

My Journey Workplaces

Flexible Working Guide 2020

COVID-19 has significantly changed how businesses function across the City.

During the COVID-19 Lockdown, many organisations adapted their working practices, introducing flexible working arrangements to enable their workforce to work remotely from home.

What is flexible working?

‘Flexible Working’ is a broad term used to describe the overlapping fields of:

- Changes in the nature of employment – essentially, moves towards greater variety and flexibility in work patterns
- Changes in technology – enabling work to be carried out in a different way

Benefits to employers

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Less time is wasted commuting 2. Staff are more productive 3. Staff are happier 4. You don't pay for office space 5. You don't pay for office supplies 6. You don't pay for drinks and snacks 7. Video conferencing allows staff to stay in touch 8. Fewer unnecessary meetings | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Recruit the best staff, no matter where they live 10. High staff retention based on happy, trusted workers 11. A trusted, happy, valued workforce is good PR 12. Using task management tools helps focus work 13. Employees are less likely to take sick leave 14. Employees will work longer hours from home |
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Does your place of work have a flexible working policy/statement?

- **57%** of employers with remote staff do not have a policy in place.
Without clear guidance for all staff can cause problems and confusion and will affect staff work delivery and cause confusion.
- **65%** of employees think they would be more productive at home than in the office.

What should an employer include in a Flexible working Policy?

1. Clearly outline your expectations for every employee.
2. Make sure every member of staff understands the individual, team and managers' responsibilities.
3. What does the organisation hope to achieve by offering staff the opportunity to work from home?
4. Outline which roles within the organisation are eligible for remote working
5. Outline the work from home request process
6. Explain the approval process when staff put forward a work from home request
7. Outline a process for managers and staff to discuss possible barriers which may affect an employee's ability to work from home
8. List acceptable reasons for staff to work from home
9. State whether employees are expected to be online during a specific time period

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10. If necessary, outline what specific IT specifications (software, internet speed, personal computer) are required for staff to carry out their duties
11. Provide a step-by-step process that employees should follow if they need IT support
12. Clearly outline security expectations for employees in relation to IT security and safe WiFi access, data management (e.g. GDPR)
13. Determine how you'll track employees' productivity
14. How will managers review employees' work and set further tasks (e.g. online/phone one-to-ones)?

Steps to take when setting up employees flexible working

1. Set clear communication expectations between managers and their staff
2. Provide guidance for staff to use instant messaging tools such as Slack and Google Hangouts
3. Provide guidance on how to use face-to-face online tools such as Skype, Zoom, Teams
4. Use a task management platform to keep track of assignments and monitor productivity
5. Clearly explain the rules and expectations to all members of staff

Benefits to employees

- | | |
|--------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| 1. Improved work-life balance | 6. Reducing personal carbon footprint |
| 2. Reduced stress | 7. Fewer distractions from colleagues |
| 3. Reduced long hours | 8. Focused tasks during the working day |
| 4. Avoiding delays on the commute to work | 9. Video conferencing helps focus your input |
| 5. Saving money on travel/snacks & lunches | 10. A working environment that suits your needs |

Top tips for flexible working

- 1. Get started early**
Often peoples commute helps them wake-up and feel ready to work by the time they get to their desk.
- 2. Business as usual**
Set your alarm, make a drink, have breakfast, wear nice clothes.
- 3. Structure your day**
Have a to-do list, plan breaks in your day away from your PC, take a walk etc.
- 4. Create a dedicated work space**
It helps you have the right mind set.
- 5. Avoid temptation**
Put in place strategies to avoid social media messages popping up on your PC/phone during work time.
- 6. Work when you're at your most productive**
- 7. Saves your calls for the afternoon**
Often, we're tired in the morning. Leave phone calls for when you've woken up.
- 8. Share your work expectations with those at home**
Make sure siblings, partners, spouses etc. respect your work space during working hours.
- 9. Take breaks, have a KitKat (or any other snack bar)**
Having regular breaks helps physical and mental wellbeing.
- 10. Set a finishing time each day**

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Examples of video conference tools used in the workplace:



Zoom has a free plan and a paid one. Zoom's free plan only offers 40 minutes of conferencing. It also limits the number of call participants to three people. With an upgraded plan, businesses can have as many users as it wants, unlimited meetings and video conferencing that includes many more features. Some of the advanced features include active speaker view, dual stream for dual screens, and full-screen views.

<https://zoom.us>



Google Hangouts is able to do more than place phone calls. Like other Google apps, Hangout can be free to use. This platform allows users to receive and send instant messages, receive and send SMS messages, and video chats. Google Hangouts also hosts VoIP calls.

<https://hangouts.google.com>



Skype for business is possible. However, this feature has different applications and it requires a Microsoft 365 (formerly Office 365) subscription. So, Skype for business may not be a good option for smaller teams looking to upgrade their service to a paid option. Skype allows users to host video and audio conferences that can host up to 25 participants. The number of participants is higher than most other solutions. Skype can also support desktop OS, Android, and iOS phone apps to allow on-the-go conferencing.

<https://www.skype.com/en/business/>



Microsoft Teams, also referred to as simply **Teams**, is a unified communication and collaboration platform that combines persistent workplace chat, video meetings, file storage (including collaboration on files), and application integration. The service integrates with the Office 365 subscription office productivity suite and features extensions that can integrate with non-Microsoft products. Microsoft Teams is a competitor to services such as Slack.

<https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/microsoft-365/microsoft-teams/group-chat-software>

*Please note: There are many other video conferencing platforms, the above are the ones most commonly used across Southampton businesses.

Employees Health & Safety

As an employer, you must protect your workers from the health risks of working with display screen equipment (DSE), such as PCs, laptops, tablets and smartphones.

The Health and Safety (Display Screen Equipment) Regulations apply to workers who use DSE daily, for an hour or more at a time. We describe these workers as 'DSE users'. The regulations don't apply to workers who use DSE infrequently or only use it for a short time.

There are some simple steps people can take to reduce the risks from display screen work:

- breaking up long spells of DSE work with rest breaks (at least 5 mins every hour) or changes in activity
- avoiding awkward, static postures by regularly changing position

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- getting up and moving or doing stretching exercises
- avoiding eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time

When working from home on a regular basis, employers must:

- Do a DSE workstation assessment
- Reduce risks, including making sure workers take breaks from DSE work or do something different
- Provide an eye test if workers ask for one
- Provide training and information for workers

Incorrect use of DSE or poorly designed workstations or work environments can lead to pain in necks, shoulders, backs, arms, wrists and hands as well as fatigue and eye strain. The causes may not always be obvious.

Advice provided by the 'Health and Safety Executive':

<https://www.hse.gov.uk/msd/dse/index.htm>

The Chartered Institute of Ergonomics and Human Factors has published an infographic to help people working at home.

<https://www.ergonomics.org.uk/common/Uploaded%20files/Publications/CIEHF-Working-from-Home-Infographic.pdf>

References

Smarter Working Guide by Transport for London

https://ec.europa.eu/energy/intelligent/projects/sites/iee-projects/files/projects/documents/astute_smarter_working_guide_en.pdf

The complete guide to Flexible Working by Toshiba Information Systems (UK) Ltd

<http://www.flexibility.co.uk/guide/Content/CompleteGuide.pdf>

ACAS Homeworking guide

<https://www.acas.org.uk/working-from-home>

Implementing Working from Home the business case

<http://www.flexibility.co.uk/flexwork/offices/office-shrinking.htm>

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

Flexible Working practices Factsheet

<https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/relations/flexible-working/factsheet>

Top tips for working remotely

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/working-remotely-top-tips-uk-v2_tcm18-73295.pdf

Top tips for Managing teams remotely

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/remote-teams-top-tips-uk_tcm18-73358.pdf

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Top tips for healthy remote working

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/healthy-work-uk-v2_tcm18-73600.pdf

Top tips for effective online meetings

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/online-meetings-ie_tcm18-73400.pdf

Legal and contractual considerations

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/legal-tips-uk_tcm18-73487.pdf

Further resources on remote working

https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/further-resources-uk_tcm18-73768.pdf

Flexible working policy

Sample flexible working policy by Acas

<https://www.acas.org.uk/example-flexible-working-policy>

Code of Practice on flexible working requests by Acas

<https://www.acas.org.uk/acas-code-of-practice-on-flexible-working-requests>

Example 'Flexible Working Policy and Procedure' by University of Manchester

<https://documents.manchester.ac.uk/display.aspx?DocID=9>

To find out more how Southampton City Council can help your business implement positive active travel measures please contact: Leon.girling@southampton.gov.uk

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