

Introduction

Flexible working

‘Flexible working’ describes a type of working arrangement which gives a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when and at what times employees work.

Flexible working practices include:

- Part-time working: work is generally considered part-time when employers are contracted to work anything less than full-time hours.
- Term-time working: a worker remains on a permanent contract but can take paid/unpaid leave during school holidays.
- Job-sharing: a form of part-time working where two (or occasionally more) people share the responsibility for a job between them.
- Flexitime: allows employees to choose, within certain set limits, when to begin and end work.
- Compressed hours: compressed working weeks (or fortnights) don't necessarily involve a reduction in total hours or any extension in individual choice over which hours are worked. The central feature is reallocation of work into fewer and longer blocks during the week.
- Annual hours: the total number of hours to be worked over the year is fixed but there is variation over the year in the length of the working day and week. Employees may or may not have an element of choice over working patterns.
- Working remotely on a regular basis: employees work all or part of their working week at a location remote from the employer's workplace. This can be at home or elsewhere, and is also referred to as mobile or teleworking. Our [Megatrends report](#) examines the key drivers behind the rise in homeworking.
- Mobile working/teleworking: this permits employees to work all or part of their working week at a location remote from the employer's workplace.
- Career breaks: career breaks, or sabbaticals, are extended periods of leave – normally unpaid – of up to five years or more.
- Commissioned outcomes: there are no fixed hours, but only an output target that an individual is working towards.

- Zero-hours contracts: an individual has no guarantee of a minimum number of working hours, so they can be called upon as and when required and paid just for the hours they work. Find out more about [zero-hours contracts](#).

The list above isn't exhaustive. Flexible working can include other practices for example employee self-rostering, shift-swapping or taking time off for training.

Flexible working arrangements can be formal or informal. Some organisations choose to amend the written employment contract when new working arrangements are put in place, and/or include flexible working policies in the employer's handbook. However some forms of flexible working, such as working from home, are likely to be offered informally, for example in agreement with an employee's line manager.

We're currently co-chairing a Government [Flexible Working Taskforce](#) to promote wider understanding and use of inclusive flexible work and working practices. It brings together policy-makers, employer groups, unions and employee representative groups, research groups and professional bodies.

Read our recent response to the Government's [Flexible working consultation](#).

Flexible working in the time of coronavirus

The COVID-19 pandemic has seen businesses adopt flexible working practices like remote working at an unprecedented rate. Not only does this protect the workforce and provide business continuity, they support broader, official measures to curb the outbreak. Home or remote working can mean people avoid lengthy commutes and have fewer distractions than in an office environment. But it can also result in people over-working and feeling isolated, so a focus on health and wellbeing is essential.

Clearly, home/remote working is not suitable for all jobs as it's best suited to knowledge work with clearly-defined tasks. In some cases, it might be possible to combine elements of remote and office/site-based working. Or for service or manufacturing staff, organisations might be able to embed more flexible working when it comes to start and finish times or shift patterns.

Flexible working can lead to direct and indirect business benefits. The direct business benefits include savings on office space, for example, using technological advances to allow remote working and hot desking. Flexible working also allows a better match between business resources and demand, for example serving customers on a 24/7 basis.

In particular, multi-skilling, freelance and part-time working, and alternative shift patterns can increase efficiency and are sometimes referred to as '[agile' working](#)'.

Indirect business benefits are achieved through improved employee job satisfaction and wellbeing. [Research](#) shows that flexible workers have a higher level of job satisfaction, commitment and are more likely to increase discretionary effort compared to those who do not work flexibly. Flexible working can also reduce absence rates and allows employees to manage disability and long-term health conditions, as well as supporting their mental health and stress, as shown in our [Health and wellbeing at work survey](#).

Flexible working options can also be attractive to employees and new recruits, especially as employee expectations change with regard to their jobs, careers and work-life balance, and demographic changes affect employees' needs to balance their job with other responsibilities such as caring - see our guide on [creating carer-friendly workplaces](#).

Source: www.cipd.co.uk