

FLEXIBLE WORKING

A guide to flexible working for senior leaders & managers

Flexible working makes good business sense. If implemented well, it can boost the attraction, retention, progression, and well-being of people with caring responsibilities...

...it can also help close the gender pay gap.

This is why the [Chartered Management Institute \(CMI\)](#) and the [Government Equalities Office \(GEO\)](#) have worked together to prepare this guidance for both senior and line managers on how to make flexible working work, and at the same time reduce the gender pay gap.

What is flexible working?

There are many ways to work flexibly. The main examples include working from home, flexibility in start and finish times ('flexitime'), compressed hours, job-shares, and part-time working.

Flexible working and the gender pay gap

Well-designed flexible working is key in enabling women to reconcile work and caring responsibilities. It can enable women to remain in work and stay in roles that reflect their skills¹, thereby potentially reducing the gender pay gap. Importantly, offering flexible working in senior positions can potentially enable women who are not available to work what may be considered a standard, full-time week, to progress despite the reduction in hours.

Further, it is important to normalise flexible working by boosting its use in all positions and levels of seniority. Challenging the stereotype of women as carers in this way may enable more men to work flexibly, share caring responsibilities more equally with their partners, and in turn support women's progression.²

The business case for flexible working

Flexible working may help with:

- **Attraction:** more flexible working may allow you to attract a wider pool of talent into jobs where women are under-represented.
- **Retention:** flexible working may enable you to retain women who are not available to work a full-time or standard working week, or to retain those who are suffering from excessive work-life conflict.
- **Progression:** offering more flexible work in senior positions is particularly important to ensure that employees who work part-time in your organisation are able to progress.

¹ Jones, L. (2019). [Forthcoming] Women's Progression in the Workplace. Global Institute for Women's Leadership, The Government Equalities Office;

² Qualitative studies have shown that flexible partners can facilitate women's progression. Examples are:

Kirton, G., & Robertson, M. (2018). Sustaining and advancing IT careers: Women's experiences in a UK-based IT company. *The Journal of Strategic Information Systems*, 27(2), 157- 169.

Jefferson, L., Bloor, K., & Spilsbury, K. (2015). Exploring gender differences in the working lives of UK hospital consultants. *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, 108(5), 184-191

- **Well-being:** well-designed flexible working can help boost employee well-being by reducing the worklife conflict they often face.³
- **Challenging gender norms:** opening all positions to flexible work, and to part-time work in particular, ensures they are open to people with caring responsibilities. It also has the potential to challenge the stereotype that caring responsibilities are women's work by signalling that positions that are currently held by men also offer flexibility.

5 STEPS FOR SENIOR LEADERS

1. Advertise and offer all jobs, including senior roles, as having flexible working options, such as part-time work, remote working, flexitime, job sharing or compressed hours.

If your organisation needs to attract more women to close its gender pay gap, advertising more roles as flexible has the potential to make a real difference. Research by Timewise shows that demand for flexible working is high while supply is lagging: 87% of employees say that they wish to work flexibly, but only 15.3% of jobs are advertised as flexible.⁴

With an increasing amount of positions advertised as flexible,⁵ organisations that do not offer flexible working risk losing out on talent to their competitors. Importantly, offering all roles as flexible, including senior positions, has the potential to boost the progression of people with caring responsibilities, including part-time employees, as well as encourage more men to work flexibly.

2. Role model flexible working.

To normalise flexible working, employees need to feel like they will not be penalised for working flexibly themselves. Visible senior role models who work flexibly, and specifically part-time, help signal that working flexibly does not stall career progression. If you work flexibly, make sure others know it.

Many organisations share case studies of role models across the organisation to promote positive behaviours. For the case studies to be effective, it is important to design these well. Research shows that role models need to be relatable and ideally share group membership with the people looking up to them, or else they will be disregarded.⁶ Also, providing examples of men who work flexibly may help challenge the perception that flexible working is an arrangement for mothers.

3. Communicate your flexible working policy and encourage discussions about flexible working at timely moments.

Beyond adopting a policy that offers flexible working from day one, encourage take-up by increasing the awareness of the offer among employees, and signalling to them that the offer is genuine. Encourage employees to work flexibly at timely moments, when they are most receptive. This has been shown to boost the impact of communications in various settings.⁷ Examples include:

³ Sherman, E. L. (2019). Discretionary Remote Working Helps Mothers Without Harming Non-mothers: Evidence from a Field Experiment. *Management Science*. Moen, P., Kelly, E. L., Fan, W., Lee, S.

R., Almeida, D., Kossek, E. E., & Buxton, O. M. (2016). Does a flexibility/support organizational initiative improve high-tech employees' well-being? *Evidence from the work, family, and health network. American Sociological Review*, 81(1), 134-164.

⁴ Timewise (2019). The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2019. Available at: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/flexible-jobs-index/>

⁵ Timewise (2019). The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index 2019. Available at: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/flexible-jobs-index/>

⁶ Morgenroth, T. (2015). How role models affect role aspirants' motivation and goals

⁷ Team, B. I. (2014). EAST: Four simple ways to apply behavioural insights. Behavioural Insight Team, London.

- Communicate to your staff about the policy during timely moments (e.g. Father's day).
- Invite staff to consider the flexible working options during induction sessions.
- Prompt staff to hold discussions about flexible working during annual reviews. Ensure line managers discuss flexible working with both men and women to challenge the notion that flexible working is an arrangement for mothers.

4. Train line managers to implement flexible working in a way that reduces work life conflict

Flexibility in working hours and location has been shown to reduce work-life conflict in some settings,⁸ but exacerbate it in others, such as when employees use remote working to increase their working hours.⁹ To ensure flexible working arrangements do not lead to over-work or additional pressures among your employees or teams, consider investing in appropriate training for line managers with an explicit aim of helping them implement it in a way that reduces work-life conflict and pressure for all team members.¹⁰

5. Measure and evaluate your policies

To ensure you're on the right track, measure and track the outcomes you care about. You can adapt your staff surveys to capture information about flexible working, as well as use administrative data or staff interviews. You may want to track:

- How many people are working flexibly, through either informal or formal arrangements.
- The level of awareness of your flexible working policies.
- The level of work-life conflict employees are experiencing.
- Staff perceptions about whether flexible working results in slower progression.
- Staff experiences and feedback relating to working flexibly.
- The experiences of line managers about how flexible working operates in their team, including any difficulties they may be facing in implementing it.

5 STEPS FOR LINE MANAGERS

1. Get informed

Make sure you understand the statutory right to request flexible working, and get familiar with your employer's policies on flexible working.

The statutory right to request flexible working allows a qualifying employee to apply to their employer for a change to their terms and conditions of employment relating to their hours, times or location of work. The right applies to all employees with 26 weeks' continuous employment. Where an employee makes a request, the employer must consider this in a reasonable manner. Requests can be refused where there is a clear business reason to do so.

⁸ Sherman, E. L. (2019). Discretionary Remote Working Helps Mothers Without Harming Non-mothers: Evidence from a Field Experiment. *Management Science*

⁹ Langner, L. A. (2018). Flexible men and successful women: The effects of flexible working hours on German couples' wages. *Work, Employment and Society*, 32(4), 687-706.

¹⁰ Moen, P., Kelly, E. L., Fan, W., Lee, S. R., Almeida, D., Kossek, E. E., & Buxton, O. M. (2016). Does a flexibility/support organizational initiative improve high-tech employees' well-being? Evidence from the work, family, and health network. *American Sociological Review*, 81(1), 134-164.

2. Get equipped

Line managers play a critical role in promoting flexible working, and in making flexible working really work. Make sure you have the skills and knowledge to implement flexible working in your workplace.

There are a wide range of online resources which explain the benefits of flexible working, help managers understand the many forms of flexible working which exist and provide insight and advice on how to implement flexible working in your workplace. Your employer may also provide training. If they don't and you feel you would benefit from training, then ask for it!

3. Be proactive

Don't wait for someone to ask if they can work flexibly. Start the conversation.

Those in your team may want to take up flexible working but may feel uncomfortable or uneasy bringing it up, or they may simply be unaware of their right to request it. So initiate the conversation about flexible working at your regular catch-up meetings, at appraisals and at team meetings.

4. Call out bad practice

Line managers play a key role in changing attitudes. So challenge any behaviours or comments that suggest those who work flexibly are somehow less productive.

In some workplaces there is still a stigma attached to flexible working, and an attitude that flexible workers are less productive than full time colleagues and contribute less. Challenge these outdated views and call out bad practice. Even where small actions remain unchallenged, invisible or played down, a culture can develop that is not inclusive and does not encourage flexible working.

5. Be a role model

Why not work flexibly yourself, and champion flexible working across your organisation?

Either take up flexible working yourself, or encourage others to. Show how flexible working can work for everyone, both men and women. Help to make flexible working the norm and not the exception.

GEO Resources:

[Encouraging employers to advertise jobs as flexible](#)
[Gender equality at work: research on the barriers to women's progression](#)
[Understanding and taking action to close your gender pay gap](#)
[Family friendly policies: actions for employers](#)

Useful links:

[The business case for flexible working](#) (produced by the Flexible Working Task Force)
[Women's Business Council's #100WaysToWorkFlexibly campaign](#)
[Acas guidance on the right to request flexible working](#)
[CMI research on the right to request flexible working](#)
[CMI research, case studies and tips for implementing flexible working](#)
Additional research on flexible working from [Timewise](#) and from [Working Families](#)