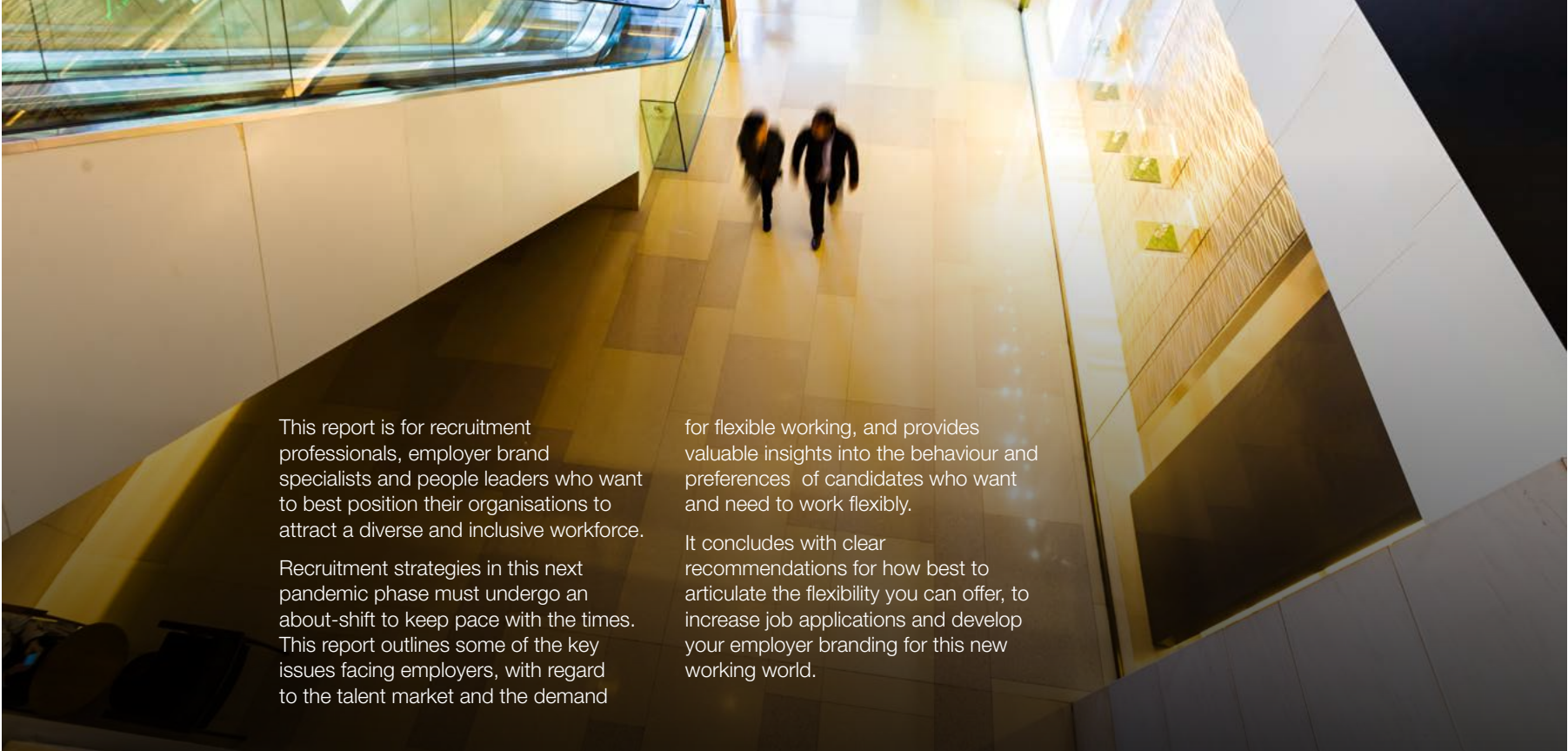


GAINING AN EDGE IN THE FIGHT FOR TALENT

How flexible working can help
you become a recruiter of
choice in the pandemic age

timewiseJOBS
PART-TIME & FLEXIBLE ROLES

A business intelligence report from Timewise Jobs



This report is for recruitment professionals, employer brand specialists and people leaders who want to best position their organisations to attract a diverse and inclusive workforce.

Recruitment strategies in this next pandemic phase must undergo an about-shift to keep pace with the times. This report outlines some of the key issues facing employers, with regard to the talent market and the demand

for flexible working, and provides valuable insights into the behaviour and preferences of candidates who want and need to work flexibly.

It concludes with clear recommendations for how best to articulate the flexibility you can offer, to increase job applications and develop your employer branding for this new working world.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FLEXIBLE WORKING: A KEY TALENT ISSUE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

- There has been a huge mindset change amongst UK workers about flexible working. The high demand that existed before the pandemic is turning into an expectation of flexibility for the long term, especially with regard to home-working.
- Employers have an opportunity to leverage this demand to attract and retain the best, most diverse talent. However, increased openness to flexible working for existing teams has not yet reached the recruitment strategies of businesses.
- In particular, in the rush to adapt to remote working for existing teams, there is a risk that other highly-prized forms of flexibility will be forgotten - especially part-time.
- The pandemic has increased gender inequality, with women being furloughed or made redundant at a greater rate than their male colleagues. As women represent 3 in 4 part-time employees, there is a strong link between flexibility and gender equality.

FLEX CANDIDATE RESEARCH INSIGHTS

- Exclusive research by Timewise Jobs into the attitudes and behaviours of people seeking flexible work, reveals how important it is for employers to offer flexibility during the recruitment process, and to clearly define the specific type of flex involved.
- For many candidates, flexible work is a life-changing preference, rather than simply 'nice to have'. It is more important to them than their salary rate, and their strength of feeling directly influences which job opportunities they will apply for.
- Part-time was the most preferred type of flexible working arrangement amongst our respondents: 80% want to work 4-days a week or fewer. However, over half of these part-time jobseekers would consider a full-time job that offers substantial home-working; so hybrid working is a possible compromise for them.
- Our research suggests that 1 in 10 flexible jobseekers will not apply to a job advert that claims the role is 'open to flexibility'; a further 3 in 10 are cautious about applying. They are unsure what it means, or fear that employers are just paying lip service to flexibility. Instead, employers need to specify the types of flexibility that are possible for the role (part-time, home-working or variable working hours).

ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS

Getting flexible working right, from the point of hire, helps to attract the best possible talent. Timewise recommends that employers:

- Understand your flex-talent audience - who they are, the skills and experience they bring, and the value they place on flex.
- Address all forms of flex, not just remote working – nearly 1 in 4 employees work part-time, and many others are attracted by variable working hours. Managers need to acquire the skills to design flexible jobs.
- Make flexible working a positive part of employer brand – for both existing teams and new talent. 70% of all workers want flex, so it needs to be positioned clearly as part of an organisation's culture.
- Be visible and be clear - offer flexibility prominently in job adverts, and be specific about the type of flex (home-working, part-time, variable hours, or a blend of these). Promising a flexible working culture is not enough.
- Remember that words and actions matter – make sure flexibility messaging is honest and authentic, and follow through by welcoming flex requests that are made by job applicants.

Contents

01

FLEXIBLE WORKING: A
KEY TALENT ISSUE IN THE
POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

02

FLEX CANDIDATE
RESEARCH INSIGHTS

03

ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS

It's clear that the COVID-19 pandemic has accelerated the demand for flexible working in all its forms, and there is a huge opportunity to leverage this demand to attract and retain the best, most diverse, talent. Yet many organisations are still working out their route back to the office, and flexible recruitment appears to be at the bottom of the agenda.

As the workplace opens up again and the battle for the best talent becomes even more intense, businesses need to consider in more detail than ever before, the how much, the when and the where of flexible working.

01 FLEXIBLE WORKING: A KEY TALENT ISSUE IN THE POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

SIGNIFICANT GROWTH IN THE DEMAND FOR REMOTE WORKING

There has been a huge mindset change amongst UK workers about flexible working, accelerated by COVID-19. The high demand for flexibility that existed before the pandemic¹ is turning into an expectation that employees will be able to work flexibly for the long term, especially with regard to remote or home-working. Multiple research studies all point in the same direction:

- At least 13 million people plan to ask for permanent flexible working arrangements once lockdown is lifted. ([Research by Direct Line Insurance](#))
- More than 71% of UK workers say they want flexible options to remain after the crisis has passed. ([Research by Microsoft](#))
- The majority of employees would prefer a hybrid working model to a return to pre-pandemic work patterns. ([McKinsey report](#))
- 9 in 10 millennials want a flexible working week. ([Research by Workthere](#))

HOW ARE EMPLOYERS RESPONDING?

An IOD survey of 600 businesses found that 63% plan to implement hybrid working as lockdown restrictions ease².

However, the increased openness to remote working has not reached the recruitment strategies of businesses. The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index indicated that a meagre 8% of job adverts offer home-working options³.

There is also little evidence of attention being paid to part-time working or variable hours at the point of hire. The Timewise Flexible Jobs Index reported that the dial barely shifted on flexible recruitment during 2020; just 17% of job adverts offered any form of flexibility at the start of the year, and this grew by only a few percentage points to 22% by the end (an increase which was almost entirely accounted for by mentions of home-working). Current indications are that when the 2021 report is released in October, there will be very little change.

- **Nationwide** is to allow 13,000 of its 18,000 UK employees to decide where they work⁴
- **Asda** intends to allow hybrid working for all its office staff⁵
- **PwC** has said it expects staff will come to the office two to three days per week¹⁰.



BUT CURRENT FOCUS ON REMOTE IS JUST PART OF THE STORY

In the rush to adapt to increased remote working, there is a risk that other highly-prized forms of flexibility will be forgotten. 23% of UK employees work part-time⁴, and research suggests that a further 25% of full-time workers would prefer to work part-time if they could⁵. Meanwhile, in sectors where home-working is not possible, pilot studies have demonstrated the value of offering people control over their working patterns in the form of variable hours or flexible shifts⁶. To retain employees, to compete in the talent market, and to meet ED&I objectives, businesses will need to offer more than just remote working.

The people who most need part-time work are women (who represent 76% of part-time employees⁴), and IFS research⁷ from 2020 shows that mothers have been disproportionately hurt by the pandemic (they are 47% more likely to have permanently lost their job or quit, and 14% more likely to have been furloughed, than fathers).

So, the pandemic has increased gender inequality, just as organisations have begun to realise the huge value of having a more inclusive workforce. According to one report by McKinsey, improved gender diversity can improve financial returns by 15%.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

In a post-pandemic world, recruitment strategies will need to consider all forms of flexibility, and not just remote working, if they want to leverage demand and maintain their employer brand differentiation.

Trailblazing businesses are already moving beyond the 'where' people work (remote and hybrid working) to address the more complex demand for 'when' and 'how much' people work. Timewise believes this will become one of the critical factors in how to be an 'employer of choice', successfully competing in the battle to retain and attract diverse and quality talent beyond COVID-19.



Contents

01

FLEXIBLE WORKING: A
KEY TALENT ISSUE IN THE
POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

02

FLEX CANDIDATE
RESEARCH INSIGHTS

03

ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS

02 FLEX CANDIDATE RESEARCH INSIGHTS

With nearly a quarter of the UK's workforce working part-time⁴, and over 70%⁸ wanting some kind of flexible working arrangement, job design and talent strategies should be optimised to attract and retain this diverse pool of talented individuals.

Exclusive research by Timewise Jobs into the attitudes and behaviours of people seeking flexible working arrangements reveals how important it is for employers to visibly offer flexibility during the recruitment process, and to clearly define the specific type of flex that is possible for the role.

The results suggest that many businesses are limiting the application rates of their job adverts and reducing the talent pipeline by not optimising their recruitment strategies.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

The research comprised an online survey with 1,079 candidates registered on Timewise Jobs, a specialist job site for part-time and flexible roles. The research set out to understand more about how attitudes and behaviours impact the user journey of a flexible job seeker. Specifically, it sought to explore whether flex job seekers have 'flex criteria' in mind before they begin a job search and, if so, how this influences their job seeking behaviours.

Flexible and part-time candidates are defined in this research as those who are already working flexibly or are seeking job flexibility, whether that means where, when or how much they work.

Respondents represented a range of occupations, self-defined as senior managers (29%), middle and junior managers (15%), modern professionals (21%), clerical and intermediate occupations (20%) and traditional professional occupations (13%).

FLEXIBILITY COMES FIRST

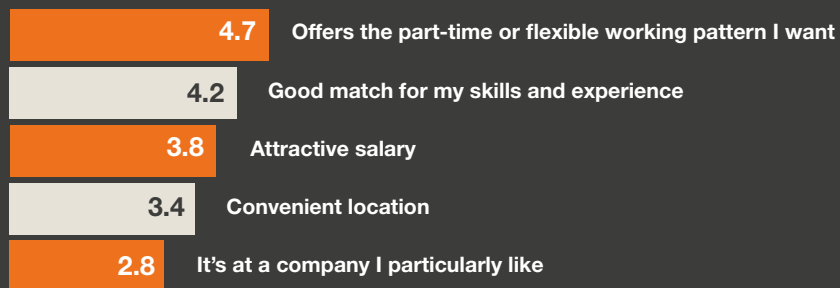
For many candidates, flexible work is a necessity or a life-changing preference, rather than simply 'nice to have'. Their strength of feeling about where, when or how much they want to work directly influences which job opportunities they will consider, how they search and if they will apply.

45% of respondents rated flexible or part-time working as their top criteria when applying for jobs, ahead of location, salary and even whether the job is a good fit for their experiences and skills.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

Candidates' personal flex criteria are not simply important to them; they are the lens through which they see a job opportunity, and the filter through which they read and process job-related information. The survey reinforces just how important it is for employers to understand the mindset of flexible candidates, if they wish to attract and retain this diverse, experienced talent pool.

Priority of factors influencing job application (mean score out of 10)



DEMAND FOR THE THREE MAIN FORMS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

1. HOW MUCH

Timewise definition: any pattern of part-time work equating to less than 4 days/week, including job shares

The 'where' and to some extent the 'when' of flexible working have been much discussed by employer teams during the pandemic. However, 'how much' people can or want to work has received less attention.

Part-time was by far the most preferred type of flexible working arrangement amongst respondents: 80% of them want to work 4-days a week or fewer.

This is a much greater proportion than the 23% of employees who actually work part-time currently⁴. Timewise believe the discrepancy can be explained partly by latent demand – as many as 1 in 4 full-time workers would actually prefer to work part-time if they could do so without jeopardising their career progression⁶. Another factor will be a stronger 'need rather than want' motivation for part-time work, compared to other forms of flexibility, due to a dominant underlying reason of fitting with caring commitments. Both these factors are likely to drive part-time candidates to engage with job sites that specialise in flexible working.



seeking part-time work rated it as being
'very important' or **'essential'**

DEMAND FOR THE THREE MAIN FORMS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

2. WHERE

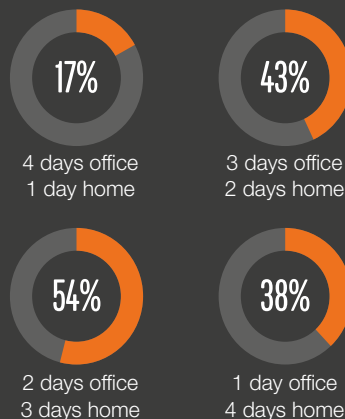
Timewise definition: remote working at any location away from the workplace, often at home

When asked how important it will be to work from home after lockdown, more than two thirds (68%) of respondents said home-working is 'very important' or 'vital' to them, with just 4% of people saying they prefer working in the office all the time.

Interestingly, over half (57%) of the respondents whose first preference is to find a part-time job would consider a full-time job if it offered substantial home-working; it's clearly a workable compromise.

With the pandemic having normalised home-working, 63% of employers are now considering some form of 'hybrid working' rather than a wholesale return to the office⁹. Timewise explored the optimum blend of home-working and office working amongst our jobseekers, and found that 2 days per week in the office was the most popular (54%), while only 17% would apply for a 4 day office/1 day home arrangement.

Home/office blend for which flexible candidates would apply



Note: data excludes jobseekers who would not consider applying for a full-time job

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

Home-working is highly valued by people seeking flexibility, and the majority want to work remotely for most of the working week. Employers who are intending to implement hybrid working patterns will benefit by making this a visible part of their employer brand, and by explaining their position on home-working in job adverts.

DEMAND FOR THE THREE MAIN FORMS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

3. WHEN

Timewise definition: control of schedule of working hours (for example compressed hours, late start and early finish times, input into a shift rota)

More than half the respondents in the research (57%) rated having flexibility over what times they work as 'very important' or 'essential'.

Other research by Timewise, in the NHS and the construction sector⁶, has shown that having input into timetables is important for employees, providing a sense of control and enhancing wellbeing. It's a win-win for employers, as the research also found a strong correlation between 'when' flexibility and the motivation of workers, contributing to greater productivity and potentially to improved retention.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

Flexibility over when people work is highly sought after, especially by younger workers. However, it needs to be positioned as an employee benefit, and not conflated with an 'always on' culture; particularly because home-working during the pandemic has led to a blurring of the lines between work and non-work time.



TALENT READY TO MOVE NOW

Despite a general view that people may be putting off their next career move because of the pandemic, the research reveals that many flex candidates are ready to make a move right now.

Just 9% of respondents stated they are waiting until lockdown ends and/or the economy is more stable. The majority (79%) were open to an immediate career move (39% were actively job searching, while 40% were passive job seekers who would apply for the ideal job if they saw it).

79% 

of surveyed flex candidates were open to an immediate career move

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

The battleground for talent looks set to become increasingly challenging as we emerge from the pandemic. There is much talk of low job application rates, partly attributed to the exodus from the UK of many European nationals.

With existing full-time staff likely to seek more flexibility, and nearly 8 in 10 of Timewise's flexible jobseekers open to a career move, clear flexible working messaging across internal and external channels will be vital in helping employers gain cut-through.



HOW FLEX CANDIDATES SEARCH FOR JOBS

The challenge for recruiters to stand out to flex candidates

To begin their job search, flexible candidates use a portfolio of recruitment channels and a range of different keyword searches. For employers and recruitment specialists, channel fragmentation and search behaviour make it difficult to build employer brand and recruitment campaigns that are relevant, have cut through, and engage flex candidates.

The majority of flexible candidates use LinkedIn (62%) and the large national job sites (62%) when searching, in conjunction with niche flexible working job sites (80%) and work type specialist sites (46%). Recruitment agencies (36%) and networks of friends and old colleagues (32%) also play a strong part in a candidate's search journey.

Candidates search for jobs using a variety of keywords, with role type being the most popular (65%), followed by using a mix of keywords for flexibility and role type (56%) and searching by flexible working terms alone, for example simply 'part-time jobs' or 'home-working jobs' (46%).

However, their searches will yield few results: the annual Timewise Flexible Jobs Index shows that 4 in 5 job adverts make no mention of flexible working. Of the few that do, around a third provide only a generic message along the lines that 'flexible working options are possible'. This lack of clarity is problematic – many flex candidates are specifically seeking home-working or part-time work, and need the reassurance of seeing the particular type of flex mentioned.

In the absence of clearly worded flexible jobs to apply for, 1 in 5 respondents (20%) go to the trouble of researching to find employers with a good reputation for flexibility, and then follow their career sites or write speculatively to them.

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

To address the needs of flex candidate audiences, employers must achieve a delicate balance between building flex credentials through employer brand messaging and designing jobs that allow for flexibility. Being explicit about the specific forms of flexibility in their recruitment adverts (whether how much, where or when) will then give them 'stand out' to flex candidates.



HOW FLEX CANDIDATES CHOOSE WHICH JOBS TO APPLY FOR

Candidate flex criteria acts as a barrier to their interest in many job adverts

Issues of distrust, confusion over flex terminology and risk vs reward calculations all affect how candidates assess job adverts. Similarly, a lack of visibility or clarity around the flexibility on offer makes them less likely to consider it. Ultimately, a flex candidate's likelihood to apply depends strongly on how explicitly the job advert talks about flexibility.

1. The risk of failing to communicate at all about flexibility

When flex candidates see a suitable job advert that is full-time, but has no mention of flexible working options, the research suggests that 2 in 5 simply won't apply (40%). Given that over 70%⁸ of the workforce want flexibility, this is a significant lost opportunity for recruiters. It's also an unnecessary one, as previous research from Timewise has found that 9 in 10 managers¹⁰ would be happy to negotiate flex for the right candidate; so failing to say so upfront simply narrows the talent pool.

2. The risk of generic, unclear references to flexible working

Recruiters whose job adverts contain generic messages saying they are open to 'flexible working options' fare a little better: more than half of respondents (55%) said they would apply, hoping to negotiate their specific flexible pattern at a later stage. However, the remainder would either research the employer before applying (33%), or not apply at all (12%).

3. The need for high visibility of the flex message

For 3 in 10 flex candidates (29%), the flexibility has to be mentioned in the job title or first few sentences of the job advert; if it isn't, they are likely to simply skip past the advert.

4. The need for clarity, referencing specific forms of flexibility

Amongst those candidates (45% of respondents) who showed reluctance to apply for full-time jobs that generically offer flexible working options, three reasons dominate:

- **Confusion over terminology:** Candidates were unclear about what the messaging means, with many thinking 'flexible working' did not include part-time (53%) or home-working (23%).

- **Effort vs reward:** Candidates didn't want to waste their time applying, as the messaging did not make it clear which forms of flexibility would be possible (51%).
- **Distrust:** Candidates were suspicious of generic messaging, thinking employers were just paying lip service to flexible working (37%) or that they might discriminate against a candidate who requested a particular work pattern (35%).

IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS

The research suggests that the candidate pipeline is significantly affected by what the advert says or doesn't say about flexible working. Employers who put extra effort into ensuring good job design and clear communication will increase their potential to attract candidates. Recruiters should try to offer some sort of flex, even with full-time roles, and to explicitly outline the type of flexibility on offer.

Contents

01

FLEXIBLE WORKING: A
KEY TALENT ISSUE IN THE
POST-PANDEMIC WORLD

02

FLEX CANDIDATE
RESEARCH INSIGHTS

03

ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS

03 ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR YOUR RECRUITMENT STRATEGY?

Getting flexible working right, from the point of hire, helps employers attract the best possible talent; not getting it right restricts the talent pool. Yet, at the moment, most employers are still neglecting the recruitment process even though they are adapting to increased flexible working for their existing workforce.

To ensure an optimal recruitment strategy that maximises the potential pool of quality, flexible and part-time candidates, Timewise recommends that you:

- 1 UNDERSTAND YOUR FLEX-TALENT AUDIENCE
- 2 ADDRESS ALL FORMS OF FLEX, NOT JUST REMOTE WORKING
- 3 MAKE FLEXIBLE WORKING A POSITIVE PART OF YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND
- 4 BE VISIBLE AND BE CLEAR
- 5 REMEMBER THAT WORDS AND ACTIONS MATTER

03 ACTIONS FOR SUCCESS

1 UNDERSTAND YOUR FLEX-TALENT AUDIENCE

Candidates seeking flexible work often do so out of genuine need (such as caring obligations) or a very clear sense of the work-life balance they want. Many of them are highly skilled, experienced, mature workers who will be a great asset to a business. Moreover, reaching out to them will also support your diversity and inclusion strategies, as they are predominantly women, people with disabilities or health concerns, and older workers.

But to reach this experienced, diverse talent pool, your job adverts must offer flexible working clearly and visibly. Otherwise, flex-seeking candidates are likely to de-select your roles during their job search, as they value flexibility above all other job factors, even salary.

2 ADDRESS ALL FORMS OF FLEX, NOT JUST REMOTE WORKING

The huge recent focus on home-working has detracted attention from part-time work, which has always been the most sought-after form of flexibility, and is still in demand. 23% of UK employees work part-time, and it remains highly prized by parents and carers in particular. Meanwhile, many younger workers (and, increasingly, all workers), are seeking variable working hours to suit their lifestyle, leisure activities and preferred commuting times.

You therefore need to ensure that your managers understand good job design, and the appropriateness of part-time or variable hours arrangements (as well as remote) to different roles. You then need to reflect what is possible in your recruitment strategies, and articulate the options clearly in your job adverts.

3 MAKE FLEXIBLE WORKING A POSITIVE PART OF YOUR EMPLOYER BRAND

The battle for quality talent is set to become fiercer than ever as we emerge from lockdown restrictions, and employer brand saliency has never been more crucial. Over 70% of all staff now want some form of flex, which means they are no longer a niche group; they are the majority of your existing workforce and future talent pipeline.

So firstly, make sure your c-suite has developed a clear framework for flexible working, and that managers have been trained both to implement it, and to manage flexible teams. Then support this activity by making it a priority in your employer brand strategy, communicating your flexible working policies and practices clearly to existing and new talent.



Channel fragmentation means you need to advertise across the right mix of channels with relevant, engaging content. Recruitment campaigns that talk in generic terms about flexible working cultures and arrangements are likely to reduce the distinctiveness and impact of an employer brand.

The best way to appeal to the maximum number of candidates is to avoid 'flex washing'; instead, be as explicit as you can at every stage about the specific forms of flexibility a role can offer. To achieve initial cut through, you also need to include highly visible flex messaging, as early as possible in your job adverts.



If you cannot clearly communicate the different forms of possible flexibility, then your brand is in danger of being inauthentic. Our research has shown that many flexible candidates distrust generic promises of a flexible working culture - they don't understand what types of flexibility are included, and think employers are simply ticking boxes to try to look good.

Finally, you will need to follow through on your word, and be open to reasonable requests for flexibility; any inkling that your application process discriminated against flexible workers would damage your employer brand. Instead, inspire your managers to be positive about the benefits of flexible working, and welcoming of flexible talent. And when you hire flexibly, be sure to shout loudly about it – successful role modelling is a great way to encourage further action and reinforce your brand values.

A CHECKLIST FOR SUCCESS:

- ✓ Agree a flexible working framework with the leadership team
- ✓ Invest in the right training to empower your managers
- ✓ Practice good job design built around team context, considering all flexible options
- ✓ Invest in employee brand communications, being explicit about flexible working
- ✓ Understand the job seeker journey and be specific in job adverts about the types of flex
- ✓ Ensure an ongoing programme of optimisation around content and message hierarchy
- ✓ Be authentic, be relevant and be clear

In a world where environmental, social and governance issues (ESG) have increasing influence on how organisations are valued by investors and perceived by internal and external stakeholders, ‘getting flexible working right’ is critical. An employer’s flexible working culture matters to their employee community, their extended supply chain community, and their consumer audience. It is a complex, multi-dimensional issue that impacts on business success, and is no longer a ‘nice to have’.

1. Found, for example by CIPD https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/uk-working-lives-summary-2019-v1_tcm18-58584.pdf and by Timewise https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Flexible_working_Talent_Imperative.pdf
2. <https://www.iod.com/news-campaigns/news/articles/iod-Directors-look-to-hybrid-working-for-the-future>
3. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/flexible-jobs-index/>
4. ONS data for March-May 2021, available here: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/employmentandlabourmarket/peopleinwork/employmentandemployeetypes/datasets/fulltimeparttimeandtemporaryworkersseasonallyadjustedemp01sa>
5. https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Flexible_working_Talent_Imperative.pdf
6. Results of pilot studies in the construction sector <https://timewise.co.uk/article/making-construction-a-great-place-to-work-can-flexible-working-help/> and the NHS <https://timewise.co.uk/article/improving-nurses-work-life-balance>.
7. <https://ifs.org.uk/publications/14861>
8. <https://www.computerweekly.com/news/252498989/More-than-two-thirds-of-staff-want-flexible-working-to-stay>
9. <https://www.iod.com/news-campaigns/news/articles/iod-Directors-look-to-hybrid-working-for-the-future>
10. <https://timewise.co.uk/article/a-flexible-future-for-britain/>

timewiseJOBS PART-TIME & FLEXIBLE ROLES

Timewise Jobs is a UK jobs board, specialising in professional part-time and flexible roles for skilled and experienced candidates. It is part of the Timewise group, which works to unlock the flexible jobs market in the UK by sharing market insights on flexible working and flexible hiring. Timewise also delivers consultancy to help businesses attract and develop the best talent.

0330 355 3555

team@timewisejobs.co.uk