

Putting inclusion at the heart of flexible working

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About Us

Who are we?

- Clare Ridout – HR Business Partner for Evelina London
- Cheryl Samuels – People & Culture Director for Evelina London

Evelina London

- Evelina London, is one of four clinical groups within Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust.
- We offer services from antenatal diagnosis through to childhood, into adolescence and on into adult life.
- We are a specialist and community children's hospital serving Lambeth and Southwark. We are mainly located in our state-of-the-art building alongside St Thomas' Hospital.
- Evelina London employs over 4,000 staff from a wide range of professional, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds.
- A flexible working culture starts with commitment from leaders, here is our Chief Executive Officer, Gubby Ayida.



Staff Experience & Flexible Working

- The 10 Year Health Plan for England has recognised flexible working as essential in improving experience for our staff, their wellbeing and work/life balance.
- Therefore a clear ambition in the NHS People Plan, with “We Work Flexibly” as a People Promise.
- Research by the CIPD has found that flexible working is pivotal in attraction and retention of staff. It also found that 80% of employees say that flexible working has made a positive impact on their quality of life.
- One of our Guy's & St. Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust's key deliverables in our strategy is embracing and enabling flexibility for colleagues, recognising the benefits to our staff's health and wellbeing.
- **Flexible working has a clear role in the future of the NHS. At Evelina London we have recognised this and taken deliberate steps to embed it into our culture.**



Our strategy to 2030

Better, faster, fairer healthcare for all



NHS
Guy's and St Thomas'
NHS Foundation Trust

NHS
Thomas'
Foundation Trust

Staff Experience & Flexible Working

- **More Time for Life** - staff gain precious hours back for family, caring and community life.
- **Health & Wellbeing** - less commuting stress, better sleep, more time for exercise and healthy routines.
- **Fairer Access & Inclusion** - when flexibility is normalised, fewer people are excluded - tackling assumptions, bias and discrimination.
- **Visible Variety** - people see the range of patterns that work, building confidence to ask for what they need.

Of course, as employers we benefit from:

- **Reduced Turnover** – flexible working is hugely valued and a reason to continue working for us
- **Attraction Tool** – can be a reason to join an employer and can give a competitive edge
- **Reduced Sickness Absence** – improved health & wellbeing leads to healthier staff
- **Improved Engagement** - showing we value our staff by offering flexible working leads to more engaged employees
- **Improved Patient Care** – flexible working improves staff experience, staff can feel valued, supported and encouraged - leading to better patient care.

Flex Evelina recognises that true flexibility must be accessible to everyone—not a privilege for a few.



What is Flex Evelina?

- Flex Evelina is a staff-led, equity-driven cultural transformation programme launched in October 2023 to create a flexible working culture that is inclusive, transparent, and sustainable.
- This programme directly addresses systemic disparities in access to flexible working, aligning with the NHS People Plan and our Clinical Group workforce strategy.
- To ground our response in lived experience, we established a diverse, **multidisciplinary working group** representing different roles, grades, ethnicities and genders. The group has been central to every decision, ensuring that actions reflect the real needs of staff.

Flex Evelina

Flexible working putting patients first



Understanding the Challenge

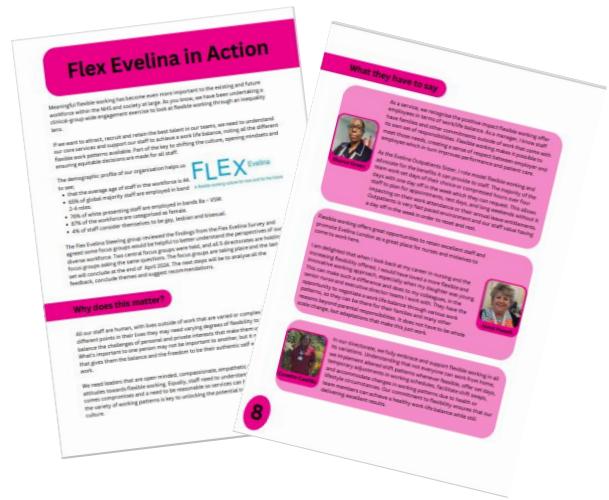


Flex Evelina



- Our 2023 NHS Staff Survey revealed that over 35% of our workforce experienced burnout.
- We scored 5.71 for the People Promise Theme, “We Work Flexibly,” lower than our comparator.
- National employment trends from recognised bodies such as the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), showed that more and more staff are changing careers due to a lack of flexibility.
- As a Clinical Group, Evelina London is committed to creating a flexible working culture that empowers and enables us to **attract, recruit and retain the best talent** to deliver services directly and indirectly to the population that we serve.
- We knew we had formal arrangements, but suspected there were many informal arrangements. We needed to see the full picture to better understand access to flexible working, and equity of access.

Methodology & Promotion



Methodology

- Formal flexible working data was obtained from the HR portal, ESR & e-Rostering.
- Quantitative data from the Survey Monkey, as well as qualitative data from focus groups was pulled together, and notable themes analysed.

Promotion of the survey

- Awareness of the survey was raised by members of the flexible working steering group within their directorates and networks, plus walkarounds, a GTI page, Evelina Staff Forum, People Exchange newsletters, posters, leaflets, in meetings, Evelina London forum and staff newsletters.
- Focus Groups were promoted within directorates with targeted communications in Directorate Management Team's and among the FlexEvelina Steering Group*.

**NB: The FlexEvelina Steering Group was set up to provide direction whilst the cultural change project was live. This was comprised of volunteers from across the Clinical Group at all levels and all professions.*

High Level Results

- 1 in 3 staff were unaware of available flexible working options.
- 1 in 3 staff lacked confidence in applying for flexible working.
- 3 in 4 applicants were not offered alternative flexible working options if their initial request was declined.
- Managers felt apprehensive about refusing applications or offering alternatives (**all 5 focus groups** mentioned this)
- Global Majority staff were significantly more likely to have requests declined (14.8% vs 8.7% for White staff)
- The demographic who responded closely mirrored our workforce profile, ensuring representative insights – giving us confidence that dataset was reliable and inclusive.
- These findings exposed a critical gap: flexible working at Evelina London was not inclusive. Access was inconsistent, awareness was low, and confidence among marginalised groups was limited.

Conclusions & Recommendations



Conclusions and Recommendations have been aligned to the 6 key themes from the Timewise Maturity Curve (left) and individual actions included in the report:

1. Improving Manager Capability:

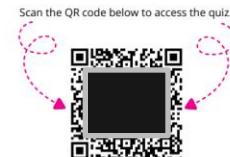
- Improving learning, cultural literacy and competency of managers
- Completing our People Management Programme – Particularly the “Managing Your Team Flexibly” module as a priority.
- Manager guidance and training - Building confidence in having flexible working conversations and offering viable alternatives

2. Leadership:

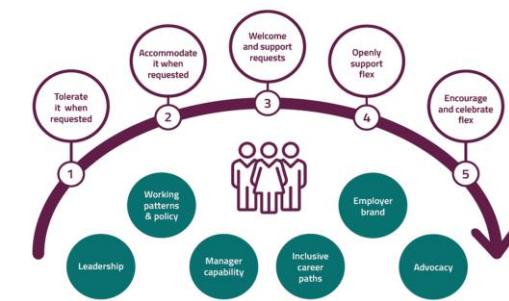
- Demonstrating a visible commitment to flexible working – including it in their email signature and Teams background. Clear support from our CEO & Executives.
- Encouraging team based flexible working, such as self-roster or team-based rostering.
- Increasing recording of all flexible working.
- Ensuring a personal commitment to recognise bias, reflect and address through practice

3. Working Patterns and Policy:

- Sharing learning on different flexible working practices that are working well in Evelina London.
- Broadening awareness of the possible flexible working patterns, including videos and quiz.
- A personal commitment to talk openly in teams to increase inclusivity.
- A move to more self-rostering across the Clinical Group - enabling greater choice and shift flexibility.



Conclusions & Recommendations



4. Inclusive Career Pathways:

- Build flexible working into service design
- Managers to understand demographic profiles of their staff and where the inequalities lie in order to adopt an anti discriminatory approach.

5. Employer Branding:

- Share report at Trust level with relevant central teams,
- Review of Evelina London Clinical Group strategy to make Flexible working a bigger focus and demonstrate it's importance to staff and leads, when attracting recruiting and retaining staff.

6. Advocacy:

- Improvement of communication channels with Trust advocate groups
- Role modelling of positive and inclusive language to shift the culture

7. High-impact communications campaign:

- A professionally produced 1 minute video shared with all 4,000 staff, raising awareness of flexible options
- Demonstrating leadership buy-in, including a commitment from our Chief Executive to flexible working – available to see online and the intranet.

8. Transparent dashboards:

- Enabling managers to view uptake, as well as disparities in flexible working by ethnicity, disability, and role.

Next Steps & How Staff Are Getting Involved

- **Established a Flex Evelina implementation group**
 - This is comprised of leaders and representatives from across Evelina London
 - Clear and target driven terms of reference will ensure that the group, and its members are held to account for the actions and recommendations as outlined in the report
- **Embed final recommendations into all areas of Evelina London**
 - Executive sponsorship is integral to drive the changes as well as local sponsors of all professions and levels.
 - Enable local access to the flexible working dashboard for directorates to drill down.
- **Update Flex Evelina branding and the Intranet**
 - This includes salutations for emails and Teams backgrounds
 - Members of the Implementation Group have made a commitment to use these in their day to day practice.
- **Continue promotion of internal People Manager Programme**
 - This is a purpose built programme for managers in Guy's and St. Thomas' to support with their everyday practice.
- **Role Model recommendations from the NHS 10 Year Plan**
 - The recently published 10 Year Plan outlines a number of commitments, one of which is to make the NHS a modern employer that is fit for the modern age;
 - This includes developing new approaches to flexible working and offering staff more freedom



Measurable Impact

Since the launch of Flex Evelina, we have seen tangible improvements in workforce inclusion, engagement, and retention:

- Formal flexible working uptake increased from 26% to 34% (April 2022–March 2025)
- Flexible working request rejection rates among Black and Asian staff dropped from 2.02 and 1.96 to 1.39 and 1.10, respectively (April 2022–March 2025)
- Staff turnover dropped from 13.8% to 10.34%. (April 2022–March 2025).
- Disability declarations rose from 5.6% to 7.2%, and ethnicity ‘not stated’ fell from 4.8% to 3.9%—suggesting greater trust and psychological safety (April 2022–March 2025).
- Evelina London’s Staff Survey ‘We work flexibly’ People Promise score improved from 5.71 (2023) to 6.13 (2024).
- These changes represent improved morale, reduced burnout, and more inclusive day-to-day experiences for our staff, who are happier at work working with our patients.



Key Learnings & Looking Ahead

- Available data that is reliable and accurate is essential in understanding disparities, raising awareness and driving change.
- The power of lived experience is essential in shaping interventions, and influencing others.
- Sustained communication and leadership support are critical for trust and engagement.
- Senior leadership commitment is essential to embedding change, our Executive Team champion Flex Evelina.
- Stakeholder groups influencing the change must be diverse with experiences across the staffing groups and their lived experience.
- Policy alone cannot drive change – it's about building awareness, supporting managers and disaggregating data. Addressing the root cause of inequality – not just the symptoms.

Looking Ahead

- Flex Evelina is not a time-limited project; it is a long-term commitment. Our ambition is to make flexible working a cultural norm—not a negotiated exception.
- We will continue to lead from our working group, using experiences and influence to continue to drive change.
- This is about programme of cultural change.

Flex Evelina is now viewed as a model of how flexibility, equity, and culture can align. It has helped retain talent, increased engagement, and made staff feel safer and more valued—all of which ultimately enhance patient outcomes.

