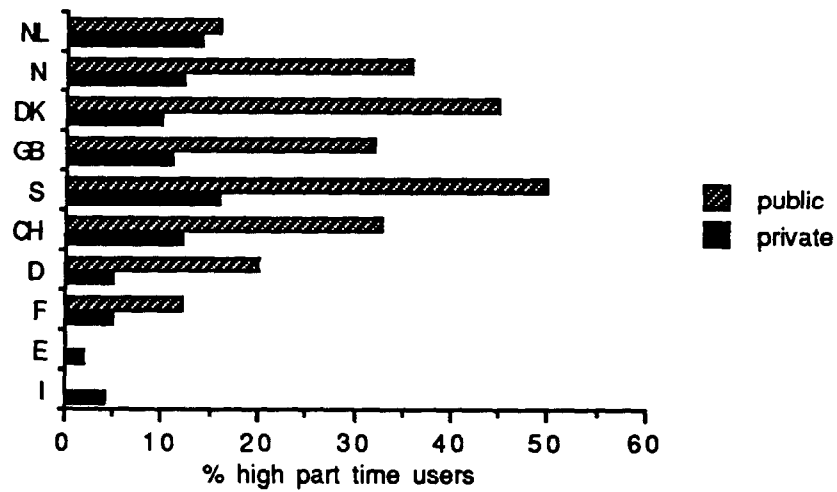


Figure 7: Proportion of part time workers in selected industries by country, EC and national statistics

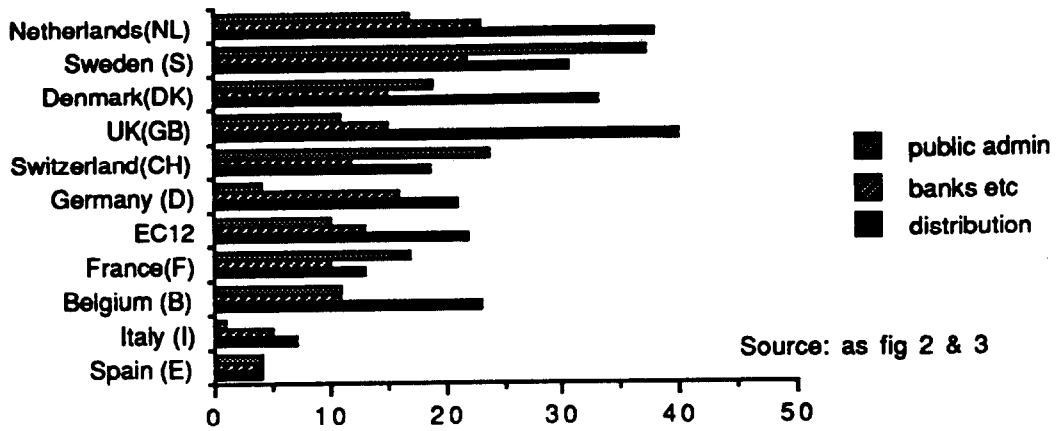
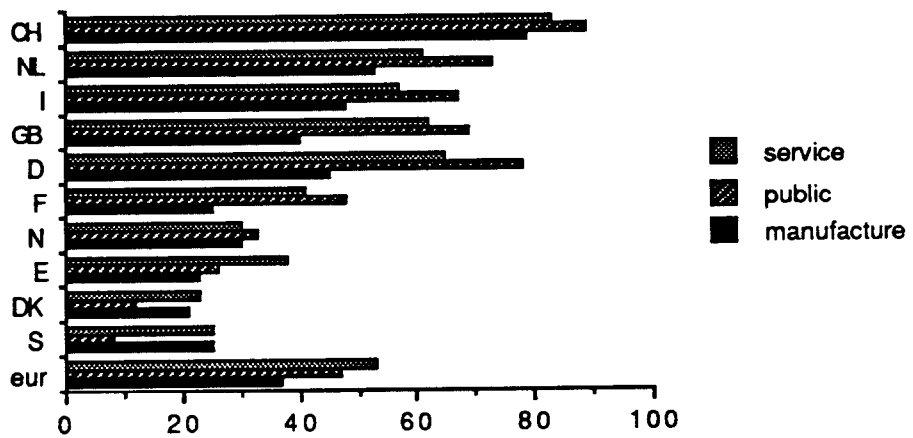


Figure 8: Proportion of organisations increasing part time employment in last 3 years by sector and country



institutional factors determining relative cost and the overall degree of control associated with different types of atypical labour .

Institutional Differences

A number of researchers have looked to the institutional forms of labour regulation and labour law, rather than, or in addition to demand and supply variations to understand national differences in part time work and its relation to flexibilisation (Rubery 1989, Hakim 1991, Marshall 1989) . Some aspects of an 'inverse rights law' can be demonstrated in differences between countries. The high rate of part time employment especially in jobs for very short weekly hours in the UK and the Netherlands can be attributed to the fairly substantial cost advantages to employers (and short term advantages of higher net earnings for employees working below tax and/or national insurance thresholds)(Maier 1990). That said , quantification of the value of the various dispensations available to employers of part time labour is by no means simple. In most countries differences in employment status and rights depend on certain threshold levels of hours or earnings, and only in very specific circumstances to part time status as such. This creates important differences *between* part time workers that are frequently ignored in the discussions of flexibility and part time work.

Moreover, the distribution of part time workers across such divisions differs greatly from country to country, complicating any comparative analysis. Schoer shows for example that part time workers in Germany are less likely to fall below the rather lower threshold required for National Insurance benefits than in Britain (11% compared to 29%). They are also somewhat less bunched into low level occupations (Schoer 1987). Dex and Walters recent comparisons of married women suggests that part time workers in France both have a higher occupational profile than those in

Britain and that in most occupations French part time workers' hourly earning are closer to full timers' (Dex and Walters 1992).

The problem of establishing any simple measure of legislatively created cost differentials between part time workers and full time workers is not simply the multitude of differences in rights but that the salience of such differences depend very much on legal structures and actual labour market relations. (Hakim 1991). Clearly the degree to which minimum rights established in law are operational, depends very much on the status of such legislation via a vis collective bargaining.

The impact of the legislative framework on the use of part time work in different countries is complex. It may impact most on the range of differences *between* part time workers, rather than the overall level of part time employment. Changes in the framework have been important in specific circumstances, notably in the Netherlands and Spain (Fina et al 1989), otherwise the effects may be more indirect; in the degree to which *alternative* forms of flexibilisation are available.

Part Time Employment and changes in demand

The rise in part time labour has sometimes been viewed as a result of policy responses to unemployment (Berg 1989), sometimes as a direct response to uncertainty about the duration of any growth . Where the latter holds it will be linked to rising employment (Blanchflower and Corry 1989) or rising product demand. Respondents to the PWCS were asked whether they had increased part time employment over the last three years (1987-90/1), and whether they had experienced a growth in product demand and/or in employment. Country differences in the proportions increasing or decreasing part time work in the period are marked, with the proportion of enterprises cutting part time work in Denmark and Sweden

outstripping those increasing it, while almost every Swiss respondent increased their utilisation of part time employment in the period (Fig 9).

Such differences may reflect differences in the level of penetration of part time work in the economy as a whole, rather than simply differences in growth. Indeed when we relate changes in part time work to changes in product demand and employment at the enterprise level in the PWCS sample, the links are not strong. Figure 10 shows that in many countries (UK, France, Denmark, Netherlands and Switzerland), organisations have increased their employment of part-time workers irrespective of whether there had been an increase or decrease in overall employment. It is possible that contrary trends are being masked here, that some organisations or types of organisations increase part time work as demand and overall employment falls, while others increase part time work with rising demand. We examine this below (Figure 11), looking at organisations which changed part time work in the opposite direction to changes in overall employment.

Shifts towards a part time workforce

A shift in the proportion of workers who are employed on a part time basis can occur with no change in employment levels and with both increases and decreases in employment. Our analysis is confined to those enterprises in the PWCS that increased part time work at the same time as cutting employment overall (or alternatively cutting part time work while increasing overall employment), as the clearest cases of 'substitution'. Substitution in this analysis refers not only to cases where work done by full time workers is reorganised on a part time basis, but also to changes in the pattern of production and employment resulting in an increased proportion of part time workers in the organisation's labour force . Given that the respondents to the PWCS were medium and large employers (200+), some with a number of establishments, some of this substitution may well arise from the closure of some

units when others expand. Substitution at an organisation level is then distinct from that at an enterprise or 'shop' level and could be a result of changes in product mix, in occupation mix etc.

Defined in this way, the UK had the largest proportion of firms shifting towards part time work, followed by the Netherlands. In both countries such shifts may be related to deregulation and other policy measures promoting flexibility, alternatively such increases may reflect rising unemployment and increased part time work amongst men. In contrast Swedish, Norwegian, Spanish and Italian companies tended to have increased part time work when they were expanding overall employment; though such employers were few and far between in both Spain and Sweden (fig 10). Indeed in those two countries and in Denmark too, shifts *away* from part time work were more common than shifts towards in the period in question (fig 11). These various responses to increases and decreases in overall employment in organisations in different European countries, illustrates the heterogeneity of part time employment and suggests that institutional differences continue to have important influence on the way part time labour is used.

Overall the public sector accounted for a disproportionate share of organisations shifting towards part time employment (Fig 12). In the UK twice as many public sector organisations had increased part timers while cutting employment or keeping it static, than would be expected on the basis of their numbers. In the Netherlands the concentration on public sector institutions is lower, but still very evident. The possible reasons for this sector split are discussed further below, alongside a consideration of its longer term significance.

The association between part-time employment and other 'non-standard' contracts

One of the major themes of debates in the discussion of part-time employment and the rise, or otherwise, of the flexible firm has been the association between part-time employment and the use of other forms of 'non-standard' employment. The 'flexible firm' model has been criticised for failing to distinguish between different forms of non-standard employment and for not recognising the essential role much of part-time or temporary employment plays in production (see for example Pollert 1991, Walsh 1991). The issues at stake for us are the differences between the various forms of non-standard employment: how far there is a general increase in the various types of non-standard employment in different economies; how far such increases are spread across economies or bunched within certain organisations. We cannot in the space of this paper draw out all the sector and country differences in all the variants of non-standard labour. We seek rather to analyse changes in temporary, fixed term work and subcontracting as a basis for understanding the specific utilisation of part time work.

The Price Waterhouse Cranfield Project allows us to examine trends in various forms of flexible employment across Europe, and their link to part-time employment, in the three years leading up to 1991; it thus covers the period since the last major British surveys on flexible labour use, the "Employers Labour Use Strategies" survey of 1987 and the Warwick Company Level Survey of large private sector employers in 1985. Contrary to these earlier surveys the period covered by the Price Waterhouse Cranfield survey was largely characterised by economic expansion, skill shortages and generally tight labour markets, partly the result of demographic changes, in most countries in the survey ⁵. The UK and the Scandinavian countries however were moving into a recession at the time of the survey.

The results firstly show, as with part time employment, a significant increase in fixed-term and temporary employment in almost every country. The choice of either temporary or fixed term employment depends strongly on differences in the legal framework, ie that to some extent they are substitutes. In general, we also find that 'traditional' forms of extending the working day, such as overtime or weekend working and shift work have increased in fewer organisations than part-time, temporary or fixed-term employment.

Fixed-term and temporary employment

At least six in ten employers in France, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Spain, Switzerland and the UK increased either temporary or fixed term employment during the last three years (Fig 13). A reduction in use of these forms is well below ten percent in most countries.

However, in the large majority of organisations the use of either temporary or fixed term employment remains, even with high rates of increase, rather marginal. High temporary users (here defined as those who employ more than 10% of their workforce on fixed or temporary contracts) are significantly below 20% in all countries. The most glaring exceptions are the Netherlands, where most employers (public and private) are high fixed term contract users (using it as a form of probation). Spain, too, lies above the average; here much of new employment especially for young people is on non-permanent contracts.

Sweden and Denmark have particularly low shares of fixed term employees. The majority employ less than 1% of their workforce on a fixed-term basis, fewer even than is found in the UK⁶. Far fewer Swedish organisations increased either temporary or fixed term employment in the period. Indeed, as with part time work,

the numbers of Swedish or Danish organisations decreasing their use of temporary employment matched or even exceeded those increasing their use.

Part-time and temporary employment

One of the issues in the debate on flexibilisation has been the extent to which flexible contracts are concentrated on a specific set of firms which in turn make use of a wide range of different forms of non standard contract. Blanchflower and Corry (1989), for example, found that in the early 1980s a majority of firms using part time workers in Britain used at least one other type of a-typical contract, with over one quarter of manufacturing firms using a variety of types of contracts. In the public sector they found a particularly marked use of short term temporary contracts among part time users. In figure 14) we examine this issue. For the purpose of this analysis we include only those employers whose workforce contains a significant number of such workers: for part time employment this is defined, as previously, as those organisations with at least 20% of part time workers. In relation to fixed term and temporary employment we follow the EC practice in treating temporary and fixed-term contracts as one. Hence high users of temporary labour are organisations whose share of either temporary or fixed term employment exceeds 10%. (In some countries this selection results in a rather small sample for sectoral analysis, and hence results for Switzerland, Spain and Denmark must be regarded as especially provisional). We find that, with the exception of Germany and the Netherlands, the incidence of high part-time use among temporary users is no higher than average; indeed, in Denmark and Switzerland it is significantly lower. However, in the *public sector* high users of temporary work users tend also to be high users of part time labour. Sometimes these will be the same workers, more often not. In all countries (apart from Denmark) the proportion of high part time users is distinctly higher amongst those using temporary workers than across the public sector as a whole (as shown in Figure 6).

In private services, too, there is some evidence that firms using a high proportion of temporary workers also use more part time workers than average. Too few manufacturing firms employ large numbers of temporary workers to establish any firm conclusion. If there is any trend, it is the opposite to that of the public sector: users of temporary staff do not make especial use of large numbers of part time workers.

Turning now to changes in part-time employment and its association with changes in use of fixed term or temporary contracts, we find that in many countries employers who increased their use of temporary employment were more likely to have increased part time employment than those who did not increase temporary contracts (Fig.15). This is only marginally true for Germany and is not the case in France or Denmark. Changes in part time employment are much less related to changes in either fixed-term contracts (Fig.16), or subcontracting (Fig 17), so that no general co-incidence of 'flexibilisation' strategies is evident.

The position of the public sector

A number of recent commentators have identified the public sector as spreading flexible employment practices (for example Marshall 1989, Horrell and Rubery 1991, Pollert 1991, McGregor and Sproull 1991). We have also found that 'shifts' towards part time employment and what 'bunching' there is of precarious employment practices tend to occur more frequently in the public sector in a number of countries.

As with part time employment, we also find important differences in fixed term and temporary employment between private and public sector employers in Britain. The higher the incidence of high fixed term employment (that is, where more than 10% of employees are on fixed term contracts) found in the public sector in Britain (7%

compared to 4% in the private sector) may partly be due, as Rubery (1989) suggests, to the public sector status of a "good employer". This could require that the status of any job which might possibly deviate from the standard permanent contract is made explicit from the outset. However, this point is less likely to account for the greater public sector *increases* in such contracts. The number of employers increasing their use of fixed term employment alone is more than twice as high in the British public sector than in the private sector.

Despite the widespread pressures on public sector budgets throughout Europe, figure 13 shows, however, that public sector organisations outside the UK in general were not more likely to have increased the use of fixed term or temporary contracts in recent years. In some countries the public sector increased one or other of these types of contracts more than the private sector (one example is the Dutch public sector's high increase in the number of temporary contracts). However, as with subcontracting (figure 18), we did not find sustained sector differences in the pattern of change. Public sector changes outside Britain appear to have been matched in one way or other by changes in private sector labour use patterns. There is, however, evidence of the role of the public sector in the shift towards part time work, and of an over-representation of public sector employers among high part time and temporary users.

Managerial Strategies and Recruitment targets

The issue of the need for strategic and integrated policy making in human resource management has received much attention in the second half of the 1980s, propelled by the new American orthodoxies of strategic human resource management. So far it has been difficult to identify any shift towards strategic policy making in practice among British employers, particularly once the investigation is moved on from the formulation of strategies to their implementation (Marginson et al; Purcell; Sisson and

Storey). It is therefore not surprising that the increased employment of 'flexible' labour is similarly characterised by ad hoc responses to changes in the supply and demand conditions, and that evidence of "a purposeful and strategic thrust to achieve flexibility" (Hakim: p.174) so far remains elusive.

The approach taken to this issue in the Price Waterhouse Cranfield Survey was to ask whether organisations had a written human resources/ personnel strategy or not. Again, a written personnel strategy is not necessarily evidence of purposeful action in relation to flexibility: one would need to know far more about the contents of the strategy to draw any such conclusion. Moreover, those employers who increased their use of part-time, temporary or fixed-term employment were not in general more likely to have a written personnel strategy than employers who did not change their labour use. The only exceptions are Denmark and Spain, where an increase in fixed term contracts coincides with a higher use of a written strategy, and in Italy where the same positive relationship holds for both part-time employment and fixed-term contracts.

Purposeful, directed behaviour by employers may also be evident in the degree to which they specifically *introduced* part time work as an aid to recruitment, and the degree to which they targeted women as a specific group. Such considerations may well have been important to managers anticipating recruitment difficulties in the face of a "demographic time-bomb". In this light it is interesting to note that over 60% of employers in Britain, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Switzerland who increased their employment of part-time workers also saw part-time employment as a recruitment incentive. In the Scandinavian countries this proportion was far lower: not only were organisations shedding part time workers, the high overall level of part-time employment made it an unlikely recruitment incentive for individual employers.

Figure 9: Proportion of organisations that increased or decreased part time work in last 3 years

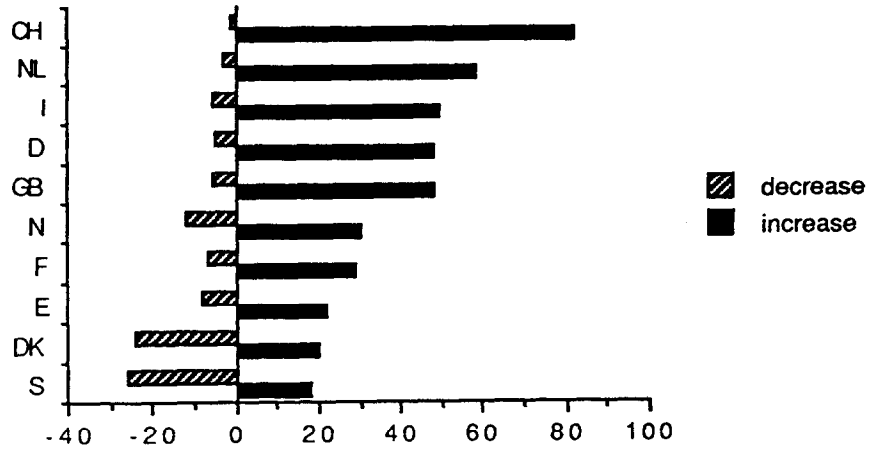


Figure 10: Proportion of organisations increasing part time employment by recent employment change

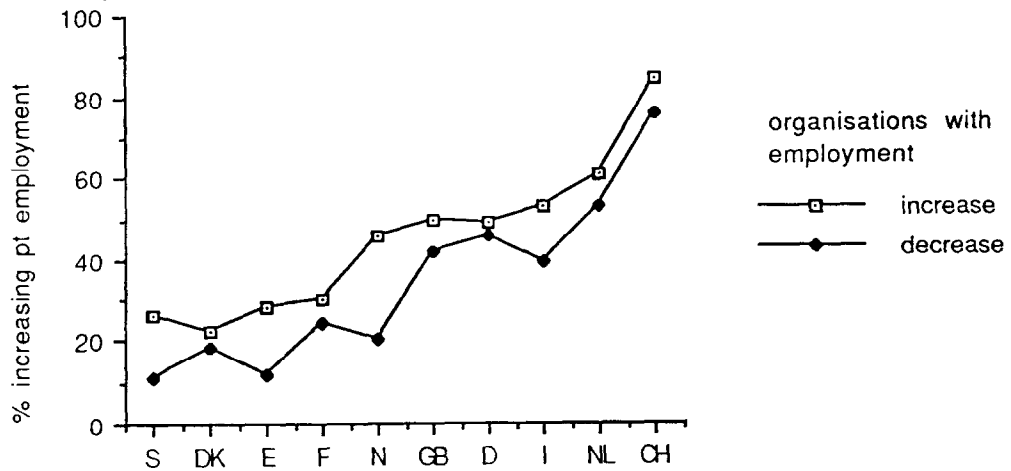


Figure 11: Proportion of organisations that 'shifted' to or from part time employment in last 3 years

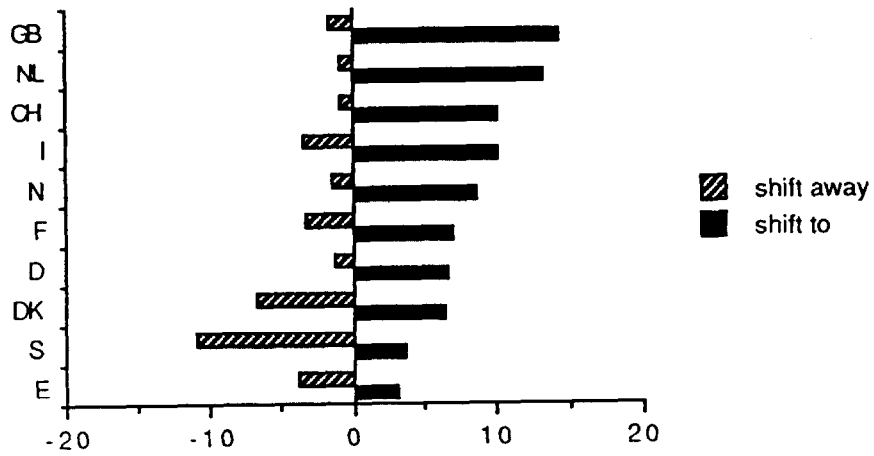


Figure 12 : Proportion of organisations that 'shifted' towards part timers that were in the public sector, compared to all organisations by country

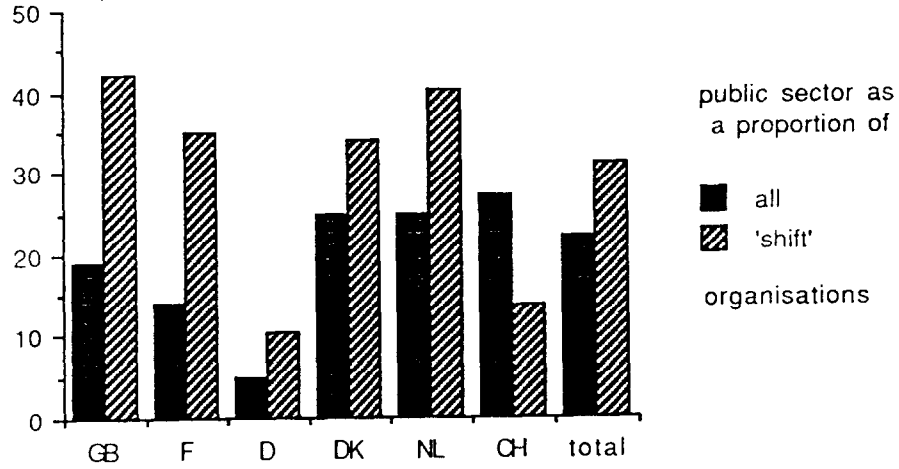


Figure 13: Proportion of organisations that increased either fixed term or temporary employment in last 3 years

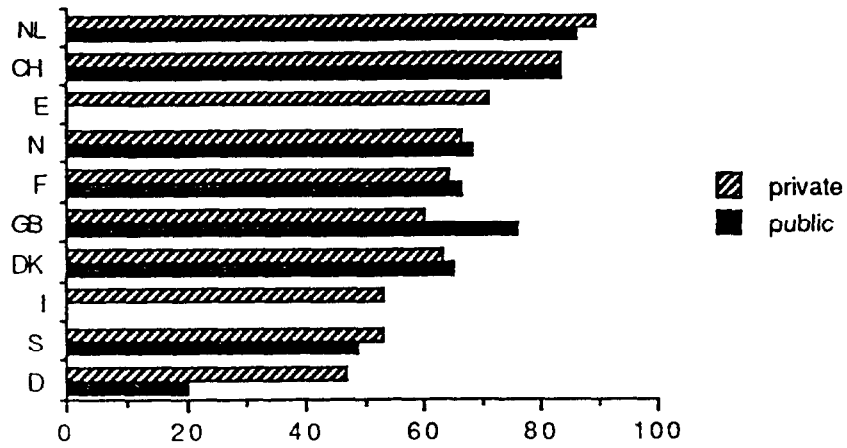


Figure 14: Proportion of high part time users by use of temporary workers and sector

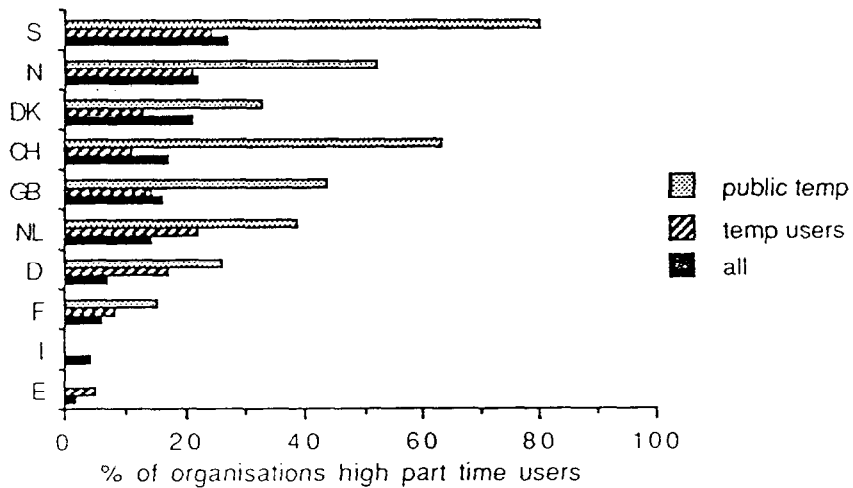


Figure 15: Proportion of organisations increasing part time work by whether temporary work increased

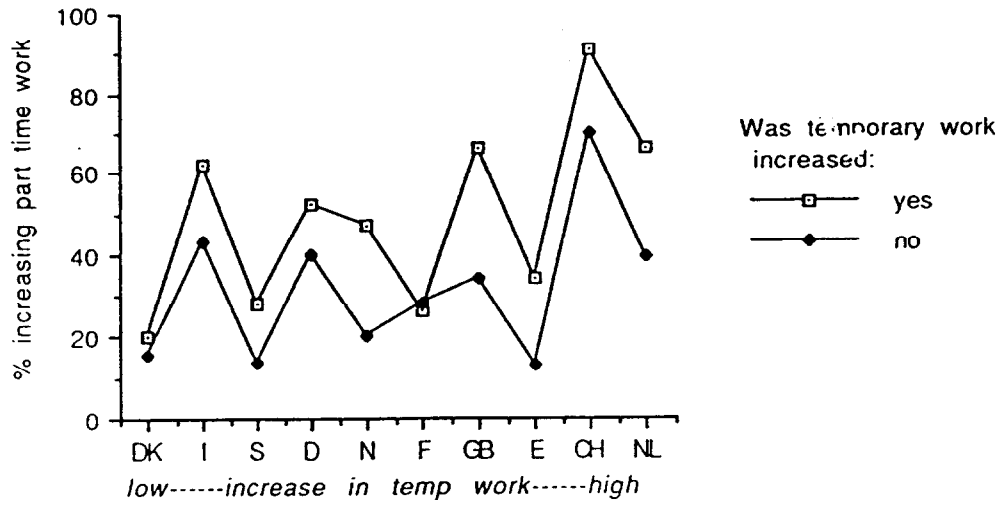


Figure 16: Proportion of organisations increasing part time employment by whether increased fixed term work

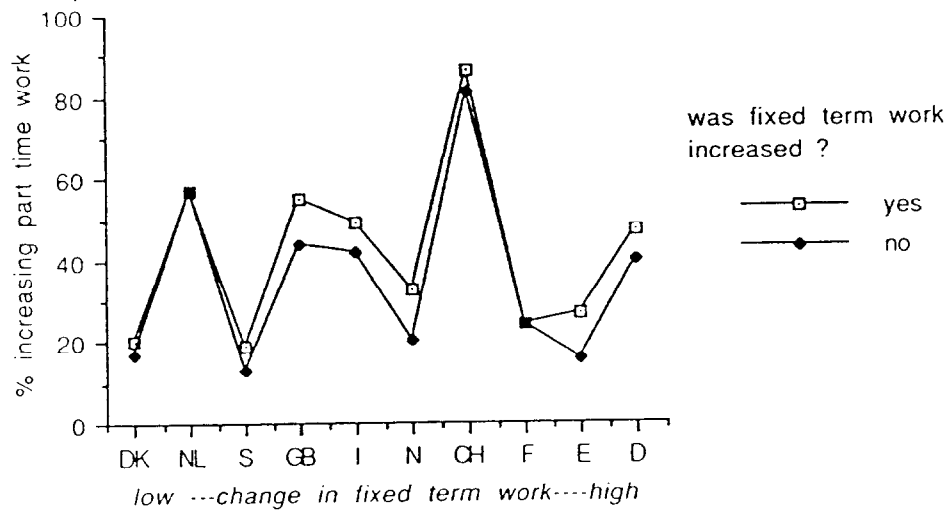
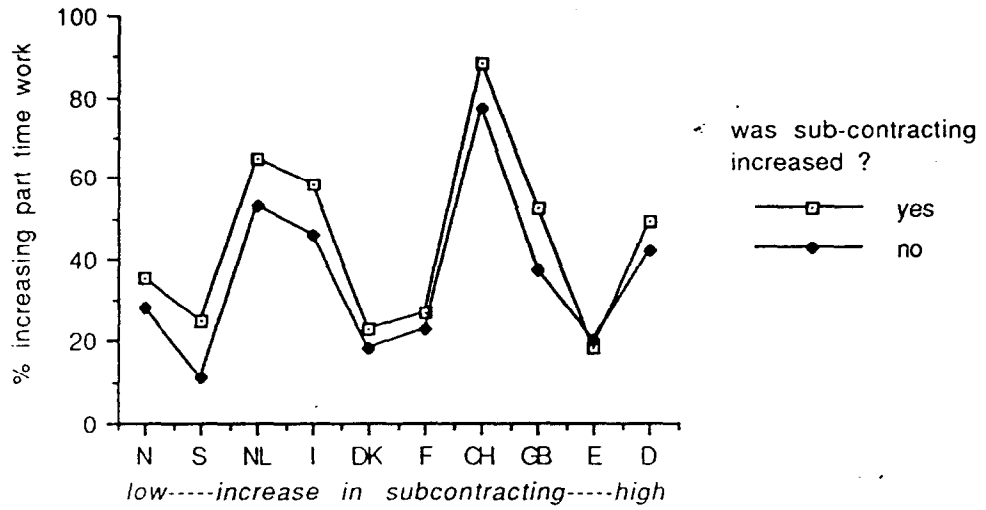


Figure 17

Proportion of organisations increasing part time work by whether increased sub-contracting



Differences in the degree to which employers associated part time work as recruitment incentive with the targeting of women are also evident. The association between the two was particularly strong in Britain, Germany and Switzerland, but was also seen amongst Danish and Dutch employers. This did not necessarily translate into a greater incidence of actual growth of part time employment. Indeed in Norway, Spain and Sweden, employers who increased their use of part-time employment were *less* likely to consciously target women than the average. This is not to say they did not employ women as part time workers. It rather suggests that differences in the patterns of women's employment and in the constitution of women as a specific part time workforce in different countries, together with differences in the awareness, or worry about future recruitment difficulties made for rather different articulations of the relationship between part time work and women's employment.

Conclusion

A large scale international survey of employers can offer insights to the comparative study of labour markets, usefully augmenting published statistics and labour force surveys. At the same time, the inevitably broad brush form of such surveys allows only for tentative conclusions. This study of variations between employers in the utilisation of part time work, confirms that historical and institutional differences between countries continue to exert an important influence across a number of dimensions, including:

- i. the extent of part time work;
- ii. employers propensities to increase part time employment
- iii. the degree to which part time work forms part of a wider move away from standard employment contracts.

Differences between industries remain important, too. The divide between the public and the private sectors has become particularly evident. These suggest that public expenditure policies may have a more immediate effect on part time work than changes in the regulative environment for private firms though the two are not unrelated.

The degree to which specific jobs are done on a part time basis varies from country to country since differences in industrial structure only go a short way to explaining varying levels of part time employment: nevertheless there is a consistent tendency for part time work to be associated with service employment, and with the public as distinct from the private sector. Differences within sectors between countries can be quite large and are not immediately explicable in terms of high national levels of part time employment, nor a high female share of the labour force.

Employers vary across countries in their propensity to increase part time employment. In part this relates to differences in growth patterns, but it also reflects shifts in and out of part time employment, which again vary both between countries and between sectors. The Scandinavian countries, Sweden in particular, have seen some reductions in part time employment, some of it alongside increases in overall employment. How far this is a result of women choosing full time over part time employment, and how far a response of employers to changes in the relative advantages of part time employment can only be answered with more detailed study, but it could suggest that the expansion of part time work may reach limits: as it becomes the normal form of women's employment, the incentive to expand it may falter, especially once participation rates for men and women have almost equalised.

Such a concept of demographic limits to the expansion of part time work, implies that part time work has been developed to tap a specific labour force and that flexibilisation gains are not important. Where the accent is more specifically on flexibility, other limits to the growth of part time work may operate, including the development of alternative forms of flexibility.

We found that organisations that operate with high levels of part time employment do not, in general, use high levels of temporary labour: nor are those that increase temporary and fixed term work more likely to increase part time work. Rather, in the private sector, there is some evidence of organisations taking different tracks; those going down the part time route being distinct from those taking either the overtime/shiftwork route or alternatively the temporary/fixed term and subcontract route. This may well reflect the distinction between manufacturing and services, or more detailed industrial differences. The public sectors of most countries polarise somewhat differently: while some public sector organisations operate a variety of flexibility strategies (including part time work), others operate none at all. In both

sectors, such differences may reflect the fitting of such strategies to the gender of each particular workforce; investigation of these issues falls outside the scope of our survey we do not.

The pattern of uptake and expansion of different forms of flexible labour across Europe over the last three years is then quite complex, and its relation to changes in part time work more complex still. In every country it is possible to discern elements of two opposing explanations for the expansion (or contraction) of part time work: the one emphasizing anticipated labour shortages and attempts to tap a latent reserve of married women's labour, and the second, flexibility perspective, emphasising employers efforts to pare down overheads. In practice even at the level of the organisation, these distinctions may be blurred, with both types of benefit sought at one and the same time; so that differences within countries should come as no surprise. At any one time different organisations, operating in different markets, may emphasise one aspect of part time work over the other, though rarely, as we have seen, is this posed as an explicit strategy. In no country can the changes in part time work be put down to exclusively to labour supply considerations or to a new drive for flexibility.

Countries such as Italy, Spain and Switzerland with relatively low levels of female labour force participation and relatively high proportions of firms increasing employment, would seem to be cases where the expansion of part time work could be best associated with a labour shortage perspective. However in Spain increases in full time employment in some firms was at the expense of part time work and few firms viewed part time employment in any way as a recruitment incentive. Again, in both Switzerland and Italy a fair proportion of organisations increased part time employment in the face of decreases in employment levels in the same period, suggesting that labour shortages were not necessarily an immediate issue. In Switzerland and Spain some shift towards flexibility was evident too, in the

increasing use of temporary or fixed term contracts, the expansion of sub-contracting and in a tendency for employers who increased these types of labour to also increase part time employment.

In the Netherlands and Britain, again, where government policies have raised employers abilities to make more flexible use of part time work, some of the increase in part time work is associated with market expansion in the service sector. Nevertheless the public sectors in these economies come closest to the 'flexibilisation' mode, with a high proportion of part time employment increases occurring alongside increases occurring alongside increases in temporary work and overall cuts in jobs.

Outside Britain, however, the evidence that the public rather than the private sector is playing a propulsive role in the development of flexible forms of labour (once temporary and fixed term employment are considered jointly) is surprisingly weak. The importance in the share of public sector employment in the growth of the temporary workforce, highlighted for example by Marshall (1989), appears to be the result of a particular group of high part time and temporary employers in the public sector rather than a more general public sector effect. The shifts towards part time employment that occurred in a number of countries would seem to have been more strongly related to recruitment problems though no doubt cost cutting strategies also played a role. But the 'price' of a part time job does not appear to have been the acceptance of precariousness and overall flexibilisation, at least among large and medium sized employers.

Notes

1. This paper draws on the Price Waterhouse Cranfield Project survey of human resource management. The survey was set up to establish a comparative European database on trend in human resource management practices. It is carried out annually, starting in 1989/90. Based on a standardized postal questionnaire, the survey includes *organisations* (not establishments) with at least 200 employees across all sectors of employment. This paper draws on the results of the second survey,

including 5,500 organisations in Great Britain, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland. In each of the 10 participating countries the distribution of respondents across sectors and by size in the private sector is broadly representative of the national distribution. (for a more detailed discussion of the survey methodology see Brewster, Hegewisch, Lockhart 1991)

The survey covers a broad range of human resource management practices of which the area of contracts of employments and flexible labour use is only one. Compared to other surveys solely concerned with flexible labour uses, such as the 1987 E.L.U.S. survey or the Policy Studies Institute survey on temporary employment, the questions about the nature of part-time employment and its link to other forms of employment had to remain broader.

Using a postal survey covering the major areas of personnel management imposes certain constraints on survey design. Thus the survey relies on self-definition and in general asks 'yes/no'- type questions without quantifying effects in order to facilitate the completion of the questionnaire. The survey is directed at employers, particularly personnel managers; as others have noted, personnel managers are not necessarily the most accurate guide to the extent of change in employment over time (Casey, 1991, :194); the survey should therefore be seen as complementary to census data and more specific case studies of flexible labour use. However, the survey does allow an international comparison of employers perceptions of changes in labour use and a testing of some of the issues that have been raised regarding flexibilisation in the debate in Britain.

2. Part time work from the point of view of most official statistics is taken as employment for 30 hours a week or less; in employment law however, only *some* of such contracts are regarded as part time. Social insurance may operate other threshold points.

3. This makes it broadly comparable with the definition of part-time users in the E.L.U.S. survey, of at least 25 part-time workers.

4. Public sector in this paper refers to public administration (central and local government, health, higher education and quangos). In the Scandinavian countries, Britain and the Netherlands a representative sample of public sector respondents has been obtained. The French public sector sample mainly represents local government and health services, with no responses from higher education of central government. In some countries, such as Italy, Spain, Switzerland and Germany, where public and private sector personnel management practices and institutions are seen to diverge widely, public sector response has been low and results for the public sector there are only illustrative. The size of public sector response is: Denmark: 147; France: 66; Germany (West): 20; Italy: 3; Netherlands: 43; Norway: 119; Spain: 20; Sweden: 96; UK: 316.

5. At the time of the survey in Winter 1990/91 Britain, Sweden, Denmark and Norway were moving into a recession and were experiencing rising levels of unemployment. Compared to the first year of the survey, a year earlier, the changed economic situation did not have a large affect on the results of the survey in most areas covered here. This is likely to be at least partly due to the fact that questions regarding change in practices referred to the last three years.

6. There are marked national differences in the changed use of temporary as against fixed term employment. These can be explained partly by employment legislation. For example, where termination of employment is relatively easy and inexpensive, as in the UK, there is less need to resort to fixed term contracts (Rubery 1989 Casey 1990). In countries where termination is relatively costly, such as Germany or France, there is a higher incentive for employers to resort to fixed term contracts.

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