

Supporting Flexible Working in your Team



Preface



To meet the health and care needs of the population of Wales, it is vital we have a healthy, engaged and motivated workforce. During recent years, increasing workforce pressures and service demands have been evident across the system. To overcome these challenges, the retention of our excellent and skilled colleagues is key.

Supporting colleagues to work flexibly, not only positively impacts them as an individual by enhancing their personal and professional lives, enabling an effective work life balance, and enhancing their health, wellbeing, job satisfaction, engagement and morale, but also the service through increased quality and productivity, improved colleague attraction, recruitment, retention and wellbeing, reduced sickness and absenteeism, and expansion of available talent pools (NHS Confederation 2023).

To help and support organisations to implement effective flexible working arrangements, an [All Wales Flexible Working Policy](#) has been developed. The policy now places a significant focus upon changing traditional flexible working cultures and attitudes from a position of ‘we can’t do this because..’ to a position of ‘how can we make this happen? To support this change there is an expectation that all colleagues regardless of role, shift pattern, team or pay band can access flexible working opportunities as far as is reasonably practicable from day one of their employment, with requests being agreed as the norm, unless there are clear business reasons in policy or law that prevent approval.

Already in NHS Wales there are many positive flexible working arrangements being supported in practice, but we need to continue to build on these foundations. As a manager you have a key role to play by thoroughly exploring flexible working opportunities with your team, effectively leading flexible teams and developing structures and processes that deliver future fit flexible workplaces.



We are stronger
together



We are compassionate
and inclusive



We are able to speak up



We recognise
everyone’s contribution



We champion
Flexible Working

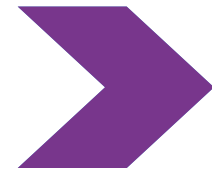


We nurture
healthy environments

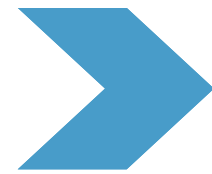


We are continuously
learning and improving

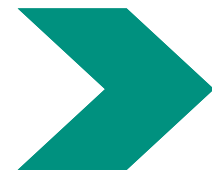
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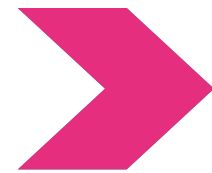
Flexible Working in NHS Wales



Enabling Flexible Working through supportive and Compassionate Approaches



How to have a good flexible working conversation with your team



Managing a flexible team



Principles of Flexible Job Design



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Useful Tools and Further Resources

Introduction: Flexible Working in NHS Wales



To meet the health and care needs of our population, it is important we have a workforce that is healthy, engaged and motivated. Our workforce is fundamental to our success, and we are committed to ensuring NHS Wales is seen by colleagues as a great place to work and learn.

Each year, significant numbers of colleagues leave due to work inflexibility and suboptimal work life balance. To overcome this we need to change our leadership and management approaches to support colleagues to work flexibly. We understand as a manager this can be challenging to achieve, but to help you we have developed this supportive guide. The guide has been developed and adapted from the NHS England and NHS Improvement, Timewise and the NHS Staff Council guide. It is aimed that this guide is used alongside the All Wales Flexible Working Policy, the NHS Terms and Conditions Handbook for England and Wales, and your local organisational flexible working processes.





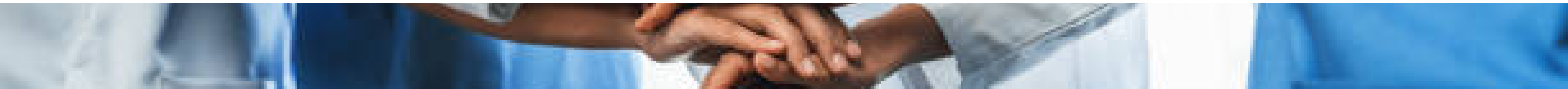
What is Flexible Working?

Flexible working aims to give an individual a degree of flexibility on how long, where, when and at what times they work to help them accommodate their individual needs and requirements.

When investigating flexible working approaches you may hear various terms used interchangeably such as flexible working, agile, smart and remote working. This can be confusing, so to help you we have developed a brief explanation of each. For consistency and clarity in this guide we will use the term ‘flexible working’. The options we have provided are not exhaustive, and other models can be considered. Further information is available within the [All Wales Flexible Working Policy](#) and your local flexible working processes and procedures.

To optimise flexible working within your area, it is a good idea to ensure your colleagues are aware of and understand flexibility options open to them.

Agile Working		Remote Working	
An ability to work in a place and time most appropriate for the task in hand. While agile working and flexible working may be similar in how they achieve their aim, flexible working focuses on the employee, while agile working focusses on the impacts on service such as performance and productivity.		When an individual works all or part of their working week at a location remote from their base. Working remotely can be a flexible working arrangement if requested by the individual and agreed as a regular, ongoing way of working, but it can also be a form of agile working.	
Part Time Working		Job Sharing	
A well-established form of flexible working where individuals reduce their contracted working hours below full time (37.5 hours) to work less or shorter days in a pre-arranged, regular pattern.		Two employees share the responsibilities, duties and benefits of a single full-time post between them. The combined salary and conditions of service are equivalent to that of a single full-time post and are divided in accordance with the number of hours worked by each job sharer.	
		Hybrid Working	
		Hybrid working is a mixture of remote working and working from a base.	



NHS Wales Wales Flexible Working Principles



To guide us to effectively implement flexible working practices, all Wales flexible working principles have been developed.

- ✓ NHS Wales is committed to a flexible working culture, this means that a request for flexible working will be approved, and every possible avenue explored to facilitate this, unless there are clear business reasons as set out in this Policy to reject it.
- ✓ Good flexible working arrangements need to balance the needs of the individual with the impact upon patient/service-user experience, service delivery and employee experience.
- ✓ All individuals should have equal access to flexible working, as far as practicable, regardless of role, shift pattern, team or pay band, with all posts being considered for flexible working.
- ✓ Individuals can request to work flexibly from day one of their contractual employment and can make more than one flexible working request per year.
- ✓ All individuals will be treated fairly when having requests for flexible working considered. Each request for flexible working will be received openly by the appropriate line manager and considered individually on its own merits.
- ✓ Flexible working requests should be approached on the assumption that they will be granted unless there is a legitimate business reason for refusal.
- ✓ If it is not possible to agree an exact request, managers are expected to ensure all avenues have been explored and alternative arrangements discussed with the individual before the request is rejected.

- ✓ Employees who are working flexibly will not be treated less favourably in relation to access to training and development or promotion opportunities.
- ✓ No form of flexible working will allow employees to work in breach of the Working Time Regulations.
- ✓ There is no limit on the number of requests an individual can make within a 12-month period, however individuals are asked not to re-submit requests that have been rejected without modification and/or a change in circumstances within the department.
- ✓ Individuals and managers should ensure regular conversations are held, so if changes arise both parties are aware and can respond appropriately.
- ✓ It should be agreed from the outset whether the new working arrangements are permanent or temporary. Where arrangements are temporary or for a fixed period, regular reviews should be held to ensure the needs of the service and of the individual continue to be met.
- ✓ Any changes to an individuals contract of employment must be confirmed in writing.
- ✓ Organisations must keep a central overview of how requests are being handled and check for fairness and equality of outcomes.



Why Flexible Working Matters

Flexible working is so much more than an employee 'perk'. Correctly implemented, flexible working can help solve a number of core service issues.



TALENT ATTRACTION

87% of people either already work flexibly or wish they could. **92%** of millennials identify flexibility as a top priority.

(Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative, Timewise, 2017)



INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY

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

(Flexible Working: A Talent Imperative, Timewise, 2017)



RETENTION AND MOTIVATION

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

(Flexible Working Provision and Uptake, CIPD, 2012)



BUSINESS COST

Over **70,000** people left NHS employment citing work life balance. The need for continuous onboarding and use of bank/agency/ locum has significant financial implications

(HCHS monthly workforce statistics- Reasons for leaving NHS Digital, 2018)



PERFORMANCE

97% of managers said the quality of work improved or stayed the same, with **93%** of managers saying the same about performance.

(Flexible Working and Performance, Cranfield University/ Working Families 2008)

Supportive and Compassionate Approach



Compassionate leadership and management is critical in creating flexible working cultures and environments. As a manager, you are key in achieving this, so it is important you consider how you can best support and facilitate flexible working for your team. It might help if you think of the following:

- ✓ Start from a point of 'yes', explore what is possible
- ✓ Ensure flexible working opportunities are available for all individuals within your team
- ✓ Make sure you are aware of any individuals additional protections in line with the Equality Act (2010).
- ✓ Listen, accommodate and respond with balance and compassion to flexible working requests
- ✓ Work with and help individuals to develop a solution that meets the needs of the individual, the team and the service
- ✓ Adapt the way individuals and the team work to accommodate flexible working
- ✓ Try new ways of working, be innovative
- ✓ Look at all the options

Compassionate Communication

Sometimes, despite investigating and exploring all possible options to support flexible working practices, you may have to decline a request. In such circumstances it is important that you demonstrate understanding and compassionate relating to the impact this could have for the individual. Having such difficult conversations can be challenging, to help you approach this effectively there are a range of supportive resources available within the [compassionate leadership hub](#).

Getting Help

We know coming to an appropriate solution can take time, and you are not expected to have all the answers. Remember you are not alone. If you are unsure, reach out to colleagues and workforce professionals who have successfully developed and implemented flexible working practices. Further resources are also available in the [belong, thrive, stay retention hub](#).

How to have a good flexible working conversation with colleagues?



Flexible working conversations offer a valuable opportunity for colleagues to discuss their needs for adaptable work arrangements with you and they are key to the development of flexible working approaches that balance the needs of the individual, team, and service. To maximise meeting outcomes it is important that time for discussions is prioritised and that discussions are held in an environment that fosters open, constructive dialogue and limited interruptions.

- ✓ Encourage colleagues to prepare for the conversation (to help we have produced a flexible work guide for individuals)
- ✓ Protect time to have an effective conversation
- ✓ Meet in a location that prevents distracts and interruptions
- ✓ Be flexible, open minded and challenge traditional working approaches, and think how you could support the request
- ✓ Listen with fascination to hear and understand the needs of the individual and solutions being suggested
- ✓ Raise any concerns that you may have in a constructive manner and work in partnership with the individual to find solutions

How to have a good flexible working conversation as a manager?



Discuss the Needs and Benefits

Support your colleague to outline their needs and how their preferred way of working could them, the team and service. Actively listen to ensure you gain the relevant understanding of the request.

This is an important aspect of the conversation as it ensures that all individuals share an understanding of the challenges faced so mutually agreed solutions can be found.

Remember, flexible working arrangements work best when they are a win-win for the individual, your team, and your service.



Consider Potential Obstacles and Barriers

Sometimes, agreeing a request may be difficult due to its potential service impact. When this happens, it is important you take a compassionate approach that acknowledges the importance of the request to the individual. Before you decline a request:

- ☒ Challenge traditional 'we can't do this because' approaches
Consider each request individually
- ☒ Take time to explain the difficulties faced
- ☒ Work together to find a mutually acceptable solution
- ☒ Challenge traditional 'we can't do this because' approach
- ☒ Think creatively
- ☒ Seek help and support

How to have a good flexible working conversation as a manager



Be Flexible

Flexibility and compromise will make it more likely that you will find a pattern that works for the individual, the team and the service. Think creatively to find solutions and be flexible in your approach.



Consider Communication

Effective communication is key to ensure everyone is kept up to date and informed of flexibility agreements. Agree

- ✓ How flexible working schedules will be shared and communicated
- ✓ How the individual will maintain communication and regular contact with you and the team
- ✓ Whether the flexible working request is permanent or temporary
- ✓ Whether a trial period could be used
- ✓ Discuss potential individual impacts if requests involve the need for contractual change e.g. salary impact, annual leave, special leave and pension entitlement.

How to have a good flexible working conversation as a manager?



Manage Performance Expectations

When considering a flexible working request you need to discuss with the individual how flexible working might effect existing objectives and how performance will be measured going forward.



Review Regularly

Inevitably, circumstances and needs of both the individual and the service will change overtime. To make sure flexible working approaches continue to meet the needs of the individual, the team and the service it is important you:

- ☒ Develop an agreed review plan together
- ☒ Encourage the individual to raise any issues or changes in circumstances with you so you can help support them going forward



Plan for Career Progression

Evidence suggests that flexible workers, particularly those on reduced hours, can miss out on professional development opportunities due to prioritising the needs of their day job over their personal development. As a manager it is really important you ensure that professional development is not affected. Discuss with the individual:

- ☒ How important their professional development is
- ☒ Their professional development needs and career aspirations
- ☒ How time for professional development activities will be built into their working pattern
- ☒ How informal networking, coaching and mentoring opportunities will be accessed and prioritised



Summary- Managing A Flexible team



- ✓ Have flexible working discussions as part of your wellbeing and career conversations, appraisal, job plan or one to one management discussions
- ✓ Talk about flexible working openly and positively with your team, share good practice and support colleagues with their needs
- ✓ Be compassionate and supportive of staff seeking flexible working opportunities
- ✓ Ensure requests don't negatively impact upon the individual, team or service
- ✓ Be innovative when considering flexible working requests and challenge the status quo
- ✓ Be open to compromise.
- ✓ Be clear of how flexible working pattern fit into the rota and shift system
- ✓ Consider individuals training and development needs to ensure they are not disadvantaged
- ✓ Be clear and transparent regarding your expectations and expected outcomes for individuals working flexibly
- ✓ Regularly review and reflect on flexible working arrangements with your team and key stakeholders
- ✓ Learn from other flexible working colleagues, support one another and buddy up together



Key Principles of successful flexible job design



Finding a working pattern that works for the individual, team and service is key to success.

To help you, find a working pattern that meets the needs of the individual. the team and service there are several key aspects you need to consider:

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



Flexing the ‘WHEN’: finding a match

‘When-based’ flexibility refers to adjustments being made to the working day, week or year. This includes patterns such as flexi-time, compressed hours and annualised hours.

Such adjustments could include working reduced hours, working fewer days, shorter days, term-time only, job sharing and job splitting. Flexibility around when people work their hours is a key enabler in helping individuals manage their outside work interests and commitments.

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

To help you with this, these are a few points to consider:

- ✓ What are the expectations of your patients/ service users in terms of response times?
- ✓ Are there core times when people need to attend to see patients or attend key meetings?
- ✓ Are there important deadlines to be met?
- ✓ Can anyone else provide cover if the individual is unavailable at certain times?
- ✓ Can technology support the flexible working request?

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



Part-time Considerations

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

Some roles will naturally be easier to reduce than others, e.g. reducing the number of clinics or projects supported by an individual. For other roles it can be more complex and requires you as a manager to consider ways that part-time working could be achieved, either by reducing workload or identifying others who could undertake additional work.

As well as considering the practicalities of enabling part time working, it is also important to consider and discuss the potential impacts part time working could have on the individual, e.g. pension changes, reduced salary, reduced annual leave/ special leave entitlements, and for international workers potential working visa implications.

Additionally, as a manager it is also important that you make sure part-time workers are in no way disadvantaged. Processes need to be in place to ensure part-time staff receive the same communications and development opportunities as full time colleagues.

Reducing Workload

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

Finding alternative resource

- ✓ Are other members of the team willing and able to support aspects of the work without it becoming a burden?
- ✓ Could a job share or job split be formed?
- ✓ Would you need to recruit backfill?



Flexing the ‘Where’: making remote working work



While many of our roles in NHS Wales have to be undertaken in a fixed location, a surprising number of roles can be undertaken remotely. To help you consider remote working options there are several things to consider:

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

To help you here are some top tips:

- ✓ Spend time with your team to develop a shared and agreed definition of what ‘good’ looks like (remember to use an outcomes-based approach)
- ✓ Plan and stick to a schedule of essential team meeting times and support everyone to attend, establish where people can flex their arrangements to attend if essential
- ✓ Use a range of communication tools and techniques to keep in touch
- ✓ Consider the use of technology and video conferencing solutions to support remote working
- ✓ Build in time for small talk to support relational development and team cohesion
- ✓ Pass on plenty of praise for a job well done, as remote workers often miss out on this type of contact
- ✓ Manage any concerns relating to working practices in a timely and open manner, ensuring this does not compromise or affect others in the team who also work flexibly
- ✓ What activities are suited to remote working?
- ✓ What presence do patients, services users and colleagues need/expect?
- ✓ Does remote or virtual working have any benefits for patients/ service user benefits? (eg they don’t need to travel to the service or take time away from their work/caring responsibilities).
- ✓ How will you measure performance by outcomes as opposed to presenteeism?
- ✓ How can you ensure regular feedback, improvement focus and sustained quality, productivity, and performance?
- ✓ How often does the whole team need to be physically together? (challenge traditional thoughts)
- ✓ How will the team communicate and interact?
- ✓ What practices could be used to support team cohesion, health and wellbeing?
- ✓ Are there any health and safety or wellbeing considerations or implications?
- ✓ What equipment will staff working remotely need?

Flexing the HOW: making it work across all roles



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. As a manager it is important to be open-minded when it comes to considering creative ways that enable and support flexibility. Here are some productive examples that have been used 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.



Being creative with shift times to ensure busy periods are covered and part time working opportunities optimised



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



Remove local rostering 'rules' that restrict individual choice e.g. supporting night or mostly weekend working patterns



Using technical remote solutions for training and personal development activities



Split shifts between two workers

Leading a flexible team



Compassionate leadership and management approaches are key to positively managing flexible working requests, to support you here are some helpful hints.



- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Demonstrate compassionate leadership behaviours,** actively listen and taking time to understand the request and the importance of the flexible working request to them, Take action to help them achieve a suitable flexible working approach that meets the needs of the individual, the team and the service.
- ✓ **Trust people to do their jobs on a flexible basis.** Don't wait for them to 'earn' it.
- ✓ **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.
- ✓ **Consciously reward and recognise people for the outcomes they are achieving** – not for working additional hours or being always present.
- ✓ **Drive proactive and positive flexible working conversations with all team members**
- ✓ **Be a flexible employer,** Consider flexible working options when you are advertising vacancies and undertaking recruitment activities
- ✓ **Talk to other teams about what you're doing.** Share your good practice and learn from theirs.
- ✓ **Be Innovative, challenge traditional ways of working,** try new ways of achieving flexibility

Getting help when you're unsure



As a manager you are not expected to have all the answers.

Sometimes, you will feel that you've explored all options and still can't find a way to balance the needs of the individual, the team and the service. When this happens seek advice from your manager, colleagues or workforce colleagues to see if there is anything that hasn't been considered before saying no.

To help you gain the relevant help and support the NHS Wales Flexible Working Policy, NHS Terms and Conditions of Service Handbook and your local processes and procedures have an 'escalation stage' that helps further options outside of your immediate team to be considered.

If you reach this stage it is 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 managing the request to allow this wider exploration to happen.

Make sure you keep the individual informed of what is happening next and together make clear and agreed notes of your conversations and the options you and the individual have considered to assist in providing an overview in preparation for review as part of the escalation stage.

To help guide and support you through the effective management of flexible working requests there are a range of additional resources available to you;

[Supporting Your Team to Work Flexibly](#)

[All Wales Flexible Working Policy](#)

[All Wales Flexible Working Guidance](#)

[Here to stay: what drives and motivates the NHS flexible workforce | NHS Professionals](#)

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.



Aim

To optimise flexible working arrangements within the team through considering the benefits of flexible working approaches and identifying and mitigating the barriers we face.

Exercise 1

Reviewing and building upon flexible practices as a team

Introduction

The purpose of this team talk is to work together and support each other to optimise how we can work flexibly as a team, whilst ensuring the needs of the team, individuals and service are met. Many of us already have experiences of working in different ways, in different roles or organisations. How can we learn and grow from this?

Benefits (10 minutes)

- 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?

Barriers (10 minutes)

- 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?

Build on the benefits and overcome barriers (15 minutes)

- 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

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



Introduction

An opportunity to think about how we can work flexibly as a team and deliver the service effectively by supporting each other through reflecting and learning from previous experiences of working in different ways to support us to learn and grow.

Consider as a team consider the following questions (20 minutes)

What flexible working patterns do we currently have in our team?

Are there any other flexible working approaches that we could try and adopt?

Review and evaluate both existing and potential flexible working patterns in line with the following:

What minimum requirements do we need to consider to ensure we provide safe, effective services?

Do we have key patient/ stakeholder timescale expectations that we need to consider?

How often do we want to meet as a team and when?

How will we ensure someone is available during our core service hours?

How will we make sure those working remotely or different hours are fully included?

What obstacles could we face?

How can we make sure our flexible working approaches are fair and equitable for all staff?

What do we need to do next to ensure these flexible working practices become a way of life?

Finish by capturing the responses and develop your flexible working protocols. Agree how you will review them and keep them alive (ensuring, that they meet the needs of the All Wales Flexible Working Policy and organisational flexible working protocols and processes) (15 minutes)