

# FLEXIBLE HIRING: A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

Ideas and action points to support your organisation's progress from flexible working to flexible hiring



## What is flexible hiring?

Flexible hiring means offering flexibility from day one of a new hire. If you can see that flexible working is beneficial to your business, and is working well for your people, then you're missing a trick if you don't hire flexibly. Without this final step, there's a block in the jobs market for people who can't work full-time; so your business is missing out on some of the best candidates, and not fully benefiting from its flexible working strategy.

Starting to hire flexibly is a much simpler step than you might think. All you're doing is waiving the 6 month qualifying period for requesting flexible working. What's more, saying in a job advert that you'll consider flexible working does not commit you to meeting a specific request. It simply means that, if a candidate requests flexibility, you will consider it and agree to the arrangement if it works for the role.

You may have some roles which are completely unsuitable for flexible hiring. That's fine - just continue to advertise these jobs as full-time, with no mention of flexible working possibilities or culture. But it's our belief that, when you really look at them, there are very few roles that can't be worked flexibly in some way.

**Flexible hiring is when an employer openly offers flexible working to new recruits, at the point of hire**



# How will flexible hiring help your business?

## Attract extra candidates

If you don't offer flexible working at the point of hire, your organisation is cutting itself off from the large proportion of candidates who won't apply for traditional full-time jobs.

## Progress your best people

Flexible hiring will improve mobility within your business – enabling talented employees who work flexibly to apply for promotion, taking their flexibility with them.

## Skills utilisation

Flexible hiring will ultimately help you build the best team, optimising performance and productivity.

## Diversity and the gender pay gap

Is your organisation worrying about these relatively new inclusion issues? Flexible hiring will go a long way towards solving them.

## Employer brand

Flexible working has become a key employee benefit in recent years – second only to salary<sup>1</sup>. Promoting your openness to flex will help make your organisation a place where people are keen to come and work.

<sup>1</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>

# Why is flexible hiring so important for the workforce?

- Nearly 9 in 10 UK employees want to work flexibly<sup>2</sup>. Many of them will ONLY apply for a job where this is possible.
- They are competing for a handful of vacancies. Only around 1 in 10 jobs with salaries of £20K+ FTE are advertised as being open to flexible working options<sup>3</sup>.
- This mismatch of supply and demand means that 1.5 million people are trapped in flexible jobs they're over-qualified for<sup>4</sup>. They have traded salary for flexibility, and employers are missing out on their skills.
- Women are disproportionately disadvantaged, as large numbers have historically worked part-time. But times are changing and the appetite for flexible working cuts across both genders and all age groups – 84% of men either work flexibly or say they want to; so do 92% of younger workers and 72% of people approaching retirement.



<sup>2</sup> Flexible Working: a Talent Imperative, Timewise, 2017

<sup>3</sup> Timewise Flexible Jobs Index, Timewise, 2017

<sup>4</sup> How Flexible Hiring Could Improve Business Performance and Living Standards, Timewise for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2016

# FOUR STAGES TO BECOMING A FLEXIBLE HIRER

## Stage four

Communicate it in  
your job adverts



## Stage three

Build it into  
the recruitment  
process



## Stage two

Gain leadership  
buy-in to  
flexible hiring



## Stage one

Check you're  
comfortable with  
flexible working



The rest of this guide  
takes you through the  
four stages of flexible  
hiring, with ideas and  
action points to move  
you on your journey

# Stage 1:

## Check you're comfortable with flexible working

Before you can begin to hire flexibly, there needs to be wide acceptance of flexible working throughout your organisation, and experience of seeing it work well in practice. You have to believe that flexible working is good for your team, and good for business.

If flexible working is still something that's granted reluctantly, with flexible workers not being properly supported, then your organisation has work to do before you can begin to think about hiring flexibly.

Even if you have a proactive flexible working strategy, you may feel that there are still parts of your business where flexible working practice can be improved. It may be, for example, that flex is seen to be a problem at very senior levels, or in a particular department.

### Ideas for action

- If you're still in the early stages of accepting flexible working, read up on its many benefits including: talent retention, motivation and loyalty, real estate savings, productivity levels, reduced levels of absence.
- Identify where you have blocks to flexible working and examine why.
- Identify areas of your business where flexible working is particularly successful, and carry the learning across.
- Identify successful people who work flexibly in your business, and promote them as role models.
- Articulate clearly in your internal communication what your approach is. This may require you to develop guidance and a set of positive behaviours in addition to your flexible working policy.

### Timewise can help

- We can help you put together the business case for your organisation, and give examples of how other businesses have taken action.
- Our training and consultancy services can help you address specific areas in your organisation where flexible working practice could be improved.

## Stage 2:

### Gain leadership buy-in to flexible hiring

To drive change and begin offering flexible working from day one of a new hire, promoting this in job adverts, you will need to ensure your organisation is fully supportive from the top down. A shift towards flexible hiring will involve line managers as well as your Talent Team, and leadership engagement is key to getting buy-in from everyone.

If becoming a flexible hirer is not yet on your leadership agenda, you will need to present the business case to them. It will be important to define clearly how it can support talent attraction and also career progression of current flexible employees, maintaining a diverse talent pipeline; and how the failure to hire flexibly creates a sticking point in fully realising all the business benefits of flexible working.

#### Ideas for action

- Run a leadership workshop with your executive team, exploring their aspirations for flexible working in your organisation.
- Secure an internal senior champion for the changes, who will promote the benefits of flexible hiring internally.
- Ask a senior leader to write a blog about how flexible workers should not be afraid to apply for promotion within the business.
- Identify employees who were hired on a flexible basis and have proved successful in their roles. Present them as case studies to your executive team.

#### Timewise can help

- Timewise can help you put the case to your leadership team, engaging their interest by sharing examples and providing challenge.

## Stage 3:

### Build flexible hiring into the recruitment process

The change is simply that, as a business, you are saying you are open to flexible working requests from new candidates, as well as for existing employees. So you are not waiting for the qualifying 6 month period before considering requests. As with existing employees, stating that you are 'open' to flexible working does not commit you to granting a specific request from a candidate.

The change may be simple, but it needs to be embedded in your recruitment processes before you can begin to offer it to candidates. There needs to be a job design step where you ask the question 'can this role be worked flexibly?' Managers need to think about when, where and in how much time the job can be done.

Managers also need guidance on how and when to respond to requests for flexibility during the application and interview phase. At the end of the first interview? At offer negotiation? Whenever a candidate raises it?

#### Ideas for action

- Perhaps start with one department, ideally where there's already an appetite for offering flexibility at the point of hire. Get the changes working there before rolling out.
- Develop guidance for managers on how to think through when and where a job needs to be done, and whether it can be done in fewer than full-time hours.
- Develop guidance for your recruitment team to prompt line managers to consider flexibility for each new vacancy.
- Develop guidance on how and when to respond to candidate requests for flexibility.
- Better still, encourage managers to pro-actively introduce the conversation about flexibility as part of the interview process.

#### Timewise can help

- We can supply case studies from other employers, describing changes they made and how they implemented them.
- Our most popular training module for recruitment teams and/or line managers, covers how to understand flexible job design and adapt to flexible hiring.



## Stage 4:

### Communicate your openness to flex in your job adverts

Once your recruitment process is ready, the final step is to tell candidates that you'll consider hiring flexibly - in your job adverts, on your careers website and through any recruitment agencies you use.

Developing a company-wide 'blanket' flexibility message is a good idea, as it will save time for recruitment teams. But be careful to include this only in job adverts where it has been agreed that flexibility is possible, to avoid misleading candidates.

And try to be specific about the types of flexible working that are possible for a role. A simple sentence saying you're 'open to flexible working options' is often regarded with scepticism by candidates – especially those seeking reduced hours. It's much more helpful to define the types of flexibility that you will consider. These options can still be worked into a 'blanket' sentence or two (you'll find examples on the next page), but they will have more credibility.

#### Ideas for action

- Test the waters within one department, to help embed the recruitment processes developed at stage 3.
- Develop a short paragraph that reflects your approach to flexible hiring, to include in your recruitment advertising.
- Consider where you want to advertise your roles. To attract the widest audience it may be a good idea to include jobsites that specialise in flexible roles, such as [Timewise Jobs](#) and [Working Mums](#).
- Build your message into your career website. Tell the stories of candidates you have hired in flexibly, or provide quotes from them.
- Remember to talk to your recruiters. They need to know they can put forward candidates who are seeking flexibility – they won't, unless they're in the loop.

#### Timewise can help

- Timewise can run a flexible hiring workshop for your talent team or line managers.

#### How to write your flexibility message

Read on for examples of how to advertise flexibility in your job adverts. Also questions to ask yourself, to help form your statement.



# How to offer flexible working options in job adverts

When offering flexible working in a job advert, it's important to put the message across in a way that is honest, positive and clear. And make sure it's positioned in a place candidates will notice it – usually together with other benefits such as bonus, pension, holidays etc.

## Use words precisely

Research with both candidates and businesses shows it's best to be specific about the types of flexible working options you will consider for each job. The phrase 'flexible working' may be interpreted differently by different people, leaving candidates unsure what will be acceptable. It could be taken to mean any of the following and more:

- Home working
- Part-time
- Compressed hours
- Job share
- Flexible start/ finish times
- Flexible shifts

## Sample statements you could use as a starting point:

At BUSINESS NAME we will consider requests for flexible working from day one in the job. For most roles, the following types of flexibility are usually possible: flexible hours, an element of working from home, compressed hours.

Many of our staff work flexibly in many different ways, including part-time. Please talk to us at interview about the flexibility you need. We can't promise to give you exactly what you want, but we do promise not to judge you for asking.

At BUSINESS NAME we welcome candidates who need to work flexibly. This might be reduced hours, remote working, flexible start and finish times, or compressed hours. Please wait until job offer stage before asking us about flexibility, and we will explore what's possible for the role.



# Five questions to help you develop your flexible hiring message

**1** How good is your record on granting employee requests to work flexibly? What positive message can you give about your flexible working culture?

**YOUR ANSWER**

**2** Do you already offer part-time or flexible working options in some of your job ads? What form of words is used, and is it sufficiently clear and positive?

**YOUR ANSWER**

**3** For the winning candidate for a full-time job, would your organisation be willing to offer flexibility from the point of hire?

**YOUR ANSWER**

**4** Can candidates ask about flexibility during the interview process, without fear of prejudice?

**YOUR ANSWER**

**5** What advice would you give to candidates seeking flexibility, who see a full-time job advertised at your organisation?

**YOUR ANSWER**

# Let's talk!

Timewise is the UK's flexible working specialist. Run by a team of innovative thinkers and opinion formers, we support employers to design flexible solutions that attract, retain and develop the best talent. From conducting research and creating programmes for change, to delivering market-leading training and consultancy, we're on a mission to make flex the new normal. We also help match flexible hirers and candidates through our bespoke jobs board, Timewise Jobs.

Contact us on **0207 633 4444**



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TALENT THROUGH FLEXIBILITY