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How to request flexible working

A guide for employees to develop a strong business case for submitting a flexible working request

With COVID-19 restrictions easing across the UK, many employers are expecting an upsurge in flexible working requests as employees reconsider their working patterns and locations following the disruption caused by the pandemic. If you've been re-evaluating how, when and where you want to work, it helps to first understand what exactly flexible working is, how it's different to the enforced homeworking many have been forced to do because of the pandemic, and how you can put together a solid business case to request it from your employer.

Flexible working: a definition

The media has often used the terms 'remote working' and 'flexible working' interchangeably when discussing the enforced home working of the past 18-months. However, being forced to work from your bedroom while being prohibited from returning to your physical workplace can in no way be described as 'flexible'.

Flexible working is a broad cluster of working arrangements which give you varying degrees of flexibility over the duration, location, and times you work. There are many [types of flexible working arrangements](#) which suit different circumstances and needs; **homeworking is just one of several arrangements employers can offer**. Here are some others:

- **Part-time working:** Reducing your hours, often by working fewer days a week
- **Compressed hours:** Working full-time hours over fewer days
- **Flexitime:** Choosing when to start and end work, often while maintaining a core set of hours, such as 10am to 4pm every day
- **Job sharing:** Where two people work one job and split the hours
- **Staggered hours:** Where you have different start, finish and break times compared

to other workers. This could be beneficial for service or manufacturing staff who can't work from home but want more flexibility

- **Hybrid working:** Working some of the time remotely and the rest of the time in the physical workplace.

Download our [#Flexfrom1st infographic](#) for more detail on the types of flexible working arrangements available.

View our latest resources on [flexible working](#), [remote working](#) and [hybrid working](#) for guidance aimed at helping your line manager *understand*, *buy into*, and *champion* these types of working arrangements.

Why there's never been a better time to work flexibly

Around half of UK companies [expect flexible working requests to increase](#) as COVID restrictions end, with many employers likely to adopt a more flexible way of working (owing, in part, to some organisations having less office space after downsizing their premises during successive lockdowns). In this climate, flexible working can be a more COVID-safe option than the traditional 'nine-to-five'. Hybrid working, staggered hours, flexitime and compressed hours also help ease large groups of people arriving and leaving organisations at the same time or congregating in rest areas at lunchtime.

In addition, many managers have gained experience in measuring outcomes remotely, and have come to trust employees more readily to fit their work into their commitments, lifestyles, and preferred ways of working.

Making a formal flexible working request

Every employee, regardless of occupation, has the legal right to request flexible working if they have been a member of staff for 26 weeks.

The first step is to submit a formal written request to your employer, which is usually followed up by a meeting to discuss your request in more detail. Your employer will then assess the advantages and disadvantages of your application.

If your request proves unsuccessful the first-time round, your employer must then offer an appeal process.

Before your meeting, do some research to provide the rationale for the specific type of flexible working arrangement you're proposing. Make sure you use the [increase in remote working](#) caused by the pandemic as a springboard to open up a conversation about all forms of flexible working, rather than just working from home.

If you worked remotely from home during the pandemic and would like to continue doing so, talk about what worked well during lockdown and the benefits your working from home can bring to the business. For example: increased productivity, more-effective meetings, less need to take up office space, or the ability to work flexibly outside regular 9-5pm hours.

If you've never worked remotely but want more flexibility, then other forms of flexible working, like compressed hours or flexitime, could work well for you. Work out a system with your line manager; speak to them about the tasks you can do at *specific* hours and those you can tackle *outside* these hours. If you're interested in a job-share opportunity or moving to part-time hours, think about how your tasks can be shared or covered at the team level, as well as within these jobs. Explain your unique skillset, what you can bring to the organisation, and how this will complement the rest of the team – employers are always looking to attract talented applicants and retain valued staff.

If you meet with resistance, suggest a compromise which might work for both parties. A trial of your flexible working arrangements over a set period will also allow your employer and yourself to review how things are working and identify any problems which might've occurred. Adaptations can then be made before the arrangements are made permanent.

Note that this advice still applies if you're in the process of applying for a position advertised as 'Open to discussing flexible working'.

Familiarise yourself with the [different types of flexible working arrangements](#) by downloading our #Flexfrom1st infographic.

Flexibility for all roles and sectors

Although many people enjoyed a better work-life balance during lockdown, our research has shown that 46% of employees [did not work from home at all](#). This form of flexibility (working from home) isn't suitable for all industries, and approval of your flexible working request can sometimes depend on your job type.

Employees in senior positions are also more likely to enjoy flexibility compared to their junior counterparts, particularly when it comes to *informal* flexible working arrangements. It may also be more difficult for apprentices or new members of staff to

work separately from their teams, as they could miss out on mentoring opportunities and on-the-job learning.

However, just because jobs have always been designed a certain way doesn't mean they can't change – our research has shown that flexible working can be creatively applied in sectors like manufacturing, construction, education, healthcare and transport too. Our Flex from 1st campaign calls for flexible working to be the default for *all* employees, including those in lower-paid and more manual roles, which have often been overlooked in the past. We believe that flexible working should be the norm rather than the exception, which is why our campaign is encouraging employers to support flexible working for all and the right to request flexible working from day-one of employment.

If your employer's open to being a little creative in the flexible working models they offer, chances are they stand to benefit by attracting a wider talent pool and retaining valued employees. It's essential that all organisations take flexible working requests seriously for the benefit of your wellbeing, productivity, job satisfaction and work-life balance. Now is the ideal time to make your case.

Support the #FlexFrom1st campaign

We're calling on organisations and government to make the right to request flexible working a day-one right.

Here's some caption inspiration to get you started – just copy and paste it into your social post to support the campaign:

I/We support the new @CIPD #FlexFrom1st campaign to make requesting #FlexibleWorking a day-one right! 46% of employees in Britain don't work flexibly in their current role. This inequality must end! Join the campaign. <http://bit.ly/F13xFr0m1st>

- [Share on Facebook](#)
- [Share on LinkedIn](#)
- [Share on Twitter](#)
- Download our [social media graphic](#) and share using #FlexFrom1st