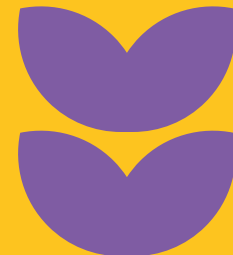
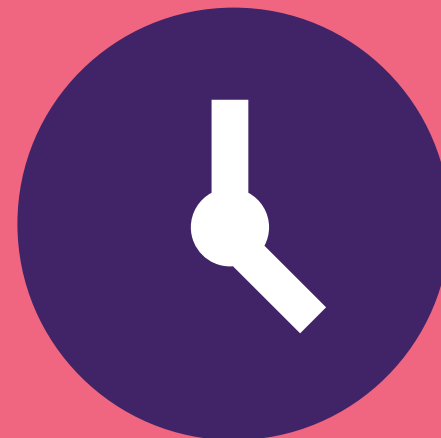


Flexible working masterclass FAQs



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Introduction

About these FAQs

These FAQs were developed from the feedback given by Pledge network members at two masterclasses on flexible working.

The questions cover some scenarios which demonstrate common day to day challenges. In the responses you will see useful links to tools and other resources from Timewise and from other expert sources. If you have any questions do email the team at employerpledge@ageing-better.org.uk





Question

“I am a shift manager in my late 20s and I manage a team of ten, who are all different ages.

As a result of the change in legislation on flexible working, my HR department wants me to report on what flexible working arrangements my team wants. It's easy for the younger team members as they have already told me, but the none of the four older workers have discussed it with me.

Is it OK to assume they don't want any flexible working?”



Answer

Not necessarily. Research from the Department of Work and Pensions has shown that nearly a third of over 50s don't realise they have the right to request flexible working and almost a quarter don't feel comfortable asking for it.

As their manager, you need to take a more proactive approach with this group of employees in their 1:1s. You need to start by sharing what flexible working options are available to them in their role and explain that you are supportive of flexible working requests (as long as it meets service need).

Give them time to reflect, before then proactively discussing it in your next 1:1.





Question

“I own a business that employs 30 people. Everyone has always worked Monday to Friday, 9.00am to 5.30pm. We have recently had three people leave because we don’t offer enough flexibility, so I am keen to explore flexible working. Where do I start?”



Answer

Firstly, you want to familiarise yourself with what flexible working is and the new legal requirements. A helpful place to start is by looking at the ACAS website.

Flexible working | ACAS

The main types of flexible working are:

- Where – your work location, for example home working or hybrid working
- When – the hours you do, for example having later start times and earlier finish times
- How much – the number of hours you work, for example whether you work full- or part-time

It is then helpful to look at job design and how flexible roles can be in terms of where, when and how much work is done. Use this Timewise job design tool using an example from the NHS to help you [here](#).





Question

“The organisation offers so much flexibility, but it feels like it is one way and that employees aren’t prepared to be flexible back.

When we need to run training, employees refuse to compromise as it doesn’t fit with their working pattern. What can I do?”



Answer

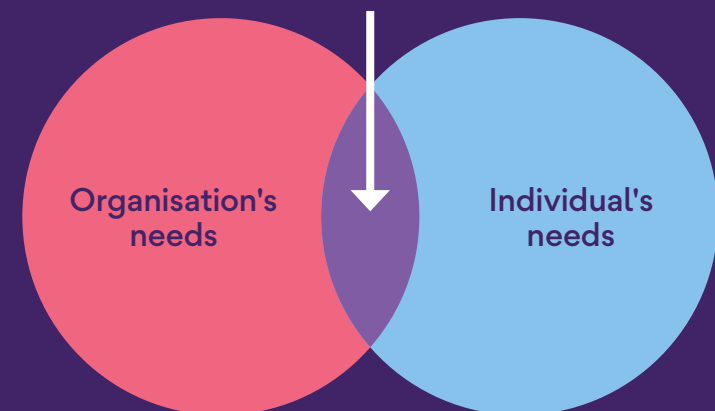
The picture below is Timewise’s Matching Needs Model. The principle is that, in order for flexible working to work, it needs to meet both organisational and individual needs. In this situation it sounds like the individual needs are being met, but the organisational needs are not, in terms of training.

When planning training, it may be helpful to ask employees what the best options would be for training times/location so that they feel they have input into their working patterns.

However it is also worth explaining that whilst you will try to accommodate as many people’s needs as possible, you may need their support to be flexible with their working arrangements for the purposes of delivering training that meets the needs of your business.



Job design identifies where flexibility works





Question

“My organisation is great at being flexible on when people work, as employees can work their hours any time between 7am and 9pm, but they are not flexible on remote or part-time working, which would be really helpful to our older workers. How can I change this?”



Answer

What may be a helpful starting point is to look at the flexible job design tool – to assess the roles you have in the organisation, to understand what degree of flexibility there are in the roles in terms of where and how much people work, as well as when they work. This will help to show what flexibility is possible without having a detrimental effect on service delivery.

When you have done this for all roles, you will get a broader view of all the aspects of flexibility which could be available to you as an organisation.





Question

“As an organisation we are really open to flexible working, but we have a lot of frontline workers where there simply isn’t the same flexibility, as we need to provide a 24/7 onsite service. What can we do here?”

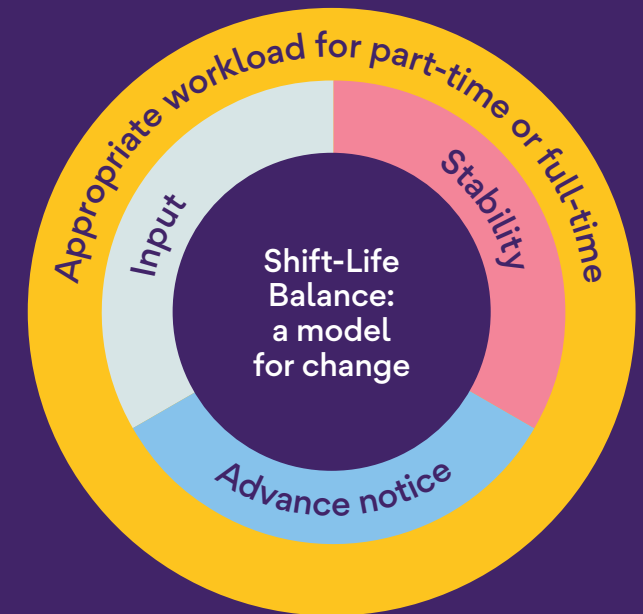


Answer

The reality is there are some roles where there isn’t the option of remote or home working as the role requires staff to be onsite. For example, nurses, construction workers, store assistants, teachers. But location is only one type of flexibility – it may be that you can explore when people work (e.g. shift lengths, start and finish times, term-time only roles) as well as how much work they do (so whether it’s possible for staff to work less than full-time hours). These time-based forms of flexibility are likely to be really valuable for your onsite workers.

Timewise has identified the principles that improve work-life balance for shift workers. They are:

- **Input** into the schedule: Enabling the employee to influence or express a level of preference into their shift pattern.
- **Advance notice** of the schedule: Giving the employee fair warning of their shift pattern.
- **Stability** of the schedule: Offering the employee a regular pattern from week to week or month to month.



Timewise refer to this as their Shift-Life Balance Model. Here is more information on the work Timewise has done on Shift-Life Balance.

It would be valuable to consider how you could increase input, stability and advance notice for your frontline colleagues.

[Improving work-life balance for shift workers – Timewise](#)



Question

“We have started promoting flexible working for older workers, but we have had pushback from younger employees that they aren’t being considered. What should we do?”



Answer

You could explain that you are taking positive action for older workers as the research has highlighted that they are less likely to be aware of, or request, flexible working.

You could also explain how flexible working is available to everyone regardless of age and signpost them to where to find more information on flexible working in your organisation as well as your EDI commitments and policies on positive action. You can reassure them that their requests for flexibility would be considered in exactly the same way as those of their older colleagues, and encourage them to talk to their line managers about the types of flex that they would find valuable.





Question

“I have predominantly older workers in my team and they have very mixed views on how much they should work from home vs work onsite. I feel like I can’t find a solution that everyone is happy with.”



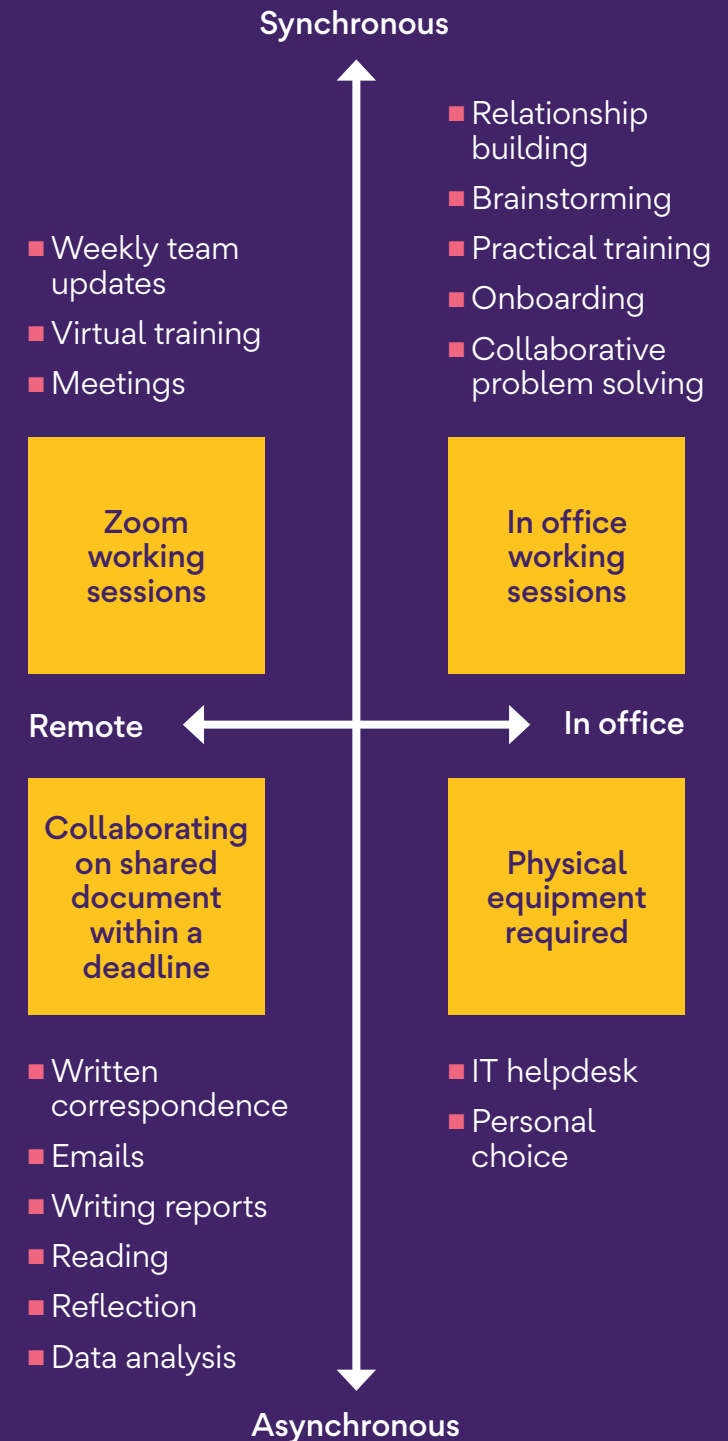
Answer

You may want to facilitate a session to look at where team activities best get done. That way you can agree as a team how often it makes sense to be onsite. If some individuals then want to come into the office more, then that will be down to personal choice, rather than team requirements.

In this session you could agree what work needs to be done in the office/in-person, and what can be done remotely. It may help you to think about what work needs to be completed synchronously, i.e. people working on it at the same time, and what can be done asynchronously, as part of this.

Another question it is useful to discuss with your team is what they see as the value of the office. People will have different views on this, and it will help to surface some of the reasons why people organise their weeks differently. Be reassured that, as with all flex, one size doesn't fit all.

So the key thing is for you and the team to be really clear on what you're all coming onsite to do, and when, and to develop a shared understanding of the purpose of this collective 'in-person' time. See the diagram opposite for an example of activities against this quadrant.





Question

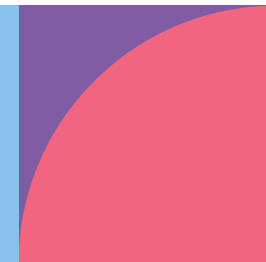
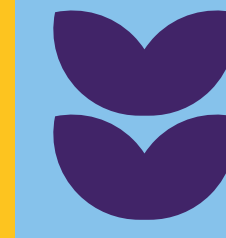
“I feel like flexibility has gone too far in the team. We have some long-standing arrangements which don’t really work for the service. I have just had another request for flexible working for an older worker that I will need to turn down as it will make service delivery even harder. What do I do?”



Answer

Remember, flexible working needs to meet both organisation and individual need to work. To start, you may wish to openly discuss this with the team, explaining that you are committed to supporting flexible working but you also need to meet service needs. You may want to get people to think about the impact of their working patterns on the service and how this could be managed better and/or reflecting on what they need flexible working for. Team activities/discussions and 1:1s are really important here.

It is important to listen and work together to explore options that will work for everyone (with compromise), not to impose new ways of working on the team. Your aim is to build a collective sense of responsibility for delivery of the service and greater awareness of colleagues’ needs.





Question

“My organisation’s leadership team is very negative about flexible working and in the last 12 months has mandated that everyone is in the office full-time again. There is no way I will persuade them to look at flexible working for older workers.”



Answer

The key here is to use an evidence-based approach to your proposals. Use the external data shared in the first workshop and also look at your internal data sets. How has this mandate impacted business performance as well as your people KPIs – turnover, engagement, health and safety data, sickness and wellbeing etc? Also think about what stories you have to bring this to life, e.g. the candidate who turned down a role because there was no flex, the employee who resigned and went to a competitor as they wanted to work from home.

You may also want to use the tool from the first masterclass to explore where work best gets done, looking at all the team activities and where you will be most productive in delivering them (Diagram detailed here). If you can demonstrate how you are more productive as a service as a result of working flexibly, this will help to build your case to the leadership team.





Question

“Another team’s flexible working arrangements has have a detrimental impact on my team, specifically impacting three older workers who do not want to work excessive hours. What do I do about this?”



Answer

Very often when looking at individual flexible working requests, we don’t always consider the ripple effect beyond an immediate team. It can often impact wider internal stakeholders and external stakeholders as well. When it detrimentally impacts another team, its most likely because there has been an oversight in thinking through the wider implications.

There is value discussing this with the other team’s manager to share the impact this has had on your team and work together agree a way forward – for example – they re-review their team’s flexible working approach, or the work gets allocated elsewhere.





Question

“In my organisation men in full-time manual work are less inclined to seek part-time or flexible working, although this could benefit their health and with pensions schemes is financially viable. What could be done to encourage a greater uptake amongst this group of older workers?”



Answer

It's great that you have this insight about the different demographics within your organisation, it means that you can really target your approach to ensure that it is inclusive of all.

We would suggest a couple of different actions which could help encourage this group:

- Make it clear that flexible working applies to them! It may be that this group of employees has some assumptions that flexibility is primarily for women, or that it's not possible for manual roles. Make it clear through your comms, your policy, and their 1-1 manager conversations that it is relevant for them to think about. You can do this by showcasing examples of men working flexibly in your own organisation and elsewhere, and by specifying the types of flex that would work well in these manual roles, so that they understand what is possible.
- You mention pension schemes – the financial impact of flex is likely to be very important to older men in particular, so coupling information about flex with information about flexible retirement options and the financial impact of working flexibly, is critical. Connect the two elements and make sure that they have somewhere to go to get advice on the financial implications of working differently.
- Share the insight you've gathered with your managers – let them know that this group of employees are less likely to proactively seek out flex and ask them to proactively open up the conversation with their team members, taking the approach outlined above.

Find out more

Where can I find out more about flexible working, workers' rights, and good practice?

Below are some helpful links to explore this topic in more detail:



[The Timewise Knowledge Hub containing research, articles and case studies](#)



[CIPD flexible working factsheet](#)



[ACAS guidance on flexible working](#)

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