

Flexible Options – A brief guide

Options involving changes in the arrangement of hours

Flexible Working Hours (Flexi time)

- Flexi time involves employees working an agreed number of hours over a set period (typically a four, six or eight week period). There are usually “core” hours of attendance (typically 09.30 or 10.00 to 12.00 and 14.00 to 16.00) with a flexible arrangement for starting and finishing times and lunch breaks within agreed minimum and maximum limits. Staff are permitted to accrue a certain number of hours and to take time off in lieu.

Compressed Hours

- With this option employees can extend the number of hours they work per day thereby working their weekly contractual hours over 4 or 4.5 days instead of 5 or their fortnightly contractual hours over 9 days instead of 10.

Staggered hours

- The employee works fixed hours every day but the start and finish times are can be agreed to suit the personal needs of the employee.

Seasonal/Annualised Hours

- This is a variation in the arrangement of hours where staff work to an annualized contract rather than a weekly or monthly number of hours. They may work more hours at particular times of the year to take account of seasonal peaks and troughs in their workload. The hours to be worked by each employee are negotiated in advance, and can vary on a daily, weekly or monthly basis.

Shift Working

- This arrangement is common in industry, involving staff working either fixed patterns of work which vary from the norm (e.g. night work only) or which vary from day to day and week to week. Typically, shift work is designed to provide cover for longer hours than would usually be worked by the majority of staff, and may cover 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Options involving changes in the number of hours

Part-Time Working

- This usually refers to employees who work less than the standard full-time hours and are paid pro rata and received contractual benefits over a 52 week period. Various other types of part-time working exist, and include those defined below (such as job sharing, term time only working, etc).

Job Sharing

- Job sharing involves two people sharing the duties and responsibilities of one full-time post, on the appropriate pay scale and terms of employment designed for that particular job. The division of hours is usually 50/50, two and a half days a week each, although some job share arrangements involve other options (e.g. alternate weeks, mornings/afternoons, two days/three days alternate weeks, etc).

Term-Time Only Working

- This is a part time variation of annualised hours, in that staff work only during term time, leaving holidays free for parents with school age children to spend time with their family. Actual working hours during term time may be full or part time, and salaries may be paid either pro rata during the year or holidays may be treated as unpaid leave.

Temporary/Voluntary Reduced Hours

- The duration of the reduced hours working period is usually agreed in advance, but may be flexible depending on the willingness of the employer and the needs of the employee. This option is particularly likely to be requested by women returning from maternity leave, or other employees experiencing personal or domestic situations which require a reduction in their normal full-time working pattern.

Pre Retirement Reduced Hours

- This arrangement may be of particular benefit to some staff nearing retirement age, who have worked full time throughout their working life. It can enable them to reduce their hours gradually rather than moving from full time to zero time suddenly, and enables a smoother transition into the next phase.

Options involving changes in the location of work

Home-working/teleworking

- Flexibility in work locations is probably the most ad-hoc and variable option, but two main types of scheme appear to be in operation. Firstly, management or professional staff with employee status, who are fully integrated within the organisation's culture and who work flexibly in accordance with their own assessment of the demands of their workload and appropriate form of work location. Secondly, staff engaged in more routine and/or independent types of work (e.g. data entry, typing, editorial or research work).

Special Leave arrangements

Unpaid leave

- This option gives employees the opportunity to take time away from work for an agreed period of time which is unpaid.

Personalised annual leave

- Employees can apply to buy or sell annual leave. Buying annual leave is basically the same as applying for unpaid leave. Selling annual leave means that employees who have extra holidays that they don't want to take can sell these back to the employer.

Career breaks

- These breaks from the workplace are usually for 6 months to 5 years and are usually but not always associated with women taking time away from work to look after a young family.

Study Leave/Sabbatical Leave

- A period of absence for the purposes of study, research or scholarship. The traditional academic sabbatical leave is usually taken in periods of at least a term, but study leave may also be available in the form of time off (typically half-day or day release) throughout the academic year, and is also more likely to be available to non-academic staff.

Leave associated with caring for dependents

- There is legislation covering many types of leave associated with caring for dependents but organisations are not limited to providing the minimum requirements under the law: some organisations choose to provide even further flexibility in areas such as maternity, paternity, parental, adoption, compassionate and dependent leave.

Disability Leave

- Some employers make special provision for workers who either become disabled or have a progressive disability, and therefore have special needs within the workplace. Provision may involve time off to attend an employment assessment of need, training/retraining by the employee and /or time off for changes in access, equipment and/or work patterns to be made within the employee's workplace.

Religious/Cultural Leave

- Traditional holidays are based around the major Christian festivals and traditional work breaks, but do not take account of the needs of a multi-cultural society. Religious festivals such as those in the Jewish, Hindu or Muslim calendars tend to be ignored, which may present problems for members of staff practising those faiths. Employees may also need to have special arrangements for other requirements of their religions such as prayers on a regular basis during the day, or may need longer periods of leave (e.g., to undertake pilgrimages).