

# WHY FLEXIBLE WORKING MATTERS

## What is flexible working?

Flexible working is any arrangement that differs from an organisation's full-time traditional pattern, in terms of where, when and in how much time a role is done. The most common forms of flexible working are:



PART TIME



SHIFT WORK



FLEXIBLE START  
AND FINISH TIMES



TERM TIME  
WORKING



COMPRESSED  
HOURS



HOME OR  
REMOTE WORKING

## Why is everyone talking about flexible working?

There's no question that the demand for flexible working is on the increase. A recent study by Timewise found that 87% of full-time workers in the UK want to work flexibly<sup>1</sup>.

At the same time, employers are under pressure to find the best talent and keep costs down. Their interest has been sparked by evidence that flexible working is an attractive employee benefit, and also that flexible workers increase business productivity.

Added to that, technological advances have made it easier for people to work efficiently at home or remotely, bringing real estate savings and reducing the carbon footprint of offices. With both employers and employees increasingly recognising the benefits of flexible working, it's clearly here to stay. Employers who don't bring their flexible working practices up to scratch may well get left behind.



# Competitive advantage for employers

## Talent attraction

Nearly 9 in 10 people want to work flexibly and, at salaries above £20k FTE, they're chasing only around 1 in 10 jobs advertised with flexible working options<sup>1</sup>. This huge gap between supply and demand means that organisations offering flexibility at the point of hire are likely to attract the best talent.

## Retention and motivation

You've invested in recruiting and training your staff, so it makes financial sense to keep them. 75% of employers say that flexible working has a positive effect on retention, and 73% that it improves staff motivation<sup>2</sup>.

## Skills optimisation

Creating career pathways for flexible workers, so they can apply for promotion and take their flexibility with them, means that talented staff won't get stuck at in junior roles. You will be able to build the best teams, progressing the people with the most potential rather than the ones who happen to be available full-time.

## Productivity

It's often assumed that flexible workers are less productive than their full-time peers. In fact, a study undertaken by Cranfield University<sup>3</sup> found the opposite:

- 97% of managers said the quantity of work improved or stayed the same
- 93% of managers said the quality of the work improved or stayed the same

## Saving business costs

Allowing employees to work remotely can enable you to reduce both your office space and your carbon footprint, cutting your business overheads significantly.

## Diversity and the gender gap

Flexible working is a vital part of any strategy to address these issues. By building flexibility into management and leadership roles, more women will progress to them, which will help reduce the gender pay gap.

<sup>1</sup> Timewise 2017: 'Flexible Working: a Talent Imperative'

<sup>2</sup> CIPD 2012: 'Flexible Working Provision and Uptake'

<sup>3</sup> Cranfield University/Working Families 2008: 'Flexible Working and Performance'

# Large scale societal issue

A large part of the demand for flexible working comes from people who have other responsibilities. For many people who need to care for sick or disabled relatives, as well as for many other groups, full-time 9-5 jobs are simply not an option. According to the organisation Employers for Carers, 1 in 9 of your employees are likely to be carers, and changing demographics mean that the number is likely to grow rapidly in the coming years.

If flexible working at the right level isn't available, these individuals end up locked in low paid jobs they're over-qualified for, or simply leave the workforce altogether. A report by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation<sup>4</sup> estimated that there are 400,000 people who can't work unless they can find a part-time or flexible role, and another 1.5 million who are trapped in poorly paid part-time jobs below their skill level .

In these days of skills shortages, and with the added pressure of Brexit looming, the sheer numbers involved are a wake-up call to employers. All these people, many of them with superb skills and talents, want to continue to work to their full potential... they just need an adjustment to the traditional working week, to allow them to meet their other commitments.

And people are increasingly demanding change. Recent research by HSBC is just one of several studies to find that flexible working, and the balanced life it delivers, now ranks as high or higher than salary<sup>5</sup> in the pecking order of employee benefits. Healthy working and kindness at work have also become hot topics.

<sup>4</sup> JRF 2016: 'How Flexible Hiring Could Improve Business Performance and Living Standards

<sup>5</sup> Sources include: HSBC research, 2017: <https://www.personneltoday.com/pr/2017/12/flexible-working-could-be-more-important-to-employees-than-a-pay-rise-in-2018-says-adrian-lewis-activ-absence/> and research by Total Jobs, 2016: <https://www.ibtimes.co.uk/job-flexibility-more-important-salary-quarter-jobseekers-britain-1543978>

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