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## Flexible working practices

Explores the benefits of flexible working, the types of arrangements commonly used and practical tips on implementing flexible working practices

### On this page

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Flexible working is on the rise, giving employees flexibility on where, when and the hours they work. It's traditionally been associated with the needs of parents and carers, but increasingly organisations are recognising the business benefits of a more flexible way of working.

This factsheet discusses flexible working as a strategic tool organisations can use to improve performance and productivity. It outlines the different types of flexible working arrangements available, including part-time and compressed hours, mobile working and career breaks. It looks at the potential benefits of flexible working, both direct and indirect. Finally, it offers the legal perspective and some ideas on how flexible working can be implemented, how common barriers can be overcome, and how HR can support staff opting for more flexible working arrangements.

### [CIPD viewpoint](#)

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Flexible working arrangements can play a vital role in an organisation's performance. It's HR's remit to identify how flexible working options can benefit both the organisation and individuals, as well as working with the business, and in particular line managers, to put the options in place. In particular, HR should consider the behavioural and attitudinal barriers to flexible working, and promote mutual trust in the flexible working arrangements adopted, supported with appropriate people management systems and processes.

Flexible working has become excessively associated with the needs of parents and carers to the detriment of its positive role in enabling employers to manage their business more effectively. While the statutory right to request flexible working has been extended to all employees, for some years, many employers have been proactively looking at opportunities to find win-win solutions that recognise the needs of employees and the business, and the direct and indirect benefits of flexible working provision. HR can make a strong case for using flexibility as a strategic tool to support improved individual and business performance through greater diversity, brand competitiveness and increased levels of engagement from workers at all levels.

### [What is flexible working?](#)

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'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 from home on a regular basis:** workers regularly spend time working from home.
- **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 in our [factsheet on zero-hours contracts \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/terms-conditions/zero-hours-factsheet/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/terms-conditions/zero-hours-factsheet/).

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.

Our [Employee Outlook: Focus on commuting and flexible working \(https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/employee-outlook/\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/employee-outlook/) report provides the latest figures on the use of flexible working practices both from employers' and employees' perspectives. It found that the most common forms of flexible working in organisations, in order of popularity, were:

- part-time working
- flexitime
- job-sharing
- careers breaks and study leave.

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.

## [The potential benefits of flexible working](#)

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Our research demonstrates that flexible working leads 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'](http://www.agilefutureforum.co.uk/AgileFutureForumReport/report.html)' (<http://www.agilefutureforum.co.uk/AgileFutureForumReport/report.html>).

Indirect business benefits are achieved through an improved employee psychological contract. An employee survey carried out for the CIPD by Kingston University/Ipsos MORI [Working life: employee attitudes and engagement 2006](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/hr-learn-develop-database/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/hr-learn-develop-database/>) found that 'workers on flexible contracts tend to be more emotionally engaged, more satisfied with their work, more likely to speak positively about their organisation and less likely to quit'. Flexible working options can also be attractive for new talent, 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.

Our report [Employee Outlook Focus: commuting and flexible working](https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/employee-outlook/) (<https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/employee-outlook/>) describes the top three benefits of flexible working most frequently cited by employees as:

- it enables better work-life balance
- it helps reduce the amount of stress/pressure employees feel under
- it has been a factor in employees staying with their current employer.

We support Timewise's [Hire Me My Way](http://hirememyway.org.uk/) (<http://hirememyway.org.uk/>) flexible working campaign which aims to treble the current number of good quality jobs with flexible working options being advertised openly in the UK. Improving transparency around flexibility in the hiring process will help organisations to attract and retain the best talent, and make work fairer for employees.

Visit our report [Future-proofing business resilience through flexible working](https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/business-resilience-report/) (<https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/business-resilience-report/>).

## **Implementing flexible working practices**

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Employers may face a number of barriers to effectively communicating and implementing flexible working. These include:

- overcoming concerns about operational pressures and meeting customer requirements
- line managers' current attitudes towards flexible working
- handling colleagues concerns about the impact of other peoples' flexible working on them
- the existing organisational culture
- a lack of support at senior levels
- an inability to measure employees' performance by outputs rather than by hours.

To help implement flexible working effectively, organisations should:

- establish a clear process for flexible working
- ensure that there are defined roles and responsibilities for employees, line managers and HR
- assess the current level of support offered to line managers and ensure it's sufficient
- invest in ongoing communication and raising awareness
- assess how supportive of flexible working organisational processes are, for example, performance measurement and management, recruitment and job design
- assess how conducive the organisation culture is to flexible working – and take action accordingly
- make use of pilots when introducing new initiatives, and trial periods for individual flexible working arrangements to highlight potential problems
- build mechanisms to monitor and evaluate progress with flexible working
- advertise job vacancies as being open to flexible working - many highly skilled individuals are looking for flexibility in working hours.

Get further advice and practical examples of implementing flexible working from our guide [Flexible working: the implementation challenge](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/hr-learn-develop-database/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/hr-learn-develop-database/>).

## Supporting homeworking and teleworking

If employees aren't working in a typical 'office' and they're working away from their colleagues and line managers, it's important to consider the following:

- **Resources and working styles** - teleworkers and homeworkers are generally provided with a computer with an Internet connection, a printer, a mobile phone and office furniture. Employees need to be able to demonstrate time management skills, the ability to work without close supervision, self-motivation and flexibility.
- **Communication with others** - the nature of teleworking means that employees are often invisible and work non-standard hours. Thus the emphasis is on task-oriented working – getting defined jobs done - and trust. Clear and effective communication channels are therefore vital, as is the need to keep in touch with colleagues and avoid isolation.
- **Trust** - for line managers who may be office-based or teleworkers/homeworkers themselves, trust becomes more important than control. Some may have problems adjusting and they may need training. Managers not knowing how to manage workers at home is a primary barrier to change.
- **Employee rights** - individuals' employment contracts may need to be amended by agreement to reflect teleworking/ homeworking. Teleworkers/homeworkers must be treated the same as office-based staff with equal access to development and promotion opportunities. If there's a trade union, it will need to be consulted to ensure that these workers are treated equally.
- **Health and safety** - the same rules for health and safety apply to home offices as to conventional workplaces, so employers need to ensure that the office space and equipment are used safely and that teleworkers / homeworkers are sufficiently knowledgeable about health and safety.

Guides to help both employers and employees deal with the implications of working from home are available from [Acas \(http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/o/3/Homeworking-a-guide-for-employers-and-employees.pdf\)](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/o/3/Homeworking-a-guide-for-employers-and-employees.pdf) and the [Health and Safety Executive \(http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf\)](http://www.hse.gov.uk/pubns/indg226.pdf).

## The legal position

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In April 2003, the UK Government introduced the 'right to request flexible working' which historically applied to parents and certain other carers. The legislation now includes all employees with at least 26 weeks' continuous employment, regardless of parental or caring responsibilities. Employers have a duty to consider a request in a reasonable manner and can only refuse a request for flexible working if they can show that one of a specific number of grounds apply. Acas has issued guidance and a [Code of Practice \(http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/g/s/Code-of-Practice-on-handling-in-a-reasonable-manner-requests-to-work-flexibly.pdf\)](http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/g/s/Code-of-Practice-on-handling-in-a-reasonable-manner-requests-to-work-flexibly.pdf) for employers on handling such requests in a reasonable manner.

Similar procedures apply to requests for flexibility with time off work for study or training.

The right to request flexible working doesn't apply to some categories of worker, for example certain agency workers.

The shared parental leave scheme introduced in April 2015 may give parents some additional flexibility - see our [factsheet on shared parental leave \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/maternity-paternity-rights/shared-leave-factsheet/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/emp-law/maternity-paternity-rights/shared-leave-factsheet/) or listen to our [podcast \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/podcasts/shared-parental-leave/\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/podcasts/shared-parental-leave/).

The CIPD and the Equality and Human Rights Commission have collaborated on a number of [short videos \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Qs0EL6JWD0\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Qs0EL6JWD0) for employers who have signed up to the [Working Forward Campaign \(https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/working-forward/working-forward-pledge-your-support\)](https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/working-forward/working-forward-pledge-your-support) to support pregnant women and new mothers at work.

CIPD members can find out more in our [Requesting flexible working law Q&As \(https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/questions/\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk/443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/questions/).

## Useful contacts and further reading

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### Contacts

GOV.UK - Flexible working (<https://www.gov.uk/flexible-working>)

Acas – The right to request flexible working (<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1616>)

Working Families (<http://www.workingfamilies.org.uk/>)

Equality and Human Rights Commission - Working Forward campaign  
(<https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/pregnancy-and-maternity-workplace/working-forward>)

### Books

ACAS. (2014) *Flexible working and work-life balance* (<http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=1283>). London: Acas.

CLARKE, S. and HOLDSWORTH, L. (2017) *Flexibility in the workplace: implications of flexible work arrangements for individuals, teams and organisations* (<http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/o/7/Flexibility-in-the-Workplace.pdf>). Research paper 03/17. London: Acas.

FAMILY FRIENDLY WORKING HOURS TASKFORCE. (2010) *Flexible working: working for families, working for business* (<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130703133823/http://dwp.gov.uk/docs/family-friendly-task-force-report.pdf>). [London]: The Taskforce.

INCOMES DATA SERVICES. (2014) *Atypical and flexible working*. Employment law handbook. London: IDS.

### Journals

FARAGHER, J. (2014) How to avoid discrimination claims arising from flexible working requests. *Employers' Law*. September. pp12-13.

HICKMAN, A. (2014) Finding the right balance. *Human Resources*. August. pp26-33.

Right to request flexible working: the new rules. (2014) *IDS Employment Law Brief*. No 998, June. pp14-19

SWEENEY, C. (2015) The future of work is flexible. *Journal of Management*. Vol 39, No 12, September. pp.89-91.

TER HOEVEN, C.L. and VAN ZOONEN, W. (2015) Flexible work designs and employee well-being: examining the effects of resources and demands. *New Technology, Work and Employment*. Vol 30, No 3, November. pp237-255.

What makes a good flexible working policy in new era. (2014). *Workplace Report*. No 126, July. pp15-17.

CIPD members can use our [online journals](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/hr-learn-develop-database/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/hr-learn-develop-database/>) to find articles from over 300 journal titles relevant to HR.

Members and *People Management* subscribers can see articles on the [People Management](http://www.cipd.co.uk/pm/) (<http://www.cipd.co.uk/pm/>) website.

This factsheet was last updated by Lisa Ayling, solicitor and employment law specialist, Louisa Baczor and Ally Weeks.



### **Louisa Baczor: Research Adviser**

Louisa joined the CIPD in 2015, specialising in research for the CIPD's Profession for the Future programme. This research explored what it means to be a professional, key drivers impacting the future of work, and how practitioners apply ethical principles when making people management decisions.

Louisa's current research is investigating the future of voice in the workplace, and how organisations can enable people to have a meaningful voice at work. Prior to this, she worked on workplace well-being, employability, and professional identity streams.

With an undergraduate degree in psychology, Louisa studied the changing roles of HR and impact on trust during a Master's at the University of Bath.



### **Ally Weeks: HR Consultant**

Ally is an HR practitioner with 20 years UK and international experience within small, medium and large blue chip businesses. A subject expert in talent management, succession planning, workforce planning and recruitment, Ally is currently an HR consultant and trainer for the CIPD and lead tutor for the Level 7 RTM (Resourcing and Talent Management) programme. She advises clients on integrating learning activity with wider commercial issues and the strategic direction of their organisation. Ally is highly adept at determining the most appropriate delivery methods, including online learning, and is experienced in 'hands on' training delivery. She also advises on monitoring the impact of learning interventions.

More recently she has focussed on writing content for CIPD's online digital Certificate qualifications and Future of HR in partnership with Avado. She speaks at CIPD branch events and conferences on attracting talent, resourcing strategies and trends, strategic workforce planning and new learning technologies.

## Explore our related content



(<https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/questions>)

Q and As

### **Requesting flexible working Q&As**

(<https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/questions>)

Commonly asked questions on the legal issues relating to flexible working requests

[Read more \(https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/questions\)](https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/questions)



(<http://www.cipd.co.uk/podcasts/right-to-request-flexible-working>)

Podcasts

### **The right to request flexible working**

(<http://www.cipd.co.uk/podcasts/right-to-request-flexible-working>)

Episode 75: Soon all employees will have the right to request flexible working arrangements. This episode looks at the implications for business, HR and society in general.

[Read more \(http://www.cipd.co.uk/podcasts/right-to-request-flexible-working\)](http://www.cipd.co.uk/podcasts/right-to-request-flexible-working)



(<https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/employee-outlook>)

Surveys

### **Employee Outlook: flexible working**

**(<https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/employee-outlook>)**

Calls for employers to recognise the business case for increasing flexible working, which can be a win-win for both the organisation and the individual

Read more (<https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/employee-outlook>)



(<https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/business-resilience-report>)

Reports

### **Business resilience through flexible working**

**(<https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/business-resilience-report>)**

Observations from a focus group meeting of diversity experts on the challenges facing employers in progressing the uptake and use of flexible working

Read more (<https://www.cipd.co.uk:443/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/business-resilience-report>)



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