

## **Flexible working**

Flexible working supports staff to have greater choice in where, when and how they work and should help them achieve a better work-life balance. The COVID-19 pandemic has provided an unexpected catalyst for different ways of working across the NHS workforce. Now is a great opportunity for organisations to challenge the traditional ideology of how work has previously been delivered and support our NHS people and managers to explore flexible working options.

This gives everyone an opportunity to achieve a work-life balance that suits them and their organisation, and in turn supports workforce retention. Understanding what type of flexible working your staff require is key to developing your approach to supporting them.

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### **Why is flexible working important?**

- People are increasingly seeking roles that offer a good work-life balance. Flexible working will help the NHS remain an employer of choice, as well as acting as part of the solution in addressing the current workforce shortages in the NHS, by attracting new joiners, returnees and better retaining current staff.
- People require flexible working for a wide variety of reasons to achieve a better work life balance and value having this choice. For some, it is necessary in order to be able to work at all.
- Flexible working can positively impact on staff attendance, morale and job satisfaction leading to engaged staff delivering the best patient care.

### **Things to consider**

- Do you proactively advertise roles with flexibility, offer it post-recruitment or only when a member of staff requests it?
- Could you work with your senior leaders to facilitate a cultural change that challenges myths and negative perceptions about flexible working?
- When you offer flexible working, how creative are you in your approach and in suggesting support relevant to staff in different stages of their lives and careers?
- Could implementing an e-rostering system support flexible working or team-based rostering in your organisation?
- How often do you share examples of where flexible working works well and could these examples help implement change across the organisation?
- Aligning your flexible working policy to the recent revisions to Section 33 of the NHS Terms and Conditions of Service that provide for a contractual right to request flexible working from day one of employment and by default. How might you support staff not covered by these terms?
- Being responsive and agile to flexible working requests when received and measuring flexibility across your organisation.

## Making this happen

### Leaders can:

- Become a board level champion for flexible working by ensuring flexibility remains a strategic priority for their organisation and by role modelling effective flexible working practices.
- Identify the cultural norms and negative perceptions that are blocking flexible working in your organisation and proactively dispel them.
- Adopt a ‘test and learn’ mindset for flexible working that is open to change and experimenting with new ideas.

- Support their teams to work more flexibly to suit individual worklife needs, whilst maintaining safe and effective services.
- Have supportive conversations with colleagues about flexible working and explore possibilities.
- Undertake training to improve awareness and equip themselves to deal effectively with flexible working requests.

### **Case studies**

- The FlexNHS movement was established to create a supportive, encouraging, and resourceful network to promote and enable flexible working in the NHS for every profession, role and grade. It is available to everyone, helping to generate more conversations about the benefits of flexible working and dispel any myths. Since Milton Keynes University Hospital has implemented FlexNHS, the organisation has halved their turnover and have been able to retain a significant percentage of staff. Find out more about the #FlexNHS campaign on Twitter @FlexNHS.
- The Oldham Care organisation has developed a job description and role profile for a band six midwife working six hours a week. This offers increased flexibility to midwives that might otherwise not have considered taking on a substantive post.
- North Central London ICS is delivering e-rostering and flexible working programme to ensure predictable working that better meets the needs of their people.

### **Tools and further reading**

- Keep up to date with interventions and practical solutions on NHS England and NHS Improvement's website.
- Enablers to flexible working: top 10 enablers to creating a culture that promotes effective flexible working practices.
- Making flexible working requests flowchart: this flowchart provides information on the steps managers and staff in the NHS should take when making a request for flexible working.

- Pensions and flexible working in your later career.