

Why is there a lack of gender diversity in the pilot trainer role? Part-time working as a barrier to women's entry

Professor Susan Durbin and Stella Warren
(University of the West of England, Bristol)

Captain Marnie Munns (Royal Aeronautical Society Fellow)

Carey Edwards (Royal Aeronautical Society Head of Diversity, Flight Crew Training Group)



Rationale for study



Aviation one of the most male dominated sectors globally – why?



Research conducted through a collaboration between UWE and RAeS Flight Crew training group as part of its diversity and inclusion plan



Independent report based upon survey and focus groups with pilots and pilot trainers



Conducted during the pandemic



No previous research of this scale and scope



ROYAL
AERONAUTICAL
SOCIETY



Study overview

- We asked male and female pilots, trainee pilots and pilot trainers about issues around the lack of gender diversity within the pilot and pilot trainer populations
- First independent study in the airline industry focusing upon three key roles - commercial pilots, trainee pilots and pilot trainers - across airlines and training schools

Methodology overview

Mixed methods

- Quantitative
 - + Online survey
- Qualitative
 - + Essay box for four open questions
 - + Focus groups



Quantitative method



Online survey



Hosted on Qualtrics



Distributed through various networks



Reach: 7,000 student/newly qualified pilots, commercial pilots, and pilot trainers



Blocks of questions relevant to specific groups

Qualitative methods

4 x open questions at the end of survey, resulting in 750 testimonials

Follow-up questions allowing respondents to elaborate on earlier answers

4 x online focus groups: male and female pilots and pilot trainers

Thematic analysis



Overview of survey sample

Survey sample



81% (n=571)

Commercial pilots
or pilot trainers



15% (n=109)

Retired or redundant
commercial pilots/trainers



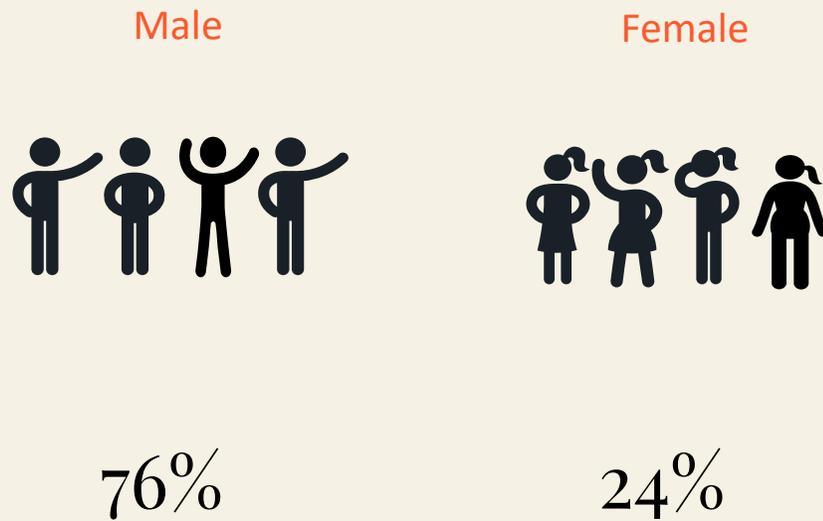
4% (n=27)

Student or newly qualified
commercial pilots

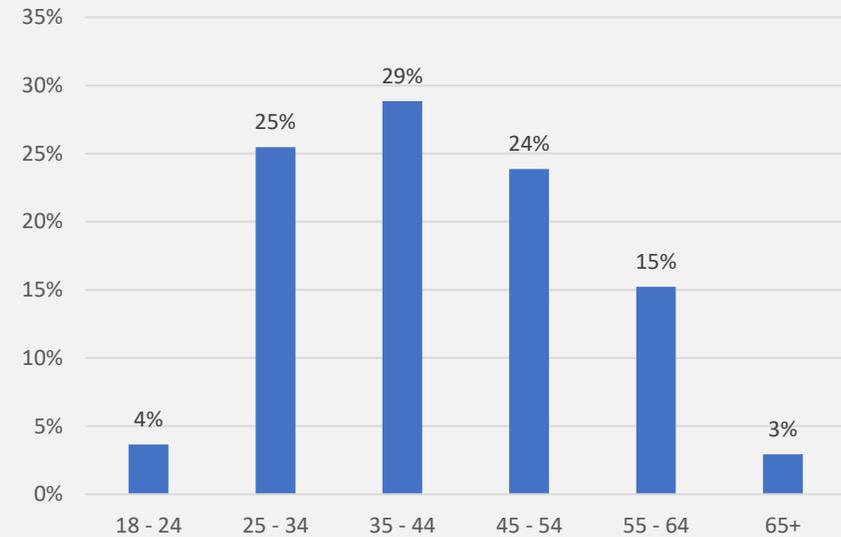
707
responses
analysed

Demographics

Gender

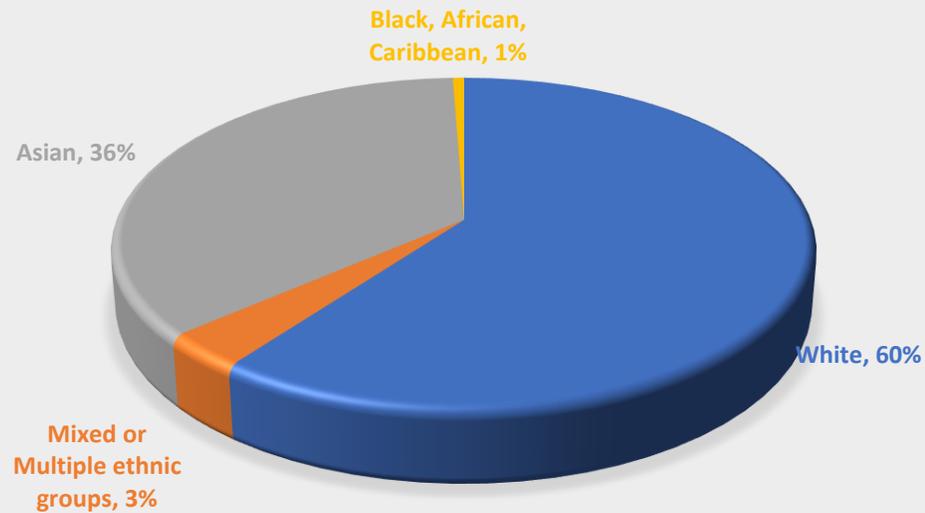


Age range



Demographics

Ethnicity



Operating region





Overview of focus group sample



Group 1

8 x female pilot trainers
UK, Canada, New Zealand
Aged between 31-63



Group 2

7 x male pilot trainers
UK, France, Netherlands
Aged between 42-68



Group 3

6 Female commercial pilots
UK and Europe
Aged between 33-55



Group 4

5 Male commercial pilots
UK and USA
Aged between 27 to 49

Focus group sample

26
participants

Aviation is 'traditionally male'



- Commercial pilot role most male dominated in the world
 - Total of 185,143 airline pilots worldwide
 - 9,746 are women (5.26%)
 - 2,630 are captains (1.42%) (IFALPA, 2021)
- UK total number of commercial pilots
 - 16,338 of which just 889 (5.5%) are female (Civil Aviation Authority, 2024)
- Type Rating Examiner role in the UK
 - Women comprise just 0.9% (Civil Aviation Authority, 2022)

Bridges, 2014; Durbin, et al., 2022b; McCarthy, et al., 2015, 2022; Yanıkoğlu, 2020; Mills et al., 2014; Harvey et al., 2019; Durbin et al., 2022a; McCarthy et al., 2015

Current Research: Challenges for female pilots

A negative workplace culture

- Implicit bias, discrimination, sexual harassment, alienation, exclusion, subjected to jokes/belittling
- *Durbin et al., 2022; IFALPA, 2021; Foley et al., 2020; McCarthy et al., 2022; Opengart and Ison, 2016; Ferla and Graham, 2019; McCarthy et al., 2015, 2022; Yanıkoğlu et al., 2020*

A recruitment and selection process that lacks transparency for internal job applications and promotions

- Process conducted by internal (mostly male) staff, gendered career path.
- *Durbin et al., 2022; Korn Ferry, 2019; Marintseva et al., 2022; Yanıkoğlu et al., 2020; Graham, 2021*

Challenges around work-life balance, especially for those with children

- Part-time working accepted for female pilots but not pilot trainers
- *Durbin et al., 2022; Marintseva et al., 2022; Yanıkoğlu et al., 2020; Amaugo, 2022*

Current Research: Challenges for female trainee pilots

Despite the paucity of women in the pilot trainer role, very little research has addressed this this challenging environment for women

- Instructors perceive women as ‘less technical’
- Their achievements are not recognized
- Female trainees endure derogatory banter from male trainees
- They have had to ‘fit in’ and suppress their gender identity
- Need for more family-friendly policies, improved mentorship and a strong commitment to DE&I

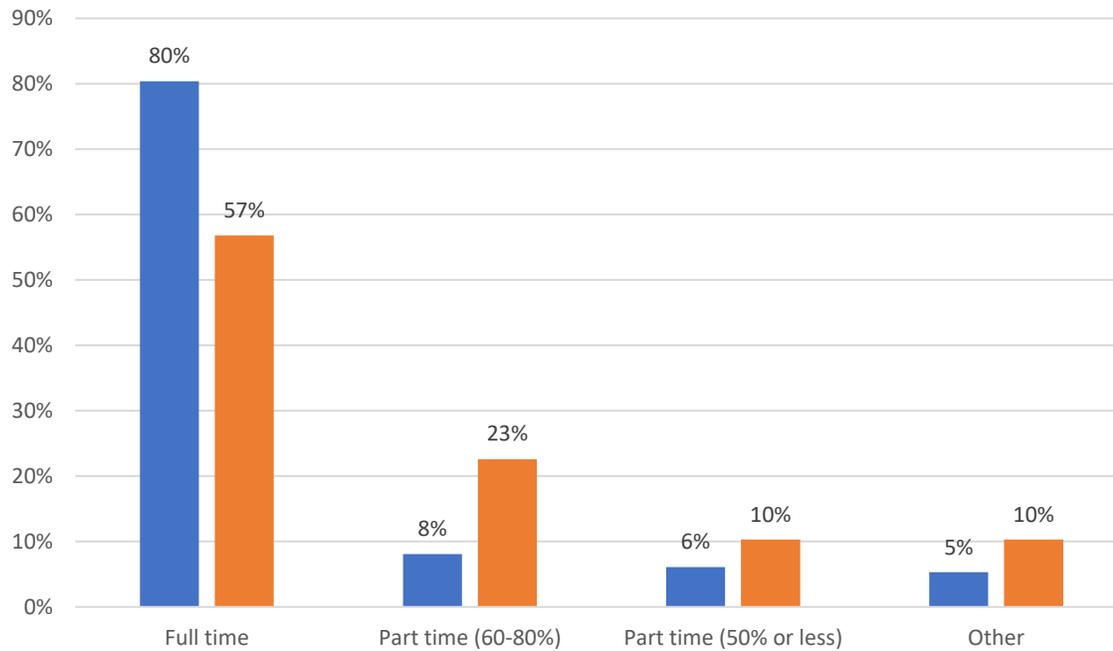
McCarthy et al., 2015, 2022; Marintseva et al., 2022; Halldale Group, Women in Aviation Training (2024)



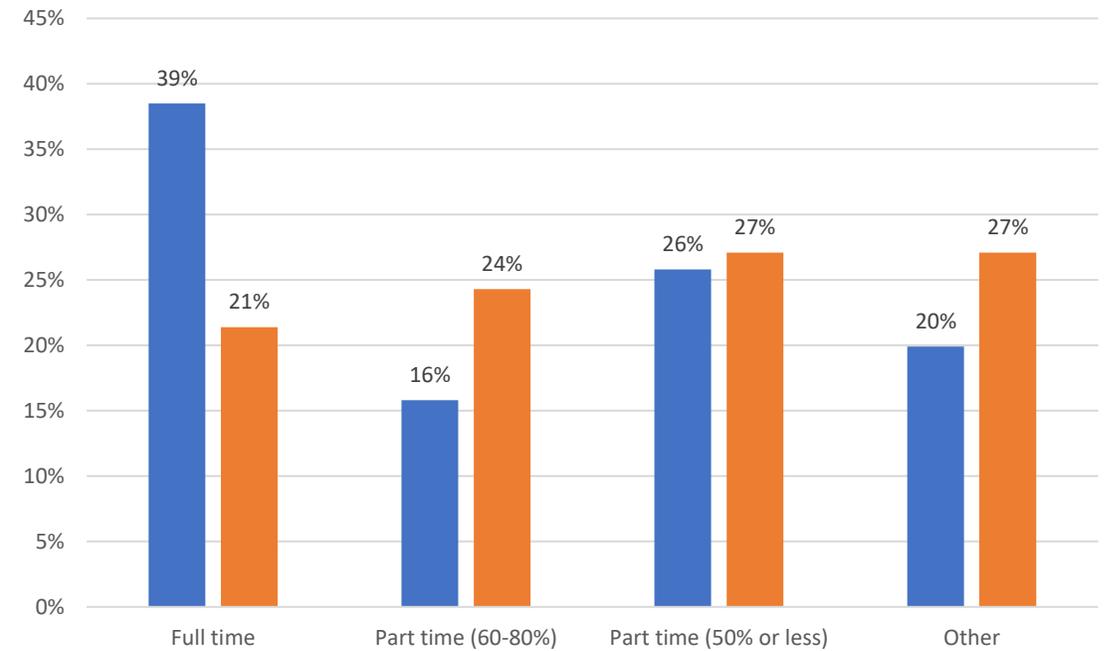
Part-time working

Working patterns by gender

October 2019



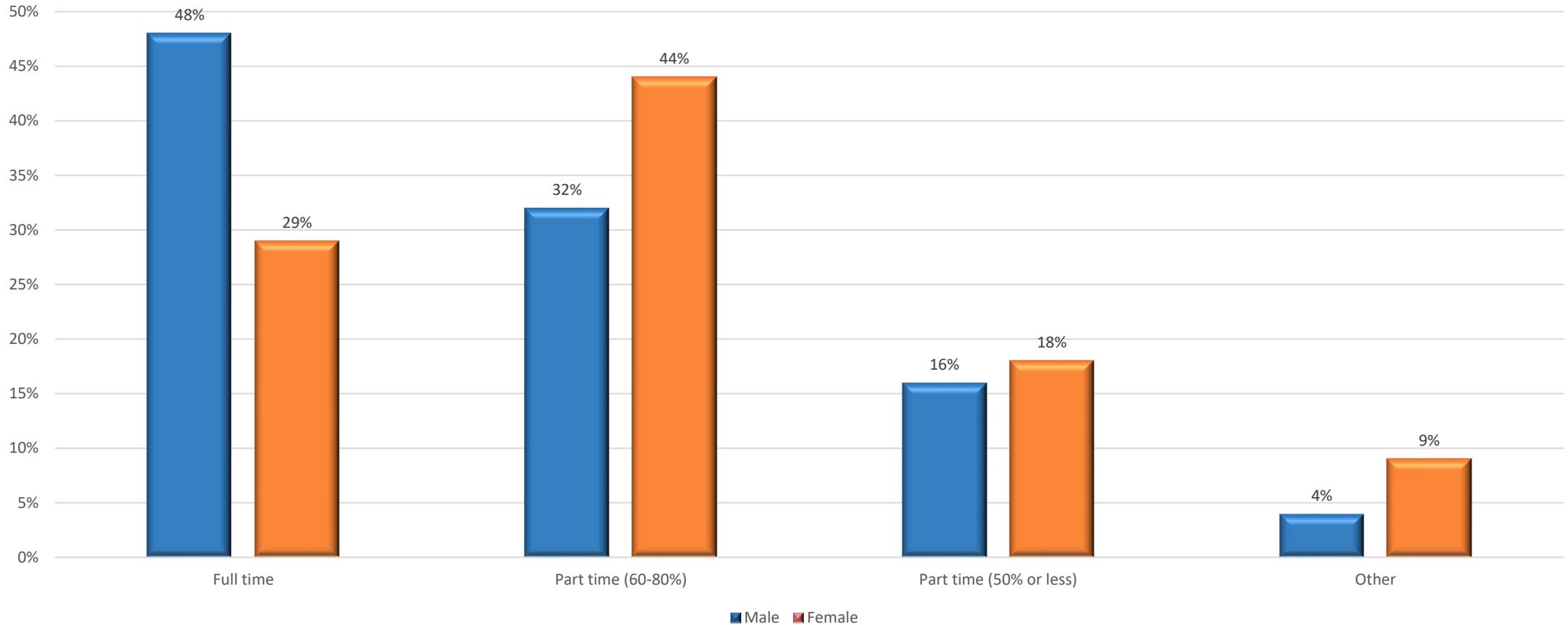
January 2021



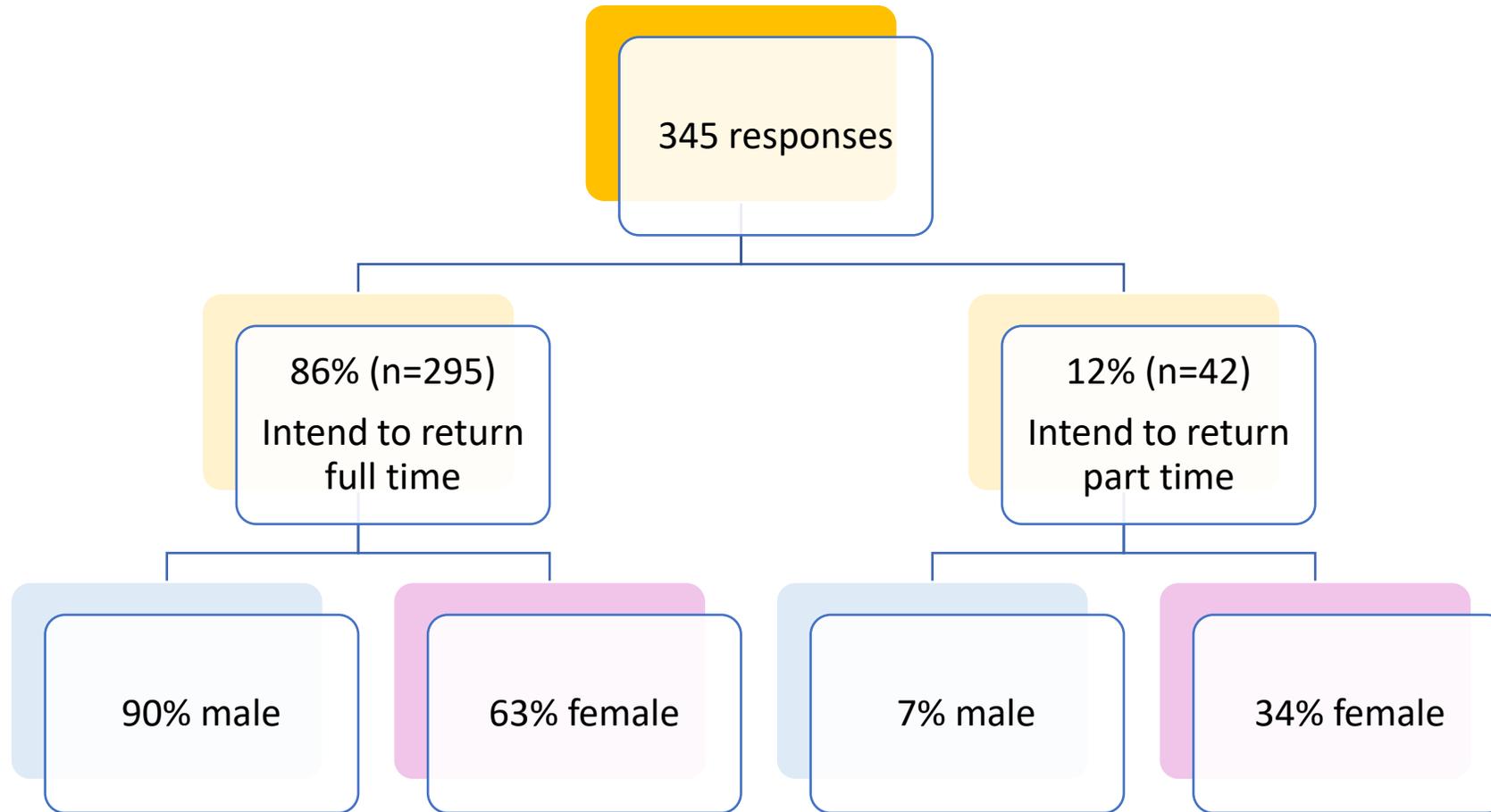
■ Male ■ Female

■ Male ■ Female

Preferred working pattern: pilot trainers



Intention to return to flying (post-pandemic)



2% (n=8) did not intend to return

Part time working

“ — And it always is the part-time issue, so a lot of our female pilots are part-time, probably because they've got children or family commitments. And our airline won't allow part-time simulator trainers, or I don't think line trainers either at the moment, so it... it's that really (female pilot).

My only comment on encouraging females into training is the conundrum for them whereby they tend to have the experience to train at a similar time to childbearing age. They then return (normally part-time) and are (by many carriers) excluded from joining training. (*male pilot*)

”

Is this Informal Occupational Closure?

- Informal and difficult to trace (Roscigno et al., 2007; Tomlinson, 2006)
- Women are 'locked out' of the pilot trainer role due to the informal 'full-time' rule
- Informal occupational closure occurs informally by managers and full-time staff and the ways in which organisations structure part-time work – inflexible career paths and construction of senior jobs along the 'ideal worker' model (Acker, 1990, 2006) in mind
- Lack of opportunities for part-time working acts as exclusionary occupational closure

Part-time Working

- The Part-time Workers (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2000 (Gov.uk)
- Same treatment as full-time workers in relation to pay, pensions and benefits, holidays, career breaks, **selection for promotion, training and career development**
- The Law: Flexible working legislation, from April, 2024:
 - Employees do not have automatic right to flexible working but now have right to request from day 1 of employment (e.g. hours, place of work)
 - Employees can make two requests per annum and employers must respond to requests within two months

Part-time Working

- This way of working appears to be accepted by airlines for pilots but not pilot trainers despite the pandemic demonstrating that the role can be performed on a part-time basis
- Restricting the progression of part-time workers is not unique to aviation (Durbin and Tomlinson 2014, 2010; Durbin et al. 2022; Hoque and Kirkpatrick, 2003)
- BUT, part-time work COULD help with recruitment and retention, inclusion, employee well-being and addressing skills shortages (Kelliher et al., Cranfield University Study, 2023)
- Current study (Durbin, Tomlinson, Warren, 2024) demonstrates that executives and senior managers successfully navigate part-time working

Practical Recommendations

- Employers should seriously consider making the trainer role available on a part-time basis so as not to exclude a female talent pool
- Part-time working could also make the role more attractive to older male and female pilots who have the experience to train and want to work part-time
- Airlines, training schools and professional bodies (RAeS) should commission a feasibility study on part-time working and look for 'best practice' in airlines and academic research



Q&A

Thanks and close

- A copy of the report can be viewed at:

https://www.aerosociety.com/media/17924/pilot_training_report_march_2022-final-pdf.pdf

- For research enquiries only, please contact the authors
 - Sue.Durbin@uwe.ac.uk
 - atshumanfactorsltd@gmail.com