



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin

Part-time Work, Flexibility and Family Leave

Findings of an online survey of Trinity staff in April-May 2017

Equality Office, November 2017

Scope and Approach

The 2016 [Gender and Trinity Staff: Trends in Contract Types¹](#) report found that male staff and academic staff are less likely to work part-time or to have shorter working year arrangements than female staff and administrative, research, support, technical or library staff. It has also been observed that uptake by male staff of paternity and parental leave is relatively low. This survey was held to find out why, and to inform evidence-based action to address gender imbalances in relation to part-time work, flexible working arrangements and family leave.

All staff were invited by email on 20 April 2017 to complete the survey, which was hosted on SurveyMonkey and entitled “Part-time Work, Flexibility and Family Leave”. The survey contains 24 questions plus a final comment box, although each respondent would not answer all questions, as they would automatically skip certain questions based on their previous answers. The survey was divided into 6 sections:

1. About You (gender, relationship / family status and household roles)
2. About your Work (staff category, length of service and academic grade if relevant)
3. Part-time Work (reasons for working part-time, benefits and drawbacks, etc.)
4. Full-time Work (reasons for working full-time, benefits and drawbacks, etc.)
5. Flexible Arrangements (working from home, flexible hours and shorter working year)
6. Family-related Leave (paid / unpaid forms of leave, benefits and drawbacks, uptake, etc.)

A mix of multiple-choice questions and free comment boxes were used, to elicit both quantitative and qualitative data.

The tables in this report which present the number of staff who chose various responses were compiled automatically by SurveyMonkey; categorisation and counting of comments, on the other hand, was performed manually and should therefore be taken as indicative only. Selected comments are presented in bold on a blue background throughout the report, to give a sense of the personal experiences behind the figures. The report begins by presenting the general findings of the survey (p9), then proceeds to an analysis of any difference in responses by women and men (p37), including a focus on female academic staff (p58) as agreed by Board².

¹ Equality Office (2016), available at

http://www.tcd.ie/equality/assets/docs/SpecificReports/Contract_Types_Report_2016_FINAL.pdf

² The following action was approved by Board (BD/16-17/039): “Possible reasons for low uptake of part-time working arrangements by female academics to be investigated in a qualitative study”. This survey addresses that question as well as further matters relating to gender equality and work-life balance

Summary and Analysis of Key Findings

Trinity staff have a variety of caring responsibilities, not just in relation to raising children. 56% of respondents have a dependent or dependents, and nearly 1 in 5 (18%) of respondents are the primary or only carer in their household. Female respondents (26%) are more likely than male respondents (2%) to fulfil this primary caring role and will therefore be disproportionately impacted by measures in relation to family leave, part-time work etc. Male respondents (49%), on the other hand, are more likely than female respondents (25%) to be the primary earner in their household, which may act as a barrier to their achieving good work-life balance. This survey shows that Trinity staff as a whole reflect traditional gender roles in relation to the household and family.

Female respondents (24%) are more likely to work part-time than male respondents (10%). Overall, 80% of respondents work full-time and 20% work part-time. The most common reason cited (by 54% of respondents) for working part-time is that it suits the staff member's family and caring commitments, so these personal factors are clearly impacting on working patterns, and the university has an interest in ensuring these staff are supported. Common drawbacks cited by part-time staff include having to work more than their contractual hours (50% of part-time respondents), negative impact on their career (45% of part-time respondents) and being expected to respond to contact from work outside working hours (44% of part-time respondents). These are commonly cited by both male and female part-time respondents; the only significant gender difference in the experience of drawbacks to part-time work seems to be that female respondents are more likely to note that they miss out on social activities with colleagues. Social isolation of part-time staff is therefore a key factor in reducing gender imbalances in this area, while the widespread expectation for part-time staff to do work for which they are not being paid, and any remaining barriers to the career progression of part-time staff, must be addressed.

Female respondents (61%) are more likely than male respondents (21%) to be working part-time because of family or caring commitments, whereas male respondents (36%) are more likely than female respondents (13%) to be working part-time because they can't get full-time work, reflecting the caring / earning differences described above. 29% of part-time respondents (38% of the men and 28% of the women) say that they would rather be working full-time; this is also borne out in comments which show that some respondents are unaware of how they can move to full-time hours, or are unable to do so. Clear pathways to full-time work would enable part-time staff to identify and avail of opportunities to increase their hours. Furthermore, many commenters (both part-time and full-time) propose that options in between half-time and full-time, such as a four-day week, should be made available.

Those who work full-time are most likely to do so for financial reasons (55% of full-time respondents), and 49% of them (57% of women and 33% of men) would rather work part-time. The primary drawbacks of full-time work as cited by full-time respondents to this survey are not having sufficient time for personal interests or relaxation (50%) or family (41%). Some full-time respondents note that their workload increases when colleagues move to part-time hours, take family leave etc., and particularly when their colleagues' former working hours are not covered. Excessive workload is a key theme running through responses to all elements of this survey, and from comments by full-time respondents it appears to put staff off working part-time as they do not believe that their workload would reduce to suit their reduced hours. Male and female respondents give different reasons for working full-time, with more men (25%) than women (14%) stating that they work full time because they enjoy their work, and more women (22%) than men (10%) stating that they work full time to progress in their career. This challenges any stereotype that women are less ambitious than men, though it is concerning that female respondents are less likely to be motivated by enjoyment of their job.

Flexible working arrangements are quite common in Trinity, with 57% of respondents working from home regularly or on occasion, and 67% of respondents having some flexibility in their working hours. Respondents in general are supportive of more flexibility as regards working from home, and even more supportive of flexible working hours. Comments indicate a wide variety of practices across the university in relation to flexible hours; access to flexibility seems to depend in many cases on who one's manager is. This is an unequal and confusing state of affairs that could be addressed by clearer endorsement of flexibility by central university offices.

Awareness of the Shorter Working Year Scheme is quite low, with 28% of respondents (27% of women, 31% of men) unaware of it. Despite this quite similar level of awareness of the Scheme across both genders, more female respondents (5%) than male respondents (1%) have availed of it. In comments, male respondents were more likely to cite financial reasons for not availing, while female respondents were more likely to believe their application would be rejected by management. Throughout comments on all forms of flexible working, many respondents expressed a sense that flexible working (work from home / flexible hours / shorter year) is not compatible with many roles in Trinity, particularly academic roles and roles with a heavy workload. This could be tackled in two ways; reasonable allocation of workload in all roles, and promotion of flexible working in the Trinity culture.

15% of respondents have taken less than their full entitlement to paid family-related leave, with 21% citing workload as the primary reason. Male respondents (25%) are much more likely than

female respondents (4%) to take no paid leave at all. This should not be attributed to a lack of interest in taking family-related leave, as many male commenters welcomed the recent increase in paid paternity leave in Ireland. It is hoped that the longer provision (10 days) will incentivise a higher level of uptake by male staff of the paternity leave to which they are entitled; culture and attitudes must also support men to take this time with their families. Awareness and training will be key in this, and should be targeted at managers as a priority. Assessments and action-planning undertaken at departmental / School level through the Athena SWAN process should also look at this issue.

23% of those taking paid or unpaid family-related leave (26% of women and 15% of men) state that they were expected to work or be contacted by work during their leave, and 21% (26% of women and 8% of men) state that they experienced barriers to career progression as a result of their taking the leave. The workload theme is strong within the comments on this section as well, especially where staff are not replaced and so must return to a backlog at the end of their leave. Although no specific examples are provided of progression opportunities missed or denied, some respondents describe negative attitudes from management and colleagues, indicating a general low expectation for staff returning from leave to progress their careers in the near future. Despite such difficulties, a number of comments show respondents' satisfaction with their leave, suggesting that benefits outweigh drawbacks for many respondents. The primary benefit of family-related leave is opportunity to bond with children, as cited by 79% of respondents (86% of women, 60% of men), and male respondents are particularly likely to note "opportunity to support my partner / spouse" as a benefit (76% of men, 24% of women). Family-related leave is clearly of value to staff but more should be done to support them on their return, including full cover of their leave where possible.

At the end of the survey, respondents were offered the opportunity to provide any further comment in a free text box. These showed strong support for greater flexibility, particularly in relation to working hours. Other solutions proposed were to provide better information on relevant university policies and procedures, and to model good practice in the private sector and in other countries. Options for flexi-time / core hours policy should therefore be explored, based on good practice elsewhere.

Both positive and negative experiences in relation to part-time work, flexible arrangements and family-related leave were shared, and inconsistency between departments is evident. Many respondents expressed a belief that working part-time and / or taking family-related leave has a negative impact on career progression, and some referred to temporary contracts as a barrier to family formation itself, even though temporary contracts are not the subject of this survey. The theme of excessive workload also appears again, in several comments. Some respondents

commented that family-related flexibility is unfair on other colleagues, or at least that the impact on colleagues should be acknowledged and mitigated. As well as arranging cover for staff on leave, so that remaining staff do not have their workload increased as a result of others availing of their rightful entitlements, actions that build team spirit within departments may also help to develop a culture of mutual recognition and solidarity.

Just 7 comments were explicitly gender-related (5 by women and 2 by men). Although this number is too small to support a robust gender analysis, it is notable that all 5 comments on the female experience are negative (feeling that they are treated worse because they are women), while the 2 male comments are positive. At least, the male comments seem positive at first glance – both note the support of their management and colleagues when they have taken family leave – but both imply that such support is rare or worthy of note, pointing to a culture in which fathers are not necessarily expected to avail of their entitlements. It is clear at any rate from these comments and others throughout the survey that male staff do value family-friendly policies and supports.

Finally, an analysis of responses by female **academic** staff specifically gives some indication of the reasons that they are less likely to work part-time than female colleagues in other roles³. The survey found that 92% of female academics are able to work from home to some extent, and that 75% of female academic staff largely determine their own working hours; these factors would allow female academics to accommodate family and caring responsibilities without needing to reduce their contractual working hours. Comments also note that moving to part-time work would cut into research time in particular. Survey responses also indicate that female academic staff are less likely than other female staff to take family-related leave: 16% of female academic respondents took either no paid leave or less than their full entitlement of paid leave on the birth/adoption of a child (as compared with 10% of female staff overall), and 81% have taken no unpaid family-related leave (as compared with 70% of female staff overall). It seems therefore that the nature of academic work allows for greater flexibility day-to-day, but discourages staff from taking any more than a minimal amount of family-related leave.

³ The *Gender and Trinity Staff: Trends in Contract Types* (2016) report found that academic staff make up 40% of total staff but just 15% of staff who work part-time. See p16 of the report: http://www.tcd.ie/equality/assets/docs/SpecificReports/Contract_Types_Report_2016_FINAL.pdf

Next Steps

Under Trinity's *Plan for Implementation of the HEA's Recommendations in its National Review of Gender Equality in Irish Higher Education Institutions*⁴, the university has committed to establishing a working group on family leave, led by Human Resources. It is proposed that the group's remit should also include the development of actions in relation to part-time working and flexible working arrangements, as well as family leave, in the light of this report. The report would therefore be used by the "work-life balance working group" as an evidence base for their deliberations, and any new actions arising from the survey findings will be directed by the group, which will have broad representation of relevant stakeholders from across the university.

Trinity is committed to other actions for work-life balance under its Gender Action Plan⁵:

Adopt core hours policy (10.00 – 16.00)
Allow part-time staff to be Fellows & Tutors
Endorse flexible work practices & communicate options
Publicise paternity leave entitlements to all staff
Review and extend FEMS pilot of 6-month post-leave protected research period
Establish working group on childcare [could merge with work-life balance group]
Communicate facilities for breastfeeding / expression
Convert rooms on campus for breastfeeding / expression (to 3 rooms in total)

Commitment to these actions is renewed by the findings of this survey, and the findings will also inform the detail of implementation, guiding prioritisation and allocation of resources.

Uptake of parental leave, career break and Shorter Working Year (disaggregated by gender) was reported on for the first time in the Annual Equality Monitoring Report 2016/17 and it is planned to report on all forms of family-related leave on an ongoing basis in future reports. The findings of this survey will also influence the development of in-house training materials on equality, diversity and inclusion, especially on the topic of gender awareness.

Readers may also wish to consider how they can act on the findings of this report in their own capacity as leaders, managers, colleagues or family members.

⁴ HEA Review Implementation Group (2017). Available at: http://www.tcd.ie/equality/assets/docs/SpecificReports/HEA%20Review%20Implementation%20Plan_APPROVED.pdf

⁵ Composite document of the Athena SWAN institutional Gender Action Plan, Strategy for Diversity and Inclusion, Strategic Plan and HEA Review Implementation Plan; available on request