

Part-time working can boost UK economy and bring economically inactive people back into work

January 18 2023



Credit: Cranfield University

A major new research report into the flexible furlough scheme from Cranfield University's School of Management urges government and employers to invest in an expansion of part-time working, with experts saying this could unlock a boost to national GDP.

The "[Part-time working after the pandemic](#)" report, authored by Clare Kelliher, Professor of Work and Organization at Cranfield University, Dr. Charlotte Gascoigne and Dr. Pierre Walthery, looked at the experience of firms that used the flexible furlough option as the country exited lockdown. Flexible furlough allowed organizations to bring back employees on a part-time basis with the government topping up their wages.

The report's headline recommendation is that the government and employers must invest in a part-time working pilot to capitalize on the experiences of flexible furlough and encourage openness to part-time working. Experimentation and innovation in the workplace should be encouraged to help embed new ways of working, share best practice and attract and retain talent.

Experience from flexible furlough could bring people back into the workforce

The researchers found that the U.K. has a pool of newfound expertise in part-time working due to the success of the flexible furlough scheme. With around a fifth of working age people classed as economically inactive—such as those with caring responsibilities, people with disabilities and older workers—this knowledge could be used to bring them back into the workforce.

As well as increased awareness of part-time work and knowledge in how to offer it effectively, there is a growing demand for more part-time jobs. As many as a quarter of all full-time employees say they would like to work part-time. That increase is partly being driven by the cost of living crisis as people look for extra jobs to boost their income.

But the Cranfield research also found that, post-pandemic, employers believe people want to work fewer hours to achieve a better work life balance.

Other findings from the report include:

- 40% of those who had used the flexible furlough scheme said line managers are now better at managing part-time working effectively
- Just over 40% of those who had used the flexible furlough scheme said that it made their line managers more open to part-time working
- Part-time working is still a gendered issue. It is seen by many employers as something women and particularly mothers are likely to ask for, but there is little evidence to support the assumption that demand for part-time is low in male dominated workforces
- Many employers are more concerned with hybrid working and increasing work from home than engaging with the issues around hours
- Labor shortages are driving openness to part-time working among employers

A unique experiment to build on

Lead author, Professor Clare Kelliher said, "Flexible furlough was a unique experiment in part-time working and it was one that many

employers and employees learnt a lot from as they put it into practice. It's vital that we don't lose that knowledge or willingness to innovate in the workplace—employers should now be looking to build on what they learnt to attract and retain talent.

"The world of work is going through unprecedented change with the move to hybrid working and events like the great resignation. Part-time work offers a route for employers and employees to successfully navigate upheaval and thrive into the future.

"The government rightly wants to see the economy grow. Investigating part-time working and encouraging its widespread use where appropriate could bring many millions of people currently excluded from work back into the workforce and boost the economy at a time when it is desperately needed."

Part-time working a 'real path to growth'

Dr. Charlotte Gascoigne, Principal Research Fellow for the project, added, "Many organizations are missing out on the huge benefits that part-time working can bring. The experience of using the flexible furlough scheme has demonstrated the benefits of practical trials in changing mindsets about different ways of working. It's important to encourage that kind of innovation by setting up a formal, funded pilot covering a range of job types and industry sectors, perhaps modeled on the recent trial of the four-day week. This would allow employers to assess the costs and benefits of part-time working in different circumstances.

"Too many people are currently excluded from the workforce and the whole country suffers due to missing out on the talents of those with caring responsibilities, the experience and expertise of older workers and the skills of people with disabilities and long-term health conditions. Part-

time working offers an effective route back into work for many people and a real path to growth for the government and the economy more widely."

Former business minister and visiting professor at Cranfield University, Jo Swinson, said, "Employees and employers alike can see that workplace practice and culture is rapidly changing in the wake of the pandemic experience. One-size-fits-all working patterns no longer make sense—offering part-time working is one of the important ways employers can attract and retain talented staff. This insightful research should be read closely by everyone interested in the future of work—I urge employers and [government](#) to act on its recommendations to embrace the economic benefits that [part-time](#) working can bring."

Provided by Cranfield University

Citation: Part-time working can boost UK economy and bring economically inactive people back into work (2023, January 18) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2023-01-part-time-boost-uk-economy-economically.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.