

Flexible working masterclass 2026

FAQs

Age-friendly
Employer
Pledge

timewise



Introduction

About these FAQs

These FAQs were developed from the content themes and from the feedback given by Pledge network members at the 2026 masterclasses on flexible working.

If you have any questions do email the team at employerpledge@ageing-better.org.uk





Question

What types or examples of flexible working should an organisation emphasise to attract and retain older workers?



Answer

Both the reasons and preferred options for flexibility vary considerably for older workers – as for any age group. However, our work shows that certain forms of flexible working can support older workers to manage health and caring responsibilities, and potentially a gradual transition toward retirement. These are important for any employer to emphasise to attract and retain older workers.

For those older workers wanting to maintain full-time hours, **compressed hours** where workers carry out their full contracted hours over fewer days than the standard five-day week (for example a 4-day week or 9-day fortnight), can be a popular way to create more personal time. Another option is **annualised hours**, in which employees work longer hours and bank these against longer holidays. Staggered hours can help those who feel early starts match their energy levels better or late starts mitigate against the strain of long commutes.

For those interested in reducing their hours, **part-time working and job shares** can help keep valuable expertise while offering a more sustainable workload, and employers can also help by supporting existing employees to understand the pension implications for any change in their working hours.





Question

How can a line manager approach conversations discussing flexible working options sensitively?



Answer

Line managers play a crucial role when considering flexible working options with an older worker. It is key to have an informal discussion to allow the employee to feel comfortable in sharing how they feel. Open conversations will help challenge stereotypes and dispel any negative perceptions that might be associated with age.

For more advice and guidance read Timewise's [research with the Centre for Ageing Better](#) on flexible working for over 50s. We set out three steps for any line manager to follow: (1) Preparation (2) Discussion and (3) Negotiation and agreement. It is generally the case that both line managers and staff benefit from being able to talk about what sort of flexibility might be possible in a role before a formal request is made. Quite often, an informal flexible working pattern can be agreed without requiring a formal change in contract (though it should be recorded centrally). Good practice includes:

- Asking open questions: 'What would help make work more sustainable for you?'
- Avoiding language about 'slowing down' or 'stepping back' unless the employee raises it
- Acknowledging an employee's experience and contribution explicitly during the conversation





Question

What if the older worker is worried that asking for more flexibility may affect how they are perceived?



Answer

For precisely this reason, supporting people aged 50 and over to work flexibly is always ideally part of a wider drive to enable more flexible working for all employees. It is quite common for workers over 50 to worry about how their request will be received – particularly if they have built their reputation on reliability, professionalism and commitment, and they may fear that requesting flexibility might be misread as disengagement, reduced capability or a step towards exit.

Initiatives aimed at older workers therefore need to be carefully managed and communicated to ensure there are no perceptions or accusations of age discrimination. We encourage organisations to build a **proactive**

approach to flexibility based around open dialogue. That means:

- Ensuring flexibility is ‘reason neutral’ – recognises that everyone needs flexibility for different reasons – and that’s ok
- Providing opportunities for informal and formal flexibility for everyone
- Looking at the work requirements of a whole team or organisation to identify opportunities for flex

The result will be that flexibility is normalised and accepted at all ages and levels and for whatever reason. Crucially, a proactive approach recognises that flexibility can be built into how teams and organisations work together collaboratively.

A proactive approach to flexibility



Flexibility is normalised



Flexibility is open to all, whatever the reason



Flexibility is integrated into how teams work together



Question

How should health & wellbeing needs and flexibility be approached if it comes up in one-to-one meetings?



Answer

[A survey of workers over 50](#) carried out by Timewise and the Centre for Ageing Better found that of those currently working flexibly or part-time, or who would like to, 29 per cent were doing so for health reasons. Over half of survey respondents felt their job was getting harder for them as they got older. They often faced competing demands on their time, together with physical changes, which can be increasingly incompatible with existing working arrangements.

When health or wellbeing comes up in a one-to-one, the manager's role is to enable a safe, respectful conversation focused on making work sustainable, not to diagnose, judge, or problem-solve immediately. Managers should therefore first acknowledge and thank the employee for raising an issue, rather than jumping into solutions or risk assessments. It is important to focus on capabilities and solutions, not just limitations.





Question

For smaller teams and organisations, the best approach from the slide presentation seems to be more on a collaborative basis. How can you start these conversations? Any examples please.



Answer

Informal flexible working cultures are often by necessity the best approach for smaller teams and organisations. For example, we have worked with one company, which has a staff of 70 and has previously been fourth in the Sunday Times Best 100 Companies to Work For. Allowing staff to do things in a way which fits around their work schedule and family commitments inevitably delivers results, Simon La Fosse, Director of the company, has argued. “Nobody came to work to do a bad job and you have got to remember that, so it’s easier to just give as an employer, and you find it comes back in spades,” he says. “The person who knows

they are being trusted by you to do the right thing, invariably will do the right thing.”¹

Tesco’s store managers are another example. One supermarket store manager was scheduled to work every Sunday which meant he missed his son’s football matches. As part of Timewise’s ‘Retail Pioneers’ pilot with the national retailer, the manager discussed the problem with other local managers, and they all agreed to amend the Rota so it was instead one Sunday in three that he had to work. The others were accorded similar opportunity to input their preferences as part of pooled rosters².

A further example comes from a national construction firm where the team of 12 used part of their weekly planning meetings to agree working schedules for the next two weeks. It created a culture of openness where individuals could say “I need to finish early on this day” or “I want a longer lunch break on that day” with no judgement about the reason. The team then collectively ensured cover on site as needed³.

The key theme with each of these examples is employees being in the driving seat and at the heart of the process.

1 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/growing-up-with-flexibility-2/>

2 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Modern-Retail-Nation-Part-Time-Shopkeepers.pdf>

3 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/construction-pioneers-pilot-one-year-on-whats-new/>



Question

Are there any useful case studies of where wider organisational change through flexible working has happened and the business benefits?



Answer

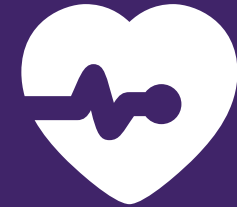
Only modest improvements are needed in either reduced sickness absence or reduced staff turnover for the benefits of a flexible working programme to outweigh the costs within three years according to previous Timewise analysis carried out with the Institute for Employment Studies⁴.

To demonstrate this, in a recent programme, Flexible Working for All, Timewise created and tested solutions to address inequalities in access to flexible working and providing models of learning to drive change⁵.

We worked with employers on introducing three key changes: firstly, creating a set of guiding principles for the development of a more equitable and consistent organisation-wide approach to flexible working; secondly, designing and testing practical solutions with our employers including more predictable rotas, reduced excessive or last-minute hours and greater employee control over schedules. Finally, we worked with employers to build the evidence base to better understand the impact that flexible working has on their people and performance. This resulted in powerful organisation-level benefits including reduced sickness absence, increased organisational loyalty and improved performance.

⁴ See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Reaching-positive-ROI-flexible-working.pdf>
⁵ See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Timewise-Flexible-Working-for-All.pdf>

What improved?



Health



‘My current working arrangements allow me to maintain a good level of personal health and wellbeing’



Question

Can you provide more detail or resource links for the Shift-Life Balance model?



Answer

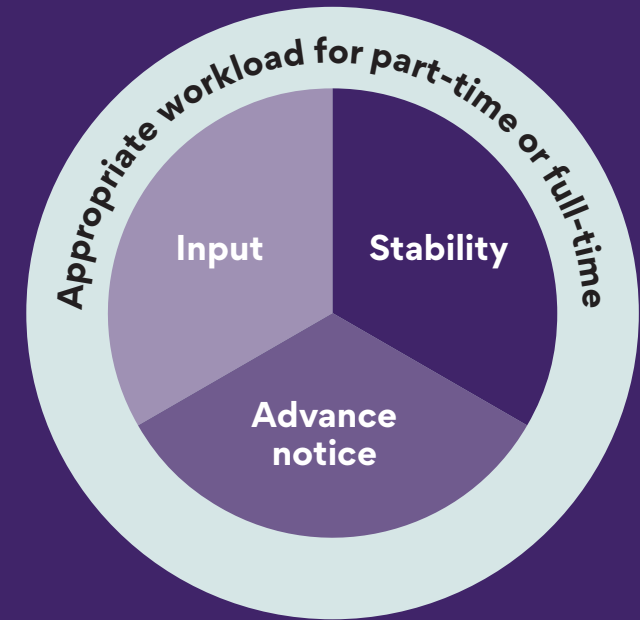
Timewise works to ensure that **'two-way flexibility'** – secure and flexible work that delivers for both employers and employees – is available for everyone who wants it. From our work across many frontline sectors, we know that work-life balance is a key element of any great place to work. The 'shift-life balance' model we have developed, for example, changes the way that rosters and shift patterns are created for greater input, notice and stability for frontline workers and has created change in occupations as varied as junior clinical fellows, nurses and early years professionals.

Drawing on the work of USA-based academic Sue Lambert, as well as our work in tough-to-crack sectors, we have identified the principles which improve work-life balance for shift workers in the UK. The first, overarching

principle is about the size and volume of work: does the individual want to work full-time or part-time? Once this has been defined, employers then need to consider:

- **Input** into the schedule: Enabling the employee to influence or express a level of preference into their shift pattern.
- **Advance notice** of the schedule: Giving the employee fair warning of their shift pattern.
- **Stability** of the schedule: Offering the employee a regular pattern from week to week or month to month.

The aim of these principles is to help employees manage their responsibilities outside of work, make plans and organise the rest of their lives.



Timewise Shift-life Balance Model©





Question

How can we balance individual needs with the wider requirements of the team and of the organisation?



Answer

Our work shows that organisations succeed when they treat balancing the needs of the individual against those of the wider team and organisation not as a trade-off, but as a design question: **how can work be organised so that both people and performance are sustained?**

Not only is this achievable, but our evidence clearly shows that interventions to increase access to flexible working are highly likely to provide a positive return on investment in a relatively short space of time. In the construction sector, for example, employers face a range of barriers to flexible working including an hourly pay structure which rewards long hours and a reliance on stretching staff resource to meet project demands.

As a result of Timewise work with these employers to embed flexible working, companies moved to a more output-based approach to pay and made changes to how shifts were arranged, which allowed for an increase in homeworking and led to improvements in well-being and increased productivity⁶. Similarly in the retail sector we have piloted a team-based approach to giving employees more advanced notice of schedules. Positive impacts include reducing the stigma sometimes associated with and a measurable increase in work-life balance scores⁷.

⁶ See: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/construction-pioneers-pilot-one-year-on-whats-new/>

⁷ See: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/modern-retail-nation-of-part-time-shopkeepers/>



Question

How can we maintain fairness with flexible working requests, especially across both office-based and more field roles? Any examples of good practice here?



Answer

There are real issues of fairness when it comes to the level of control frontline workers (those in site-based and shift-based roles) can exert over their working patterns, in comparison with office-based workers. Between 2019 – 2024, over 1.3 million more people in higher paid desk-based jobs gained access to flexible hours working – the ability to vary start and finish times (14 per cent). Shift-based workers have found their jobs frozen in time however, with no change in how many of them can have a say in their working hours (6 per cent).

However, it is possible to offer far greater choice and control over working patterns for those in site-based and shift-based roles. A range of scalable solutions and approaches exist, some of which have already been tested by employers in partnership with Timewise. These include team-based and employee-led approaches to organising and scheduling work⁸; ‘cross-skilling’ of staff as a response to the barriers associated with operational complexity⁹; and innovative technologies and models, such as e-rostering and employee-led participatory platforms¹⁰.

With the implementation of the Employment Rights Act, there is a need for greater adoption, acceleration, and scaling of best practice within sectors and more coordination between industry, unions and government to tackle sector-specific barriers.

- 8 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Timewise-Secure-and-Flexible-Work-in-the-Retail-Sector.pdf>
- 9 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Timewise-Secure-and-Flexible-Work-in-the-Health-and-Adult-Social-Care-Sectors.pdf>
- 10 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/articlecontenttype/case-study/>



Question

How can an organisation cover present needs but also prepare for the future?



Answer

By focusing on sustainable work design, rather than short-term fixes. In the present, this means making roles workable so people can perform well without burning out – thereby retaining experienced staff, by adapting workloads where needed, and using flexibility to keep critical skills in place.

At the same time, future-focused organisations need to build flexibility into roles and teams so work can evolve as needs change. This means recognising that experienced and older workers are a vital asset, and designing paths that allow people to contribute differently over time - through reduced hours, changed responsibilities, or knowledge-sharing - rather than exiting abruptly, whether due to health reasons such as stress and burnout or through planned workforce cuts.

By planning with a longer workforce horizon, regularly reviewing which skills are most at a premium and most at risk, and signalling clearly that flexibility and sustainability are part of how the organisation operates, employers can protect delivery now while building resilience for the years ahead.



References

- 1 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/growing-up-with-flexibility-2/>
- 2 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Modern-Retail-Nation-Part-Time-Shopkeepers.pdf>
- 3 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/construction-pioneers-pilot-one-year-on-whats-new/>
- 4 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Reaching-positive-ROI-flexible-working.pdf>
- 5 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/Timewise-Flexible-Working-for-All.pdf>
- 6 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/construction-pioneers-pilot-one-year-on-whats-new/>
- 7 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/article/modern-retail-nation-of-part-time-shopkeepers/>
- 8 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Timewise-Secure-and-Flexible-Work-in-the-Retail-Sector.pdf>
- 9 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/Timewise-Secure-and-Flexible-Work-in-the-Health-and-Adult-Social-Care-Sectors.pdf>
- 10 See: <https://timewise.co.uk/articlecontenttype/case-study/>