

Flexible Working

Introduction to Flexible Working

What is flexible working?

Flexible working is a type of arrangement that gives employees flexibility over how long, where, when and the hours they work. This is to better accommodate their commitments outside their job.

Why is flexible working important?

- Improved work/life balance
- Reduced absence
- Improved staff retention
- Improved morale
- Better working relationships
- Greater job satisfaction

Who is flexible working for?

Flexible working is a statutory right for any employee who has worked for their employer continuously for at least 26 weeks.

Types of flexible working:

- Job sharing- two people so one job and split the hours
- Working from home- it might be possible to do some or all of the work from home or anywhere else other than the normal place of work.
- Part-time- working less than full-time hours usually by working fewer days.
- Compressed hours- working full-time hours but over fewer days
- Flexitime - the employee chooses when to start and end work (within agreed limits) but works certain 'core hours', e.g. 10am to 4pm every day.
- Annualised hours - the employee has to work a certain number of hours over the year but they have some flexibility about when they work. There are sometimes 'core hours' which the employee regularly works each week, and they work the rest of their hours flexibly or when there's extra demand at work.
- Staggered hours - the employee has different start, finish and break times from other workers.
- Phased retirement - older workers can now choose when they want to retire. This means they can reduce their hours and work part time.

How to apply for flexible working?

You must put your request in writing (your employer may have a specific form you can use) and it should include:

- The date
- A statement that this is a statutory request.
- Details of how you want to work flexibly and when you want to start.
- An explanation of how you think flexible working might affect the business and how this could be dealt with e.g. if you are not at work on certain days.
- A statement saying if and when you have made a previous application.

What happens after your request?

Your employer is obligated to deal with requests in a reasonable manner. For example, they should assess the advantages and disadvantages of the application, hold a meeting with you to discuss the request and offer an appeal process. They should usually make a decision within 3 months unless you have agreed a longer period.

If your request is agreed, it should be put in writing, and you should be issued with a revised contract or addendum to your contract within 28 days of the approval.

What are possible reasons for refusal?

A refusal of the request must be based on business reasons, which might include any of the following:

- Extra costs that will damage the business.
- The work can't be reorganised among other staff.
- People can't be recruited to do the work.
- Flexible working will affect quality and performance.
- The business won't be able to meet customer demand.
- There's a lack of work to do during the proposed working times.
- The business is planning changes to the workforce.

What are the advantages of flexible working?

- Reduces sick days.
- Improved health and wellbeing
- Reduces absence.
- Increased productivity
- Enhanced employee engagement and loyalty
- Increases morale.

What are the disadvantages of flexible working?

- Difficult to arrange team meetings.
- Some workers may be less productive.
- Can be difficult to for team bonding.
- Can limit communication.
- Can limit interaction between staff.

Likely changes to be implemented for the flexible working legislation.

- Employees will be able to make two requests in any one 12-month period.
- Employers will be required to consult with their employees as a way of exploring the available options, before rejecting a flexible working request.
- Employers must respond to the flexible working request within two months, which was previously three months.