

HOW AND WHEN TO ASK FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

A Timewise toolkit for candidates in Scotland

What this timewise toolkit will give you

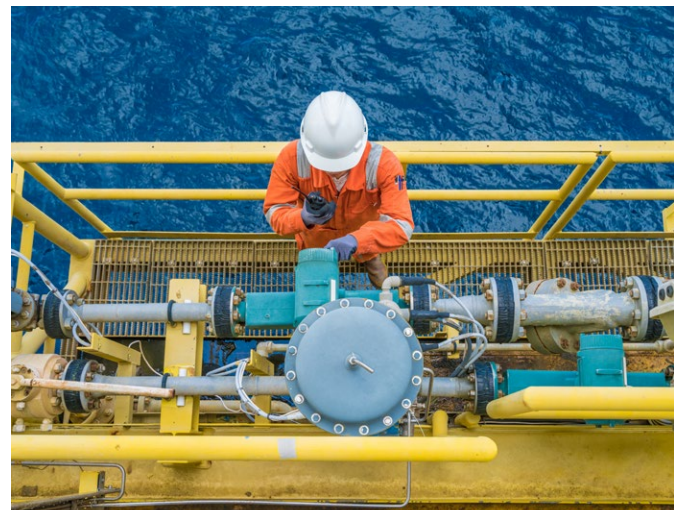
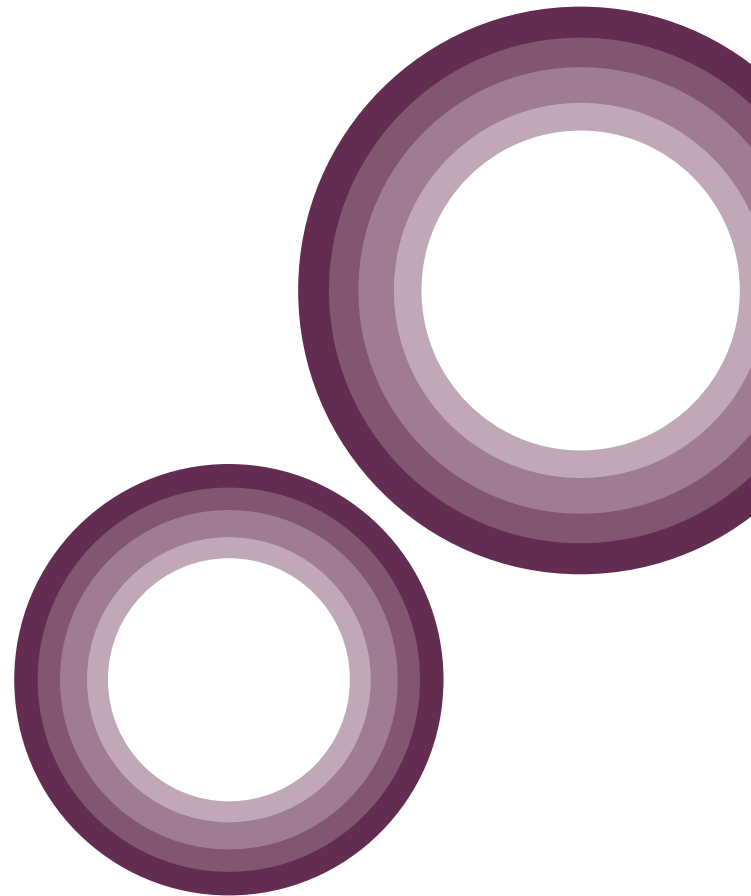
There's no question that the Covid-19 pandemic has thrown flexible working into the spotlight, and shifted attitudes in a way that is good news for candidates.

Enforced periods of remote working have bust some long-held myths about what jobs can and can't be done from home. And as office-based companies start to encourage people back in, it looks as if a hybrid model – in which employees can work part of their week remotely – will be widely adopted.

However, this doesn't mean that people who want or need to flex are pushing at an open door. Some employers remain unwilling to agree to flexible working; others may consider remote working, but be less keen on other arrangements (including part-time). So when you're applying for a job, it's still worth making every effort to discuss your preferences in the right way, at the right time.

This Timewise Toolkit is a practical guide that will help you do just that. It takes you through the different processes for WHEN to ask, depending on the level of flexible working that has been stated in the job advert. And it then sets out HOW to ask in a way that improves your chances of getting the arrangement you're looking for.

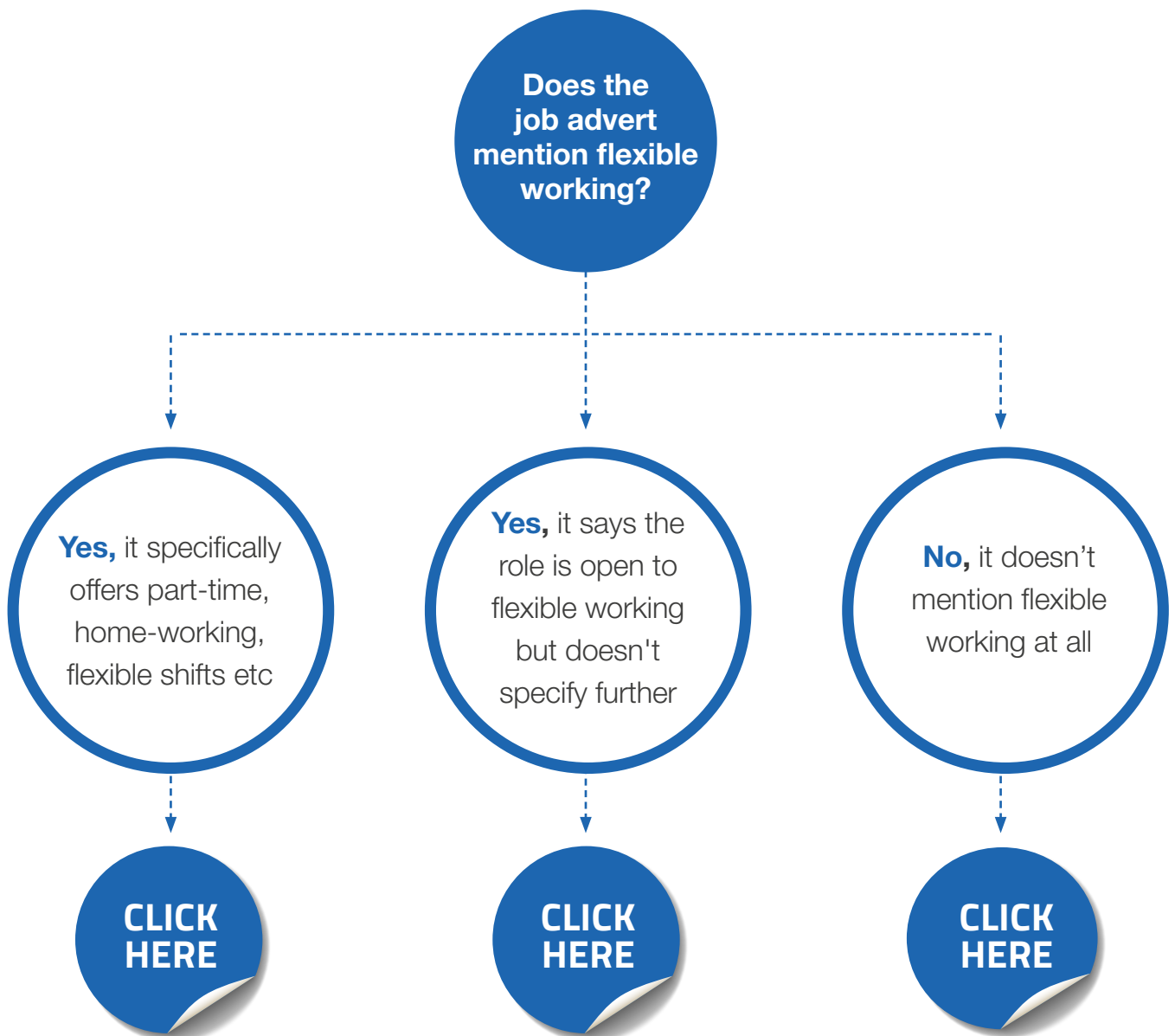
We hope you find it useful.



When to ask for flex: the starting point

When it comes to raising your preferences with a prospective employer, timing is everything. But there's no one-size-fits-all answer; it all depends on whether the job has been advertised with flexible options.

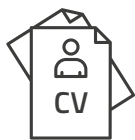
This chart is a starting point for how to navigate the process, depending on the wording of the job ad. You'll then find more detail for each scenario on the following pages.



When to ask: roles advertised with specific flexibility

If the job advert mentions a specific kind of flexibility, whether that's remote working, part-time, flexible shifts or variable working hours, much of the work is done for you. It means the employer has assessed the requirements of the role, and concluded that it can be done on a flexible basis.

However, that doesn't mean you should pile straight in and ask about flexible working; that won't make you stand out as the best person for the job. Instead, you should focus on demonstrating why they should hire you. Here are our dos and don'ts.



IN YOUR CV AND COVER LETTER?

NO

Use your application to focus on your skills and experience. Make sure you tailor it to the job spec; sending out a generic letter that doesn't reference the skills the employer is looking for is less likely to get you onto their shortlist.



AT INTERVIEW?

MAYBE

Again, we'd advise focusing on selling yourself, and persuading the employer that you'd do a fantastic job; that will make them more likely to offer you the role.

However, if you feel the interview has gone well, you could ask an open question, such as "Could you explain a bit about how you see flexibility working within this role?"



WHAT IF THEY ASK YOU?

OF COURSE

Given that the role has been clearly advertised as flexible, the employer might well ask you about your preferences. If they do, our advice would be to give a straight answer, but also say that you'd be willing to flex your arrangement to match the needs of the business.



AT JOB OFFER?

YES

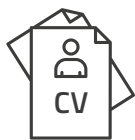
If you haven't mentioned it at interview, now is the time. Again, we'd recommend starting the conversation with an open question, rather than laying down a set of demands. For example, for shift-based flexibility, you could ask 'how much advance notice is usually given when agreeing shift times?'

Click [HERE](#) for advice on HOW to ask for flex

When to ask: roles advertised with potential for flexibility

Some job adverts include a vague reference to flexible working, such as ‘Open to flexibility’ or ‘We are willing to consider flexible options for the right candidate’. And while that’s better than not mentioning flexibility at all, it does mean you need to be more careful about when to ask.

You’ll be in a stronger position to discuss your preferences if they’ve decided you’re the person they want to hire, so getting to that point should be your focus. Here’s how we suggest you approach it.



IN YOUR CV AND COVER LETTER?

NO

At this stage in the application, your focus should be on highlighting your skills and experience. You’re more likely to be shortlisted if you tailor your application to the points set out in the job spec; a generic letter that doesn’t reference the skills they want is unlikely to get you very far.



AT INTERVIEW?

POSSIBLY

Given that the advert only loosely mentions flex, we’d advise using this time to persuade the interviewer that you’re an exceptional candidate, and boost your chances of being offered the job.

However, if you feel the interview has gone really well, you could introduce the topic through an open question, such as “How is flexible working approached within your organisation?”



WHAT IF THEY ASK YOU?

OF COURSE

It’s possible that the employer might ask you whether you would like to work flexibly at some point. Our advice would be to answer honestly, but briefly, with a clear willingness to be flexible in return. Explaining in detail why you want to flex, or setting out your must-haves, is unlikely to go down well.



AT JOB OFFER?

YES

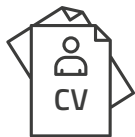
In our view, this is the best time to bring up the subject. Again, start with an open question, such as “Could you explain a bit about how you see flexibility working within this role?”

Click **HERE**
for advice on
HOW to ask
for flex

When to ask: roles advertised with no mention of flexibility

If a job advert doesn't mention flexible working at all, don't rule out applying; now, more than ever, the employer might be willing to consider flexible working for the right candidate.

We'd recommend doing some research into the company's flexible working record first, as well as thinking through whether you could actually fulfil the role within the arrangement you're seeking. If you then decide to apply, here's our suggested approach.



IN YOUR CV AND COVER LETTER?

NO

If flex isn't mentioned in the advert, there's no point in mentioning it in your application. It's unlikely to be the employer's priority, and it's not the way to persuade them that you're a brilliant candidate.

Instead, focus on selling yourself by setting out your skills and experience, making sure you tailor your application to match the requirements set out in the job spec.



AT INTERVIEW?

NO

Again, the fact that the job advert hasn't mentioned flexible working means that the interview probably isn't the right time to ask.

You don't want the employer to remember you as the 'flexible' candidate; you want them to think you're the best person for the job. So focus on winning them over and showing how you'd deliver.



WHAT IF THEY ASK YOU?

OF COURSE

It's unlikely that the employer would proactively ask you whether you want to work flexibly. But if they do, we'd recommend giving an honest, but open answer, saying that it is something you would be interested in pursuing further if you are offered the job.



AT JOB OFFER?

YES

Once you've been offered the job, you can make your request with confidence. However, it's important to make it a two-way conversation. We'd suggest starting with an open question such as "Is there any scope for this role to be carried out on a flexible basis?"

Click **HERE**
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How to ask

Once you've worked out when to ask about flexibility, the next step is to think through how to discuss it.

The fact is, your prospective employer is unlikely to be very interested in why flex is good for you. What they would rather hear is the 'business case' for your preferred arrangement; that is, how letting you work that way could benefit the organisation.



THREE TIPS FOR CREATING A BUSINESS CASE

- **Reflect on past achievements.** Note down examples of how you have succeeded in a previous flexible role. If you haven't worked flexibly before, other people's success stories may inspire you.
- **Assess the upside of your flex preference.** For example, asking to work part-time could free up some budget to be spent elsewhere; working from home could help you focus on key tasks.
- **Have some stats up your sleeve.** Research has shown that working flexibly supports motivation and wellbeing and reduces absence, as well as supporting productivity.

By thinking all this through in advance, you'll be better prepared to explain how working flexibly will help you do a brilliant job.

DISCUSS, DON'T DEMAND

Don't forget, it's not just what you say, but how you say it that matters. So when the time comes, make sure you're having a two-way conversation rather than listing a set of demands. For example:

- **Ask open questions, rather than making statements.** You'll find some examples of good questions to ask at specific times on the previous pages.
- **Take the emotion out of your argument.** However important flex may be to you, you need to discuss it in a calm, business-like manner.
- **Be clear that you're willing to compromise.** Flex works best when it works both ways, so be prepared to collaborate to find a mutually beneficial solution.

In the end, if the employer can't offer you the flex you need, and it's not possible to find a compromise, it might not be the right job for you. So just give it your best shot, and see what unfolds.