

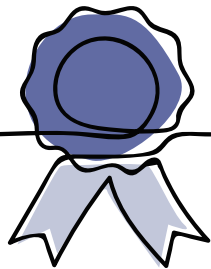


Supporting **your team** to **work flexibly**

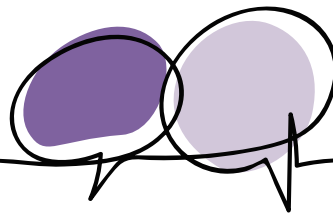
A line manager's guide



We are **compassionate** and **inclusive**



We are **recognised** and **rewarded**



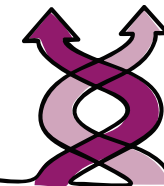
We each have **a voice that counts**



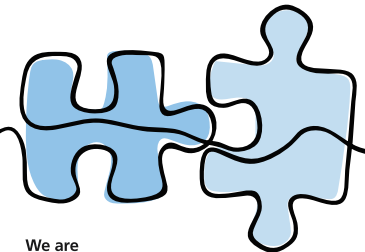
We are **safe** and **healthy**



We are **always learning**



We work **flexibly**



We are **a team**

Foreword

The NHS has made a clear commitment to flexible working, both in the NHS People Plan and the People Promise. This commitment supports our vision to be a modern and model employer, actively supporting the health and wellbeing of our people.

The COVID-19 pandemic has particularly focused minds on remote working as a flexible working solution. However we must continue to build on a whole range of solutions to be at the forefront of working in new and flexible ways that work well for individuals and their teams and deliver for the NHS.

There is a great deal of speculation about what the world of work will look like in three, five or 10 years' time. While we can't predict exactly what this will mean, it is clear we are experiencing an emerging blend of remote and flexible working practices that look like they are here to stay.

Evidence suggests leaders are increasingly of the view that giving employees greater control over how they work can benefit everyone involved. Employees are proving

that flexibility and productivity can be achieved together. We know many of our people in the NHS go on to bank rotas, become locums, or leave us altogether because they are not offered the flexibility they need to combine work with their personal commitments or health and wellbeing needs. We need to change so we can support and retain our dedicated and experienced employees throughout their careers, as well as attract new talent.

NHS England and NHS Improvement, Timewise and the NHS Staff Council have worked in partnership to create this guide to help you explore the opportunities of working more flexibly, lead flexible teams, and put structures and processes in place to deliver future-fit workplaces. It is designed to support your own organisational policy on flexible working, so you might want to have that to hand as you explore this guide.

This guide is for all line managers working in the NHS. It is intended to complement the draft flexible working definition and principles published by NHS England and NHS Improvement and the NHS Terms and Conditions Handbook for England and Wales.

Finally, we want you to turn thinking about flexibility on its head and start from a position of 'yes'. In the People Plan we talk about the ambition to work flexibly by default; working flexibly needs to become 'simply the way we work' in the NHS.

We hope you find the guide helpful. We'd love to hear how you've used it.

**NHS England and NHS Improvement
Timewise
NHS Staff Council**

What this guide covers

Inside this guide, you'll find a combination of guidance and practical support as follows:

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Introduction

The **NHS People Plan** puts our people at the front and centre of the NHS. It includes 10 commitments relating to flexible working, with the aim of supporting the wellbeing of our people.

NHS England and NHS Improvement have developed a working definition of and principles for flexible working. The definition aims to support the shared and common understanding of flexible working that we need to achieve fair, equitable and consistent practice. The principles apply to all of us working in the NHS, and look to guide the ethos and values that should make flexible working become 'simply how we work', putting the NHS front and centre as a modern, flexible employer. They form a foundation for flexible working, giving each NHS organisation the ability to innovate and test out local policy approaches against them, and to embed and grow strong flexible working for their workforce. You will find the definition and principles on the [we work flexibly](#) web page.

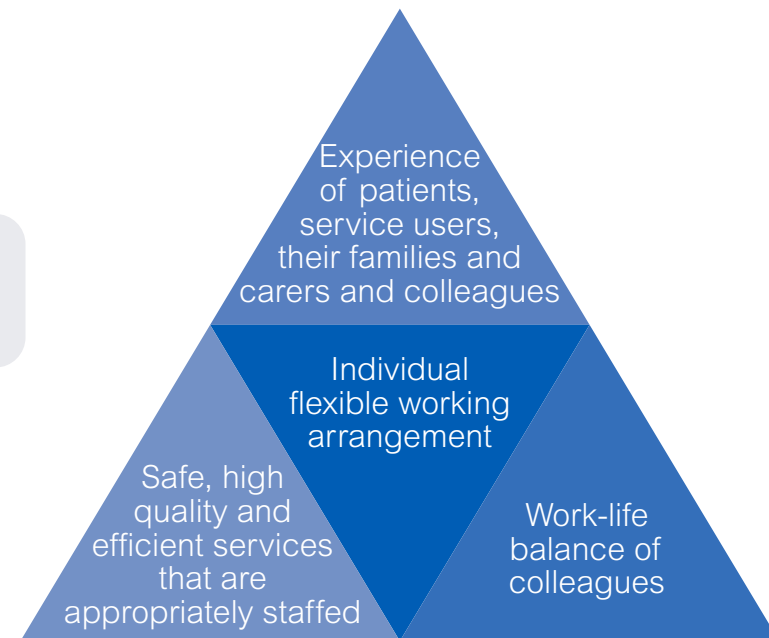
You may hear the terms flexible working, agile, smart and remote working used interchangeably, and they can mean different things to different people. For clarity and consistency, the term flexible working has been used throughout this document.

Good flexible working arrangements should balance the needs of the individual with three key organisational factors:

- **Patient/service user and staff experience.**
- **Service delivery.**
- **Work-life balance of colleagues.**

For simplicity, the term 'manager' is used throughout to refer to those who have direct managerial or educational responsibility for a particular individual. This may include, but is not limited to, line managers and supervisors

and trainers. The term "individual" is used to refer to employees and workers on a permanent or fixed term NHS Senior Manager, Agenda for Change and Medical and Dental contracts within England.



The flexible working definition and principles and section 33 of the NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook for England and Wales both set out the right to request flexible working from day one of employment, regardless of the reason for the request, and do not specify a limit on the number of requests that can be made.

For those covered by the NHS Terms and Conditions Handbook, these form part of the employment contract which now also includes the following **provisions**:

- Organisations must keep a central overview of how requests are being handled and check for fairness and equality of outcomes.
- Where line managers and colleagues haven't been able to find a solution, there is a further escalation stage to check for other suitable options that could be considered. This is so that embedding flexibility becomes a whole organisation effort and line managers have support to make this happen in their teams.
- Line managers should have regular conversations with direct reports – including in one-to-one conversations – about working flexibly without waiting for them to make a formal request.

These changes were designed to embed a positive culture of flexible working in the NHS and help address wellbeing and work-life balance for NHS staff. We also hope they will help to keep valuable and experienced staff working in the NHS while attracting new staff from a wide talent pool.

As a line manager, you are encouraged to discuss flexible working with your direct reports during your regular health and wellbeing conversations, appraisals, job plans and/or your one-to-one discussions. Picking up conversations about flexible working in these more informal settings often enables solutions to be reached through exploration and dialogue. This may mean a formal request is not required or if it is, some of the groundwork will have been laid in advance. This will require you to have a conversation to explore what's important to the individual and what options might work based on their suggestions or any alternatives you identify together.

Our NHS people have the right to request flexible working from day one of employment.

Read Section 33 of the NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook for full details.

Why flexible working matters more than ever

It's worth noting that flexible working is so much more than a perk for employees. Correctly implemented, it can help solve a number of core business issues, including:



TALENT ATTRACTION

87% of people either work flexibly already or wish they could.

92% of millennials identify flexibility as a top priority.



RETENTION AND MOTIVATION

75% of employers say that flexible working has a positive effect on retention and **73%** say it improves staff motivation.



INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

Flexible working is a key enabler for many carers, parents, older workers and those with health conditions.



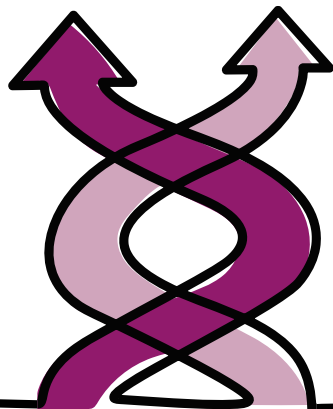
PERFORMANCE

97% of managers said the quantity of work improved or stayed the same. **93%** of managers said the same about work quality.



BUSINESS COSTS

Over **70,000** people left NHS employment citing work-life balance addressing this would reduce our agency spend.



Supportive line management is critical to enabling a culture that promotes effective flexible working practices.

As a line manager, consider how you can best support and facilitate flexible working for your staff. Consider:

- How do you start from a point of 'yes' to explore what is possible?
- How do you listen, accommodate and respond with balance and compassion?
- How do you work with your staff to provide a solution that meets their needs and that of the service and the patients they support?
- How do you, as a line manager, adapt the way individuals and teams work to accommodate the many options available?
- How do you make all team members feel that they are making a valuable contribution?

We know that coming to an appropriate solution can take time and you are not expected to have all the answers. You might find it useful to have conversations with colleagues (within and outside of your organisation) who have made flexible working work for them and their teams to explore ideas and the art of the possible.

You will also still have to say 'no' to some requests that cannot be accommodated. How can you do that with compassion having explored all options? Remember that an individual does not need to give you a reason for wanting to work flexibly. Flexible working should be available for all staff groups and you should particularly have due regard for applications where the individual has additional protections from the Equality Act 2010 (for example: to meet childcare needs; as an adjustment to support a disability; or to meet religious requirements).

In the NHS, flexible working arrangements may be informal or formal, be implemented in shift and non-shift-based roles and put in place on a short or long-term basis.

Many flexible working arrangements can be agreed informally, between you and a team member without the need for formal contractual changes. However, do seek the advice of your HR representative or equivalent management arrangement in line with your own policies and procedures; some arrangements may require contractual variation.



The key principle at the heart of successful flexible job design

The key principle at the heart of getting flexible working right is finding a working pattern that works for the organisation/service, the team and the individual. You need to explore what your employee needs are, what your service needs are, and to identify options where they can both be met.

In terms of exploring these options, it is helpful to consider:

- **WHEN** the work needs to be done.
- **WHERE** the work needs to be done.
- **HOW** work is planned and undertaken.

We will cover each of these points individually in the next few sections.

As a starting point, ask your team 'are there any changes we could make to your working patterns to help you manage commitments outside of work?' Read the [health and wellbeing conservations](#) guidance to help you plan your approach.

"We have used Listening into Action in our trust to engage our teams with the topic of flexible working in terms of how it works for them as individuals but also how we work together as teams.

"We encouraged them to come up with ideas and their ideas were brilliant and we have been able to adopt them. For example, across our admin teams, rather than everyone working 8.30am-5pm, we now have people starting earlier or finishing later. This means we are able to offer support across all services early until late.

"This has improved how we deliver to patients and how we support medical and nursing teams.

"Flexible working has so many benefits to the individual but so many benefits to our services in terms of what it offers. The big consequence of all this is that the service we offer our patients becomes richer and more diverse".

**Nick Whitehead, Service Manager,
Chesterfield Royal Hospital
NHS Foundation Trust**

Flexing the **WHEN:** finding a match

‘When-based’ flexibility refers to patterns in which the working day, week or year is adjusted. This includes patterns such as flexi-time, compressed hours and annualised hours.

It could include working reduced hours, such as working fewer days, shorter days, term-time only, job sharing and job splitting.

Considerations

We don’t know for sure what the situation will be post COVID-19, but it might be that some people will be encouraged to travel at non-peak times, as well as to continue to make use of home working. Flexibility around when people work their hours is also a key enabler in terms of managing outside work interests and commitments.



You can help individuals balance their work and personal needs by clearly defining your expectations and any fixed commitments for each role.

These are some of the points to consider:

- What are the expectations of your patients/service users in terms of response time?
- Are there core times when people need to attend key meetings or see patients?
- Are there any important deadlines to be met?
- Are there key meetings during the week that should be attended?
- Can anyone else provide cover if the individual is unavailable at certain times?
- Can you use technology to support flexible working in different ways, and to keep people involved and informed?

Flexing the **WHEN**: finding a match (continued)

Part-time considerations

Job design is critical when considering any role, but particularly important to part-time working.

Some roles will naturally be easier to reduce – for example by reducing the number of clinics or projects – but for other roles it is important to identify how the role can be reduced, either by reducing the workload or identifying who else could do the work.

It is important to ensure the same development and stretch opportunities are given to part-time workers, or those working at different times, to ensure they are not disadvantaged by not being around every day.

It is also important to ensure these staff are not missing out on receiving key communications.

Reduce workload

- What is the workload right now?
- Can any activities be stopped?
- Can deadlines/deliverables be reduced or delayed?

Find alternative resource

- Are other members of the team willing and able to support aspects of the work without it becoming a burden to them? For example, is there an opportunity to support personal/career development?
- Could a job share, or job split, be formed? Is there anyone else in scope?
- Do you need to recruit backfill and how quickly can that be actioned?



Flexing the **WHERE:** making remote working work

While many of our NHS roles have to be undertaken in a fixed location, the COVID-19 pandemic illustrated that a surprising number of roles can embrace remote working – including working from home. It has become a new normal for many people and has given us an introduction to remote working principles and practices.

Considerations

Here are some questions to consider to ensure you have the right approach to remote working:

- Who are your patients/colleagues and what do they need/expect by way of presence?
- What are the benefits to your patients from remote or virtual working? (eg they don't need to travel to the service or take time away from their work/caring responsibilities).
- How will you move away from presenteeism as a traditional measure of performance and towards measuring performance in an outcomes-based way?
- How often does the whole team need to be physically together, in the same room? Double-check that this based on reality, not on one person's perception/comfort levels.
- Which activities are suited to remote working? Which require presence in a physical location such as an office, ward or GP practice?
- Are there any health and safety considerations?
- What equipment will staff working remotely need?
- How will the team communicate and share knowledge?
- What practices have you adopted/could you adopt which support team cohesion, health and wellbeing?
- How can you ensure regular feedback and improvement focus, about performance, health and wellbeing and ways of working?

Flexing the **WHERE:** making remote working work (continued)



Managing remote team members

Many teams expect to work in a more remote or hybrid way in the future.

Managing a more remote team does require more planning to ensure things work smoothly.

Here are our top tips:

- ✓ Spend time with your team defining what 'good' looks like to ensure that you all agree it together and have a shared clarity (remember to use an outcomes-based approach).
- ✓ Plan and stick to a schedule of essential team meeting times and support everyone to attend, using technology and video conferencing solutions if these work for the team. Establish where people can flex their arrangements to attend if deemed essential.
- ✓ Use a range of communication tools and techniques to keep in touch, so that individuals have a sense of belonging, and can still get involved and understand the context of their work.
- ✓ Build in time for small talk, as it is important for relationship building and team cohesion.
- ✓ Pass on plenty of praise for a job well done, as remote workers often miss out on this type of contact.
- ✓ Make sure you deal with any concerns you may have in a timely and open manner, ensuring this does not compromise or affect others in the team who also work flexibly.

Flexing the **HOW:** making it work across all roles

Other ways to support flexible working

While many NHS roles can be done remotely or with flexible hours, patient-facing roles may require people to be present in specific locations at specific times.

We want to encourage all managers to be open-minded when it comes to considering creative ways to allow flexibility. There may still be options for working different hours and working remotely for certain activities.

Here are some productive examples we have seen in shift-based, patient-facing roles.

Holding one-to-one appointments and clinics via phone or video conferencing, to allow patients to be seen remotely.

Using e-rostering to allow teams greater choice and input into scheduling.

Splitting shifts between two workers.

Using technical, remote solutions for activities such as training and personal development.

Removing some of the 'rules' which have been applied locally to rostering but restrict individual choice eg to allow a 'nights only' pattern or working most weekends.

Creating a '10-2' shift, to provide cover during the busiest period on a ward, while also being an attractive shift for someone who wants to work part-time.

Flexing the **HOW:** making it work across all roles (continued)

Case study: Birmingham Children's Hospital

The trust started piloting team-based rostering in 2018, with Timewise support.

- **How does team-based rostering work in practice in your trust?**

We ask our staff to complete a form of their working preferences, any restrictions, set days off, clubs they attend, etc. We then record this information in our roster. For any changes or updates, we ask the staff member to update their form and make us aware so we can make changes. It is a working document.

- **What are benefits for the service?**

It has allowed us to look at shift patterns differently, enabling us to break the 'rules' and has sometimes helped us fill outstanding shifts. Also, happier staff means fewer shift swaps.

- **Are there any downsides?**

Depending on what staff are asking for, your options can be more limited. It has been important to explain that requests will be honoured where possible, but may have to be overruled by clinical need. The roster can take longer to produce, but this only reflects the importance of getting it right.

- **Is there anything you do now on a continuing basis to keep flex alive in your team?**

Monitoring changes to reflect these on the roster. Reminding staff to review and update their flexibility forms to reflect their personal needs.

- **What key learning would you pass on to other managers?**

Throw the rulebook out of the window and listen to what your staff want! If you can make it work for your service, give it a go, and evaluate after a trial period. Saying yes is refreshing!

Helen Cox, Ward Manager, Birmingham Children's Hospital



Getting help when you're stuck

Sometimes, you will feel that you've explored all the angles and still can't find a way to square the needs of your service and your team with what an individual member of staff wants. No-one expects you to have all the answers and you shouldn't feel it's on you alone to solve things. Before you think about saying 'no' to a request, do speak to your manager, your HR colleagues or other line managers for support and advice.

Where the individual is covered by the NHS terms and conditions of service, your local policy should build in an 'escalation stage' which should be used where you've not been able to agree a solution. The purpose is so you can get support to check for other possible solutions, including whether the form of flexibility the individual is seeking could be accommodated in a different team, location or role.

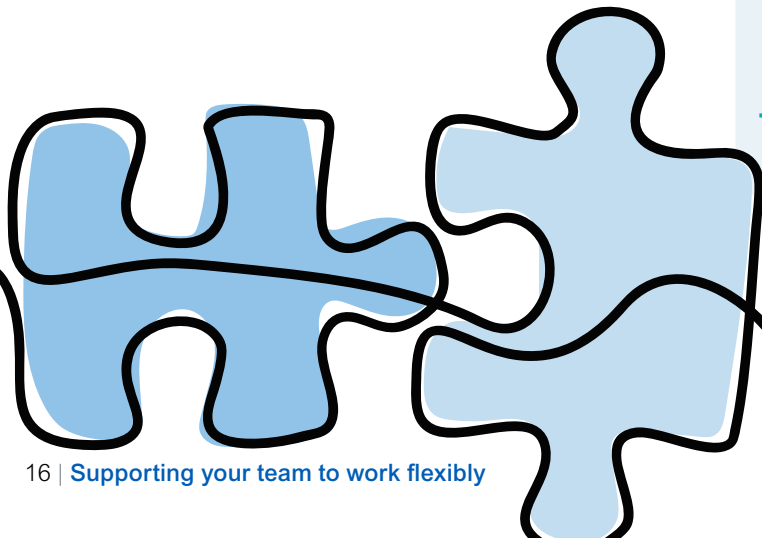
How this is resourced will be covered in your local policy. It's a good idea to check with the individual whether they would be open to looking wider than their current role/team, perhaps as a trial initially. It's also useful where your discussions with them have come about through a formal request to check at this stage whether they are willing to extend the timescales for dealing with it to allow this wider exploration to happen.

Make sure you have clear agreed notes of your conversations and the things you and the individual have considered. Keep the individual informed about what's happening and when.

Leading a flexible team

Here are seven ways you can demonstrate successful leadership when it comes to promoting and embedding flexible working:

1. **Lead by example.** Be a role model, be open about your own flexibility and how you're managing your wellbeing. Book out space in your own diary for family time, out-of-work activities or breaks. Log off visibly and be clear that you don't expect replies out of hours.
2. **Trust people to do their jobs on a flexible basis.** Don't wait for them to 'earn' it.
3. **Be accessible.** Let your team know they should contact you if they need support. Create spaces in your diary where they can catch up with you outside of a formal meeting.
4. **Consciously reward and recognise people for the outcomes they are achieving – not for working additional hours or being always present.** This can unconsciously reinforce certain behaviours eg 'presenteeism'.
5. **Drive the conversation on flexible working.** Bring it up with people in health and wellbeing conversations, in one-to-ones, at end of year, and during recruitment conversations. Even if the individual doesn't want to work flexibly right now, mentioning it proactively will say a lot about how your team works.
6. **Consider flexible working options when you are advertising vacancies.** Be clear about the types of flexibility that would work well in the role, and make it clear that conversations around flexibility are welcomed at interview stage to encourage a greater diversity of talent. You can use the 'flexible working patterns' options in NHS Jobs and TRAC to signpost these options clearly to potential applicants.
7. **Talk to other teams about what you're doing.** Share your good practice and learn from theirs.



Flexible Working Team Talk Template

Use this tool to consider flexible working across your team. Feel free to adapt to meet the needs of your team.

Introduction

- The aim of our session is to think about how we can work flexibly as a team, delivering the outcomes we need to but also supporting each other to work effectively
- Many of us have experiences of working in different ways, in different roles or organisations. How can we learn and grow from this?

Exercise 1

Aims

- To identify the benefits of building on our flexible working best practice
- To identify any barriers to building on flexible working in our team
- To build on benefits and minimise barriers

10 mins on benefits

- What do we see as the benefits of building on our flexible working practices?
- What have we learned from how we worked over the past year? What practices should we keep?
- What are the implications for our health and wellbeing?

10 mins on barriers

- What have been the barriers to effective flexible working during this period?
- What activities have we been unable to undertake as effectively using flexible ways of working?

15 mins to build on the benefits and overcome barriers

- How can we build on the benefits we have identified?
- How can we overcome some of the barriers? What actions should we take?

Finish by summarising agreed actions.

Flexible Working

Team Talk Template (continued)

Exercise 2

Aims

- To agree the way we can best implement flexible working practices together in the coming weeks.
- To capture this as our flexible working protocols:
 - What working patterns do we have in our team?
 - Do we have minimum requirements for running safe, effective services that we need to consider?
 - Do we have key patient/stakeholder meetings/deadlines to consider?
 - How often do we want to meet as a team and when?
 - How will we ensure someone is available during our service opening hours?
 - How will we make sure those working remotely or different hours are fully included?
 - What are the obstacles we will have in implementing these?
 - What do we need to do next to ensure these flexible working protocols become a way of life?
 - How can we make sure these protocols are fair for all staff?

Finish by capturing your flexible working protocols and agree how you will review them and keep them live (ensuring, of course, that they meet with your local policies too).

Next steps

We hope that this guide has inspired you to embrace greater flexible working in your team.

If you need further support to progress this agenda across your organisation, please use these further reading links and contact details.

Further reading

NHS England and NHS Improvement

- For more on the Flexible Working programme, including case studies
- We work flexibly
- Health and wellbeing conversations
- NHS Futures: Flexible Working

NHS Employers

- Guides to flexible working and flexible retirement for nurses

Timewise

- Case studies, info on Flex Positive programme for trusts and more on job design



Contacts



If you have any questions, please contact your local HR professional, or mail the NHS England and NHS Improvement flexible working team at:

weworkflexibly@nhs.net