

Listen to an interview with a social commentator on changes in patterns of working.

Optional exercise

Which of these subjects does she mention?

1. part-time work
 2. temporary work
 3. pension provision
 4. leisure activities
 5. working hours
 6. starting your own business
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Interviewer: We have with us in the studio Nicola Bayleigh, our social affairs commentator, to give us some perspective on the changes that have taken place in our working lives over the last twenty years or so. Good morning, Nicola.

Nicola: Good morning.

Interviewer: Now, we hear an awful lot these days about the end to a job for life, the rise of flexible working, the numbers of women now engaged in employment and so on. It's very different from our parents' day, isn't it?

Nicola: Well, it's true there's a lot more terminology around these days. Anyone would think from listening to the media that some kind of social revolution was going on.

Interviewer: And are you saying that these are not real trends for the future?

Nicola: I'm not saying these phenomena are not present today, but I just think we need to put them into some kind of perspective. Traditional 9 to 5 working is not going to disappear quite as fast as some analysts would like to believe.

Interviewer: I think you have some interesting figures from recent research on the subject

Nicola: That's right, if you look at the proportion of working people in Britain today who have a permanent contract of employment for example, you'll find it's not very much different from twenty years ago. It's still around 80%. And around 30% of us have had the same job for more than ten years, which is also little changed from the past.

Interviewer: That doesn't mean that people necessarily feel more secure, though...

Nicola: Oh no, employers still retain the right to use redundancy as a way of reducing their labour force, for example. But the idea that most of us are moving from one temporary job to another is not borne out by the figures. Temporary employment only accounts for about 6% of all jobs.

Interviewer: Well, let's talk about women's employment. Isn't it true that there are far more women in the workplace today?

Nicola: Oh yes, there are certainly more women with dependent children in the workforce than before, but the overall proportion of women in full-time work hasn't really changed in twenty-five years, especially in the more traditional sectors - clerical, secretarial and sales jobs.

Interviewer: And what about specific patterns of working? Is it true there's more part-time work in the UK compared to the rest of Europe? And aren't we working longer hours than before?

Nicola: Well, yes both of these are unfortunately true. A third of us work more than 46 hours a week, while for other European countries it's not much more than 10%.

Interviewer: So much for new technology liberating us to do other things. And how about the golden future where we are all engaged in 'flexible working'? Is this a reality today?

Nicola: Again, if you look at how many people have some formal agreement, for example to annualise their hours or job share, it's only about 20% of us. The old working patterns persist...

Answers: 1,2,5