NHS Flex For The Future
Evaluation: Final report

Executive Summary

Report Contents: This report is an assessment of the aims, implementation, development and achievements of the NHS Flex For The Future programme which was carried out between October 2021 and March 2022. The progress and effects of the project have been measured by a comparison of data taken at the beginning and end of the project as well as feedback from participants. The report contains excerpts from five case study conversations held with Change Team Leaders who coordinated the projects on a local level at NHS organisations across England, together with comments from post-workshop feedback and made by attendees during workshops.

Project Goals: The NHS is facing an acute workforce crisis. This project aims to help attract and retain staff by introducing and strengthening flexible working practices within the NHS, creating a workplace where its workforce are able to thrive.

The Set-Up: Timewise's research has shown that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to establishing successful flexible working practices. 93 different NHS organisations participated in the programme, each creating their own organisational change team for flexibility. These teams were trained to develop tailored action plans that would support flex within their individual organisations. Each Change Team had its own Leader plus a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) to champion its work at an executive level. Change Team members were drawn from a wide mix of roles, disciplines and organisation types to give varied input and reflect the range of challenges currently faced by NHS staff.

What Happened: Over six months, the Change Teams participated in monthly workshops and local discussion clinics. They had access through the programme to expert speakers, tools, resources and assistance in creating their tailored action plans. At the end of the project, we recorded their feedback on the mechanics of the programme, the progress they had achieved and their plans to strengthen flexible working in the future.

What Progress Was Made?: The programme finished in March and we are in the early stages of assessing the impact of the project but significant advances have already been made:

- There has been a marked increase in understanding and embedding flexible working practices across participating organisations. This change is now being supported at an executive level which would not have occurred without the programme.

- The teams who took part in the programme are now skilled in using a new range of tools that will assist them with designing jobs flexibly, collecting and analysing data about the state of flexible working within their organisations and creating tailored action plans to implement flexible working practices.

- Programme participants have connected with other Change Teams in their local areas in order to share their new knowledge and experiences; and reported that this in turn has strengthened the impact of their work.

- There has been a clear improvement in the commitment to flexible working in the NHS. At the beginning of the project, measured on the Timewise Flexibility Maturity Curve©, just 15% of the organisations taking part were welcoming and supporting requests for flex working. Post programme, that figure increased to 40%. We expect this improvement to continue as the Change Teams implement their action plans.
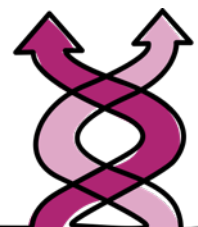
Feedback from participants: There is a high level of enthusiasm among team members for this course and the results they have achieved. There is also strong, positive expectation about the progress their new skills will enable in the future. Participants feel better equipped in all areas of establishing flex and are confident they could now restructure situations where, previously, they hadn't been able to envisage how flex could work. Respondents report that the course has given them both inspiration and practical steps to improve current rigid ways of working. There is a clear feeling that the clinics which connected local teams were hugely beneficial and would be useful in the future. Finally, the programme has given participants knowledge and credibility which means they are now taken seriously at a senior level.

Conclusion: NHS Flex For The Future has successfully equipped a solid base of committed advocates to take practical steps that will make flexible working one of the cornerstones of a more attractive, competitive and responsive NHS. This would not have happened without the expertise shared with participants through workshops, speakers, tools and resources. This programme has turned interest into commitment and awareness into action.
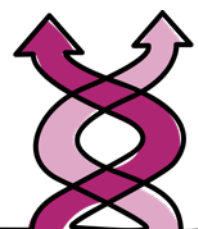
Introducing NHS Flex For The Future

Amy Butterworth,
Consultancy Director, Timewise

'We cannot afford to lose any more of our people':
These ten words in the NHS People Plan highlight
an acute workforce crisis which impacts us all: the
inability to find and retain NHS staff. It's a crucial
issue that has widespread and detrimental effects
on the ability of the NHS to function effectively now
and in the future. Supporting and developing flexible
working practices is acknowledged as a key step in
improving work-life balance and helping to prevent
the loss of skilled and valued members of staff. With
our Flex For The Future programme we set out to
discover the current state of flexible working practices
within the NHS; establish localised organisational
Change Teams to lead improvements; gain support
for positive change at a senior level; share our
knowledge and experience of flexible working with
participants and support them in taking steps towards
implementing positive change.

The challenge
The NHS employs 1.36 million staff in hospital and
community health services of which more than half
are professionally qualified clinical staff. Between
2011 and 2018, more than 56,000 people left NHS
employment citing work-life balance as the reason.
Since then, the pressures of working in the health
system through a global pandemic have only added
to this toll. Analysis of NHS Digital figures for the last
quarter of 2021 shows that at least 400 NHS staff in
England left their posts every week due to inadequate
work-life balance.

The NHS People Plan, published in 2021, sets out
practical actions and systems for the NHS to adopt
and encourages it to take action to enable flexible

working for their people, underlining how important
flexibility is for retaining talent across the organisation.
Through the NHS Flex For The Future programme,
NHS England and NHS Improvement have underlined
their commitment to flexible working as a key enabler
for attracting and retaining talent in the coming years.

From our work across many sectors, Timewise knows
that flexibility is a key element of any people strategy.
Given that almost 1 in 3 members of the NHS
workforce have caring responsibilities and that
28% are aged over 50, it is critical that NHS
organisations embrace flexible working and
proactively explore how it can help stem the flow of
leavers and keep experienced people at work.

We recognise that it can feel challenging for an
organisation to offer flexibility in a constrained, 24/7
service environment. Within the NHS, as with many
sectors, flexible and remote working has increased
significantly during the course of the Covid-19
pandemic. Remote meetings and video consultations
have enabled staff to work differently. But enabling
remote work is only one element of flexibility.

At Timewise, we have already worked with a range
of NHS organisations to develop their flexible working
practices, including those for clinical roles. We have
led pioneering action research into team-based
rostering solutions for nurses, and flexibility within GP
practices. The NHS Flex For The Future programme
therefore, drew on the collective knowledge and
experience of NHS England and NHS Improvement
and Timewise. The programme set out to provide NHS
organisations with a step by-step approach to building
a personalised plan for their organisation - to open
up more flexible working opportunities in all roles and
deliver on the promises made in the NHS People Plan.

Foreword

Jane Galloway, Head of Flexible Working, NHS England and NHS Improvement

The challenge for the NHS in embracing and embedding flexible working is not to be underestimated. There is a huge culture shift that needs to take place for us to really unlock and benefit from the impact that flexible working practices can have when done well. We know that some of the complexities of running services safely and effectively can create challenges for flexibility, but the time has come to consider the art of the possible. Running the NHS Flex For The Future programme with Timewise has helped to engage with and support 93 organisations across the NHS in England to embrace that case for change and test those creative solutions.

Recruitment and retention are key issues to securing the success of the NHS moving forward, and in order to be the best place to work, we need to continue our journey in becoming a modern and flexible employer. The NHS is forward thinking about flex and proud of the shift to date, with changes to the NHS Terms and Conditions effective from September 2021 going above and beyond statutory rights to request flexibility from week 26, to day one of employment.

Flexible working can unlock talent pipelines, contribute towards the closing of a gender pay gap (which has widened in society since the pandemic), support the health and wellbeing of our staff, encourage ways of working that we need to embrace in order to see better equality and diversity in our workforce, and help us to retain our staff.

Research shows that even the availability of flexible working opportunities (even if not taken up) leads to engaged staff, and we know that in the NHS, having engaged staff leads to better patient experience. The case for change is clear and compelling. We are proud to have supported a range of organisations to move forward on their flexible working journey, and look forward to seeing the impact that will be unlocked as the ripples from the programme spread with the realisation of action plans.
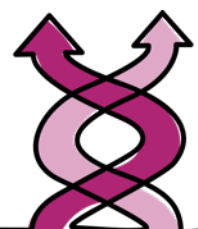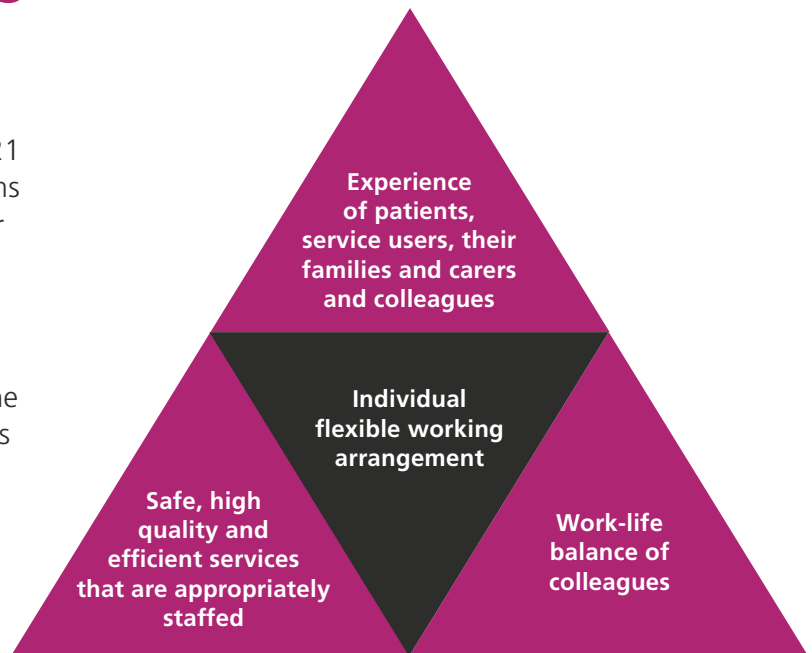
The Aims of the Programme

NHS Flex For The Future was a six month programme carried out between September 2021 and March 2022 . It was designed to equip teams of organisational change agents to develop their own tailored action plan that would enhance flexible working understanding, practices and culture within their NHS organisation.

We developed a programme model, based on the Timewise Flexibility Framework©, which describes the key areas where NHS organisations can take action to define and embed flexibility:

- Leadership and culture of trust
- Flexible working policy and process
- Manager capability and support
- Employer brand and talent acquisition
- Inclusive career paths and progression
- Social responsibility and advocacy

Through this guiding model, participants were encouraged to consider flexibility in a systemic and holistic way. They were then helped to collect and analyse relevant data, identify key areas of focus for their organisation and develop an action plan to embed flexible working. We were keen to support organisations who were at the start of their change journey as well as those who had already taken steps to build a culture of flexibility.

At the heart of the programme is the belief that good, effective flexible working arrangements are those which balance the needs of the individual employee with three key organisational factors: patient/service user experience, service delivery and work-life balance of colleagues. Therefore, there isn't a one-size-fits-all approach to flexible working. Successful working arrangements will look and feel different for differing roles, depending on these factors.

Experience of patients, service users, their families and carers and colleagues

Individual flexible working arrangement

Safe, high quality and efficient services that are appropriately staffed

Work-life balance of colleagues

> " *The programme has really helped me focus on important areas I wouldn't necessarily have considered… Before, I might have just focussed on making sure we advertised jobs as flexible and left it at that.*
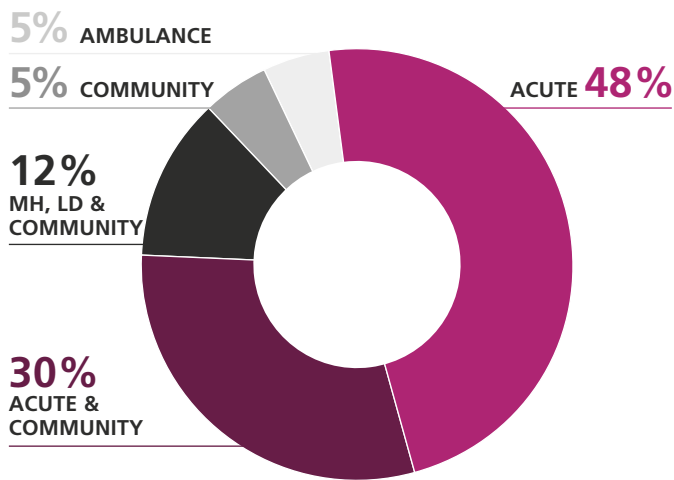>
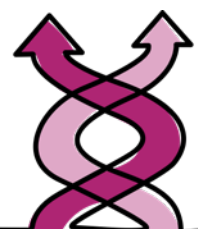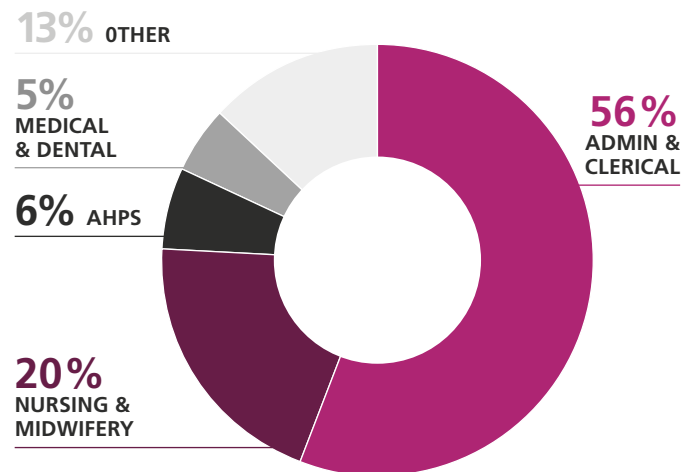> **CHANGE TEAM LEAD, POST PROGRAMME INTERVIEW**

Who Took Part?

A total of 93 NHS organisations registered to take part in the programme. A range of organisation types were represented with the majority being Acute and Acute & Community Trusts.

The project members were drawn from a variety of roles. Over half were in administrative and clerical positions, with a similar proportion having a background in HR or Organisation Development. Nursing and midwives were also well represented, with smaller numbers of Medical and Dental and Allied Health professionals. 80% of participants stated that they personally were able to work flexibly in their role and 16% were responsible for e-rostering within their organisation. About 75% of participants were directly line managing others.

PARTICIPATING NHS ORGANISATIONS

5% AMBULANCE

5% COMMUNITY

12% MH, LD & COMMUNITY

30% ACUTE & COMMUNITY

ACUTE **48%**

ROLES UNDERTAKEN BY CHANGE TEAM MEMBERS

13% OTHER

5% MEDICAL & DENTAL

6% AHPS

20% NURSING & MIDWIFERY

56% ADMIN & CLERICAL

Actions Taken

1. Establishing our advocates for flexible working

Two of the key elements in Timewise's approach to introducing flexible change are:

- Establishing an Organisational Change Team with its own Leader and a core group of committed representatives from across the organisation who lead and advocate for the transformation to working practices
- Nominating a Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) who is a visible, vocal executive level sponsor and supporter of the work

From our experience, we know that having advocates across an organisation, including at senior levels, is a critical enabler for bringing about change. So, we structured the NHS Flex For The Future programme to ensure that each Change Team had its own nominated leader as well as a senior responsible officer.
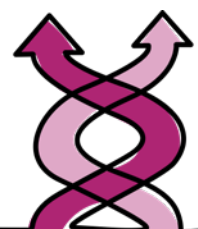
We encouraged participants to make sure that their Change Team reflected the change they wanted to bring about – for example, some organisations wanted to focus their efforts on clinical staff groups so they needed strong representation from that area. The value of structuring the teams in this way became evident early on in the programme. We heard from participants that having a diverse Change Team was positively impacting the quality and creativity of their discussions, the work being undertaken and ultimately the design of the actions they were taking forwards.

> *The nursing and midwifery representatives were concerned with the practical elements of making flex work in their areas, while HR brought lots of positive experiences of flex to the group. The consultant came from the medical perspective and initially she thought that our medics weren't culturally there yet with the idea of flexible working so that area was going to be a challenge*
>
> **CHANGE TEAM LEAD, POST PROGRAMME INTERVIEW**

> *We got representation from each of our divisions - women's, children's, medicine, surgery, staffing and corporate onto the core Change Team. Then we reached out to key stakeholders plus our divisional nursing directors and matrons for further support. What naturally happened was that the people who were keen to support us jumped on board for the journey… You need to identify your early adopters, the people who are really passionate about flexibility and you need buy-in and support at a senior level if you want to make change*
>
> **CHANGE TEAM LEAD, POST PROGRAMME INTERVIEW**

We encouraged participants to get together as a Change Team in between project sessions and reflect on their ambitions, progress and how effective their teams were. As a result some teams added members as the programme progressed because they recognised they needed to engage additional stakeholder groups. One Change Team Leader explained that they had initially organised their Change Team primarily with colleagues in corporate roles, to avoid adding to the pressures on capacity among clinical and medical colleagues. However, they soon realised they were at risk of their work being out of touch with their front line teams so they paused, reviewed and reorganised their team to engage more clinical and medical representatives. This revised Change Team reviewed their areas for focus and having a more diverse group led directly to a more refined action plan.

2. Taking part in monthly workshops

The programme was structured around six 2-hour virtual workshops, which took place monthly via Zoom. All participants were invited to attend the workshops live but the sessions were also recorded and uploaded to the programme resource library for team members to watch back later if they were unable to attend. They were also required to undertake supporting activities in between workshops.

With the aid of specialist speakers, tools, checklists, examples and case studies the workshops guided participants through the process to develop an evidence-based action plan for flexibility within their organisation. They covered five distinct stages:

1. Establish a Change Team, agree vision and ambition for change

2. Organisational diagnostic phase – collect information about current state of flex working, qualitative and quantitative analysis

3. Identify the change levers that will enable flexibility in your organisation

4. Develop a business case, engage leadership

5. Produce an action plan and obtain sign off

The workshops provided examples of good practice and 'the art of the possible' via case studies and speakers. Participants were also given a template action plan and introduced to techniques and tools, including one to help with workforce data capture and analysis, to further their work.

We also used the workshops to highlight and explore examples of innovative workforce practices including hiring people to flexible patterns, proactively developing team-based rosters, and designing individual roles flexibly. In particular these examples were useful to demonstrate what flexibility is possible within clinical and rostered roles, which were 'hard to flex' areas that many participants felt were vital to explore:

> *It was great to have the speakers and real time examples. [The programme should] continue to focus on case studies that have tackled real problem areas*
>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-WORKSHOP 2 FEEDBACK**

> *We had 'felt' we would struggle to accommodate unusual working patterns in the urgent care pathway in the community, however hearing that the ambulance service has managed it really makes me/us think differently.*
>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE**

Having covered the process from project kick-off and creation to sign-off of the action plan in workshops 1 to 4, the fifth workshop saw participants develop their understanding of flexible job design for different roles. This specific area of skill development taught participants to use a job design tool to build flexibility into roles that would deliver the right work-life balance for an employee. They were then encouraged to take that expertise into their own organisations, to bring about more adaptability. A sixth workshop provided an opportunity to consolidate the learning and insights from the programme, consider next steps and celebrate success.

Feedback on the quality and relevance of the workshop content was very positive. Due to the large group size (we had over 400 live attendees for the first workshop and over 300 for each of Workshops 2 and 3) we ran the first three workshops using a webinar format, with participants primarily using Chat and Polls to engage with the content and ask questions. We received some requests for opportunities for more interaction within the workshop sessions, which coincided with a drop off in numbers able to attend the live workshops, due to escalating Covid rates and the inclusion of Covid in the VCOD (Vaccination as a Condition of Employment) regulations. Therefore in Workshop 4 we trialled the use of breakout rooms to enable people to work in smaller groups to complete activities. This was appreciated by those attending the workshops live. Due to the positive feedback on the breakout activities, we used this format again in Workshops 5 and 6.

> *The workshops were brilliant, they had great passion and energy. The speakers were good too, really useful…it all came together to make my job so much easier than it would have been had I been starting from scratch by myself.*
>
> **CHANGE LEAD, POST PROGRAMME INTERVIEW**

3. Sharing knowledge across local regions

Between the workshops, Change Team Leaders were also invited to attend group clinics organised in regional groups. These smaller optional group clinics enabled participants to discuss particular issues with a member of the programme team and share ideas, challenges and progress with peers from their geographical region.

The clinics were facilitated by either a Timewise Consultant or a member of the NHS England and NHS Improvement Flex team, so they provided another useful source of feedback from attendees, alongside the post workshop questionnaires.

The overall feedback for these regional group clinics was that they were a valuable complement to the larger workshop groups.

> *The main sessions and the clinic sessions worked together nicely because the workshops themselves were really good and then you got to be interactive, sitting with other Change Teams going, 'Right, let's get on with these specific questions'. It was a good combination*
>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-WORKSHOP 2 FEEDBACK**

> *The drop-in sessions worked really well. You could say, 'I'm not making any progress here, I'm feeling a bit overwhelmed.' And other people would say, 'Well, what about this? What about that?' That was very helpful*
>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-WORKSHOP 2 FEEDBACK**

How the Programme Evolved

To best support the cohort of organisations participating we ensured that the programme's plan and design schedule allowed for evolution and development of the content. Based on participants' feedback and progress across the six months as well as the themes from group clinics, we evolved the programme in a few specific ways:

- An agenda was provided for participants to use internally after each workshop to help guide their internal Change Team meetings.

- Access to the workshop materials and the Change Team agenda was given immediately prior to the live workshop so that participants could refer to it at a relevant time.

- Opportunities to showcase examples of progress being made by other participants were included in the workshop sessions, to highlight the progress that was being made and inspire others to act.

- Breakout room activities were enabled so that participants could interact in smaller groups within the larger workshops.

- Several participating organisations told us that they were going to set up pilot initiatives to test ways of working in particular teams so, in the final workshop, we provided tips on creating pilot schemes and measuring their progress.
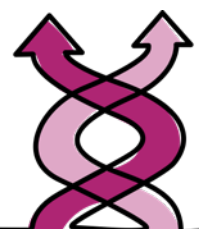
Learnings From the Programme

As the largest ever flexible working change project within the NHS, the NHS Flex For The Future programme provided an opportunity to gather valuable information and insight. At the start of the programme, all participating organisations were asked to submit a set of organisational data relating to their workforce and flex patterns. This gave us greater insight into the cohort, and a baseline from which to track progress. The data ranged from the proportion of the workforce working flexibly, through to staff survey levels of satisfaction with flexibility and number of vacancies advertised as open to flexibility.

This data collation and analysis gave us valuable information about current practice and processes relating to flexible working within the NHS in England. We were able to incorporate these into recommendations for action plans within the programme, and also to learn from them to inform other work on flexibility within the NHS.

We found that while most organisations were able to gather data on part-time workers, many did not collect information about people working with other flexible working patterns. Likewise, many organisations were not able to report on the outcome of formal flexible working requests, i.e. whether they were successful or not in translating into flexible working patterns. Improving data collection and analysis of these and other measures is undoubtedly an important action for many NHS organisations. This would enable a more evidence based approach to flexibility and workforce planning.
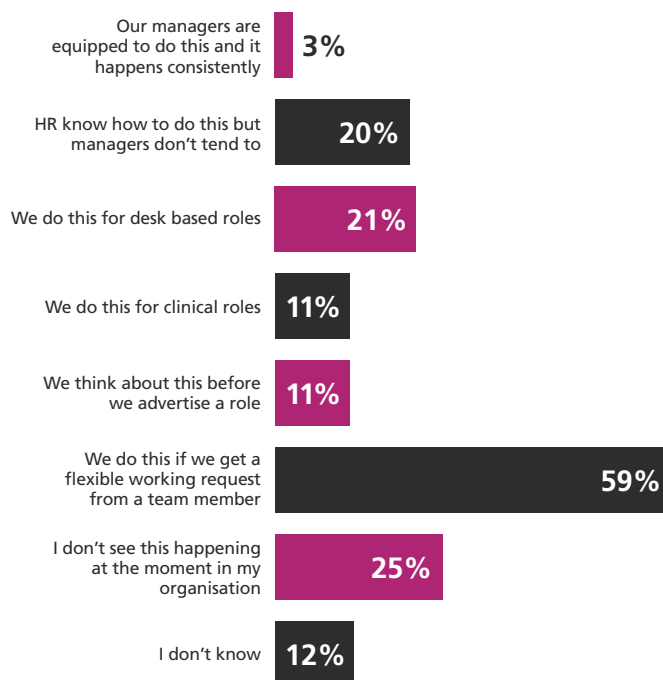
We were also able to see vast differences in the responses to certain data points:

- While some organisations were advertising 100% of their vacancies as being open to flexible working, others were not advertising any positions with reference to flex. An average of 42% of vacancies were advertised without offering flexible conditions.

- There was a wide range in the proportion of staff working part-time, from 17% to 68% with the average being 39%.

Insights were also gathered about current processes and practice. In Workshop 5 we explored how organisations were currently using flexible job design. We found that while almost 60% of participating organisations undertook job design in response to a flexible working request from a team member, only just over 10% used flexible job design before advertising a role. In addition, 25% didn't see flexible job design being undertaken at all within their organisation.

HOW DO YOU USE FLEXIBLE JOB DESIGN WITHIN YOUR ORGANISATION AT THE MOMENT

Our managers are equipped to do this and it happens consistently	**3%**
HR know how to do this but managers don't tend to	**20%**
We do this for desk based roles	**21%**
We do this for clinical roles	**11%**
We think about this before we advertise a role	**11%**
We do this if we get a flexible working request from a team member	**59%**
I don't see this happening at the moment in my organisation	**25%**
I don't know	**12%**

On a more individual level, we asked those taking part in the programme about their primary reason for participating. The key aims among the cohort were to bring about a change in culture and enable greater flexible working options. A wider aim of talent retention and acquisition was the driver for a quarter of participants.

34% Wanted to support a change in leadership commitment to a flexible working culture

27% Aimed to support the delivery of more flexible working opportunities locally

24% Hoped to enhance workforce/talent retention and acquisition

6% Were interested in supporting manager capability and development

5% Reported they had been told to be a representative for their organisation

The programme also highlighted certain challenges and blockers experienced by the teams as they developed their action plans. Winter pressures plus the impact of Covid-19 and the VCOD programme affected the capacity of many participants.

Despite these challenges, all bar one of the organisations involved continued with the programme. As noted above the numbers attending the workshop sessions live dropped for the sessions in December, January and February due to Covid pressures, and Change Team Leaders fed back through the clinics that they were reviewing the timeframes for some of their action activities. However, feedback in the final workshop session and post-programme survey indicated that participants still recognised the importance of pushing ahead with the planned changes in spite of capacity pressures.

Impact of the Programme

> " *We were at the very start of exploring flexible working and these sessions have been invaluable to give us the tools and guides to ensure the project starts well.*
>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE**

> " *[The programme has] given us the time, space, tools and insight to move forward with this agenda and will hopefully support the attraction and retention of staff at our Trust.*
>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE**

Increased understanding and confidence

Prior to the programme, we assessed the level of confidence and understanding among participants on ten different indicators relating to flexibility. The areas covered ranged from confidence in making the business case for flexible working to others, through to their understanding of flexible job design. At the end of the programme, we measured these indicators again to assess the progress made.

Participant commitment to increasing the availability of quality, flexible work in the NHS was already high prior to the programme and reached 100% following it.

Confidence, understanding and clarity increased in all ten indicators with over 70% of respondents to the post programme survey saying that they agreed or strongly agreed with all of the indicators. This demonstrates that a committed and knowledgeable cohort of change makers have graduated from the programme and that they are well equipped to take this work forwards within their organisations.

> " *I have gained a much greater understanding as to how to enable managers to introduce and/or extend flexible working within their clinical area*
>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE**

PARTICIPANT CONFIDENCE AND UNDERSTANDING PRE AND POST PROGRAMME
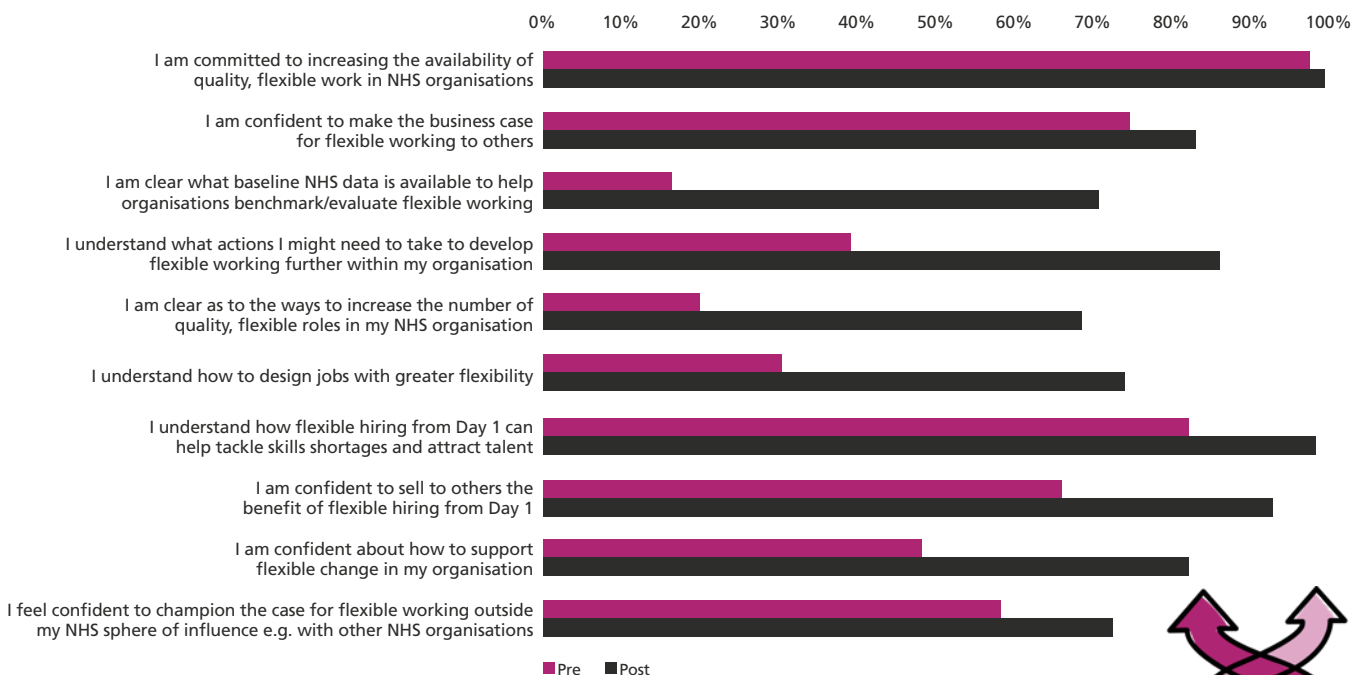
Pre ■ Post

Note: 376 participants (70%) completed the pre-programme survey and 94 (20%) completed the post-programme survey. Therefore the comparisons are representative rather than absolute. This chart shows the proportion of respondents selecting 'agree' or 'strongly agree' in response to each statement, pre (pink) and post (black) the programme.
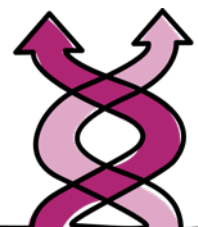
Of note is a 40-55% increase in participants agreeing or strongly agreeing with the following indicators (which had all started at below 50%):

- I am clear what baseline NHS data is available to help organisations benchmark or evaluate flexible working – agreement increased from 16% to 71%

- I understand what actions I might need to take to develop flexible working further within my organisation – agreement increased from 39% to 87%

- I am clear as to the ways to increase the number of quality, flexible roles in my NHS organisation – agreement increased from 20% to 69%

- I understand how to design jobs with greater flexibility – agreement increased from 30% to 74%

This impressive progress shows that the programme has been particularly successful in developing knowledge of flex data collection and collation, and equipping participants to undertake flexible job design.

The significant increase in understanding of which actions can help develop flexible working further (from 39% to 87%) is notable, and will have a huge impact on the teams' ability to finalise and implement action plans for the short and medium term:

> *It has given us so many ideas on what could be implemented. Lots of info all in one place allowing us to pull out ideas that may work in our Trust and leave other actions to refer back to at a later date.*
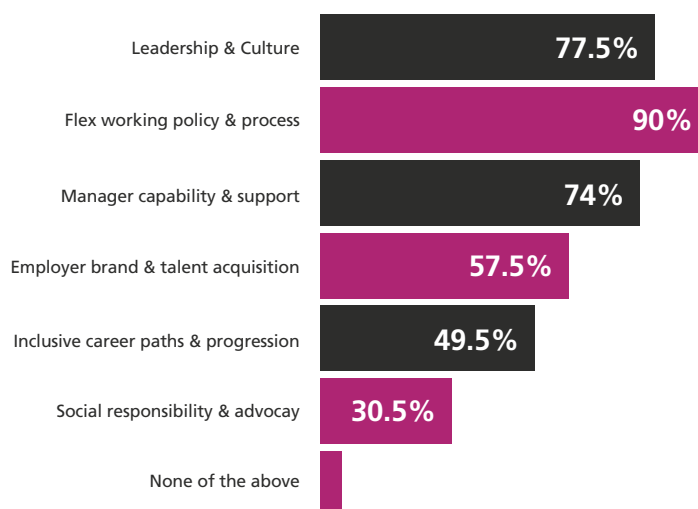>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE**

The creation of innovative action plans

In the post-programme survey, participants were asked if they had produced an action plan yet. Half of them responded positively and the same proportion agreed that this would not have happened if they hadn't participated in the programme. Interestingly, a greater proportion - 70% - of respondents told us that their Leadership teams were supportive of their action plans, which suggests that a greater number of participants had produced action plans than they indicated. We don't know the reasons for this, although can speculate that the lower proportion saying they had produced an action plan may be due to delays waiting for internal approval and sign off of their plans, and/or that they added flexible working activity to a pre-existing action plan within a wider transformation project, which we know is the case for some organisations.

The infographic below shows the proportion of plans containing actions in each of the areas listed – with policy and process, leadership and culture and manager capability and support being the key areas of focus. This is valuable insight for the NHS England and NHS Improvement Flex team, to inform areas for support in the future.

ACTION PLAN CONTENTS

Area	Percentage
Leadership & Culture	77.5%
Flex working policy & process	90%
Manager capability & support	74%
Employer brand & talent acquisition	57.5%
Inclusive career paths & progression	49.5%
Social responsibility & advocay	30.5%
None of the above	

There was impressive range, practicality and ambition in the actions pledged in participants' organisational action plans. They included showcasing leadership working practices, improving reporting and measurement of flexibility and building flexibility into organisational redesign. These are some actual examples taken from the flexibility action plans produced by participating organisations, some of which are already underway:

- Develop a leadership blog to focus on 'A day in the life of…', incorporating flexible working arrangements and what this enables in terms of work-life balance

- Develop a dedicated space on our intranet which will house guidance, support and toolkits

- Conducting 'stay' interviews instead of 'exit' interviews to discuss work-life balance issues with staff members who are considering leaving their positions, with the aim of re-shaping these jobs in a more flexible manner to encourage retention

- Establish drop-in support forums for managers to enable improved understanding

- Work with the Workforce Systems and Information managers to identify the best way to record flexible working agreements (formal and informal)

- Review access to leadership development and other development programmes by full-time and part-time working of participants

- Kick-off pilot self-rostering programme with e-rostering provider and selected wards

- Create flexibility service design principles and build them into service redesign process so that redesign cases cannot be approved unless these have been seriously considered

- Monitor our progress by establishing flexible working metrics or a dashboard, agreed with our Senior Leaders, which can be reported on and monitored by Trust Board via Performance Management Reports

It was optional to share your action plans and so we have only had the opportunity to review the sample of plans which were sent to us by participants. If we were doing this again we would consider making it mandatory to submit your action plan as part of the programme, for sharing with colleagues in other organisations, to maximise the learning from the action planning process.

Support at a senior level

At the end of the programme, 70% of participants agreed or strongly agreed that the organisation's leadership team was supportive of their action plan for flexible change, with 60% agreeing or strongly agreeing that the SRO for the programme was engaged with their action plan and could advocate for it with senior colleagues. This shows a good level of engagement at senior levels within the participating organisations, which was borne out by participants' reflections at the end of the programme.

> *It's raised the conversation [around flexible working] for us as a Trust and brought it to the forefront of plans.*
>
> **PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE**

Anecdotally from conversations in clinics, many Change Teams expressed that they were focussing their initial actions on developing manager capability, as well as introducing trials of new ways of working. Undoubtedly, empowering and equipping managers with the knowledge and skills to manage flexible requests and proactively consider flexibility for their teams will bring about change. It was heartening to see this focus, given so few participants (6%) initially cited manager capability as the primary reason influencing their participation in the programme.

New skills and vital resources

The programme's resources were found to be particularly useful. During the six-month programme, there were 4,245 visits to the Resource Library site and 324 views of the recorded workshops. These resources will remain on the site for a period to allow participants continued access. Ultimately, they will be housed on the NHS England & NHS Improvement flex site.

Following the programme, participants were asked which of the tools and resources provided they had used. The figures below show the responses. Alongside the NHS definition and principles of flexible working, the data capture and analysis tool was the next most used resource with over 60% of participants having used this. This is further indication of the programme's impact in encouraging Change Teams to take an evidence-based approach to this work.

We would expect the usage figures for some tools such as the template slides, job design tool and individual guide, to increase over time as Change Teams progress further through their projects. The cost calculator was the least used tool by participants, and although several participants commented that they found it helpful, they acknowledged that it was complex to use.

> ❝ *The tools we were given were so helpful because they saved valuable time to be able to say, 'Look, here's an action plan template or a change template we can use straight away'*
>
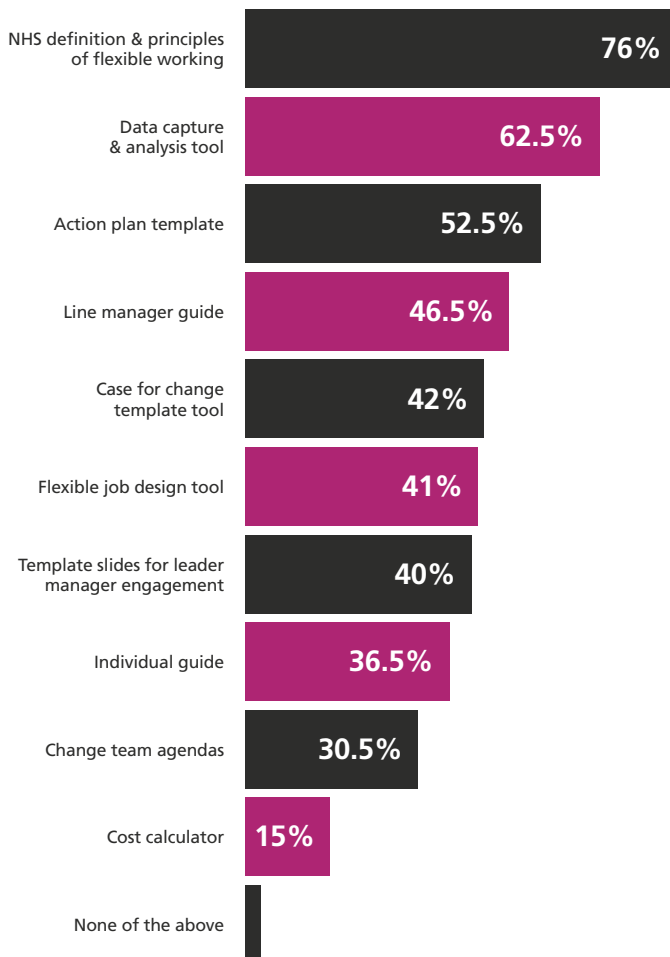> **CHANGE TEAM LEAD, POST PROGRAMME INTERVIEW**

Breakthrough in attitudes towards flex

At the kick-off workshop we asked participants where they would place their organisation on the Timewise Flexibility Maturity Curve© which shows how supportive they feel their organisation is of flexible working.
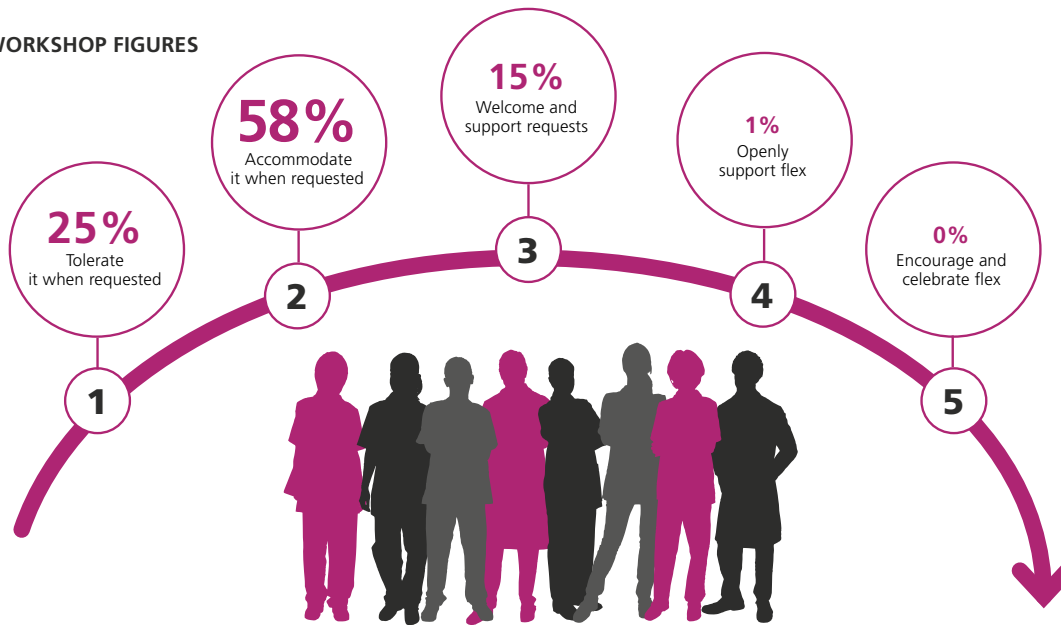
RESOURCES USED BY PARTICIPANTS

Resource	%
NHS definition & principles of flexible working	76%
Data capture & analysis tool	62.5%
Action plan template	52.5%
Line manager guide	46.5%
Case for change template tool	42%
Flexible job design tool	41%
Template slides for leader manager engagement	40%
Individual guide	36.5%
Change team agendas	30.5%
Cost calculator	15%
None of the above	

1 Tolerate it when requested
2 Accommodate it when requested
3 Welcome and support requests
4 Openly support flex
5 Encourage and celebrate flex

timewise
TALENT THROUGH FLEXIBILITY

NHS

KICK OFF WORKSHOP FIGURES

25%
Tolerate
it when requested

58%
Accommodate
it when requested

15%
Welcome and
support requests

1%
Openly
support flex

0%
Encourage and
celebrate flex

It was interesting to see the spread of results with 25% assessing that their workplace had a position of reluctant tolerance and almost 60% at the position of accommodation when requested. Only a very small proportion of organisations were above level two - where there is considered to be support and encouragement of flexible working - on the five point curve.

FINAL WORKSHOP RESULTS

51%
had moved forward
one space

8%
had moved forward
more than one
space

Tolerate
it when requested

Accommodate
it when requested

Welcome
and support
requests

Openly
support flex

Encourage and
celebrate flex

This gave the programme team useful insights into the starting points of the participating organisations. It was noticeable that over 40% of participants stated an ambition to be at stage 4 by the end of the programme and over 30% wanted to be at stage 5. Given the programme duration and its purpose i.e. to support organisations to produce a tailored action plan, these figures felt aspirational but they provided us with a strong sense of commitment and vision which we wanted to build upon throughout the six months.
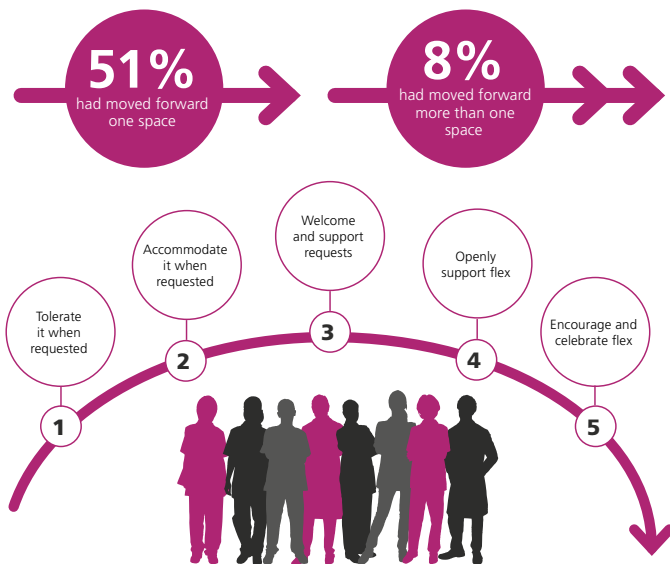
In the final workshop we repeated the poll from Workshop 1, asking participants to rate where they felt their organisation was on the Timewise maturity curve for flexible working. The figures (below) show that during the course of the programme, the cohort of organisations developed a deeper level of flexibility maturity.

Overall, 59% of attendees said that their organisation had moved forward along the maturity curve during the course of the programme. Of these, 51% stated that their organisation had moved forward by one space and 8% had moved forward by more than one space. The actions taken by programme participants during the programme will have supported this movement and are likely to have further positive effects once the action plans they have created are implemented.
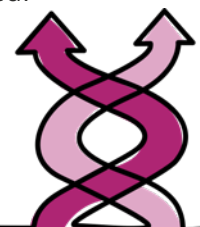
Feedback From Participants on the Effects of the Programme

Progress is being achieved:

> *It does feel like the beginning of something, particularly as we come out of winter and Covid.*

CHANGE TEAM LEAD, IN WORKSHOP 6 CHAT

Difficult issues are being tackled:

> *It's a big challenge in the current climate, but it's also the perfect time to be looking at attracting and retaining. Hard, but essential.*

PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE

Flex is becoming visible at a senior level:

> *The programme has helped me influence the board and not just start the conversation, but get an organisational objective on our 22/23 business plan.*

PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE

The programme has provided inspiration and direction:

> *It has given me a plethora of ideas whereas before the programme, I felt a little like a rabbit in headlights.*

PARTICIPANT, POST- PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE

Practical advice and support has proved vital:

> *It has opened my mind to the differing aspects of flexible working and given real examples of how it can be introduced in practice.*

PARTICIPANT, POST- PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE

The programme has given participants authority:

> *The programme has credibility and I feel that people are listening more to the ideas because of that.*

CHANGE TEAM LEAD, POST-PROGRAMME INTERVIEW

Change is happening thanks to this programme:

> *I have learnt a lot and our organisation would not be doing what we are doing without this course.*

PARTICIPANT, POST-PROGRAMME QUESTIONNAIRE

In Conclusion

NHS Flex For The Future has successfully equipped a solid base of committed advocates to take practical steps that will make flexible working one of the cornerstones of a more attractive, competitive and responsive NHS. This would not have happened without the expertise shared with participants through workshops, speakers, tools and resources. This programme has turned interest into commitment and awareness into action.

Now, we want to see the tailored action plans created by the teams put into action to achieve even greater change and flexibility in the future.

When asked, *"What do you think the main successes of the programme have been?"* one Change Team Lead replied: *"I would say, putting flexible working on the agenda of the trust, because prior to the programme we were not really getting anywhere with it. Also, it's helped sort out the trust's response to flexible working. We can see the recruitment and retention benefits and now we're committing to be an employer who offers flexibility."*

We also hope that the programme will act as a catalyst for other NHS organisations to embrace the flexible working elements within the People Promise, and take action.

If you've been inspired, there are lots of places you can go to find out more:

The dedicated NHS Futures site for flexible working contains a specific section on the NHS Flex For The Future programme, including a link to the library where you can access the resources used in the programme:

www.future.nhs.uk/NationalFlexibleWorking/ grouphome

Timewise have a knowledge hub which will provide you with the latest facts and thinking on flexible working, including summaries and case studies of our work with clients, to help prompt your thinking about flexible working initiatives for your own organisation:

www.timewise.co.uk/knowledge-hub/