

## Flexible working

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### Is it right for me?

If you are someone who is filled with dread at the idea of working nine-to-five in a single location then flexible working may provide an alternative. If you have multiple skills and interests and are struggling to find one job that suits you then flexible working may offer you the opportunity to balance multiple jobs or to balance work and hobbies. Flexible working can also be worth considering if you want to take time out to raise a family, or have caring responsibilities, but don't want to stop working entirely.

Flexible working tends to appeal to people who value autonomy and variety, and who are organised, focused and self-motivated. There are lots of different kinds of flexible working, and different approaches will appeal to different people. The downside of flexible working is that it can be stressful to balance different jobs or interests, you may experience more financial uncertainty and you may feel more isolated from colleagues than if you work full time in one location.

### Advantages of flexible working

- Greater autonomy
- More variety in work
- Better work / life balance
- Multiple income streams can spread financial risk
- More choice of working locations and styles
- Relative freedom from organisational politics
- More choice over taking time off
- Less time spent commuting
- Ability to develop multiple or alternative career paths

### Disadvantages of flexible working

- Stresses of time management
- Financial pressures or uncertainty
- Loneliness from lack of colleague contact
- Isolation in the workplace – feeling 'left out'
- Lack of regular routine
- With freelance work, a need to market yourself
- Lack of understanding from others who choose more conventional paths
- Difficulty 'switching off' at the end of the day
- Stress in close relationships

### What are the options?

Types of flexible working include flexibility in the number of hours worked or when they are worked and in terms of working location (for example homeworking). Options include:

- Reducing working hours
- Changing the pattern of working hours
- Managing several different jobs

- Temporary or agency work
- Working from home
- Freelance work
- Time out on a career break
- Self employment
- Voluntary work

## Getting a work-life balance

Flexibility in your working life can also impact on your personal life. While you may have more flexibility to take time off or adjust your working patterns, you may also find it difficult to turn down work and this can impact on your free time.

Flexible workers may find the concept of work-life blend more fitting than work-life balance. Flexible work allows you to 'blend' your personal interests and personal life with your working life, allowing you to get more out of your time.

You may find it useful to look at the [Windmills](#) website which contains exercises and activities to help you examine your work-life blend and identify possibilities for the future.

See the not-for-profit website [Flexibility.co.uk](#) for up to date information and debate about the changing world of work and developments in flexible working.

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## Working hours

### Part-time work

Part-time work involves working fewer hours than would be considered full time. There is no particular number of hours that make someone part time or full time, but a part-time worker will usually work less than 35 hours a week.

Part-time work is the most common kind of flexible work, with about a quarter of all workers in the UK working part time (ACAS, 2010).

Part-time work is often undertaken to free time for study, training or other responsibilities such as childcare, and the majority of part-time workers are women (ACAS, 2010).

### Flexi-time

Flexi-time offers employees some flexibility over the times that they work. Provided employees work core hours (often in the middle of the day, or at the busiest times) they can make up their remaining hours as they choose.

Some organisations allow employees to take excess hours as additional leave (sometimes called 'flexi-leave'). Although normally employees are not allowed to accrue too many hours and commonly there is a limit of one to one and a half days per month.

Flexi-time is most common in office environments.

### Compressed working hours

Compressed working hours involves working different patterns of hours on different days. Commonly an employee will work longer hours over four days of the week and take a day off or half a day off one day of the week. Unlike flexi-time the pattern of hours is fixed and agreed in advance with the employer.

### **Term-time working**

With term-time working an employee works regular hours during school terms but takes time off over school holidays. This kind of work is common in the educational environments and is often popular with parents of school-age children.

### **TOIL (time off in lieu)**

Time off in lieu is where an employee takes time off to compensate for extra hours they have worked. It is often offered by employers instead of paid overtime. TOIL normally needs to be agreed with managers in advance.

### **Annualised hours**

An annualised hours contract specifies the number of hours to be worked in one year. This pattern originally developed in industries with a seasonal work flow, such as manufacturing, but has extended into retailing, financial services, and health and emergency services.

Annualised hours contracts are normally (but not always) associated with shift work. In annualised hours a worker's hours are calculated over a year. The majority of these hours are then allocated to specific shifts, but the remaining hours are kept in reserve so that workers can be called in at short notice as required.

### **Zero-hours contracts**

Zero-hours contracts are where a worker is not guaranteed any work at all. Instead an employee agrees to work as and when they are needed by their employer.

Zero-hours contracts are common for supply teachers and bank staff in health and social care settings. This kind of work tends to appeal to people who are looking for an occasional income.

### **V-time working**

V-time working involves a voluntary reduction in hours for a fixed period with the guarantee of a return to normal hours once the period ends.

V-time working may be initiated by the employee or the employer, and is normally agreed for specific purposes, e.g. undertaking a course of study or caring for a family member.

### **Holiday purchase scheme**

A holiday purchase scheme allows employees the opportunity to purchase an additional number of days' holiday on top of their annual entitlement. The cost of a day's holiday varies depending on a worker's salary and there is usually a limit to the number of days that can be bought.

### **Holiday work and work experience for students**

Holiday work is commonly undertaken by students. It can be used primarily to earn money, or to gain experience relevant to a future career. University careers services or job shops will often advertise vacancies, and may have details of student internships or work experience opportunities in particular industries. Some opportunities may be unpaid but students should check their rights as the law is complicated in this area. Additional information is available from the [National Association of Student Employment Services](#) and on the [Rights for Interns](#) website.

## Further information

- [Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service \(ACAS\)](#)
  - [Directgov - Flexible Working](#)
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## Locations

### Hot-desking

Hot-desking is a system where employees don't have a permanent designated desk space but share desk space, working wherever there is free space at any given time. In practice it is often combined with other forms of flexible working, for example homeworking or mobile working which mean that employees only need a desk in the office for some of the time.

Some employees find hot desking stressful because they don't have the familiarity of a normal work space, however other employees find working from a variety of locations with different colleagues can create variety.

Hot-desking requires a high level of tidiness because desks have to be cleared at the end of a period of work. It also requires a great deal of organisation because documents and equipment need to be stored appropriately or brought in and out of work as required.

### Homeworking

Working from home is an option for many self-employed people, particularly in the creative industries but also for any other types of work where modern communication technology enables remote contact. Homeworking can also be associated with very low-paid manual work conducted at home on a commission basis. Home based business opportunities are advertised by a number of companies however caution is needed when looking at these as bogus job adverts are common.

Increasingly it may also be possible for employees to negotiate to work from home for some, or in occasional cases, all of their contracted hours. This option is most commonly found in professional jobs where at least part of the duties can be done away from an office. This kind of work from home normally depends on having suitable equipment at home and a suitable internet connection. In order to agree to working from home an employer needs a high level of trust in an employee, and the employee needs to be organised, disciplined and good at communicating with their employer.

Working from home can be experienced as isolating and stressful (with some employees finding it difficult to 'switch off'). However reduced commuting time and costs and an increased ability to manage other commitments can make homeworking appealing.

## **Mobile working**

Mobile working refers to work, which through the use of technology, can happen anywhere and at any time. Some employers will offer employees laptops or palm tops in order to allow them to work from different locations. With the growing availability of wireless internet access employees may also be able to access emails, and company systems remotely from the office. The advances in hand-held technologies means that email and digital information is increasingly available through phones and allows access to work wherever and whenever an employee wants.

Undertaking this kind of work requires a high level of confidence in using technology and requires a company to make significant investment in appropriate equipment. The advantage of being able to use previously unproductive time (such as commuting) can come at a cost of finding it difficult to 'switch off' from work, especially where mobile phones or portable devices are left on outside of work hours. Frustration with technology and working with incompatible systems may also be a problem.

## **Teleworking**

Teleworking involves working part of the working week away from the workplace. It could mean working from home or from another remote location, and normally involves the use of telecommunications. Many homeworkers are also teleworkers. Teleworking can be done on a permanent or a temporary basis.

## **Virtual teamwork**

A virtual team consists of a group of people who are brought together to work on the same task but who work in different locations, possibly for different organisations and often at different times. A common kind of virtual team is one that is convened to work on a specific project - for example copywriters, editors and illustrators may all work on the same book but may never meet face to face.

With developments in technology virtual teamwork is becoming increasingly possible. Virtual teams may now exist within single organisations with communication taking place largely through email, telephone and instant messaging, and meetings convened via teleconference or videoconference.

Virtual teams can provide advantages in terms of flexibility of location, but with less face to face contact, it is important that team members have excellent communication skills and that there is a clear structure in place. With teams dispersed over different areas of the globe cultural differences can prove challenging but may also provide a valuable range of perspectives and ideas.

## **Further information**

- [Career At Home](#)
  - [Telework Association](#)
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## Working patterns

### Job-share

Job-sharing is a type of part time work where one job is split between two (or occasionally more) part-time workers. The responsibilities, pay and hours are divided up, although the exact way that they are split depends on everyone's circumstances - common ways of splitting are to work split days, split weeks or alternate weeks.

The success of a job-sharing arrangement relies on job-share partners having compatible personalities and a high degree of trust. Arrangements also need to be in place to cover the hand-over of work and communication.

When advertised some posts state whether or not they are suitable for job-share. In addition job-sharing may be an option if you want to reduce your hours at work because employers will sometimes consider advertising an additional part-time post to make up your hours.

### Portfolio workers

The term portfolio worker traditionally refers to someone who works on a freelance basis on a number of different projects for a number of different clients. This kind of work may be common for art and design graduates in the early part of their careers as they build up a portfolio of experience, and it is also a common pattern for freelance consultants.

The original concept of portfolio working has recently expanded to cover the phenomenon of 'portfolio careers'. This includes individuals who may be employed either part time or full time but alongside this, balance other paid jobs, freelance work or self-employment.

Portfolio working can provide a high level of variety, challenge, and autonomy, however the challenges of balancing multiple projects also demands excellent time-management and organisational skills. Working with multiple organisations in a similar professional area can also prove challenging in terms of managing business relationships and maintaining confidentiality around commercially sensitive information. Contracts will sometimes state that working for competitors is not permitted.

### Fixed-term contracts

Unlike permanent contracts fixed-term contracts specify an end date to the employment. Fixed-term contracts are more common in public sector employment and in specialist settings where an employee may be taken on only for the duration of a project.

Fixed-term contracts may be used by an employer to assess an individual's suitability for employment before offering a permanent contract. They can also be an opportunity for an employee to try out different kinds of work and some people progress through a number of temporary contracts as a way of building up experience.

There is evidence to suggest that younger workers are more likely to be employed on temporary contracts and some graduates may find that temporary contracts could offer a practical step into full-time work, for example through the use of a graduate internship, which is a particular kind of fixed-term work.

### Freelancing

Freelancing is a particular kind of self-employment which involves providing professional services to a company but without being employed by them. Freelance work is most common in creative industries and is particularly associated with areas such as journalism, publishing, graphic design and event management.

Freelance work is often accompanied by a specific brief for the project. Pay may be on an hourly rate or per-project and may be paid upfront, on delivery, or may be split across the duration of a project.

## Agency work

Agency work is also known as temping. It involves going 'on the books' of an agency which calls on you when employers have need of temporary cover. Agencies may specialise in one kind of work or deal with a wide range of employment. Agency workers have a contract with the agency rather than the employer they work for, and they are paid by the agency.

The work you do can range from a few hours to a few weeks, and it can be a way of building up a lot of experience quickly. Agency work is very flexible and you can accept or reject work that is offered. An employer is also able to end your work without being liable for redundancy pay. Agency work can lead to permanent work in some cases.

## What flexible working pattern suits my needs?

What pattern suits you will depend on what kind of work you want to do and what is available. It will also depend on your own values, skills and preferences. The [Windmills](#) website offers a number of interactive tools to help you identify what is important to you.

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## Other flexible working options

### Downshifting

Downshifting is where an employee moves away from a job that is high in status, responsibility or reward, to one that has less of these rewards. It normally refers to a whole lifestyle shift away from materialistic culture, and is often associated with moving from cities to rural areas.

To be able to downshift you would normally already hold a senior position. Therefore this kind of work is most characteristic in the later stages of a career rather than for new graduates. However, although new graduates may not 'downshift' as such, some may make similar choices in terms of prioritising location or quality of life rather than pay or status in their career. Deciding what is important to you is vital if you are going to choose this kind of route, and you may find the [Windmills](#) resources helpful in this respect.

### Career break

Career breaks are extended periods of leave which are agreed between an employer and an employee and are normally unpaid. They are commonly used to allow an employee to take time off to care for children or other members of their family. Granting a career break can be an attractive option for an employer as a way of avoiding losing trained and experienced staff.

Sabbaticals are a particular kind of career break that can be offered by employers to reward employees for long service. Sabbaticals may be offered for a set period of time (often up to one year) and can normally be used for any purpose an employee wants, such as travel, volunteering, study or pursuit of a hobby.

## **Maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave**

Childcare is one of the main reasons why people adopt a flexible working pattern. As an employee you have certain statutory rights to maternity, paternity, adoption and parental leave, for further details refer to the section on your legal rights. On top of your statutory rights, many employers will offer more generous schemes.

## **Study leave**

Study leave is time off to study a professional course, possibly resulting in a qualification, which may be paid or unpaid. Study leave is most commonly offered by employers where there is a professional requirement to undertake training or undergo regular continuous professional development. If you have been working for an organisation of over 250 employees for at least 26 weeks, you have the right to ask for time off to complete training that would help you in your work. Your employer must consider your request but does not have to grant it.

Further information is available from the [Citizen's Advice Bureau - Basic Rights at Work](#) website.

## **Secondment**

A secondment is a temporary move to another organisation or department. Secondments usually last for up to a year and involve working on a specific project or in a temporary post. Some temporary posts are advertised as suitable for secondments. You may wish to consider a secondment if you would like to develop additional experience in a different environment or try using different skills. In some companies secondments are offered as part of staff development programmes. Your salary, annual leave and other benefits normally stay unchanged after negotiations between the two organisations or departments.

## **Further information**

- [Portfolio Careers](#)
  - [The Career Break Site](#)
  - [The Recruitment & Employment Confederation](#)
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## **Your legal rights**

### **If you have children**

If you have a child under the age of 17 (or under the age of 18 from April 2011) you have a statutory right to request flexible working as long as you:

- are an employee of your company (ie you are not an agency worker);
- have worked continuously for your employer for at least 26 weeks;
- have not made another statutory request within the last 12 months.

This right applies if you are the mother or the father of the child, and to foster carers, guardians and step parents.

Employees who care for a disabled child under the age of 18 who is in receipt of disability living allowance, and employees who look after certain adults who need care, also have a statutory right to request flexible working.

You can request to change the hours you work, change the times you work, or request to work from another location or from home for part of all of your hours.

An employer does not have to accept your request, but they can only reject a request on the grounds that it would have a detrimental impact on the business.

## **Pregnant women**

With a very few exceptions most pregnant women have statutory maternity rights including:

- paid time off for ante-natal care;
- the right to work in a safe environment - which may include making adjustments to the working environment, location, or hours to accommodate pregnancy;
- the right to take up to 52 weeks maternity leave;
- the right to claim Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP) for up to 39 weeks for most women who have worked for the same employer for 26 weeks continuously and who have average weekly earnings of at least the national insurance lower earnings limit.

Women also have the right to claim unfair dismissal and discrimination if they are not allowed to return to work after having the baby or are dismissed because of pregnancy.

## **Adoption**

If you have been matched with a child for adoption or have had a child placed with you for adoption you may be entitled to adoption leave. Adoptive parents are entitled to up to 52 weeks adoption leave and most parents will also be entitled to Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP) for 39 weeks.

Only one parent is entitled to take adoption leave, although the other parent may be able to take paternity leave.

A new proposal is currently being considered by the government, in which parents, including those of adopted children, may share the allocation of parental leave between themselves and their partners. It is not yet known if and when this will come into force.

## **Paternity leave**

Most working fathers are currently entitled to one to two weeks paternity leave. Most fathers will also be entitled to Statutory Paternity Pay.

Paternity leave can start either on the day the baby is born, or at a future date (within 56 days of the birth).

The government is currently consulting on a new shared parental leave policy in which fathers may be entitled to additional paternity leave. Under the proposed scheme, if your partner has gone back to work without using up all of their statutory maternity leave then you can take the remainder of their leave off instead. You are only entitled to this after the baby is 20 weeks old and before they are 1 year old. It is not yet known if and when this will come into force.

## Parental leave

If you have worked for your employer for at least a year, and have a child who is under five then you have the right to take time off work to look after them. You are entitled to up to 13 weeks of unpaid leave. If you have a child who is under 18 and disabled then you can take up to 18 weeks of unpaid leave. However an employer may be able to limit you to taking no more than four weeks for each child in each year.

## Emergencies

Employees are entitled to reasonable time off for unexpected problems or emergencies involving family members or other people who depend on them. This includes illness or injury, death, or unexpected breakdown in care arrangements. The employer will decide what counts as 'reasonable' time off and leave is normally unpaid, unless the contract of employment states otherwise.

## Career breaks and sabbaticals

There is no legal requirement for an employer to offer career breaks or sabbaticals to staff. However a number of large companies offer these opportunities.

## Further information

- [Department for Business Innovation and Skills](#)
- [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\)](#)
- [WorkSMART](#)

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## Convincing employers

### Selling the benefits of flexible working

Evidence suggests that the vast majority of employers would be happy to consider an application for flexible working. However, in many cases employers will have concerns over the business impact of flexible working patterns. If you are going to approach your employer to ask about flexible working it is important that you are prepared to address their concerns and sell the benefits of flexible working.

You should start by considering the situation from your employer's perspective. Are there good business reasons on which they could refuse your request? Is it possible to find solutions to their concerns or can you compromise on the kind of flexible work you are proposing?

You may find it helpful to emphasise the benefits of flexible working from an employer's perspective. These include:

- greater loyalty of the workforce;
- falling absenteeism and increased retention of staff;
- increased productivity from motivated staff;
- ability to increase skills in the organisation by recruiting more staff with a wider range of talents;
- lower stress levels;
- increased recruitment of staff and better brand image for the organisation.

You may also like to consider identifying sources of information or support for your employer. Organisations like [ACAS](#) provide advice to employers on flexible working. Case studies of employers who have instigated flexible working practices successfully are available from a number of sources, details are given in types of flexible employer below.

## Types of flexible employer

Flexible working options are widely available in all sectors. Historically the public sector has championed flexible working with a wide range of part-time and term-time only options. However increasingly flexible working options are being provided by private sector companies as part of additional benefits packages designed to attract the best candidates. Some companies emphasise their flexible working policies in order to demonstrate their corporate and social responsibility and to develop a reputation for being an ethical business.

Although flexible working is widely available it is worth checking the record of individual employers as the kind of options available may vary. You will also want to check that employers are delivering on their flexible working promises rather than just using them to attract candidates.

Some employers have a particularly strong record with offering flexible working practices. Every year the charity [Working Families](#) publishes its list of the top employers for flexible working practices. You may also like to check [Work Foundation](#) and the [Equality and Human Rights](#) website for case studies of employers who have instigated flexible working procedures successfully.

## How to apply for flexible working

If you are interested in applying for flexible working you should check if you have a statutory right to apply as this will involve following a set procedure. You should also check whether your employer has a flexible working policy as this may offer additional guidance.

In general you should:

- apply well in advance as the process can take several months;
- consider your preferred option(s) and be prepared to negotiate if necessary;
- anticipate any concerns your employer may have and prepare to answer these;
- identify examples of similar organisations or roles where flexible working has been introduced successfully;
- consider talking to colleagues who may be able to provide advice and support, particularly if they have previously applied for flexible working;
- consider an informal conversation with your line-manager or with HR before you make a formal application;

- make an application in writing (either on paper or electronically) giving details of the kind of flexible pattern you would like to adopt, any reasons you have for the request and your preferred start date;
  - explain how you believe changing your pattern of work would affect your employer and how this could be dealt with;
  - be prepared to appeal if your request is turned down.
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## Alternative approaches to employment

### Cooperatives

A cooperative is a business which is owned and democratically controlled by its members. Cooperatives are guided by principles of democracy, equality and cooperation and have a strong social or environmental objective. Unlike other businesses cooperatives share their profits with their members, and frequently also contribute a proportion of profits to organisations or causes associated with their aims or ethos. Setting up a cooperative involves working with a group of people to identify a business opportunity and using each other's skills to make this opportunity a reality. Like a conventional business, due consideration needs to be given to developing a business plan, marketing plan and identifying financial and legal concerns. Further information is available from [Co-operatives UK](#).

### Communes and intentional communities

A commune, or an intentional community, is a community of people who share a common social, political or spiritual purpose. This purpose is often based on developing a different model of living to that of the dominant culture. So for example some communities may be based around principles of sustainable living, or around developing spiritual lifestyles. Members of the community typically work together and share responsibilities and resources. The emphasis within a commune tends to be on the group as a whole rather than on individuals or on individual families. If you are considering this kind of lifestyle it is important to fully research a community before joining to ensure that the group ethos matches your values. Many communities offer interested people opportunities to visit and experience the lifestyle before they join.

Further information is available from [Intentional Communities](#).

### LETS - local exchange trading schemes

LETS are locally run not-for-profit schemes enabling the exchange of goods and services without the need for money. Instead of money members use a system of credits which can be 'earned' by providing services to other members and then 'spent' on services that other members are offering.

For further information see [LETSlink UK](#).

### Self-employment

Self-employment may offer a great deal of flexibility because ultimately it is up to you to decide when and where you will work. Some forms of self-employment will offer more flexibility than others, and this often depends on the kind of business you are running - for example many businesses are constrained by the expectations of customers that they will

be open 9-5pm. Pursuing part-time self-employment alongside other work may also be an option for people who would like to diversify their work, without taking the risk of becoming self-employed full time. Options may include freelance work or setting up a small home-business.

## **Self-employed business opportunities**

Setting up your own business can take a great deal of thought and planning. Advertisements that promise 'earn cash from home' or 'be your own boss' can appear tempting, however you need to be very cautious when looking at these. Adverts which ask you to pay money in advance are often scams and should be avoided.

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## **FAQs**

### **How many hours can I work while studying for my degree?**

There are no legal restrictions on the number of hours UK and European Economic Area (EEA) students aged 18 or over can work while studying. However, some higher education institutions recommend no more than 10 to 15 hours a week during term time. This figure aims to balance financial need and academic workload, so it is not advisable to exceed this limit.

Restrictions for non-EEA students depend on what is stamped in your passport. Many non-EEA students can work up to 20 hours a week during term time and more during vacations. [UKCISA: UK Council for International Student Affairs - Working during your studies](#) has useful information and a regularly updated factsheet.

### **I have a young child – can I request flexible working?**

In the majority of cases if you have a child under the age of 17 (or 18 from April 2011) then you have a statutory right to request flexible working. Your employer can only reject your request on the grounds that it would adversely affect the business or incur a great deal of expense.

Even if you have a right to request flexible working you will want to think carefully about what kind of pattern you want to request and how you approach your employer. In particular you will want to consider what is practical for you, what is practical for your employer and recognise that some degree of negotiation may be necessary.

Useful ideas and advice are available at [Working Families](#).

### **What issues might I face when applying for flexible working as a manager?**

As a manager you have the same ability to apply for flexible working as other employees. Traditionally flexible working has been less common at managerial levels but this is beginning to change as more pressure is put on leaders in business and industry to seriously consider the benefits of flexible working. The attitude is very much that, unless there is a business case against it, employers should consider implementing flexible working practices across the organisation, or at least granting requests as they come in.

The issue for managers may be that there often seems to be a business case against flexible working. A common concern of employers is how able a manager is to manage a team or resources when they are absent from the office for part of the time. If you are going to apply for flexible working you will need to think carefully about how you can address this concern. Perhaps you have examples of how you have effectively managed your workload or your team when you have been absent for other reasons, if you can, identify the business advantages for working flexibly such as increased ability to manage your workload through working from home or through compressed hours. Think about what you might need to change in your own working practices to accommodate flexible work, for example, if you are going to be absent from the office for periods of time it might be necessary to review or revise communication channels to ensure you remain informed. It may also be a good idea to identify case studies or examples of where flexible working has worked in practice in other areas of the organisation or other similar companies.

### **What problems might I face if I choose a flexible working pattern?**

- It may be difficult to find an appropriate employer/position if you have decided on a flexible pattern prior to job hunting.
- There is a possible or perceived risk to promotion prospects, although in many industries flexible working is no longer seen as barrier to promotion.
- You may face distrust from colleagues, especially if some of your time is home based.
- Keeping to contractual hours, which may require considerable self discipline, can be a challenge.
- You may encounter problems in ensuring your workload fits your contractual hours and that senior management does not overestimate what can be achieved in the timeframe.
- You may feel pressured by your employer to adjust your normal working pattern according to business needs – for example to attend meetings outside of your agreed hours.
- Time management, for example scheduling meetings for when you are in the office, may cause difficulties with other staff who feel their time is being arranged around your needs.
- Communication can be challenging. Mobile phones, teleconferencing or videoconferencing may not always work or always be suitable. Working part time may result in missing team meetings or informal communications.
- Developing a strong team may be difficult to achieve if you do not work the same hours as other team members.
- If you jobshare, developing an effective working relationship with your jobshare partner may be difficult if their approach to work differs from your own.

### **Will asking for flexibility be viewed as a lack of commitment or ambition?**

Whether a request for flexible working is viewed as a lack of commitment depends on the culture of your workplace and how you explain your circumstances to your employers.

Some working environments have a culture of long hours where demonstrating your commitment by working late in the office is important. This kind of culture is particularly associated with City firms although it may be found in all kinds of work places. With increased pressure on businesses to consider flexible working and to consider the needs of workers with families there is some evidence that this culture may be changing.

Before you ask about flexible working you may like to check whether your employer has a flexible working policy. You may also consider identifying other people within your organisation who work flexibly and asking them about their experience. This may help to inform you about how a request for flexible working is likely to be viewed.

If you decide to make a request, a great deal of how it is perceived will depend on how you explain your wish to work flexibly. In some cases you may be able to explain your request in terms of self development, for example taking leave to study, or taking a secondment. Where you are requesting home working or teleworking similarly you may be able to explain this in terms of improving your ability to manage your workload. Generally where you are requesting flexible working it is a good idea to emphasise your long-term commitment to the job, and to be clear about your plans for the future.

### **Will working while studying affect my studies?**

Not necessarily. Before taking up work you should weigh up the positives and negatives. Some positives include:

- Easing financial pressures and stress.
- Gaining variety in your day to day life and building confidence.
- Ability to put your learning into practice (where you are working in an area associated with your studies).
- Improving your employment prospects after your course as work experience is attractive to future employers.

Things to consider are:

- Whether the hours fit round your studies, and if there is room to negotiate the hours, particularly around exam time and essay deadlines.
- How will you manage your time to prevent becoming too tired or stressed.
- Whether the job will offer you a chance to develop useful skills or offer useful experience for what you want to do in the future.
- If you would rather use your time on other activities, such as social activities.

Written by Rosie Alexander, AGCAS, April 2011

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