

# Flexible working

Briefing for board members

October 2020

# Introduction

Allowing your staff to work flexibly is an important part of creating a modern and inclusive employment culture across the NHS.

**% of our workforce are happy with flexible working arrangements**  
(insert stat from local NHS Staff Survey data)

To ensure the NHS remains an employer of choice and can **attract** and **retain** talent in a competitive job market, more action is needed to explore flexible working options.

Flexible working means different things to different people and can relate to:

**HOW MUCH** | **WHEN** | **WHERE WE WORK**

Greater **predictability** in working patterns can also allow staff to achieve a better work-life balance and improve the experience of those working across the NHS.

# Strategic context – key messages

The NHS needs to recruit and retain **more people** to address workforce shortages.

We know we need to **work differently**:

- Between 2011 and 2018, more than **56,000** people left the NHS citing work-life balance as the reason.
- The 2019 NHS Staff Survey found that only **54 per cent** of staff are satisfied with opportunities to work flexibly.

(option to insert localised statistics here)

An **inclusive culture** should be at the heart of everything we do:

- The NHS workforce is made up of people from all walks of life, who may require flexibility for many different reasons. The NHS needs to do more to promote a truly diverse and inclusive workforce, where flexible working is accessible to all.
- Flexible working is not just about offering part-time working for those with children or working from home during a pandemic.

# Learning from COVID-19

The NHS workforce has demonstrated enormous adaptability and flexibility in response to COVID-19. Many staff have taken on new roles and worked in different ways and these changes have been achieved at pace.

In response to COVID-19, the NHS workforce has embraced:

- Homeworking
- Technology and digital means of communication
- Flexibility in hours to accommodate childcare and caring responsibilities
- Staff returning to the NHS from retirement
- Strong team-working to balance needs of service with those of staff.

The response to the pandemic presents us with an opportunity to continue the momentum in improving opportunities for flexible working across the NHS.

**How do we embed this into culture going forward and continue to offer these flexibilities post COVID-19?**

# Learning from COVID-19

While many have worked **more flexibly throughout the pandemic**, there are also staff who have worked additional hours, in often stressful conditions. It is essential that we give due time and attention to looking after the wellbeing of these individuals.

- Lack of flexibility in working patterns can be a contributory factor to burnout, work related stress and poor mental health.
- There is a risk that COVID-19 may increase the desire of those nearing the end of their careers to bring forward their retirement plans.
- Different challenges and opportunities exist when implementing flexible working for different sections of the NHS workforce and what works for those in patient-facing roles will differ from office-based staff.

# People Plan

**We are the NHS: People Plan 2020/21 - action for us all** from NHS England and NHS Improvement and Health Education England sets out what our NHS people can expect from their leaders and each other.

Improving opportunities for our NHS staff to work flexibly is a strong focus within the plan and features as part of 'Our People Promise,' which sets out ambitions for what people working in the NHS say about it by 2024.



# People Plan - actions

Within the People Plan, there are 11 actions for employers, national bodies and systems relating to flexible working:

Action	Who
Be open to all clinical and non-clinical permanent roles being flexible.	Employers
From January 2021, all job roles across NHS England and NHS Improvement and HEE will be advertised as being available for flexible working patterns.	NHSE/I
From September 2020, guidance will be developed to support employers.	NHSE/I
Cover flexible working in standard induction conversations for new starters and in annual appraisals.	Employers
Requesting flexibility – whether in hours or location, should (as far as possible) be offered regardless of role, team, organisation or grade.	Employers

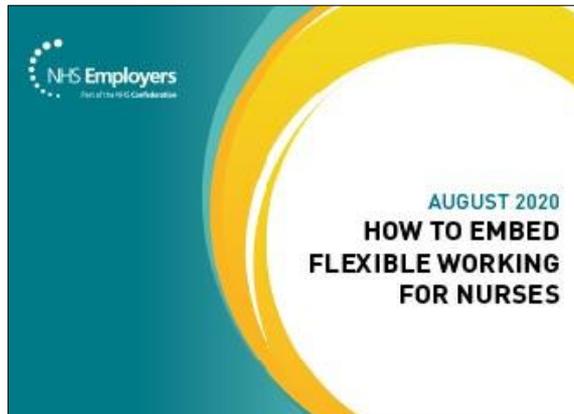
# People Plan - actions

Action	Who
Board members must give flexible working their focus and support.	Employers
Add a key performance indicator on the percentage of roles advertised as flexible at the point of advertising to the oversight and performance frameworks.	NHSE/I
Support organisations to continue the implementation and effective use of e-rostering systems.	NHSE/I
Roll out the new working carers passport to support people with caring responsibilities.	Employers
Work with professional bodies to apply the same principles for flexible working in primary care.	NHSE/I
Continue to increase the flexibility of training for junior doctors.	HEE

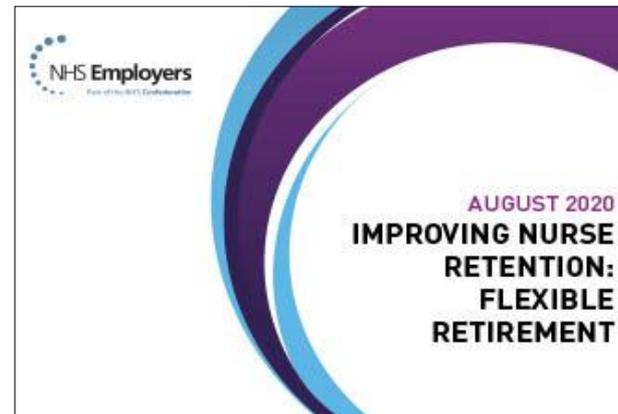
# NHS Employers resources

There are many great things already happening across the NHS to increase the uptake of flexible working.

NHS Employers has developed a suite of resources aimed at colleagues that have a responsibility or interest in implementing flexible working, including HR professionals and line managers.



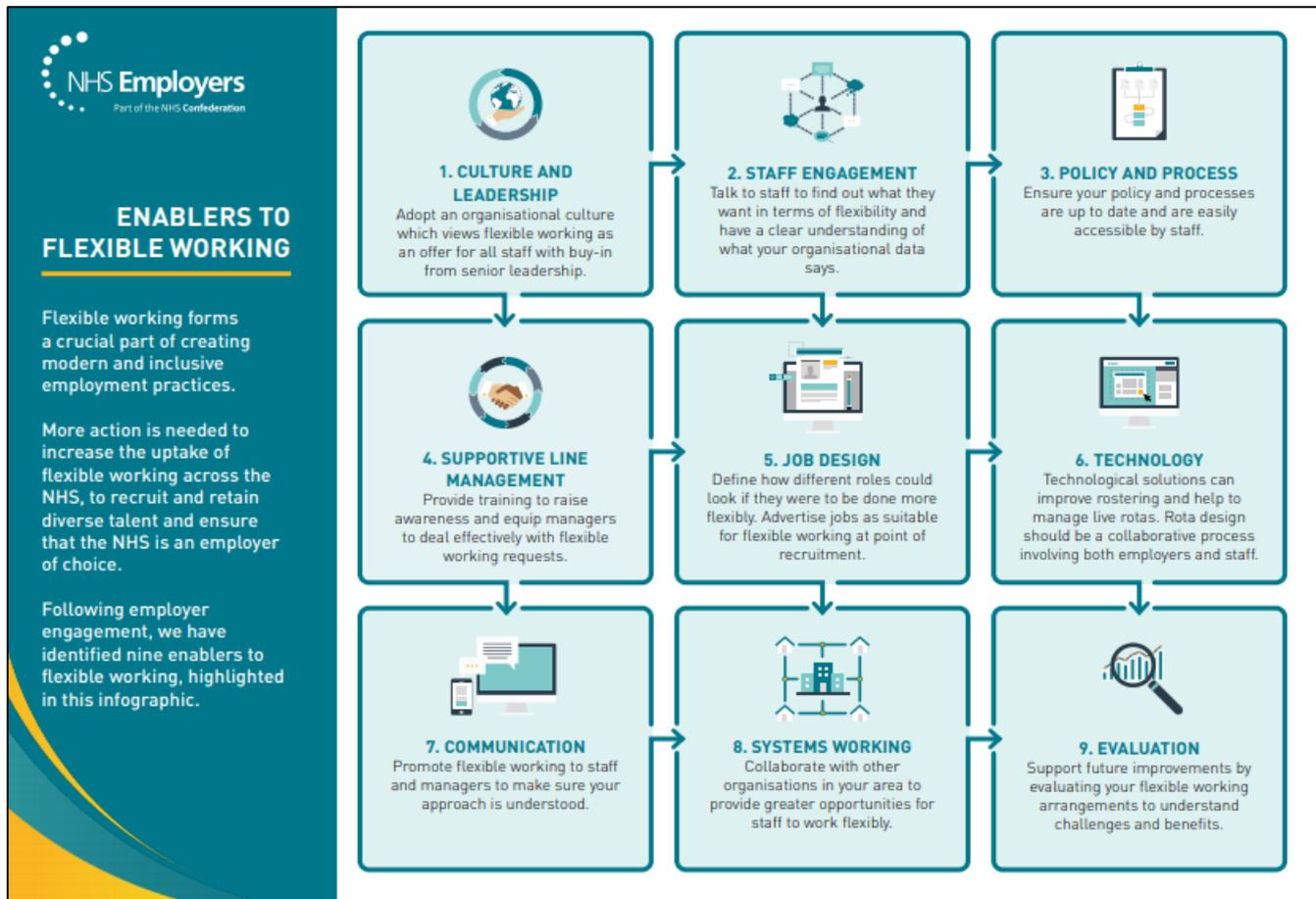
[Flexible working guide](#)



[Flexible retirement guide](#)

# Enablers to flexible working

Based on employer engagement, NHS Employers has identified **nine key enablers** to successfully embedding a culture of flexible working, which we have highlighted in a handy one-page [infographic](#).



# What next

Promoting the benefits and encouraging leaders at all levels to be open to discussing flexible working and empowering teams to identify and try balanced solutions - **does the exec support this culture change? What can the exec team do to ensure the message is heard throughout the organisation?**

Flexible working requires compromise, so that the needs of individual staff members are balanced with those of the service – **how can you find your flex? What are you willing to compromise on (on both a personal and organisational level)?**

There are undoubtedly challenges in permitting flexible working for those in shift-based roles, but these same professions are often those struggling with supply shortages – **can we afford not to take action? What support is needed to help leaders overcome barriers and implement team-based solutions?**

We've already demonstrated through COVID-19 that our organisation and workforce are capable of enormous flexibility and innovation – **how can we harness this power to drive forward further change?**