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PROGRAMME: "NICE WORK"

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LAMB: Hello. Ever thought about working part-time? More than one in four of us already does but many career professionals who put in years of hard graft climbing up the ladder at work find that the price they pay for going part-time can be more than just a financial one because they wave goodbye to their career prospects as well.

LADY: When you're working 60/70 hours a week, I don't think people want to see somebody swan in for two days a week and there is that resentment in the office that makes it difficult for you even when you are working part-time and people might not think you can revert to the career you had. Maybe other people in the office will always think of you now as a part-timer.

LAMB: But does it have to be that way? And flexible working doesn't have to mean fewer hours and a smaller salary. Work compressed hours and you can have it all if you can stand the pace. We'll be looking at that later in the programme. First though, nearly 6½ million people work part-time in Britain and the vast majority of them are women. For many of them how much they work isn't a matter of choice, it's driven by caring responsibilities and

financial pressures. But the number of career-minded professionals who are actively choosing to work fewer than five days a week is on the rise and with new legislation giving parents of young children the right to ask for flexible hours, it does seem as if you really can have the lot nowadays. A great career and time for family and other interests as well. But how true is that and what sacrifices do part-timers have to make? With me I have Elaine Aarens who's head of Employment Law at the City law firm Eversheds, and Jo Thurman who works for Flexexecutive, a recruitment consultancy which places people who want to work flexibly. Elaine, you do something which wouldn't have been possible I think 20 years ago. It's pretty difficult to do it now. You work part-time as a partner in a large law firm and you head up a very big team of employment lawyers. How does that work?

AARENS: It's been very successful. Actually I started this arrangement fifteen years ago and I prefer to call it less than full-time than part-time, which probably is a sign of the legal profession and how one feels about this. But when I started fifteen years ago I had just one assistant working with me in my team and I'm now part of an overall team of about 250 HR professionals which is lawyers and consultants, but my own little part of that which was built from that original two people, is myself and 32 lawyers plus a couple of HR consultants. So whilst working this four day week that I've been doing we've built up something very successful indeed.

LAMB: You say it's a four-day week, but it's very long days isn't it?

AARENS: Yes, but then partners who work full-time work very long hours.

LAMB: How many hours do you work? Go on confess.

AARENS: Well I like to compare myself with the partners who are working 60 to 70 hours a week which is a full-time commitment and I'm doing probably round about 45 to 50 hours a week. So by most normal people's standards that's a very heavy load but compared to the people around me I have a lot more flexibility than those who are working 60 to 70 hours.

LAMB: Why do you do it?

AARENS: Because it has enabled me to combine family life and working. I think I'm very ambitious on every front I face and I never really wanted to accept second best at work and I also don't really want to accept second best at home, and I feel very privileged I've been able to do this.

LAMB: Jo Thurman, are you seeing a lot of demand from people at the kind of middle management stage with this sort of working?

THURMAN: Yes we are and I think that's where it's growing significantly. One point I would make out of that is it's not just with women either.

LAMB: Absolutely.

THURMAN: At Flexexecutive I would suggest we probably have 50% females and 50% males and also those women are not just looking for part-time for caring reasons. Where we're seeing a lot of growth and particularly with younger people, they're actually looking for dual careers. So they may be very ambitious, very committed and maybe wanting to be a marketing manager for four days a week, but on their fifth day they want to do something for themselves, be it charity, be it writing a book, be it further study. So it isn't just about reducing their hours because they have caring needs.

LAMB: Well one job that used to be about as full-time as it was possible for it to be was being a family doctor. GPs were on call seven days a week and nights as well and it certainly wasn't a job you could ever have imagined doing part-time. Not any more. Part-time GPs are very common nowadays, in fact the number has more than doubled in the past ten years. Our reporter, Mike Johnson, visited the Aberfeldy surgery in Poplar, East London where all the doctors work part-time.

DR: So she was one last week, was she?

LADY: Yea.

DR. So you've come for the injections today? Is she fit and well?

JOHNSON: Dr. Phil Bennett Richards oversees the weekly child health clinic. He's a partner in this surgery which means he's in charge. He's one of four GPs looking after 3,500 patients in one of the most deprived inner city areas in Europe.

CHILD (Child crying).

JOHNSON: You might think this would be a stressful high-pressure place to work, but you'd be wrong. Every doctor here is part-time. That's because Dr. Bennett Richards had a vision when he helped set up this surgery almost five years ago to give his doctors freedom to choose the hours they work.

DR. RICHARDS: We decided that we wanted to be in a position where we had control of our own lives and control of the practice that we set up. The more strings you have to your bow really the better you are capable of avoiding things like burn out. It just means that we can do the bits within the practice better mostly. I think it allows us to be able to come in fresh.

JOHNSON: Keeping Dr. Bennett Richards fresh is the fact that he only spends three days a week in the surgery. On one of the remaining days he runs a local GP-training course, on the other he helps look after his two-year old son, Ralph, at home. Just the sort of benefits which his younger colleagues enjoy too. Also on a three day week here is newly qualified Dr. Emma Radcliffe. She spends her non-surgery time writing a book. For her seeing patients full-time would be just too much.

RADCLIFFE: I find clinical sessions fairly stressful and I think if I was doing nine a week then I think I would find it really too much actually.

JOHNSON: And in terms of building a career, do you think it's harder if you don't put the hours in, if you don't work full-time?

RADCLIFFE: No, I would argue very strongly that someone that is not doing 9 clinical sessions a week has the opportunity to enhance their career really. Working too many sessions a week has the potential to lead to burn out and at the moment I can plan my career and I can do that much better than if I was working full-time.

JOHNSON: So the doctors seem to like working this way, what about the patients? When every GP is part-time, it's harder to see the same one from one visit to the next. But for this mother who's just brought her child to the clinic, that doesn't seem to be an issue.

JOHNSON: So did you know that the doctors here work part-time?

LADY: No, I thought they were all full-time.

JOHNSON: Do you usually go to the same doctor all the time?

LADY: No, never the same one. There's always different ones, but there's always one when we need them.

JOHNSON: And it doesn't matter to you that you don't go to the same doctor?

LADY: No not really.

JOHNSON: Nonetheless, the communication between part-time GPs does need to be good if patients aren't to suffer as Dr. Radcliffe concedes.

RADCLIFFE: I think there is an issue about continuity of care, the same doctor is not there day-in-day-out and that's certainly something that patients perhaps have expected in the past and that's not really the case any more. But hopefully because I'm a happy doctor I'm hopefully a better doctor as well.

JOHNSON: These days GPs have lots of reasons to feel happy. Recent changes to their contracts are expected to increase average pay to more than £80,000 a year, making it easier for them than for others to bear the financial losses involved in being part-time. What's more the government is giving GP partners, like Phil Bennett Richards, a direct financial incentive to take on more part-time doctors through what's known as the flexible working scheme, the NHS subsidises their wages. For Dr. Bennett Richards that's just as well. He believes the very notion of a full-time GP will soon be consigned to history.

DR. RICHARDS: There are very few people who are coming out of training these days who want to go into the traditional model of general practice which might have encompassed 9 clinical sessions a week. General practice these days is becoming a career where you can have a portfolio of interests.

JOHNSON: And it doesn't damage your basic career as a GP, do you think?

DR. RICHARDS: I don't think it does. I think it enhances it. I think you're seen as someone who has a broader CV and someone who is more employable rather than less employable.

LAMB: Dr. Phil Bennett Richards ending that report by Mike Johnson. Well listening to that was Judy Hargaden who's director of New Ways of Working at the NHS Modernisation Agency. GPs' surgeries do seem to operate completely differently now to perhaps the way they did when you and I were growing up. I'm guessing that must have meant changing a lot of people's expectations about them along the way.

HARGADEN: I think so and I think health care has changed so much over the years that more and more we're used to seeing a particular specialist for a particular condition. I certainly choose which GP I want to go to in my practice and I choose an appointment according to when they're available and I don't know that I know whether they're full-time or part-time.

LAMB: I guess many patients might feel the loss of the familiar always present GP, but was this really the only way that you could move forward in order to solve what was really a recruitment crisis for GPs, wasn't it?

HARGADEN: Yes we've had a number of difficult situations in health care where different groups of staff at various times have been in high demand and it's been difficult to recruit and that has made us look at very very flexible ways of managing staff. One of the things we're doing though is developing new roles for people. So, for example, someone who has a long-term condition where they need a degree of support, they will have a key care worker. So although the GP may not be working in that way any more, enhanced roles for

nurses, different ways of working of others, are still giving patients the kind of contact and care they want.

LAMB: Now you mentioned nurses, thinking of hospital nurses, they were certainly one group which was very inclined, I think it's fair to say, to go and join agencies. They left, they resigned, they joined an agency if they wanted to work part-time. I know you're trying very hard to reverse that trend. How are you doing that?

HARGADEN: Well we've got a whole range of schemes on. I think one of the important things is to remember that anybody in the health service is part-time because we deliver health care 24 hours a day, seven days a week. So rather than just using traditional models of covering the service, we've been trying all sorts of different ways and one of the key ones is self-rostering that allows staff to plan their own cover between themselves so that patients get the care they need but staff can be flexible.

LAMB: How does that work? It does require quite a lot of cooperation between team members?

HARGADEN: Yes, yes of course. But the examples we've had and there are quite a few around the country include job-share schemes too. People who join the health service really do want to look after people and help make them better and if they can have a job in the National Health Service where they can be flexible, maybe full-time, maybe part-time but the flexibility seems to be the key thing, then they will be motivated, and our evidence shows that they are to make these systems work.

LAMB: Last month we heard about these very interesting plans to cut the time it takes doctors to train as consultant surgeons. It's 12 years I think

at the moment, isn't it, at post-graduate training? The idea is it will come down to 7. Is this about bringing more women in?

HARGADEN: The time it takes to train is very variable at the moment and quite a lot of people spend time in posts due to the way we organise training where they're not actually getting as much training, doing a lot of service delivery. The Working Time Directive has made us really concentrate on that as an issue but all of the different medical specialties are saying, "what exactly do you need to have covered during your study period to become a doctor?" Let's focus on the studying that you need to do, particularly during your registrar years when you're already qualified, you've left medical school and qualified, but you're learning a specialty, whether it be general practice or surgery or whatever. What exactly do you need to know during that period? We've identified that perhaps it doesn't take quite as long as it traditionally has if we focus people's time correctly.

LAMB: And women were very put off the idea of going into that area weren't they, because of the length of time it took to qualify?

HARGADEN: I think there were two things. One was the length of time to qualify and the hours that people used to work and different specialties had more on-call and were therefore likely to be more intensive. We have a flexible training scheme now for doctors that enables them to flex the hours they work during the registrar period which is usually the main child-rearing period.

LAMB: Well despite the changes in the medical profession, people working in some other industries still find it extremely tough if not impossible to make the move to part-time work. Before she had children Jackie Annesley was a high-powered executive at the Daily Mail editing the well known female section. She had a secretary, a team of 25 staff, a six figure salary and a

company car and she usually worked 13 hour days. Not any more. Zillah Watson went to meet her.

ANNESLEY: A lot of people were amazed when they came into the job about how different it was from other newspapers. It had a culture of very long hours and leaving decisions very late and being expected to just keep up.

WATSON: So what happened, you then had a baby?

ANNESLEY: So then I got married and then had a baby and didn't want to continue working those hours. They allowed me to come back two days a week.

WATSON: But was that at the same level?

ANNESLEY: No. The thing about my job is you couldn't do it part-time because it demanded continuity, you had to be there organising these 25, 30 people five days a week.

WATSON: But since then legislation has been passed allowing people to ask to be able to work more flexibly, perhaps do a job share or something like that. Would your situation be different now, do you think?

ANNESLEY: No, because a newspaper is inflexible in that respect. It just wouldn't work because so much goes on, so many decisions are made, there are so many people to deal with both the sort of personnel, hiring, getting rid of, commissioning. You just couldn't hand that over half way through the week.

WATSON: What because it would take too much time?

ANNESLEY: It would just take too much time, it's a completely impractical situation, and I think, not just newspapers but a lot of jobs are like that. You need to be there for the full week.

WATSON: You are still working now but on very different terms. What do you actually do now?

ANNESLEY: I work just two days a week, long hours, 12 hour days, but I'm not in charge of a department, I'm not in charge of staff, I'm not in charge of signing invoices or anything like that. They basically want me for ideas and commissioning and contacts and getting pieces into the paper.

WATSON: So what compromises have you had to make in order to be able to work in a way that suits you now and fits in with your family?

ANNESLEY: You lose the status. I didn't think I'd find that difficult, but it is slightly difficult. For obvious reasons you're not included in the big meetings, you're not part of the special team. You lose all that but then that's the compromise you make.

WATSON: What about your career prospects now because you obviously were a high flyer who rose very quickly through the system. By working part-time, what's changed there?

ANNESLEY: Working part-time does allow me to keep my hand in, I know what's going on and it's a great privilege to do that. But would I be offered an editorship of something? I mean there's a whole generation of new journalists coming up behind me, very ambitious. One might have a reputation of only being a part-timer now.

WATSON: But if you did want to do that and become an editor you'd have to go back to the 12 hour days at some point.

ANNESLEY: Oh yes, yes. If I wanted to pick up my career where I left off, I would have to go back to a 60/70 hour week, not see the children and that's something I can't do at the moment. I mean they just give me such a lot of joy and I love being a mother that I just wouldn't, I wouldn't do that.

LAMB: That was Jackie Annesley. Elaine Aarens, Jackie very clearly feels she has fallen right off the career ladder. She also interestingly feels you can't be a good manager as a part-time person. I'm guessing you would take issue with that.

AARENS: I think it's very much about the culture of the organisation. It sounded to me as though there were cultural issues that she was describing there. At Eversheds it's a core value that it should be a great place to work and out of 4,000 people working there, of course many many of them professionals, over 500 work on a flexible basis and amongst the partnership we have the largest number of part-time partners with 19 not working full-time. And once you get that sort of quantum mass going then you can start structuring the way that you manage yourself and the people around you because it becomes quite a normal thing that you have managers who are not working full-time rather than having individuals having to really trail blaze which is what we were hearing there.

LAMB: You talk about attitudes and we think of bosses' attitudes in this context, but do you find that the individuals themselves can struggle to understand that maybe they will have to work differently when they go part-time? It's not just a question of doing less hours, they might have to devolve power or responsibility and sometimes they can be uncomfortable with that idea.

AARENS: Yes I think there's certainly potentially adjustment. But I think it's about having a very honest conversation between employer and employee or partnership and partner as to what part-time means. I think we're a bit shallow when we think about part-time working. We think it's got one model. But in fact you get very ambitious part-timers and you get other people who are prepared to actually come off the career super highway in order to have a more moderate life in order to have more energy for their families and that's a very personal decision. It's based on different people's energy levels and commitment levels and interest levels and there isn't one model that fits every situation.

LAMB: This is a good moment for me to bring in Jill Kirby. She's in our Westminster studio. She's from the right-wing Think Tank, the Centre for Policy Studies and she writes about part-time working. Jill, I know you're a litigation lawyer yourself. You had children. What did you do about work then?

KIRBY: Oh I made the decision actually to drop out of the law altogether because I wasn't in a job that was at all susceptible to part-time working and I certainly knew that I didn't want to continue with full-time work and being a mother.

LAMB: So you felt you couldn't maintain the professional position you'd had at all?

KIRBY: No, and it didn't seem to me that I could gain by doing so because I would be losing so much at home.

LAMB: Do you think it's reasonable for part-timers to expect to retain the same status and indeed promotion prospects as full-timers?

KIRBY: Well I think that in fact most women are quite realistic about the fact that working part-time won't bring them the same career status but research tends to show that that is for a reason and that women are opting for part-time work and we have to remember that nearly 50% of all working women work part-time. They're opting for that because it enables them to follow their other priorities and those priorities tend to be away from the workplace once they have a family.

LAMB: You describe in your work 70% of women as being adaptive in the context of work. What exactly do you mean by that?

KIRBY: Well that's a phrase coined by Catherine Hakim at the London School of Economics who's researched a great deal into what she describes as women's preferences in life. So instead of simply looking at labour force survey results and saying this is what's happening, she also actually examines surveys of women saying what it is they want in their lives at any one time and what they envisage the balance between work and family to be. And what she finds is that whereas only about 20% of women regard work as the only thing or the main thing in life, about 70% of women are quite happy to see work as a priority for a period in their lives and then for home life to be a priority and then possibly a mixture of the two. And so whereas men still tend to be focused on full-time work and to be what she calls work-centred through life, women are not very often work-centred for very long.

LAMB: Jo Thurman, this brings us back to this honesty point that I think Elaine raised about are we prepared to say which camp we're in. Are we at this particular moment very focused on being career ambitious or are we wanting to work part-time because we have other aspirations, other responsibilities? Do you find that the people who come to you are prepared to be honest about that?

THURMAN: I think they're delighted to be honest about it. But I don't think it matters, again coming back to that, I don't think it matters what the reason is. I think...

LAMB: But to be honest is important, isn't it?

THURMAN: I think it is, I think you do need to be honest because you need to be honest with yourself as to how much you want to put into your work at this stage in your career and at what point you're going to be ready to go back to it.

LAMB: Elaine, it seems to me that what is going to persuade employers to actually go further down this road is the business case. Is the business case there or is this actually just something we like the idea of doing?

AARENS: I don't think firms that commit to flexibility do it because of some social model. I think by and large they're doing it because they see very genuine business benefits. So, for example, if you're in a client service business such as Eversheds, you're in a situation where you actually want to have your lawyers working to maximum effect to deliver good client service. The Eversheds' perspective on that says if you create a great place to work, you'll have great client service and that therefore has moved us down the flexibility model because it's a good business model. Also, from the point of view of the demographics, we've got some real challenges coming up in the future as to where we attract and retain our talent from, and I think Jo referred earlier to the fact she has as much interest from men as she has from women for flexible working. In Eversheds 11% of the people who are working flexibly are men and that number will continue to rise. So if we're going to have the very best lawyers, we're going to have to have a flexible model.

LAMB: As you say enlightened employers are going down this road for very solid business and demographic reasons, but Jo, there is this question of commitment, isn't there? I mean obviously employers look for commitment. There's the question of how part-time is part-time? The three days, the four days. If you're doing four days you're perceived to be committed, if you're doing three days, are you really viewed as a bit of a serial part-timer?

THURMAN: I think it does make a very big difference. There's an enormous difference between three days and four days. Very often someone who's doing four days is being very focused and very efficient and actually not very different to what Elaine's saying. So they're actually doing a full-time job. They're still delivering to their full-time commitment but the business is doing very well because they've just cut their salary bill by 20%. Three days a week I think is a very very different option and there are very few three day a week meaty senior jobs to go for. Our advice is always to go forward for a five-day week, a five-day-a-week job, and look at where you can negotiate it. But you do have to be very sensible about what it is you're trying to deliver and can you cut it back. There is no point going forward for a full-time job and saying I can do it in three days if it simply isn't going to work.

LAMB: And really you're suggesting that people should go there, demonstrate their worth and then negotiate?

THURMAN: Very often, particularly when you're talking at senior level, what people have to do is recognise they may have to work full-time for a business when they're new to a company for a 6/9-month period where they're getting themselves up and running, they're getting a track record, they're getting to understand the job. But then make it very clear that at some stage they're looking to back away from that and maybe reduce to a four day week.

LAMB: You are listening to Nice Work on Radio 4. We've been talking about part-time working and staying on the career ladder. What if you could work fewer days and keep your full-time salary? Well you can but it's not easy. Compressed hours are an increasingly popular way of working and the idea is very simple. You work the same number of hours but you cram them into fewer, longer days or even opt to work say flat out for three months and then spend the next three months on the beach. Chris Bones of Cadbury Schweppes joins us now. He's at a conference today so he joins us on the phone. He's been looking into the pros and cons of compressed working. Also with us is a woman who's already working compressed hours, Jenny Connick. Chris, compressed hours do mean you work very hard when you actually are working, don't they?

BONES: Yes I think they do but I think they come from the fact that to pick up an earlier comment, that people have different stages in their careers and at different stages they want different things, different things are important to them, and increasingly some of the research we've been doing and some of the research that has been done by Henley Management College has shown that for a lot of younger people, this whole concept of self-fulfilment is really important. I want to be able to contribute, I want to be able to benefit, I want to be able to get something out of an employment relationship but I also want to give back something or I want to go and expand myself through doing something very different. And increasingly I think employers are being faced by a lot of younger people who don't want the traditional long-term employment contract, they want something that gives them an opportunity to break away or break out, whether it's for education or for personal development or just a different experience.

LAMB: But do these young people also have expectations about career development, do they really think they can work in this way and develop their careers?

BONES: Yes I think they do, and I think one of the things that's interesting about them is they see the chance to break away and break out as enhancing what they bring to an employer. Whether it's going travelling and getting experience of international cultures, whether it's learning a language, whether it's going to work on a major community project. They think that experience brings back to the employer real benefit in terms of their ability to work and manage in different organisations in different cultures.

LAMB: And do you agree with them?

BONES: Yes I do. I think for a lot of them they really are looking for a different type of life and I think we, as employers, are going to have to respond to that. It's quite clear, for example, in Cadbury Schweppes, one of the things we've done in the last couple of years is actually put people on development programmes with NGO organisations and small businesses where they break out. They spend three months or six months working with a different organisation and working with a voluntary organisation to help put them on the right track and at the same time break away from Cadbury Schweppes, get a different experience and then come back into a new role.

LAMB: Well let me bring Jenny Connick in here. You're a freelance interim manager so you go and work chunks of time with various organisations. How do you arrange your working hours?

CONNICK: Really I arrange it around my life. My life is the driver for what I do at work. So at different times over the last six years I've had different drivers, for example, children have been a major major driver.

LAMB: But you also run a different business as well, a Bistro?

CONNICK: Well yes, I guess after doing the third contract, what it actually did was enable me to have the space to decide what I really wanted to do and so I actually decided that I'd create a bistro earlier this year.

LAMB: And how's that going?

CONNICK: It's going very well.

LAMB: Now I know your husband fits his work with yours. Would your working pattern be possible if he didn't? Is this a team effort essentially?

CONNICK: It's very much a team effort. We've got four children and we've always made the decision that for one of us, our career would take precedence over the other one. So one would be a main carer and one would be the main career person at any one time.

LAMB: Thank you all very much indeed. I'm afraid we're going to have to leave it there. You'll find our website at [bbc.co.uk/radio4/nicework](http://bbc.co.uk/radio4/nicework) where you can listen to all or indeed part of the programme again and you can email us at [nicework@bbc.co.uk](mailto:nicework@bbc.co.uk). I'll be back next week when we'll be investigating the growing problem of fearfulness at work. Nearly a quarter of people who deal with the general public now believe they're likely to be threatened or assaulted at work. But is the risk really that high? That's Nice Work at the same time next week. Join me then.