



FACTSHEET

Resources for employers

Supporting dads to work flexibly

In recent years, flexible working has become part of the landscape of good employment practice in the UK.

The Government introduced the 'right to request flexible working' in April 2003. For just over a decade it applied only to parents and certain other carers, but it was extended from July 2014 to include all employees with at least 26 weeks' continuous employment, regardless of their parental or caring responsibilities.

Employers have a duty to consider every request in a reasonable manner and can only refuse if they can show that one of a specific number of grounds apply. ACAS has issued guidance and a Code of Practice for employers on handling such requests in a reasonable manner.

There are many different types of flexible working, including:

- Part-time working
- Job-sharing
- Home working
- Variable start and finish times (flexi-time)
- Term-time working
- Compressed hours
- Annualised hours
- Time off in lieu
- Shift swapping.

Not all will be appropriate to the size and nature of your organisation, but maximising the availability of a range of flexible working options is likely to result in improvements in job engagement and productivity, according to Working Families¹.

Variable uptake

Three-fifths (62%) of organisations consider flexible working reactively, upon request from employees; in 39% of cases it is agreed informally with the line manager². According to Working Families, almost a third (31%) of parents report that there is no flexible working on offer where they work³.

Among fathers surveyed by the Equality and Human Rights Commission in 2009, 60% of those working in the finance and business sector said flexible working was available to them, compared to only 30% of those employed in manufacturing industries⁴. More senior employees may have greater access to flexible working options than those in manual occupations – but it's also the case that professionals work the longest hours.

It's worth noting, too, that part-time working, the flexible working option most commonly made available, involves a reduced salary and is highly likely, therefore, to be out of many dads' reach. It is offered by 74% of organisations overall – but all the other flexible working options are much less available (ranging from flexi-time, offered by 41% of organisations, down to annualised contracts, offered by 15% and output-based contracts with no fixed hours, offered by 3%).

What are the advantages for employers?

Whatever the sector, evidence suggests there are many advantages to businesses of allowing staff to work flexibly. These include:

1. Reduced costs, through reduced staff turnover and less absenteeism

Replacing staff and training new ones can be very expensive. In 2010 BT estimated that flexible working had produced savings of around £5 million a year through improved retention – for example the percentage of female employees returning to work after taking maternity leave reached 96–99%⁵. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development estimated that the average turnover cost per employee was £8200, rising to £12,000 for senior managers or directors⁶. In the Third Work Life Balance Survey, 38% of employers reported that flexible working had a positive effect on absenteeism and 42% that it had a positive effect on labour turnover, including retention of female staff⁷.

2. Higher productivity

Research from the British Chambers of Commerce found that 58 per cent of small to medium sized enterprises reported improvement in productivity as a result of introducing flexible working⁸. In a survey of 1,000 company directors, of the 667 who had flexible-working policies, 50% identified increased productivity as a benefit, and 75% thought their employees were more/as productive when working flexibly and at home⁹.

3. A wider talent pool

In a survey by the Equal Opportunities Commission one of the reasons given by women as to why they were working below their full potential was because they could not find part time work which properly made use of their skills and experience¹⁰. In a global survey of final year MBA students, 90% cited work-life balance as a key factor in determining commitment to their employer¹¹.

4. Greater commitment and loyalty

A CIPD survey found that employees who are satisfied with their work-life balance and those on flexible contracts are more engaged with their work than those who are dissatisfied or not working flexibly. It found that those on flexible contracts tend to be more emotionally engaged, more satisfied with their work, more likely to speak positively about their organisation and less likely to quit than those not employed on flexible contracts¹².

5. Reduced carbon footprint

In 2010 BT estimated that increased home-working brought about significant falls in energy and water consumption and CO2 emissions; the company also saved over £500 million in accommodation costs and an estimated £6,000 per annum for every home worker employed¹³.

What are the advantages for dads?

Research by Lancaster University Management School into fathers' experiences of combining work and family life suggests that flexible working can bring many advantages to men.

- Fathers with more flexible working options are less troubled by stress, and feel a greater sense of purpose and wellbeing; they are able to achieve a better work-life balance, are better able to deal with work overload.
- Dads who work flexibly in the private sector have better physical and psychological health, are less stressed, are more committed to their employer and have better relationships with their colleagues.
- Low-income fathers find work relationships more troubling – but when they use flexible working, things get better. These dads also feel less stressed and more 'in control' if they can work flexibly.

Increasing dads' use of flexible working

Employed British fathers' use of flexible working (particularly flexitime and occasional working from home) has grown. Between 2002 and 2005, the percentage of new fathers working flexi-time to care for infants rose from 11% to 31%, with 29% occasionally working from home for this purpose¹⁴. Between 2006 and 2009 the percentage of full-time employed fathers working a

compressed working week more than doubled from 6% to 15%; as did the percentage using term-time flexible working, which rose from 6% to 13%¹⁵.

But dads' flexible working remains at a low level in contrast to mums'. While 50% of women in couple-households work part-time, only 5% of fathers do so, for example¹⁶.

Flexible working options are less available in male-dominated settings¹⁷; and there are marked differences in the availability of part time working between men and women. For example studies have suggested that part time working is more than twice as available to women as men: 52% of women but only 25% of men had access to it according to a 2009 EHRC study. The gender gap in availability was even greater for parents of children under one (68% of women working part time versus 14% of men) and under six (61% of women versus 19% of men)¹⁸.

Changing the culture

In terms of attitudes, factors stacking up against dads' greater use of flexible working could include the gender pay gap; ideas about breadwinning; prevailing workplace cultures; and social/gender expectations and norms. It's also the case that while the idea of men working flexibly for work-life balance reasons is accepted by many employers, few have done anything to actively encourage it.

Whatever the reasons, fewer men than women make requests to work flexibly. Fewer also have their requests granted or are successful when taking their cases to tribunals¹⁹ – and the grounds on which fathers can take cases to tribunals are different from mothers', and less favourable²⁰.

Ideas for changing things

It can be tough for employees to push, as individuals, for the possibility of working flexibly - and especially if, as is often the case, your company operates a 'long-hours culture' and/or offers a 'traditional' model of support for parents whereby parenting leave and benefits are promoted primarily to mothers.

Many dads don't take up flexible working for fear they will damage their career if they do so: in the EHRC's 2009 survey, 36% of dads said working flexibly would mark them out as not committed to their jobs and 44% thought that it would negatively affect their chances of promotion²¹.

Dads often feel that while family friendly policies like flexible working might in theory be available to 'parents', what this really means is that they're available to working mothers. Researchers have found that in fact, mums also find it difficult to access flexibility – suggesting that men may overstate the extent to which they are excluded from flexible working by virtue of their gender²².

But even so, it is likely that making a conscious and explicit effort to advertise flexible working options to men, and more generally to help men make their fatherhood more visible, would give enough of a nudge to some dads to take them up. 'Dad passports' could be a useful tool to help bring about this change²³.

Notes

¹Working Families

²CIPD

³Working Families

⁴Equality and Human Rights Commission (2009). Working better: meeting the needs of families, workers and employers in the 21st century. London: Equalities and Human Rights Commission.

⁵Department for Children, Schools and Families (2010) Think Fathers: how flexible working for dads can work for your business. London: DCSF. Available online at: <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/how-flexible-working-for-dads-can-work-for-your-business/>.

⁶Cited in Department for Work and Pensions (2010) Flexible Working: working for families, working for business: A report by the Family Friendly Working Hours Taskforce. London: DWP. Available online at: <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/family-friendly-task-force-report.pdf>.

⁷Hayward, B., Fong, B. and Thornton, A. (2007) The Third Work Life Balance Employer Survey. Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, Research series No. 86.

⁸British Chambers of Commerce (2007) Work and Life: How Business is striking the right balance.

⁹YouGov Survey (2006) cited in Department for Work and Pensions (2010) as above

¹⁰Grant, L, Y eandle, S and Buckner, L (2005) 'Working below potential: women and part time work' Equal Opportunities Commission Working Paper Series No 40, Manchester

¹¹Coopers and Lybrand (1997) International Student Survey Report, cited in Department for Work and Pensions (2010) as above

¹²T russ, C., Soane, E. and Edwards, C. (2006) Working life: employee attitudes and engagement. Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development research report London

¹³Cited in Department for Work and Pensions (2010) as above

¹⁴Smeaton, D., & Marsh, A. (2006). Maternity and Paternity Rights and Benefits: Survey of Parents 2005. Employment Relations Research Series No. 50. Department of Trade and Industry.

¹⁵Biggart, L., & O'Brien, M. (2009). Fathers' working hours: parental analysis from the third work-life balance employee survey and the maternity and paternity rights and benefits survey of parents. Employment Relations Occasional Paper. London: Department of Business. Innovation and Skills

¹⁶Working Families, Time Health and the Family (2014)

¹⁷Dex, S. & Ward, K. (2010). Employment trajectories and ethnic diversity. In K. Hansen, H. Joshi & S. Dex (eds.), Children of the 21st Century: the first five years. Bristol: the Policy Press.

¹⁸EHRC (2009) as above

¹⁹Working Families (2006). Working Families Policy on Flexible Working. Available at: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

²⁰For more details on this, see <http://www.fatherhoodinstitute.org/2011/why-dads-and-mums-should-be-able-to-challenge-flexible-working-refusals-at-tribunal/>.

²¹EHRC (2009). Working better: meeting the needs of families, workers and employers in the 21st century. London: Equalities and Human Rights Commission

²²Gatrell et al (2014)

²³Burnett et al (2012)

Prepared by Jeremy Davies of the Fatherhood Institute

More resources for employers, service providers and families are available at: www.yearofthedad.org

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