

FLEXIBLE WORKING ENABLERS IN PRACTICE

This document helps you answer these questions:

- What are the key enablers to flexible working?
- What actions can I take to implement flexible working in my organisation?
- What impact could these actions have on staff satisfaction?

Chesterfield Royal Hospital NHS Foundation Trust has committed to being a flexible employer. The trust has an ongoing aim to be 'the best place to work' for its 4,000 staff and as part of this aim, they decided that they needed to pay more attention to flexible working.

In this document we have outlined the key actions they have undertaken to achieve this, framed under nine key enablers to flexible working.

THE EXISTING APPROACH

It was becoming clear that some parts of the organisation were not embracing flexible working and investigations found low levels of staff satisfaction.

In 2014/15, the trust observed the following data around flexible working:

- ✓ 14 per cent of medical staff worked part-time
- ✓ 48 per cent of other staff worked part-time
- ✓ 29 per cent of staff chose to return after retirement
- ✓ 43 per cent of staff were satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunities for flexible working patterns in the NHS Staff Survey
- ✓ 67 requests for flexible working made with 6 per cent being declined

On the basis of this data, a decision was taken at board level to make improvements in offering opportunities for staff to work flexibly.



USING THE ENABLERS

In November 2017, a working group was established to develop and promote flexible working across the trust, including an executive level sponsor, HR operational lead and nursing workforce co-ordinator.

The trust committed to the following actions in order to work towards their ambition, which are framed under the [nine key enablers to flexible working](#).⁷



1 Culture and leadership

Once the board had set an ambition to be a more flexible employer, it was evident that in order to achieve this there needed to be a culture shift in the way the trust perceived and implemented flexible working. As leaders set the cultural tone within organisations, their involvement was critical from the outset.

At first staff didn't believe that flexible working for all was possible and there were misconceptions around certain bands needing to work certain hours, which meant that some areas of the trust embraced the new approach, whereas others took longer to feel comfortable. Flexible working across a number of senior roles helped to role model behaviours and encouraged a broader shift in mindset across the workforce.

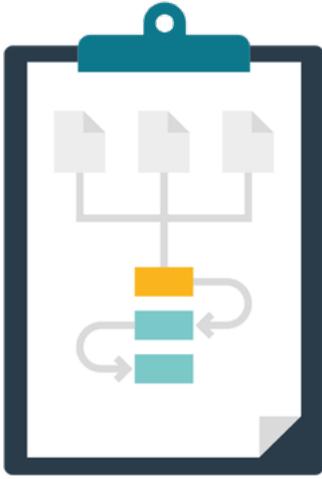
2 Staff engagement

The trust's data reflected the low level of satisfaction of staff with the current flexible working offer, with the trust also scoring poorly in the flexible working section of the NHS Staff Survey. There were various concerns from nurse leaders, including difficulties in rostering and the need for certain tasks and handovers to be performed at specific times.

Once the issues were understood, the working group ran roadshows with departments and worked with line managers and ward matrons to help them think differently about their wards could be run.

As a result of this work, wards are now doing handovers at patients' bedsides on an individual basis, and are staggering start and finish times based on the preferences of the nurses on each ward.





3 Policy and process

The trust already had a flexible working policy, however it had been written from an organisational and legal process perspective, so staff didn't tend to look at it and even if they did, it didn't help them understand the various options for flexible working.

The HR team developed an informative new guide for staff, which outlined what flexible working is, the benefits and included personal stories from across the trust about how staff worked flexibly. This guide sat alongside the policy and helped to promote the opportunities for flexible working and encourage staff to consider their options.

4 Supportive line manager

Early on, the trust identified that it needed to give line managers the permission to do things differently. At first, they found that there were perceived rules in place about what staff can and cannot do in terms of flexible working, but once these were broken down, line managers were able to have more meaningful conversations with staff.

A line manager training session was also developed and deployed at managers meetings. The focus of the training was how managers deal with requests, improving the approach to requests, understanding the benefits and why managers should be open and fair in their approach. Since rollout of the training, managers have had a more positive view about flexible working and take a 'think yes' attitude to requests.

5 Job design

The trust started to look at contracts differently and began designing jobs around the people in post. Prior to this, term time and part-time contracts were rejected. However, when managers started to discuss working preferences with staff and potential candidates, they found these patterns could actually fit well with job share arrangements and they began trialling this approach. For example, there was a staff member who wanted to work term time, with another who wanted to work school holidays, resulting in an effective job share for both parties.

A number of nurses at the trust put in requests to adjust their start times and ward matrons were tasked with looking at how this could be accommodated. It was found that by analysing the roster and looking at this in conjunction with requested start times, a matching process could be undertaken that would permit staggered start times based on service needs.



6 Technology



To begin with, a number of nursing areas trialled self-rostering but teams reported that they did not like this approach and would prefer to give control back to the ward matrons. A new e-rostering system was then installed and a review undertaken of all formal and informal flexible working arrangements, so that everyone had set patterns. However, the trust found that this action actually had the reverse effect of that which had been intended, as it meant that while the roster was more predictable, it was less flexible.

Teams have since relaxed this approach and now do a lot of informal requests instead, resulting in staff finding a happy medium in how they prefer to work. Working through this process also provided the trust with an opportunity to review existing flexible contracts that may have become outdated for their initial purpose and allowed them to review new requests.

7 Communication



Communication has been important across the trust to help break down perceived rules about flexible working and bust some of the myths that were evident.

The trust undertook a number of activities, including:

- flexible working roadshows
- social media promotion
- sharing videos and personal stories of flexible workers
- a flexible working and flexible retirement guide
- holding a week-long flexible working campaign
- sharing posters displaying the options available and differences between formal and informal flexible working across the trust's sites.

As part of this strategy, a 'think yes' tagline was developed and promoted, which has encouraged more staff to make flexible working requests and improved the chances that these requests will be approved.

8 Systems working



The working group contacted neighbouring trusts that were doing well in the flexible working space to get advice and tips about what they could do to improve their approach. These conversations highlighted the importance of a cultural shift in improving the likelihood that flexible working practices became more commonplace.

Following the launch of the [NHS People Plan](#), the trust identified that it was already undertaking a number of the actions outlined, however there are now plans to refresh any outstanding actions locally and work with other organisations in the area to develop system-level plans.



9 Evaluation

The trust continues to evaluate its work through staff satisfaction surveys and monitoring exit interviews. The results show an improvement of satisfaction and, importantly, the NHS Staff Survey results reflect this. There have obviously been challenges along the way but by taking a multifaceted approach, based on a number of key enablers, the successes have been evident.

During COVID-19, a lot of staff have had to work from home or introduce new flexible working arrangements. The trust is mindful that these arrangements can be positive for some colleagues but may be negative for others and post-pandemic, intends to take time to reflect on approaches that have worked well and areas where there are still improvements to be made.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSION

In 2019/20, the trust re-visited its data on flexible working and compared to previous years to benchmark improvements:

- 27 per cent of medical staff working part-time (doubled)
- 56 per cent of other staff working part-time (8 per cent increase)
- 45 per cent of staff choosing to return after retirement with flexible retirement and retire and return options (16 per cent increase)
- 57 per cent of staff satisfied or very satisfied with the opportunities for flexible working patterns from the NHS Staff Survey data (14 per cent increase)
- 129 requests for flexible working made with none declined (almost doubled in number of requests and now all accepted).

The results obviously show a dramatic improvement across all areas, with a marked increase in the number of staff now making and having flexible working requests approved.

The trust is now anticipating this year's staff survey results and hoping for an even better result. They would also like to identify the pockets within the trust that are still not quite where they want to be and focus on these areas, working in partnership with both staff and managers.

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