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Health Education and
Improvement Wales (HEIW)

Working Flexibly

An individuals guide
to flexible working in
NHS Wales



Preface

NHS Wales recognises our workforce is the cornerstone to our success and we are committed to fostering working environments and cultures that make NHS Wales an outstanding place to work and learn.

Evidence suggests supporting individuals to have flexible working arrangements can positively impact their personal and professional lives, work life balance, health and wellbeing, job satisfaction, engagement and morale. In addition to such individual benefits, supporting flexible working practices also positively impacts service by enhancing the quality and productivity of services, reducing sickness and absenteeism, improving employee attraction, recruitment, retention, and enabling individuals from underrepresented groups to enter, grow, and succeed within NHS Wales.

This guide has been adopted from the NHS England, NHS Improvement, Timewise, and NHS Staff Council Toolkit. The guide aims to help you explore flexible working options that available to you and to help you prepare for a positive flexible working conversation with your manager. While it is accepted that not every request may be workable, it is hoped that this guide will support you in identifying a solution that best works for you, your team, and your organisation.

This guide should be read alongside the All Wales Flexible Working Policy and your organisations flexible working procedures and processes.





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Introduction

Flexible working arrangements can help you to have a greater choice around when, where and how you work.

Flexible working can benefit you, not only through enabling a balance between your home and work life, but also by enhancing your general health, wellbeing, engagement and productivity.

Good flexible working arrangements should always balance

- ✓ Your needs
- ✓ Patient/ service user and staff experience
- ✓ The needs of the service
- ✓ The Work-life balance of colleagues

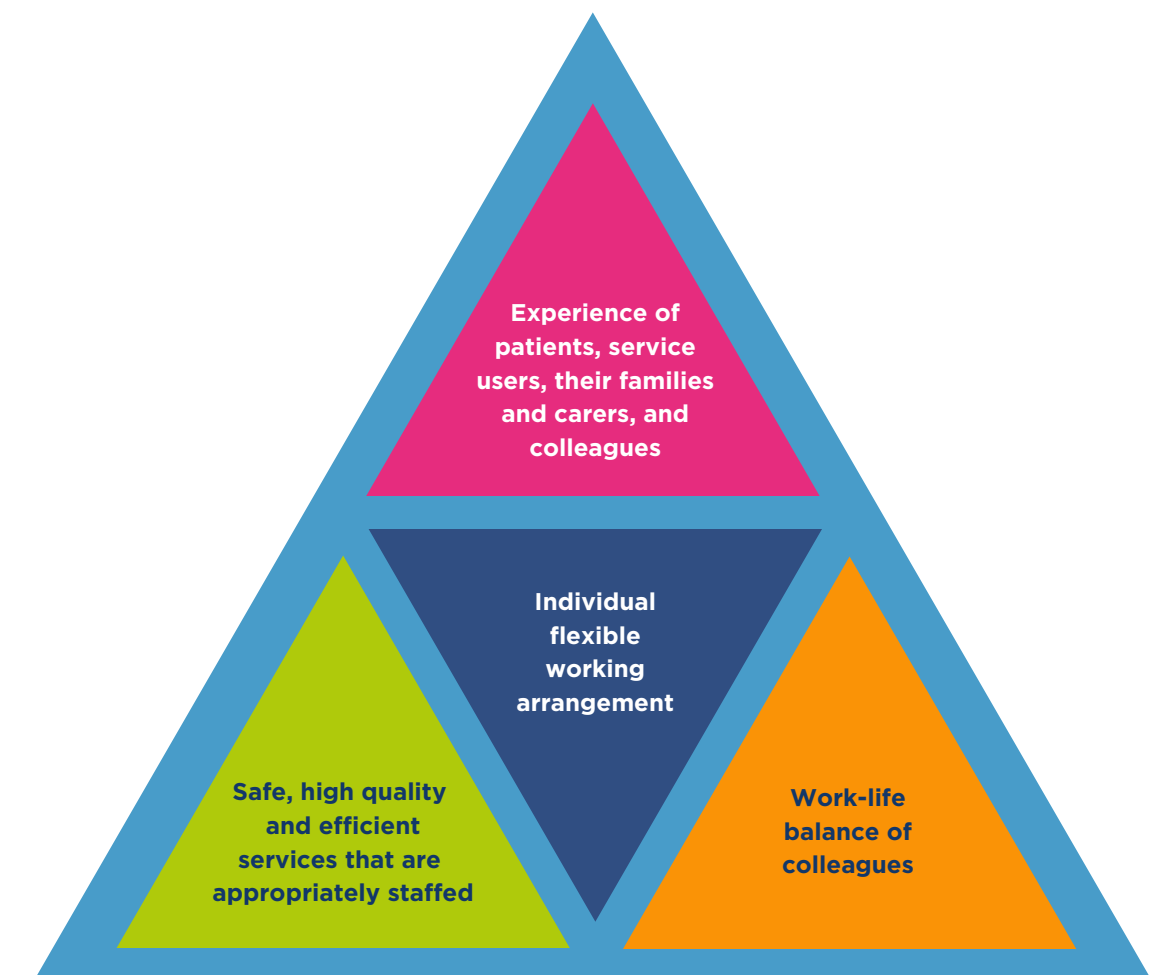
Within NHS Wales, we know that to effectively meet the health and care needs of our population, it is vital we have a workforce that is healthy, engaged and motivated. To support this we are committed to ensuring flexible working opportunities are available in line with the [NHS Wales Flexible Working Policy](#).



Benefits of Flexible Working

Flexible working can benefit you not only in enabling you to balance your personal and working life, but also by enhancing your general health and wellbeing. Individuals that are happier with their balance between life in and out of work are generally more productive and produce better quality work.

As well as benefits to you, enabling flexible working can also benefit your organisations by enhancing service quality and productivity, attraction, retention and recruitment of colleagues, and reductions in sickness and absenteeism.



A Guide For Everyone



This guide has been developed for all staff working in NHS Wales. If you are covered by the NHS Term and Conditions of Service Handbook, changes have been made which form part of your employment contract and mean that:

Flexible working requests can be made formally or informally at any time. Details of how you can make a request are included in the All Wales Flexible Working Policy and your organisational procedures.



All employees have the right to request flexible working from day one of employment



There is no limit to the number of requests that you can make



You have the right to make a request and have it considered, regardless of reason



Your employer should keep a central overview of how the organisation is handling requests, so they can check everyone is being treated fairly



If you and your line manager can't find a solution straight away, there is a further stage to check for other suitable options



Your line manager should have regular conversations with you about working flexibly without waiting for you to make a formal request

To support you in preparing for a positive flexible working conversation this guide includes a range of tools that can either be accessed through the interactive links or by referring to pages 15-25 of this toolkit.

Considering Your Options



Being clear of what you want to achieve from a flexible working arrangement is a good starting point for finding a realistic and practical working approach that suits you, your patients, your colleagues and the organisation.

To help you follow each step a ne=umber of tools are available within pages 17-27 of this guide.

Step 1

Identify changes that could improve your work life balance

Reflect on your current working pattern. Are you happy with the way you currently work or are there elements that you would like to change?

Make a list of the differences between how you work now and how you would like to work, consider what could move you closer to your ideal.

Be specific about what difference these changes would make to you and consider whether you would like a flexible working arrangement for a time limited period, or longer-term.

If you are an unpaid carer, this might also be a good time to raise explore other support that is available to help you balance your work and caring responsibilities.

If you have additional protections from the [Equality Act 2010](#) make sure you include this in your conversations.

Although you don't need to justify your request, thinking about these elements before you have a conversation with your manager can be helpful.



Tool 1

Defining Your Work Life Balance can help you to reflect the changes you would like to make

This will enable me to collect my children from school.

This will enable me to do some exercise and improve my wellbeing.

This will enable me to avoid busy rush hour traffic.

Considering Your Options



Step 2

Explore the most common flexible working patterns

It is important that you are aware of the different options that are available to you so you can better consider your optimal flexible working pattern.

Some options might not be possible in your role, so consider which options would provide the best balance for patient/service user experience, service delivery, and the work life balance of you and your colleagues.



TOOL 1

Defining Your Work Life Balance



TOOL 4

Where, when and how model to explore what flexibility can be built into a role

Step 3

Understand the difference between formal and informal flexibility

Some types of flexible working can be agreed informally with your line manager. Other arrangements, particularly those affecting your pay or contract, may require a formal flexible working application. At times it might be necessary to ask for a combination of both to meet your needs, for example you might decide to formally reduce your working hours, but also work from home from time to time with agreement from your line manager.

The All Wales Flexible Working Policy and your local organisational processes and procedures will guide you in how to make a flexible working application.

Considering Your Options



Step 4

Closing the gap between your current and ideal balance

When considering your options to improve your work life balance through flexible working, it is important that you clearly express your needs and the changes in working pattern that you would like.

To help you it can be useful to complete a quick exercise that breaks your working time into smaller chunks of activity, e.g. commuting, key tasks etc and consider whether flexible working could help you change these elements. For example, would changing your start and finish times help reduce your commute time? Whilst doing this it is also important you think about how your preferred way of working would impact your workload, the service and the work life balance of your colleagues.

During flexible working discussions, your manager can help you explore what might be possible in line with the All Wales Flexible Working Policy and your organisation's flexible working processes. You can also seek advice from your local workforce team or trade union representative. Further resources are also available within the [Belong Stay and Thrive Retention Hub](#).



Tool 2 and Tool 3

Defining Your Work Life Balance

Key things to consider:

- ☒ Can you share your responsibilities with someone else so you each provide cover when one of you is absent?
- ☒ How responsive do you need to be and in what timeframe?
- ☒ Are there peak times in your working day or week, or shifts that your team find hard to cover?
- ☒ What are the expectations of your patients and key stakeholders, and how will you manage these in a more flexible role?
- ☒ Are there opportunity to work in a different team, setting or role to help you get closer to the flexibility you would like?

Considering Your Options



Step 5

Think about how to make your preferred flexibility work for your team and organisation

Having explored the different types of flexible options that might work for you, it is time to think about how you could make them work in practice.

Experience has shown that flexibility works best when arrangements benefit both the individual and the organisation in which they work. So, it is really important that you consider what your organisation needs from your role, as well as your individual needs. To help you think about this it can be helpful to create a shortlist of working patterns that you think are feasible and consider the benefits and the challenges of each option.

Here are some key things for you to think about

- ☒ What changes (if any) would you need to make to your workload to make this pattern work?
- ☒ How would this working pattern impact upon your patients/stakeholders?
- ☒ What effect would this working pattern have on your team and colleagues?
- ☒ If you are a manager how would the working pattern impact your direct reports?



TOOL 5 **Exploring What Flexibility Suits Your Role**

How to have a good flexible working conversation with your manager?



If you have worked through the five previous steps, you will have; explored the different types of flexible working; identified a working pattern that could improve your work life balance; and started to think about the implications your flexibility request could have on colleagues, patients, stakeholders, and the service.

Its now time to bring everything together and start to prepare for a positive flexible working conversation with your manager. It might help to think of yourself telling your manager a compelling story about why your request for flexible working can also be in their best interests. Working through these seven phases will help you with this.



TOOL 5

Preparing to have a good conversation with your manager

How to have a good flexible working conversation with your manager?



Identify the Needs and benefits

- ✓ Outline how your preferred way of working could benefit you, your team and the service
- ✓ Include as many specific benefits as you can If you find this hard try to turn one of your needs into a benefit and use the “so what” test:

- Working from home two days a week will save me six hours of commuting **So What?**
- This means I can be flexible about my timings, either starting earlier in the day or working later in the day **So What?**
- This will give our team better coverage for dealing with incoming enquiries and calls

- ✓ Clearly describe the service benefits of your proposal as well as how it helps you
- ✓ Stay objective, these conversations can feel hard



Handle Potential Objections

- ✓ List any potential concerns your manager might have about your request and possible solutions to overcome them
- ✓ Be honest with yourself about parts of your role that are hard to flex, come up with some alternative suggestions
- ✓ Think of the positive and negative impact any flexible working arrangement would have on those you work closely with and the service you provide
- ✓ If you work shifts or are part of a rota, think about how your flexible working arrangements would fit
- ✓ Think how work could be reallocated or arranged to achieve your preferred working pattern
- ✓ Give examples where similar arrangements that have worked well
- ✓ Remember, flexible working arrangements work best when they are a win- win for you, your colleagues and the service

How to have a good flexible working conversation with your manager?



Be prepared to be flexible in return

- ✓ Not every flexible working option is suitable for all roles, your manager will need to consider the health and wellbeing and needs of the whole team, to ensure your request won't adversely affect colleagues of service delivery
- ✓ Be willing to compromise and think creatively to find a pattern that works for the team and service
- ✓ Be practical and realistic when making flexible working requests.
- ✓ Speak to your colleagues about the possibilities to find the best options for everyone



Make a plan for communicating

- ✓ Show how you will effectively communicate with your team and manager to allay any concerns that your manager may have
- ✓ Explain how you will clarify your availability. How will your manager and stakeholders know when you are working? Who else can be contacted in your absence?
- ✓ Be transparent about when you are working and when you are not
- ✓ Set out how you will maintain regular contact with your manager, team and wider stakeholders
- ✓ Consider how and when your flexible working arrangement will be reviewed
- ✓ If you are a manager think about how you will give your team clarity on how you will be working (how will issues will be escalated when you are not available, and your willingness to be contacted in an emergency)
- ✓ Suggest an initial trial period to show you can make your flexible working arrangements work before you make a formal change

How to have a good flexible working conversation with your manager?



Manage Performance Expectations

- ✓ Consider how your performance can be measured and how will your objectives be assessed? discussion about how your performance can be measured.
- ✓ Be realistic and to think about the most positive way to present your suggestions



Review Regularly

- ✓ How and when will your flexible working pattern be reviewed?
- ✓ Demonstrate your willingness to review working patterns if circumstances change and adjustments are required.
- ✓ Raise any issues or changes with your line manager sooner rather than later, to enable time to come up with new ideas and solutions.



Plan for your career progression

- ✓ Evidence suggests that flexible workers, particularly those on reduced hours, can miss out on development opportunities due to prioritising the needs of their day job rather than their own personal development so it is important you consider;
- ✓ How you will access time for training and development activities?
- ✓ How will you engage in informal networking, coaching and mentoring opportunities?
- ✓ What career plans and aspirations you have and what support do you need to achieve them?



Top Tips for working flexibly



- ✓ Have regular one to ones with your manager as part of your regular wellbeing and career conversations, appraisals, job plan and one to one management discussions.
- ✓ Be clear about your needs and priorities
- ✓ Consider your objectives with your line manager in light of any new flexible working arrangement
- ✓ Regularly review and reflect on your arrangements with your line manager, colleagues, team and key stakeholders
- ✓ Be transparent about when you are working and when you are unable to work
- ✓ Be clear about how your working pattern fits into the rota and shift system
- ✓ Be rigorous about timing and deadline expectations of work and projects and clear regarding the expected outcomes
- ✓ Plan your time effectively and efficiently, including your workflow and breaks
- ✓ Don't try and do everything on your own. If you are struggling talk about it
- ✓ Ensure you consider your training and development needs
- ✓ Signpost and clearly communicate when you are and are not working
- ✓ Talk about flexible working openly, share good practice and support colleagues with their needs
- ✓ Learn from other flexible working colleagues, support one another and buddy up together
- ✓ Be open to compromise.
- ✓ Ensure your requests don't negatively impact upon your colleagues, team or service provision



Defining Your Work Life Balance

A. Start by listing the different elements of your life for example this might include, work, family, exercise etc

B. Visualise how you currently split your time across the day



C. Now note your feelings about how you are currently splitting your time

Parts that work well...

Parts I would like to change...



D. Building on your notes in section A,B and C, think forward to how you would ideally like to split your time. You might also want to add extra parts that you currently don't have time for.

E. What are the key difference between your current and ideal time split?

F. How could you change your current ways of working to move closer to your ideal?

Defining Your Work Life Balance (Continued)



Now carry out the same exercise, this time breaking down how your working time is split. (e.g. commuting meetings, key tasks). This will help you see opportunities to do things differently.

My current time split is...

My ideal time split is...

How could you change your current ways of working to move closer to your ideal?

How would this impact on your stakeholders, patients and colleagues?

Exploring What Flexibility Suits Your Role?



Ask yourself these questions to help you decide which flexible working pattern could work best for you.

Where

- ✓ Can some of your work activities be done remotely?
- ✓ What can be done via technology?
- ✓ Will you need additional equipment or software?
- ✓ How will you show your work is being progressed?
- ✓ How will you ensure effective communication?
- ✓ How will you support team cohesion?
- ✓ What flexibility can you show in return?

When

- ✓ When do you need to be available for patients, colleagues, and service
- ✓ Does your role have core hours?
- ✓ What speed of response is needed?
- ✓ Who else can cover the role when you are not available?
- ✓ If you are a manager, how will issues be escalated when you are not available?
- ✓ What flexibility do you need to show in return?

How

- ✓ Are efficiencies possible? Are there activities that could stop or be delivered elsewhere?
- ✓ Can some of the work be delegated to others?
- ✓ Is a job share possible?
- ✓ Could the role be reduced over time?
- ✓ What flexibility do you need to show in return?



Preparing to have a good conversation with your manager



This tool is designed to help you have good and meaningful flexible working conversations with your manager. If you need extra support or advice in thinking about your answers, you can talk to your Workforce representative or local trade union representative to ensure your request is balanced and practical to help you get the most out of the conversation.

Setting your goals

List flexible working option(s) you would like to explore further with your manager

Plan for success

How will you make sure that your new flexible working arrangement will work for the team and the service?

Be Solution focused

List any concerns your manager might have and the solutions that would address them.

Arrange regular reviews

When will you and your manage review your flexible working arrangement.

Supporting continued development

How will you stay on top of your personal and professional development or be supported to progress

Stay in touch

List practical ways you can stay in touch with your manager and team.

Show the benefits of working flexibly

How your flexible working arrangement will positively impact upon you, colleagues and service

Things to Think About

Working part-time or reduced hours

Points to consider

| For you | For you and your manager |
|--|---|
| Do you want to work a reduced number of hours each day or fewer days? | How can the service needs still be met? Think about how to backfill the remaining hours or how you can organise things differently. |
| You will have a reduced salary but you may make savings on other things like travelling and childcare. How will this impact on you and your household? | What are the benefits of agreeing this request? |
| Have you considered the impact of pro-rata reduced annual leave and other leave entitlements such as special leave? | How will this fit in with existing flexible working arrangements? |
| What will be the impact upon your pension contributions/benefits? | What is the impact on the rest of the team |
| Are you aware of the impact on your maternity and redundancy entitlements? (these might not be important now, but you might want to consider them for the future). | |
| Remember that where a permanent change has been agreed, your hours might not be able to be increased at a later date. | |

Frequently Asked Questions



How will this affect my annual leave entitlements?

Annual leave is calculated on a pro-rata basis for part time workers. Please review to your organisations annual leave policy for information.

Can I request to work on set days of the week or combine this with other flexible working options?

Yes, your manager will need to consider the impact this will have on your team and service as with all flexible working requests.

Can I work overtime if I have reduced my hours?

Yes you can request to work overtime where this has been agreed with your manager in advance. Additional hours up to full time (37.5 hours) are paid at a basic rate for bands 1-7. Hours worked above 37.5 are paid at overtime rates. Unsocial hours attract enhanced pay in the usual manner. Bands 8-9 are not eligible for overtime payments.

Things to Think About



Job Sharing

A form of part time working where one full time role is shared between two members of staff. Salary and benefits are divided according to the hours worked.

Points to consider

| For you | For you and your manager |
|---|---|
| How will you and your job share divide the job role? Are there particular points of the job you want to focus on? How will you keep in touch with each other and hand things over? How will communicate these arrangements to others? | How can the duties and responsibilities of each role be clearly defined and measured for each person? |
| You will have a reduced salary but you may make savings on other things like travelling and childcare. How will this impact on you and your household? | How will the hours/days be worked by the sharers to best meet individual and service need? |
| Sharers may be on different points of the salary scale depending on their individual length of service. | |
| Salary and pay related benefits will be reduced pro-rata. See information on part time working/ reduced hours. | |
| If one of you wants to leave and the other doesn't, you will have some options to consider, which could involve finding another partner, taking over some additional hours, or considering a part-time post. | |

Frequently Asked Questions

Does a job share have to work on an equal split of time and responsibilities?

Not necessarily, but how time will be split depends on the requirement of the job to be shared and the skills each job sharer brings to the role.

If the person I share with is off sick or on leave, will I have to cover for them?

No, there is no contractual expectation for you to cover. However, if practical, there may be times when you are asked to cover or flex your days to suit the service, though you are not obliged to do so.

If I want to work a job share, can my employer find someone to share with me?

You are encouraged to find out if there is anyone in your team/ department who might be interested in a job share. Your employer can help by reviewing whether other employees have requested to work part-time and by placing an internal/ external advert on NHS Jobs.

Things to Think About

Average Hours e.g. annualised hours

Contractual hours are averaged out over a set time period e.g. quarterly, six monthly or annually. This can allow staff to work more hours at some times of the month or year and fewer or no hours at others- e.g. working more in the winter months and less in the summer.

Points to consider

| For you | For you and your manager |
|--|---|
| What period do you want to average your hours over? This could be quarterly, bi-annual or annual. | What are the minimum and maximum staffing levels and skill mix required per day/shift? How will the working hours be recorded? Are there peak times of the year that you will need to manage differently? |
| Do you want to work a regular pattern over the period, or have short term flexibility to decide when you work your hours? Do you want to work more hours in winter and less hours in summer for example? | How will the hours/days be worked by the sharers to best meet individual and service need? |
| Where you do not work full time hours, your salary and pay related benefits will be reduced pro-rata. See information on part-time working and reduced working hours. | How will time owing/time owed be managed? When does the year run from? For example January- December or April to March. |



Frequently Asked Questions

How will my total hours be calculated?

By calculating the total number of hours to be worked in a year minus your annual leave entitlement.

How many weeks is a year calculated over?

To account for leap years, annualised hours are calculated over a 52.25 week period.

Can I vary the hours I work each week? It may be possible to vary your weekly hours providing:

- You work your contracted hours within the agreed period
- This is agreed by your line manager

How will you be paid for working averaged hours?

Your salary is usually paid over 12 equal instalments. If you leave part the way through the year you will have your final salary adjusted if you have not completed or have completed more than your contracted hours.

Things to think about

Set working hours

Fixed hours and days to give certainty that other commitments can be fitted around work.



Points to consider

| For you | For you and your manager |
|--|--|
| If you change work shifts which do not attract enhancements your salary could be affected. | How many other staff have a similar working pattern? Is there scope to have a team discussion to ensure set days compliment each other? |
| Are there already people with the same set days in your department which might make it difficult to accommodate your request? If so, could you talk to each other about how to make it work between you? | How many staff can be accommodated with similar requests? |
| | What is the impact on other staff members? What are the benefits of agreeing to the request? |

Frequently Asked Questions

Do I have to work the same set days each week?

You don't have to work the same set days each week. It may be that the agreement is to work set days/ shifts over a month or roster period.

Can I flex my start and finish times?

this may be more difficult for staff working in wards or departments which operate around shift patterns. However, each request will be considered on an individual basis.

Things to Think About

Staggering working hours

Where staff work a set number of hours during the day but with different start and finish times.



Points to consider

| For you | For you and your manager |
|--|---|
| Remember you need to schedule minimum break times into your working day. | What are the minimum and maximum staffing levels and skill mix needed per day/shift. How will the working hours be recorded? Are there peak times of the year that you will need to manage differently? |
| | Is there enough cover during core hours to support your request? |

Frequently Asked Questions

Can staggered working hours include weekend work?

Yes, if your existing work pattern include weekend work, or you could request a change to your work pattern to include weekends if this is what you want.

Can I reduce my working hours by working through my breaks?

Minimum rest break requirements are there for your health and safety and the safety of the service. They must be provided for during your working hours.

Can I work staggered hours if I work part time?

Yes, you should be able to ask to combine different flexible working options.

Things to think about



Flexi time

Allows you to vary your working hours on a daily basis (which may include your start and finish times) to suit your individual circumstances whilst ensuring you meet your contractual working hours over an agreed period.

Points to consider

| For you | For you and your manager |
|--|---|
| Your contracted hours will need to be complete within the agreed period and your local policy may have core hour requirements. Make sure both you and your line manager are both clear about what these are. | Does the nature and volume of work allow for flexi time to work well? |
| Working hours should be agreed with your line manager prior to being worked. | Are there enough employees covering the service to meet work demands in core hours? |
| Your local policy might have limits on the amount of time in credit you can build up, and when you have to use it by. Check your local policy for details. Workforce colleagues can help you with any questions you might have. | Are there any health, safety and security issues relating to staff working outside of 'normal' hours, e.g. lone working? |
| | Are both you and your line manager clear about how staff record their hours worked and how requests for time off are managed? |

Frequently Asked Questions

Would I need to start/ finish at the same time each day?

No flexi-time policies normally allow flexibility around core hours, but you and your line manager need to agree how you will work your hours.

My colleague works flexi-time, does that mean I can too?

Your employer should be supportive and accommodating when it comes to your flexible working requests and if somebody in your team is already working flexi-time successfully, speak to them to find out how they made a success of their flexible working application.