

# Flexible Working: A Guide for Managers

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# Introduction

Covid has forced us to rethink how we work. Lockdown imposed homeworking on many people who had never done it before. Keeping your people safe requires a rethink about how you use space, and when and where people work on your premises and remotely.

It's not going to open the doors to a flexible working free for all, but it's clear that organisations of all sizes, from large global employers to small local organisations, understand that there is no going back, and talk now about *blended* working. Our new normality is inevitably flexible in one way or another. So a key skill for you as a manager has to be managing flexible working.

This short guide takes you through it, from the basic questions you might be embarrassed to ask, to three practical checklists which will support you as you build flexibility into how you run your team or organisation.



# 1. Flexible working: why should I care?

Flexible working is not a benefit, but increasingly it is a way of working that the majority of people are looking for.

It is not something just for mums or working parents, although it can be hugely supportive for these groups, it's for everyone.

Pre-COVID, 75% of people in Scotland either had or wanted flexible working. And the data shows this is set to increase post COVID.

To be a progressive employer of choice in Scotland – now and in the future – flexible working needs to be in your organisational DNA.



Here are some of the reasons why flexible working gives you and your organisation significant advantages:



### Business Continuity

Offering flexibility under **changing circumstances** is key to sustaining business performance



### Productivity

**9 in 10** employees say flexible working is a key motivator at work (HSBC)



### Wellbeing

**40%** of senior leaders in Scotland who offer flexibility say it has an impact on employee wellbeing (BUSINESS INSIDER)



### Retention & progression

**75%** of employers say flexible working has a positive impact on retention (CIPD)



### Talent & attraction

**92%** of millennials identify flexible working as a top priority when job hunting (CAPABILITY JANE).

However, only **18%** jobs are advertised as flexible (TIMEWISE)



### Diversity & Gender Pay Gap

Flexible roles are more likely to **attract talent** from cross sections of the labour market irrespective of age or gender.

Flexible roles improve the potential to **progress** regardless of work patterns, placing more women in senior roles.

## 2. What makes a job flexible

A flexible job is simply a job that is not Monday-Friday, 9-5, on your premises.

It is a job that aligns with the needs of your business, and also with the needs and preferences of your employees. It may be informal, formal (i.e. detailed in a contract), or a blend of the two.

It's basically common sense.

With one caveat: **How much** work has to be right. All the flexible working in the world cannot compensate for a role that is badly designed, overloaded, or with unclear objectives. This is obviously the case for part-time roles, but you should bear it in mind generally.

If flexibility in where and when your people work becomes essentially permission to manage too much work, you risk losing all the benefits. Your people may become cynical, and you risk burn out. Either way, their performance will be compromised. See our checklist for successful job design.

The flexibility itself may be in one or a combination of:

### Where

*For example:*

- On your premises, all or most of the time
- Occasional, regular or permanent homeworking
- On your client's premises
- Mobile: sometimes on your premises, and at other times at home, in a café, at a client

### When

*For example:*

- Varied start and finish times
- Core hours with flexibility around them
- Shift swapping and self-rostering
- Compressed working week
- Term time working or annualised hours

### How Long

*For example:*

- Part-time
- Jobshare



### 3. What makes flexible working such a powerful way of working?

When you get flexible working right, it delivers reduced costs from reduced absenteeism and increased retention, better engagement, better performance and better business resilience.

You also can benefit from greater diversity and productivity as well as better wellbeing for your people.

Why? It's not a magic fix in itself. But it is a way of working that enables employees to balance their work and life responsibilities.

It also focuses individuals, teams and managers on working better and smarter together. It is a way of working that is based on respect and on trust, two of the most powerful drivers of success.





## Flexibility means control and choice for your employee

- ★ Feeling in control reduces stress
  - ▶ Stress is the number one cause of absenteeism in the UK
  - ▶ Stress reduces our ability to make good decisions or to risk innovation
- ★ Feeling in control increases wellbeing
  - ▶ Happy workers are loyal and go the extra mile
  - ▶ Happy workers are your best PR agents



## Flexibility is for everyone – it's a team builder

- ★ Creating a team protocol – what does flexible working mean for us? – helps everyone understand each other's contribution and role within the team; and each other's lives and commitments outside work
- ★ Collaboration becomes more purposeful
- ★ Communication becomes central to shared values and shared purpose



## Flexibility makes you a better manager

- ★ You can step back from the detail of how, when and where the work is done, to concentrate on what is done, by when and to what standard
- ★ Your clarity about objectives and deliverables builds two-way confidence and trust
- ★ You understand the business better, because you ask your people what works best for their role
- ★ Working flexibly yourself shows commitment to flexible working for everyone

### Formal versus Informal flex

Remember that flexible working does not have to be a **formal**, contractual arrangement (resulting from a request to work flexibly under the Right to Request Flexible Working legislation). Much of the power of flexible working comes from its **informal** use, when people have the confidence to flex when and where they work on an ad hoc basis, to better meet their work objectives.

## 4. Checklist 1: Job design

### Expectations for individual roles

The starting point is to define exactly what the organisation needs the role to deliver. It is about being clear, for each role in your team, what the basic requirements are (for example, opening hours, or core team meetings). And being clear about its purpose for the organisation: what has to be done, what has to be delivered, what the milestones and success measures are.

Understanding each role will enable you not only to be confident in extending greater control to your team via increased flexibility, but also to understand whether it can be done part-time or as a jobshare, and if so, to scale its objectives and deliverables to ensure success.

### Build a full picture of the team's roles

Why bother with reviewing each role? Because it puts you on the front foot.

A whole-team review of how everybody works will fit you for the new Covid-normality. But role by role, if you are asked to approve a flexible working request by an existing team member, or if someone new raises it during recruitment, you will already know what kind of flexibility is possible, and to what extent you can align the organisation's needs with the individual's needs and preferences.

### Team collaboration

Don't do this alone! Your team members will know better than you what kinds of flex are likely to work in their roles. And taking a team approach means you take into account the impact of changes on everyone. It also lets you think about how better to allocate work.

Your starting point for each discussion is to establish the key operational requirements for the role. For example, a service level agreement; or public opening hours; or business critical delivery dates.

## Questions to consider

### ✓ Location

Where is the role done now?  
Could it be done anywhere else?



### ✓ Timing

When is it done now?  
Could it be done earlier, or later? On different days?



### ✓ People

Can the role be done by one person on their own, or can it only be delivered by a two or more team members at the same time or in the same place?

Is it external facing, for example a customer service role?

Is it supervisory or managerial?



### ✓ Collaborative

For example, developing a client pitch for new business (likely to involve teams working closely together in time; and possibly location – although collaborative tools like Teams or Zoom may enable greater choice here)



### ✓ Transactional, or process-driven

For example, staffing a reception desk at a sports centre (clearly, not possible to do from home!); or paying invoices (not particularly tied to location or specific working hours)



### Kinds of tasks

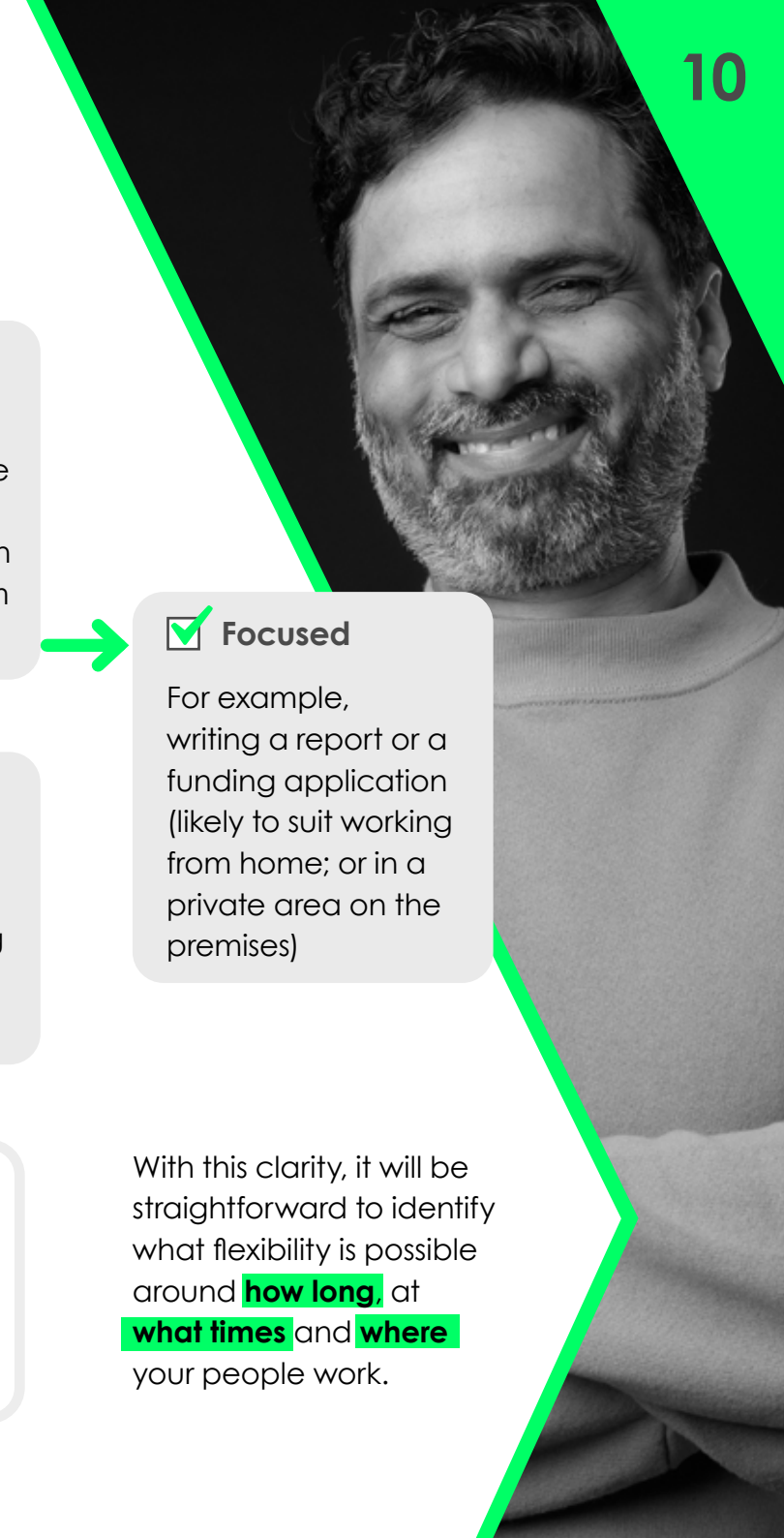
Think too about the kinds of tasks the role involves, because they may be better suited to some ways of working than others.



### ✓ Focused

For example, writing a report or a funding application (likely to suit working from home; or in a private area on the premises)

With this clarity, it will be straightforward to identify what flexibility is possible around **how long**, at **what times** and **where** your people work.



## 5. Checklist 2: What's in a team protocol?

### Team protocol

Having a team protocol helps to deal with concerns and establish a common understanding of what flexible working means in that particular team and that particular part of the business.

It helps to build in agreed review points – perhaps every six months – to enable the protocol to be adjusted to meet new business needs, or changed personal circumstances within the team.

The protocol should cover:

#### Core operational requirements

These are the essentials for the team. They might include:

- ▶ opening times to the public or to provide an internal service
- ▶ internal or external response times
- ▶ the availability of major clients or customers
- ▶ critical deadlines
- ▶ peak times during the year, week or day



#### Communication and boundaries

How will I know where you are? This is often what worries people the most when new flexible arrangements are introduced. Think about:

- ▶ **Contact and availability**
  - anyone working remotely should be available and contactable during their normal working hours
  - check in with colleagues regularly with when/ where you are working
  - be careful to avoid “always on” availability – that’s stressful and unfair
- ▶ **Keeping up to date**
  - commit to keeping rotas and shift planners up to date
  - office workers include usual working hours in their email footer, and keep their outlook calendar up to date





### ✓ **Team issues and working together**

If the team is used to being together in the same place, across the same hours, people may worry that team working will be undermined. Talk about:

#### ▶ **How often the teams needs to get together**

- Formally – Planning meetings? Training?
- Informally – Over lunch or other team building events?

#### ▶ **How to manage meetings**

- Agree core hours when everyone can be available to join a meeting- being particularly mindful to include people who work less than full time
- Think about when it will be essential for someone to take part in person and when you are comfortable meeting digitally
- Agree how much notice is needed for in-person meetings

#### ▶ **Working remotely**

- Whose responsibility is it to check in (not check up on!), and when?
- How to keep in touch with team-mates?
- How to keep healthy? – keep an eye on working hours and formal break times



### ✓ **IT**

In the blended work future, it will be less usual for the whole team to be together, so having the right IT infrastructure will be essential to enable everyone to work at their best without avoidable tech frustrations. Think about:

#### ▶ **Does your existing tech support the way you want to work together.**

#### ▶ **Do you have a good clear remote working policy that everyone understands**

- Whose responsibility is it to ensure that team members working from home have the right kit and reliable broadband?
- Unless home-schooling makes it unavoidable again, does everyone understand that working from home is not a substitute for childcare?

#### ▶ **How cyber-secure is your business?**

#### ▶ **Do you have suitable health and safety procedures in place for home workers?**

For details of our line manager training:  
[hello@flexibilityworks.org](mailto:hello@flexibilityworks.org)

## 6. Checklist 3: Managing a flexible team

### Top tips

Your role as a manager is so important to getting flexibility right within your organisation. Here are our top tips for leading successful flexible teams and organisations:

#### ✔ Nuts and bolts

##### ▶ Design roles to be flexible

- Put yourself on the front foot so that you know what is possible for the roles across your team

##### ▶ Set SMART objectives

- Clarity around what has to be done, by when and to what standard allows you to step back from the detail of where, when and how the work gets done

##### ▶ Agree a trial period for new working arrangements

- You can confidently have “yes, why not?” as your default position with SMART objectives, supported by a trial period.

##### ▶ Monitor the progress of flexible workers

- Sad but true: in many organisations, part-time and flexible workers experience a pay and career penalty as the price for greater flexibility. Track performance reviews and promotions in your team. Make sure that your flexible workers do not lose out.

##### ▶ Advertise and hire flexibly

- Around 90% of jobseekers are looking for flexibility. Only 17% of roles in Scotland are advertised flexibly. Promote the flexibility that is available in each role you advertise, as a key attractor of talent.

## ✓ Communicating and making it real

### ▶ Flexible working is for everyone

- This is your most important message. To deliver full benefits to your team, it cannot be an accommodation or an exception. Everyone can benefit. But of course flexibility will look different for different people and different roles. Communicate this and always be transparent. Flexibility doesn't have to be the same to be fair. A consistent approach is what is important.

### ▶ Ask what works

- Be open and unafraid to recognise that the person doing the job probably knows more about what is possible than you do. Listen and learn!

### ▶ Agree communication protocols with the whole team

- Let the team take responsibility for making flexibility work
- Encourage team members to respect and support each other to work better together

### ▶ Work flexibly yourself!

- Don't forget – flexible working is for you, too. Control over when and where you work, perhaps setting some boundaries to protect personal time, will be good for your wellbeing and for your performance.
- Role model and communicate your flexible working – even if it's simply by taking a visible lunchbreak. What you are seen to do, sets the culture and establishes trust that flexible working in your team is real and meaningful.



# Next steps

If you would like further help or support to establish great flexible working in your organisation, we would be delighted to help you.

For more information on our manager training, employee engagement work or leadership sessions, please email us:

[hello@flexibilityworks.org](mailto:hello@flexibilityworks.org)

For further information, tips, contacts and access to other flex stories and resources, please visit:

[www.flexibilityworks.org](http://www.flexibilityworks.org)



# About us

Flexibility Works is a social business with vast experience of working with employers in Scotland on developing flexible working.

We offer training, coaching and employee engagement support, run B2B events to share best practice, conduct research about flexibility in Scotland and comment frequently in the media about the business benefits of flexible working. Our experienced team have worked in senior roles, setting up and running organisations.

As a social organisation, part of our mission is to support lower income workers to secure the flexibility they need to balance their work and home life.

We are funded and supported by The Hunter Foundation and The Scottish Government.

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