Female part-time managers in the UK: work-life balance, career prospects, role models and mentors
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The question/problem
While a small amount of research has focused upon the experiences and employment profiles of female professionals working part-time (Dick and Hyde, 2006; Lawrence and Corwin, 2003) only recently has the focus turned to the experiences of women working as part-time managers in the UK (Durbin and Tomlinson, 2010). This is because part-time managerial jobs are incredibly rare despite the dramatic rise in part-time work since the 1960s. In the UK, of 28,129,000 workers, 27 percent (7,882,000) are part-time and a high proportion of these workers, (5,868,000), 74 percent, are women. Of all part-time workers, a very small number (516,000), just 6.5 percent, work in the occupational category of managers and senior officials (LFS, 2012). Thus the commentary by Burchell et al., (1997: 215), in their study of part-time work in the UK in the mid 1990s, that ‘moves towards opening up management jobs on a part-time basis’ were ‘slow’ and ‘embryonic’ remains the case nearly two decade later. Indeed the LFS data (2012) reports that the most likely occupations for part-time workers are elementary occupations (1,206,000 part-time workers), customer service occupations (1,206,000 part-time workers) and administrative and secretarial occupations (1,186,000 part-time workers). Women struggle to progress their careers while working part-time, which often coincides with raising a family (Lane, 2003; Durbin and Tomlinson 2010). Consequently research in the UK indicates that when women work as part-time managers they are perceived by others as ‘one-offs’, fortunate (originally full-time) employees in strategic positions which enables them to negotiate reduced working hours (Tomlinson, 2006). However, other than this, relatively little is known about these female managers’ experiences of work following a reduction in their hours or the consequences of such transitions for their career prospects.

The method
The data presented in this paper is based on social-biographical interviews with 27 female part-time managers, all with child and/or elder care responsibilities, in a range of public, private and third sector organisations. Through our qualitative data, we aim to shed light on this little studied group of employees in the UK. We also aim to explore, why when there is so much use of part-time work in the UK, openings at managerial level remain rare. In this paper we will give an overview of four connected aspects of female part-time managers’ working lives. First we trace female part-time managers’ career histories to gain insight of their careers before and after transitions to part-time work are made. Second, we explore the career aspirations and career mobility of our sample of part-time managers. Third, we examine female part-time managers’ experience of mentorship and identification with role models and finally we look at differences between contract and actual hours of work and engage with issues of work-life balance and work intensification.

Policy Implications
Implication for both government policy, including working-time regulations and reconciliation of work and private life and organisational policy are addressed, with a particular focus on ways in which organisations might enable women to avoid experiencing stall careers when they make a transition to part-time work.

Findings
Findings are discussed in relation to four themes: experience of work and careers before and after a transition to part-time work; career aspirations and mobility; issues of work intensification, working-time and reconciliation of work and private life; and the roles mentors and role models play in these women's experiences of work and perceptions of future career prospects. We find that many women struggle to progress further while part-time, despite being committed to their careers, progression and working in excess of contracted hours. Lack of progression appears to be exacerbated by a lack of mentors and positive female role models, and we note that many women would welcome the opportunity to be mentored at mid-career stage, when they are facing challenges of combining raising a family alongside developing an organisational career.

References