

Valuing older workers: Working flexibly

Evidence suggests there is high demand for more flexible work among older employees; this approach may help workers and employers to better manage the demands of work and age. However, recent research has shown that employers tend to think of younger workers as the primary beneficiaries of flexible working arrangements in relation to parenting and childcare responsibilities – more flexible ways of working for older workers could be equally beneficial.

In April 2024 the Flexible Working (Amendment) Regulations 2023 came into effect. The regulations removed the requirement for an employee to have 26 weeks service in order to be eligible to make a request for flexible working. The changes make the right to request flexible working a day one right.

Evidence suggests that employers who offer flexible working options including different or set working patterns are able to retain staff for longer.

Flexible working opportunities for older workers or retirees may encourage them to stay in work for longer. It also makes it easier for those who have already left employment by creating more options to come back in flexible, contracted roles or as part of the temporary staffing workforce.

Examples of flexible working patterns include (the list is not exhaustive):

- **Annualised hours** is where contracted hours are calculated as a total number of hours over the year instead of a weekly number of hours. The employee's working pattern may consist of both fixed and unallocated shifts. With reasonable notice, the employer can use unallocated shifts for surges in demand.
- **Compressed hours** is a working pattern where employees complete their contracted hours within fewer working days. For example, they may work 37.5 hours over 4 days instead of 5 days.
- **Flexi-time** is a system where employees can choose when they work, subject to working an agreed number of hours over a specified reference period. Employees may have a core period of the day when they must be at work. It allows employees to carry over a debit or credit of hours between reference periods.
- **Job-sharing** is a form of part-time working where 2 or more people share the responsibility for a job in a structured way.
- **Part-time** is where an employee is contracted to work less than the recognised full-time hours.

- **A reduced working year** is a work pattern with agreed periods when the employee does not work. The salary of the post is reduced proportionately to the hours worked. An example of a reduced working year is a term-time contract.
- **Self-rostering** allows team members to schedule their shifts while maintaining agreed service levels.
- **Temporary reduced working hours** allows employees to request a reduction in their contracted hours for a temporary period.

The [RCN flexible working advice guide](#) and reps guide on working flexibly provide more in depth information on the types of flexible working options available, preparing for flexible working and what staff should do if there are concerns.

A significant amount of work has been completed on developing flexible working arrangements and opportunities by organisations.

The NHS Long Term Workforce Plan has a specific section on flexible working. In addition, the [NHS Staff Council flexible working webpage](#) contains more specific guidance on the topic including:

- the contractual issues of flexible working
- a guide on making flexible working requests
- flexible working toolkits to support individuals to make flexible working requests and for line managers in supporting their staff with requests.

There are also a number of good practice case studies on how specific organisations have implemented flexible working.

References

NHS Long Term Workforce Plan

NHS England, June 2023

<https://www.england.nhs.uk/long-read/nhs-long-term-workforce-plan-2/#3-retain-embedding-the-right-culture-and-improving-retention>

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