

FLEXIBLE HIRING: A GUIDE FOR EMPLOYERS

Ideas and action points
to support Scottish
organisations' progress
from flexible working to
flexible hiring

Introduction

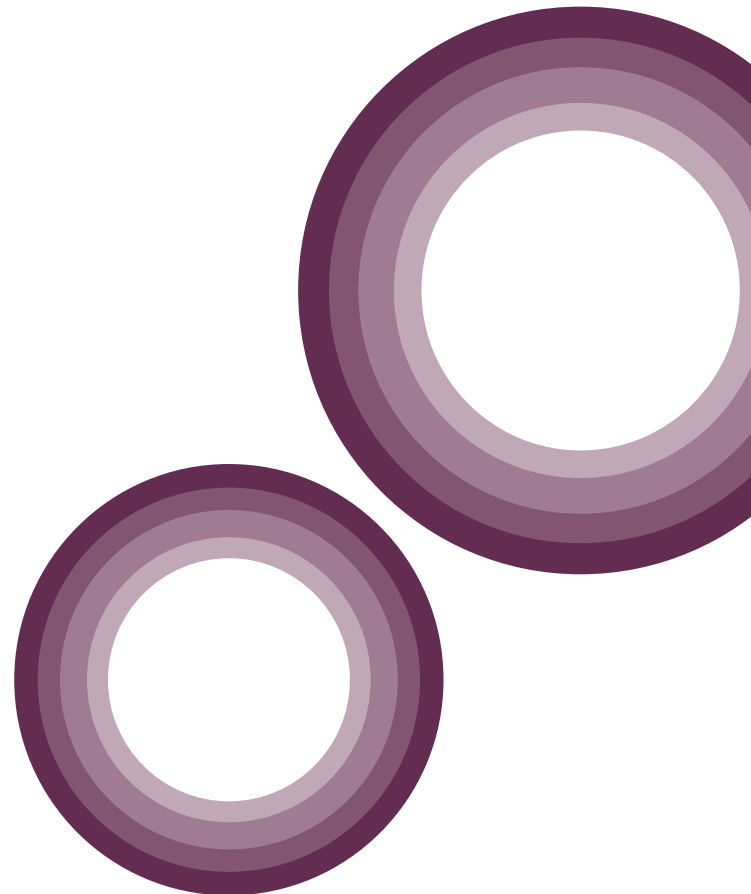
In 2020, whilst grappling with the pandemic, the Scottish government recognised that the impact on workplaces was likely to be long term, and that companies would need help to recalibrate their working practices in response.

These issues were already on the radar in Scotland; the government was conscious that many people who needed to work flexibly (such as parents, carers and those with disabilities) were struggling to access good quality work. So they commissioned Timewise to create a Scotland-wide programme to create deep, lasting change at a systemic level.

The programme aims to encourage employers to advertise more jobs as flexible from day one, and to provide more tailored support for employees, to help them find and secure the hybrid working they need.

We believe this challenging time offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for employers and others to transform the way organisations hire. So we've created this guide to help you put structures and processes in place to offer flex from day one, and deliver future-fit workplaces.

We hope you find it useful.



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What is flexible hiring?

Flexible hiring means offering flexibility to new recruits, from day one. If you can see that flexible working is beneficial to your business, and is working well for your people, then you're missing a trick if you don't hire flexibly. Without this final step, there's a block in the jobs market for people who can't work full-time. Which means your business is missing out on some of the best candidates, and not fully benefiting from its flexible working strategy.

Starting to hire flexibly is a much simpler step than you might think. All you're doing is waiving the 6 month qualifying period for requesting flexible working. What's more, saying in a job advert that you'll consider flexible working does not commit you to meeting an unreasonable request. It simply means that, if a candidate requests flexibility, you will consider it, and agree to the arrangement if it works for the role.

You may have some roles which are completely unsuitable for flexible hiring. That's fine – just continue to advertise these jobs as full-time, with no mention of flexible working possibilities or culture. But it's our belief that, when you really look at them, there are very few roles that can't be worked flexibly in some way.



Flexible hiring is when an employer openly offers flexible working to new recruits, at the point of hire



How will flexible hiring help your business?

ATTRACT EXTRA CANDIDATES

If you don't offer flexible working at the point of hire, your organisation is cutting itself off from a large number of candidates who can't or won't apply for traditional full-time jobs.

DIVERSITY AND THE GENDER PAY GAP

Most organisations have targets for these inclusion issues, and flexible hiring can play a big part in solving them.

PROGRESS YOUR BEST PEOPLE

Flexible hiring and hybrid working will improve mobility within your business – enabling talented employees who work flexibly to apply for promotion, taking their flexibility with them.

EMPLOYER BRAND

Flexible working has become a key employee benefit. Promoting your openness to flexible and hybrid working will help make your organisation a place where people are keen to come and work.¹

SKILLS UTILISATION

Flexible hiring will ultimately help you optimise performance and productivity, by recruiting the best person for the role and making the most of their skills and experience.

¹ Sources include: Flexibility Works 2021:- <https://www.flexibilityworks.org/research/> CIPD Flex From 1st Flex From 1st | Campaigns | CIPD

Why is flexible hiring so important for the workforce?

Even pre-pandemic, nearly 9 in 10 UK employees wanted to work flexibly². Many of them will ONLY apply for a job where flexible working is possible.

They are competing for a handful of vacancies. Our Flexible Jobs Index has shown that only 1 in 4 jobs advertised in Scotland offer any kind of flexible working. And there has been surprisingly little change during the pandemic; the widespread move towards working from home is not being reflected in the recruitment process. This lack of flexibly advertised jobs is a clear barrier to fair flex for all; with 3 in 4 jobs off-limits for those who need to work flexibly, opportunities for work or progression are scarce³.

The problem has been exacerbated by the pandemic, which has led to increasing unemployment. When a flexible worker becomes unemployed, how can they find their way back into work, when so few jobs are advertised with the option to work flexibly?

This mismatch of supply and demand means that 1.5 million people are trapped in flexible jobs they're over-qualified for⁴. They have traded salary for flexibility, and employers are missing out on their skills.

And when it comes to part-time in particular, the picture is even worse; the Index shows that only 10% of vacancies are advertised specifically as part-time. Even when part-time roles are advertised, they tend to be low-paid, with little autonomy over hours or options to work from home. The lack of quality part-time roles limits job mobility for people who need to work in this way, both in terms of progressing up within their organisations or up and out into other ones⁵.



Women are disproportionately disadvantaged by this, as large numbers have historically worked part-time. But times are changing and the appetite for flexible working cuts across both genders and all age groups – 84% of men either work flexibly or say they want to; so do 92% of younger workers and 72% of people approaching retirement².

69% of all Scottish workers say flex would make a positive difference to their work-life balance⁶.

² Flexible Working: a Talent Imperative, Timewise, 2017

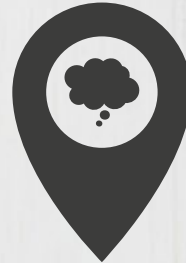
³ Timewise Scottish Flexible Jobs Index, Timewise, 2021

⁴ How Flexible Hiring Could Improve Business Performance & Living Standards, Timewise for J Rowntree Foundation, 2016

⁵ The Impact of Covid-19 on Part-Time Employees 2021

⁶ Flex for Life, Flexibility Works 2021

Four stages to becoming a flexible hirer



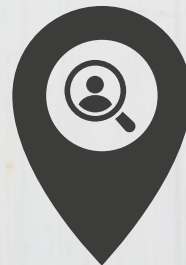
Stage 1

Check you're comfortable with flexible working



Stage 2

Gain leadership buy-in to flexible hiring



Stage 3

Build it into the recruitment process



Stage 4

Communicate it in your job adverts

The rest of this guide takes you through the four stages of flexible hiring, with ideas and action points to move you on your journey



Stage 1: Check you're comfortable with flexible working

Before you can begin to hire flexibly, there needs to be widespread acceptance of flexible working throughout your organisation, and examples of it working well in practice. As a result of the pandemic, you may be considering 'hybrid working' – a blend of home-working and office work. Our guidance is the same for this form of flexibility as for any other: make sure it's working smoothly with your current workforce before offering it to new recruits.

People need to believe that flexibility is good for their team, and for the business. If flexible (or hybrid) working is granted reluctantly, with flexible workers not being properly supported, then your organisation has work to do before you can begin to think about hiring flexibly.

Even if you have a proactive flexible or hybrid working strategy, you may feel that there are still parts of your business where flexible working practice can be improved. It may be, for example, that flex is seen to be a problem at very senior levels, in a particular department, or with certain types of flexible working such as part-time or variable hours.

IDEAS FOR ACTION

- If you're still in the early stages of accepting flexible working, read up on its many benefits including: talent retention, motivation and loyalty, real estate savings, productivity levels, reduced levels of absence.
- Identify where you have blocks to flexible working and explore the reasons why.
- Identify areas of your business where flexible/hybrid working is particularly successful, and carry the learning across.
- Identify successful people who work flexibly in your business, and promote them as role models.
- Articulate your approach clearly in your internal communications. This may require you to develop guidance and a set of positive behaviours in addition to your flexible working policy.

TIMWISE FAIR FLEXIBLE CHANGE AGENTS CAN HELP

We can supply case studies from other employers, describing changes they made and how they implemented them. Please email info@timewise.co.uk

Our Timewise Guides can support you further too:

[Timewise-Scottish-Flexible-Jobs-Index-2020.pdf](#)

[Impact-of-Covid-19-on-part-time-employees.pdf](#)





Stage 2: Gain leadership buy-in to flexible hiring

To be in a position to offer flexible working from day one, and say so in your job adverts, you will need to ensure your organisation is fully supportive from the top down. A shift towards flexible hiring will involve line managers as well as your Talent Team, and leadership engagement is key to getting buy-in from everyone.

If becoming a flexible hirer is not yet on your leadership team's agenda, you will need to present the business case to them. It will be important to define clearly how it can support talent attraction and the career progression of current flexible employees, as well as supporting a diverse talent pipeline. You will also need to explain how failing to hire flexibly creates a sticking point in fully realising all the business benefits of flexible and hybrid working.



IDEAS FOR ACTION

- Run a leadership workshop with your executive team, exploring their aspirations for flexible working in your organisation.
- Secure an internal senior champion for the changes, who will promote the benefits of flexible hiring internally.
- Ask a senior leader to write a blog about how flexible workers should not be afraid to apply for promotion within the business.
- Identify employees who were hired on a flexible basis and have proved successful in their roles. Present them as case studies to your executive team.
- Consider what flexibility is possible for ALL roles (there is always a way to offer more input and control, even in frontline roles)
- Ensure hybrid and flexible working feature within your diversity and inclusion plans; they should also be built into your wellbeing strategy.





Stage 3: Build flexible hiring into the recruitment process

In some respects, the change you are making is a simple one. As a business, you are saying that you are open to flexible working requests from new candidates, as well as for existing employees. So you are not waiting for the qualifying 6 month period before considering requests. As with existing employees, stating that you are 'open' to flexible working does not commit you to granting a specific request from a candidate.

However, in order to make a success of this change, you need to make sure it is embedded in your recruitment processes before you can begin to offer it to candidates. And critically, there needs to be a job design step where you ask the question 'can this role be worked flexibly?' This involves managers thinking about when, where and in how much time the job can be done.

Additionally, managers will need guidance on how and when to respond to requests for flexibility during the application and interview phase. At the end of the first interview? At offer negotiation? Whenever a candidate raises it?

IDEAS FOR ACTION

- Perhaps start with one department, ideally where there's already an appetite for offering flexibility at the point of hire. Get the changes working there before rolling out.
- Alternatively, if you have agreed a hybrid working future for some types of roles, you could test flexible hiring by starting with these.
- Develop guidance for managers on how to think through when and where a job needs to be done, and whether it can be done in less than full-time hours.
- Develop guidance for your recruitment team to prompt line managers to consider flexibility for each new vacancy.
- Develop guidance on how and when to respond to candidate requests for flexibility.
- Better still, encourage managers to pro-actively introduce the conversation about flexibility as part of the interview process.





Stage 4: Communicate your openness to flex in your job adverts

Once your recruitment process is ready, the final step is to tell candidates that you'll consider hiring flexibly - in your job adverts, on your careers website and through any recruitment agencies you use.

Developing a company-wide 'blanket' flexibility message is a good idea, as it will save time for recruitment teams. But be careful to only include this in job adverts where it has been agreed that flexibility is possible, to avoid misleading candidates.

And try to be specific about the types of hybrid and flexible working that are possible for a role. A simple sentence saying you're 'open to flexible working options' is often regarded with scepticism by candidates – especially those seeking reduced hours. It's much more helpful to define the types of flexibility that you will consider. These options can still be worked into a 'blanket' sentence or two (you'll find examples on the next page), but they will have more credibility.



IDEAS FOR ACTION

- Test the waters within one department, or with certain types of roles, to help embed the recruitment processes developed at stage 3.
- Develop a short paragraph that reflects your approach to flexible hiring, or specifically to hybrid working patterns, to include in your recruitment advertising.
- Job adverts need to be as transparent as possible about which forms of flexible working are possible for the role.
- Consider where would be the best place to advertise. To attract the widest audience, it may be a good idea to include jobsites that specialise in flexible roles, such as [Timewise Jobs](#) and [Working Mums](#).
- Build your message into your website. Tell the stories of candidates you have hired in flexibly, or provide quotes from them.
- Remember to talk to your recruiters. They need to know they can put forward candidates who are seeking flexibility – they won't, unless they're in the loop.

How to write your flexibility message

Read on for examples of how to advertise flexibility in your job adverts, as well as some questions to ask yourself as you're writing your statement

How to offer flexible working options in job adverts

When offering flexible working in a job advert, it's important to put the message across in a way that is honest, positive and clear. And make sure it's positioned in a place candidates will notice it – usually together with other benefits such as bonus, pension and holidays.

USE WORDS PRECISELY

Research with both candidates and businesses shows it's best to be specific about the types of flexible/hybrid working you will consider for each job. The phrase 'flexible working' may be interpreted differently by different people, leaving candidates unsure about what will be acceptable. It could be taken to mean any of the following and more:

- Home working/hybrid working
- Part-time
- Compressed hours
- Job share
- Flexible start/finish times
- Flexible shifts

SAMPLE FLEXIBILITY STATEMENTS:

For this role we will consider requests for flexible working from your first day with us. Variable times and partial home-working are both possible. We may also consider a part-time arrangement, but would need this to be a minimum of 30 hours per week.

Following the pandemic, BUSINESS NAME has moved to a permanent blend of office and home-based work. People can choose how often they work in the office, provided it is at least 1 full day per week plus occasional meetings on other days. We will discuss your preferences with you at final interview.

At BUSINESS NAME we welcome candidates who need to work flexibly. This role can be worked full-time or part-time, and we are additionally open to flexible start and finish times. However, home-working is not possible. Please wait until the job offer stage before asking us for flexibility.



Five questions to help you develop your flexible hiring message

1. Have you developed a clear hybrid working strategy? Are hybrid patterns available to all employees or just, for example, in office based roles?



2. How good is your record on granting employee requests to work flexibly? What positive message can you give about your flexible working culture?



3. Do you already offer part-time or flexible working options in some of your job ads? What form of words have you used, and is it sufficiently clear and positive?



4. For the winning candidate for a full-time job, would your organisation be willing to offer flexibility from the point of hire?



5. Can candidates ask about flexibility during the interview process, without fear of prejudice?

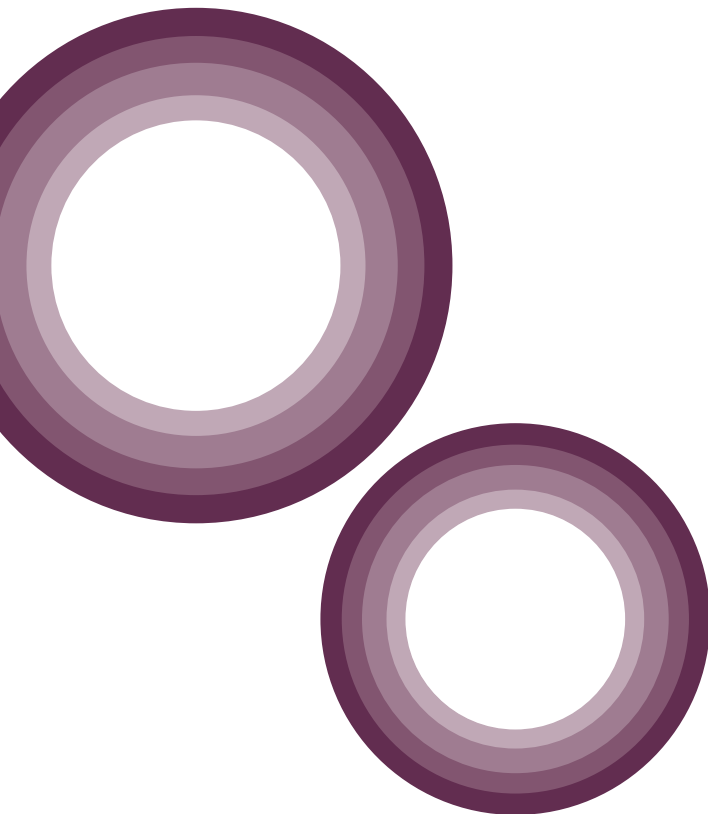


6. What advice would you give to candidates seeking flexibility, who see a full-time job advertised at your organisation?



Further information and support

- Further help on www.timewise.co.uk
- Scottish Flexible Jobs Index [Scottish Flexible Jobs Index - Timewise - Flexible Working Specialists](#)
- CIPD Flex Working info [Information on Flexible Working | CIPD](#)
- Scottish government guidance on home working <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-homeworking/>
- Employer support to develop more flexible workplaces <https://www.flexibilityworks.org/>
- Open to flexible hiring? [New Job By Email | Timewise Jobs](#)
- Line managers guide to flexible working in Scotland <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Timewise-Scottish-Gov-Line-Manager-Guide.pdf>



timewise
TALENT THROUGH FLEXIBILITY

Timewise works to unlock the flexible jobs market in the UK. We share market insights on flexible working and flexible hiring, deliver training and consultancy to help businesses attract and develop the best talent, and conduct research such as our annual Flexible Jobs Index. We also run Timewise Jobs, a jobs board for roles that are part-time or open to flexibility.

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