

The BAWP guide to

Flexible working



Supporting
gender
AGENDA 2

What are the benefits of flexible working?

Flexible working provides the opportunity for people to give their best at work and at home. It isn't necessarily about working less – it's about having more control over when, where and how you work.

By providing flexible working arrangements for employees, organisations have a more motivated and productive workforce. They are more likely to retain these members of staff, this in turn cuts the cost of recruitment – advertising, interviewing, selecting and training – as well as keeping all the skills and experience that only time can build. With this extra adaptability the organisation should also be able to manage peaks and troughs in demand more effectively, and provide a better service to the public.

Advantages for employees include increased motivation and less stress – a flexible working option can be the answer to the work / life juggling act that many of us face. There are a growing number of reasons why people are investigating different work practices, these include childcare, further education and training, caring for elderly relatives, voluntary work and increasing the quality and balance of life.

This is a huge subject which can't be covered in one leaflet, but there are numerous documents, organisations and web sites which can provide all you need to know about flexible working. To find out more, look under the 'Useful contacts' section on the back page.

What does flexible working actually mean?

Flexible working encompasses a wide variety of work patterns.

These include:

- Part time – in basic terms this applies to staff who work fewer hours than full time, eg working 20 hours over 3 days rather than 37 hours over 5 days
- Job share – usually involves two members of staff forming a partnership covering one full time post. Within this partnership the split does not necessarily have to be 50:50, an arrangement can be made to suit both partners' needs
- Compressed hours – allowing people to work their total number of hours over fewer days, e.g. working full-time hours over 4 days instead of 5
- Voluntary reduced hours – a temporary reduction in working hours should be available in all forces, but may be given a different name
- Flexi time – allowing staff to choose their start and finish times at work, whilst covering a set core period

- Annual hours – works on the basis of agreeing a fixed number of hours over a year, then calculating the hours on a monthly basis, ie instead of a five-week shift pattern
- Term time working – involves staff with childcare responsibilities working during school term time and either not working during school holidays or working reduced hours
- Variable working hours – staff work varying hours rather than set hours, for example designing a rota on a weekly basis
- Career breaks – taking an unpaid break in your career.
- Home/tele working – staff working mainly from home or at a geographically separate site and communicating with their HQ /base station via phone and e-mail

At the moment only some of these options are offered by most forces, but things are changing. There is fierce competition in the jobs marketplace and chief officers are starting to realise that new and innovative ways of working are needed to attract, keep and reward high quality staff.

ACPO and Home Office researchers have found examples of all of the above work patterns in forces around the UK – evidence that flexible working is possible and can be successful within the police service.

The ups and the downs

Officers requesting flexible working have sometimes faced old fashioned attitudes and misconceptions about alternative work patterns – eg a perceived lack of commitment, part time means part able, it's something only requested by 'difficult' members of staff, a case of 'the tail wagging the dog' etc

They have also experienced feelings of isolation, a lack of development opportunities and pressure from others because they have broken away from the mainstream and the long hours culture. However, the same officers have overcome these hurdles by knowing their entitlements, being flexible, accepting compromise, presenting solutions and not problems. Seeking out support from mentors and colleagues in a similar position has also kept them confident and determined.

And one of the most effective ways to win over the doubters is to sell the benefits – make sure supervisors and managers know that flexible working provides advantages to employers as well as employees, if possible giving examples of good practice.

Is the police service ready for flexible working?

Flexible working practices are fundamental to the work of the public sector in the 21st century, but the police service has yet to take full advantage of the benefits which varied working patterns can bring for individuals and organisations.

At the moment we have a 'one package fits all' approach – officers all earn the same and can only join the service if they are prepared to do round-the-clock shift work. If things don't change the police service will suffer real problems in the future, in recruiting and keeping skilled staff.

The police service needs to be able to offer a range of different packages to suit different people – flexible working is a positive way forward.

Some of the bigger changes in policy and attitudes will only happen with the approval of government, chief officers and other major players, but individuals can make a difference. Those of us who are supervisors have a responsibility to support part time and other flexible ways of working – these options may need more managing initially, but can make a real contribution to getting and keeping high quality staff. We should also be making more creative use of job share whenever possible.

Team meetings should be at suitable and 'family friendly' times, and we should challenge the long hours culture – supervisors and senior managers should lead by example: guillotining meetings, ensuring staff have a balanced workload and going home on time.

If things don't change the police service will suffer real problems in the future, in recruiting and keeping skilled staff.

How do I broach the subject of flexible working with my manager?

Do your research. Check whether your force has any policies regarding flexible working, for example a scheme for returning part time after maternity leave, a job share or a working at home policy. If you can't find details of the option you are interested in, suggest it anyway. New ideas may be favourably received – you don't know if you don't ask!

Prepare your case. Think about alternatives that will meet your needs and draw up a preference list starting with the ideal arrangement but with a fall back and a least preferred option as well. Try to anticipate questions your boss may ask, such as:

- How would a different working arrangement affect the work you do?
- If you work fewer hours how would you get the job done?
- What about the impact on your colleagues?
- How will this arrangement benefit the organisation?

Arrange a meeting with your line manager to discuss possibilities and procedure. It may also be a good idea to have an informal chat first to get a feeling for the reaction and find out the best way to proceed.

Try to be flexible. You and your manager should try to negotiate working patterns which fit both the organisation's and the individual's needs. Take time to consider any alternative suggestions made by your manager.

“I'd like to help, but...”

If your supervisor or manager turns down your request, ask the reasons for the refusal and whether he/she can suggest any alternative solutions – be prepared to compromise. You can also seek advice from your personnel department, a more senior manager or a union or staff association representative.

Try to re-negotiate, perhaps with support from personnel or a staff association representative. Try to find out what concerns your manager may have and how these can be resolved – the answers to the most common questions your boss may have can be found on web sites and documents listed under the 'Useful contacts' section of this leaflet.

Seriously consider alternative suggestions put forward by your manager or personnel staff.

Useful contacts

The BAWP Guide to Flexible Working can only give a broad overview of this subject, but there are a number of sources which contain much more detailed information. These include:

- The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) website outlines all flexible working options, frequently asked questions, real life examples, relevant rules and regulations, and details of more than 50 organisations and websites which may help you. Call 020 7215 5000 or visit www.dti.gov.uk/employment/workandfamilies/flexibleworking
- Home Office report on 'Flexible working practices in the police service' written by Rachel Tuffin. Visit www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds. It can be found in the Police Research Series, Paper 147

ACCOR SERVICES – Childcare Vouchers

You could make significant savings on the cost of your childcare by using Childcare Vouchers. They are the most popular way for your employer to assist you with your childcare costs as they are tax and NI free for up to £55 per week so you could make savings of up to £1,195* per year.

Accor Services pioneered the childcare vouchers concept in 1989 and today offers a user-friendly scheme for employers, working parents and childcare providers that is trusted by organisations of all sizes across a range of sectors.

Accor Services is the UK's most experienced provider of Childcare Vouchers, the most popular form of employer-supported childcare. For an information pack to give to your force call 0845 330 4406 or email ccv@accorservices.co.uk. Visit www.childcarevouchers.co.uk for more information.

*The exact amount you can save depends on your individual circumstances in terms of how much tax you currently pay and how much you spend on childcare.