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# Flexible Working in Primary Care - the What, Why and How.



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# WHAT....

## NHSE DEFINITION OF FLEXIBLE WORKING:



“An arrangement which supports an individual to have greater choice in when, where and how they work.”

Good flexible working should balance the needs of the individual with three principles: patient, carer and staff experience, service delivery and work-life balance of colleagues.

# WHAT TYPE OF FLEXIBLE WORKING WOULD BE BEST FOR YOU?

Some of us need to be free in the school holidays to provide child care. Others need flexibility to work out of hours to be free to take a relative to frequent hospital appointments. Annualised hours can allow someone to come back from retirement and still have long holiday breaks.

Part-time working	Shift swapping	Commissioned outcomes	Annualised hours	Career breaks
Zero hours contract	Staggered hours	Remote working	Job share	Flexible retirement
Term time working	Split shift with unpaid break	Flexitime	Compressed hours	TOIL

For more information on Flexible retirement and NHS Pensions: [Click here](#)





# EMPLOYMENT LAW NOW PROMOTES AND PROTECTS FLEXIBLE WORKING

All employees have the legal right to request flexible working and employers must deal with requests in a reasonable manner.

For the current employment law guidance please [click here](#).



# WHY...

## PRIMARY CARE STAFF IN DERBYSHIRE WANT FLEXIBLE WORKING

The Hub Plus Primary Care Staff Intentions Survey showed that, after the hard asks of increased pay and reduced intensity of work, flexible working was the factor most likely to retain both clinical and non-clinical staff working across all roles in Derbyshire. *(Please see Ref 1 for more information).*



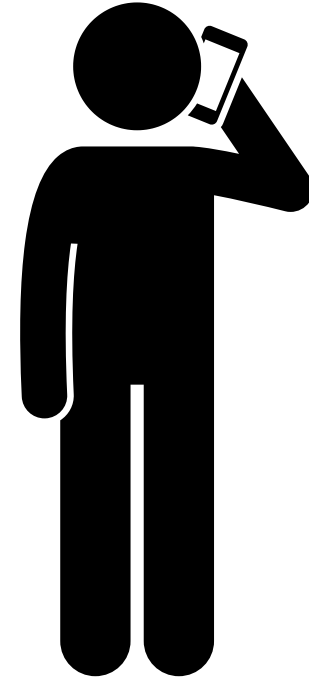


# WHY...

## BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING FOR THE EMPLOYEE: REASONS CITED BY FULL-TIME EMPLOYEES WHO CURRENTLY WORK FLEXIBLY



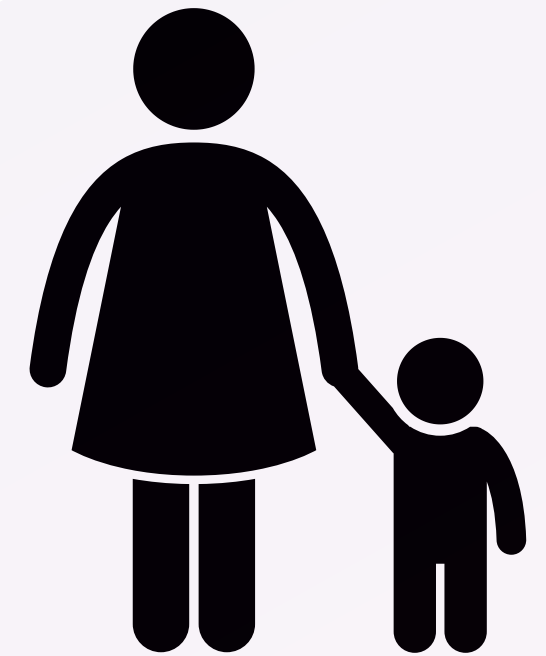
**57% It gives me more control over my work/life balance**



**20% It is better with other work commitments**



**50% It is generally useful or convenient**



**29% It helps with caring for my children or other dependents**



**32% It allows me to enjoy leisure time or study**



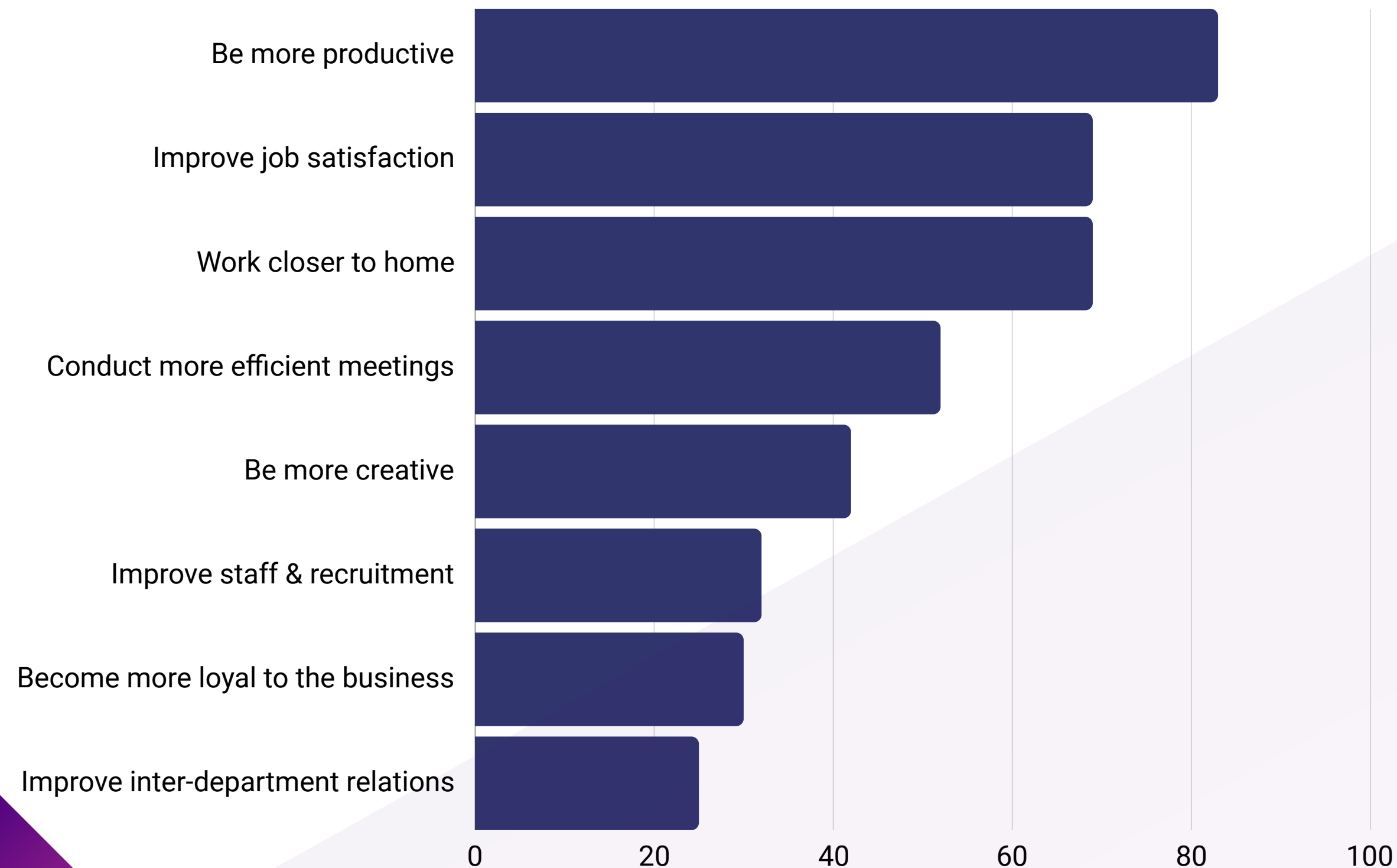
**14% It allows me to work around my health and disability**



**33% It cuts down on commuting time**

# WHY...

## BENEFITS OF FLEXIBLE WORKING FOR THE EMPLOYER:



Flexible working has been shown to result in happier, healthier and more productive employees. *(Please see Ref 2 for more information).*

Employees given flexible working options are less prone to burnout.

Flexible working arrangements help to retain loss of skills linked to retirement of older employees.

# WHY...

## BENEFITS FOR THE EMPLOYER

**“Employer” becomes  
“Employer of Choice”**

**Diversity**

**Talent attraction**

**Improved performance**

**Retention and motivation**

**Inclusivity**

**Reduced sick leave**

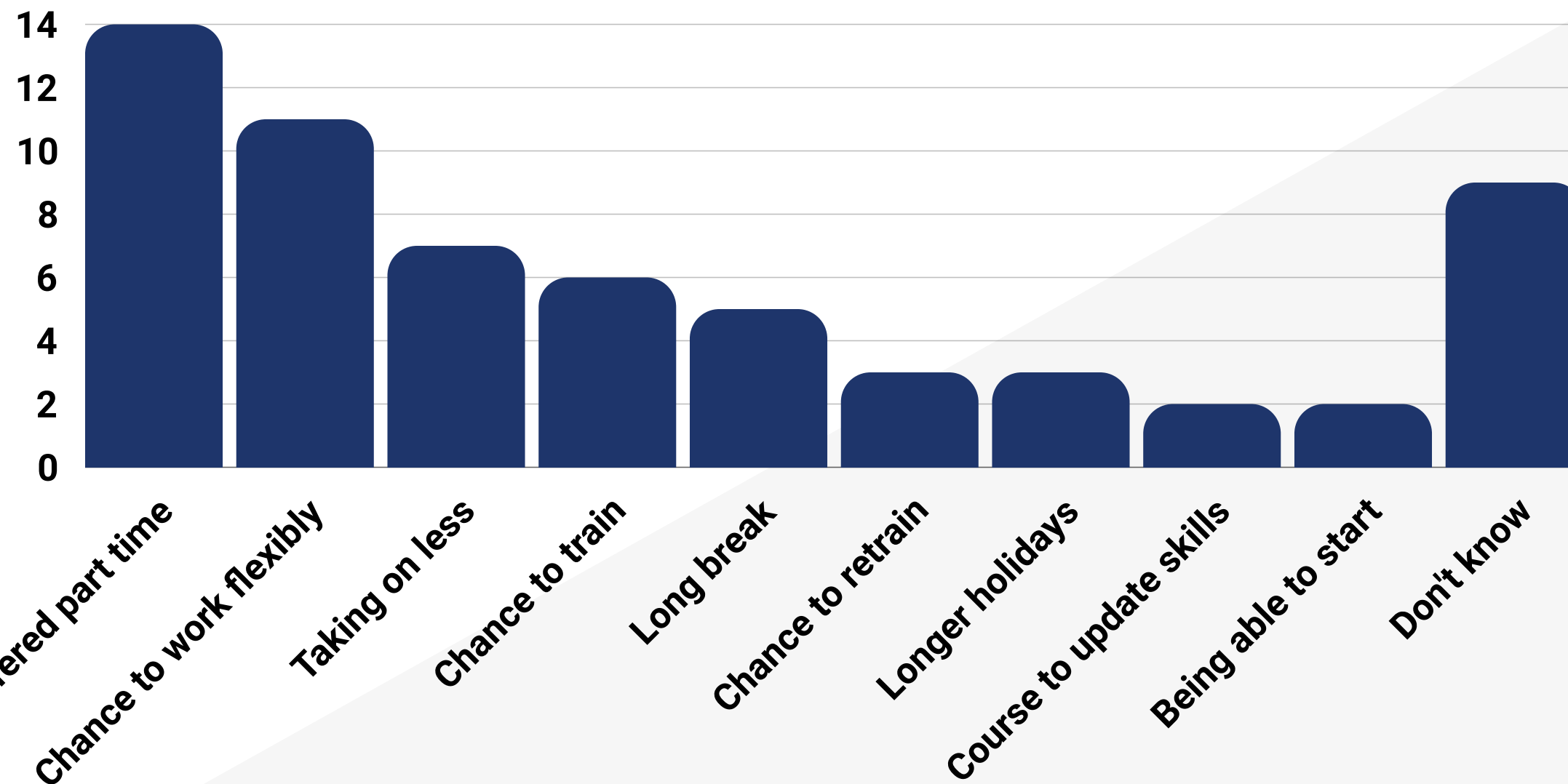
**Reduced Business Costs  
(recruitment, induction,  
locums)**

**The NHS People Plan 2020 made 10 commitments related to flexible working. Following the NHS People Promise “We work flexibly” NHSEI have set ambitious targets for flexible working within the NHS workforce stating that it should be considered on a case by case basis for individuals at all stages of their careers and can be considered from day one of employment.**



# FLEXIBILITY MAKES WORK MORE SUSTAINABLE

Would any of these have encouraged you to work longer?  
Retirees aged 50+



1 in 3 workers in the UK are now over 50 years of age. This represents 4 million more than in the year 2000. The proportion of the workforce that is over 50 continues to expand. At the same time, 1 in 4 workers don't think they can do their job by the time they are 60. A mixture of ages in the work force increases the mixture of ideas, skills and innovation. Older workers are vital for the transfer of skills to younger workers.



# Who is accessing flexible working currently?

Which age groups want to work flexibly?<sup>5</sup>

**92%**

of 18-34  
year-olds



**88%**

of 35-54  
year olds



**72%**

of those aged  
55 and over

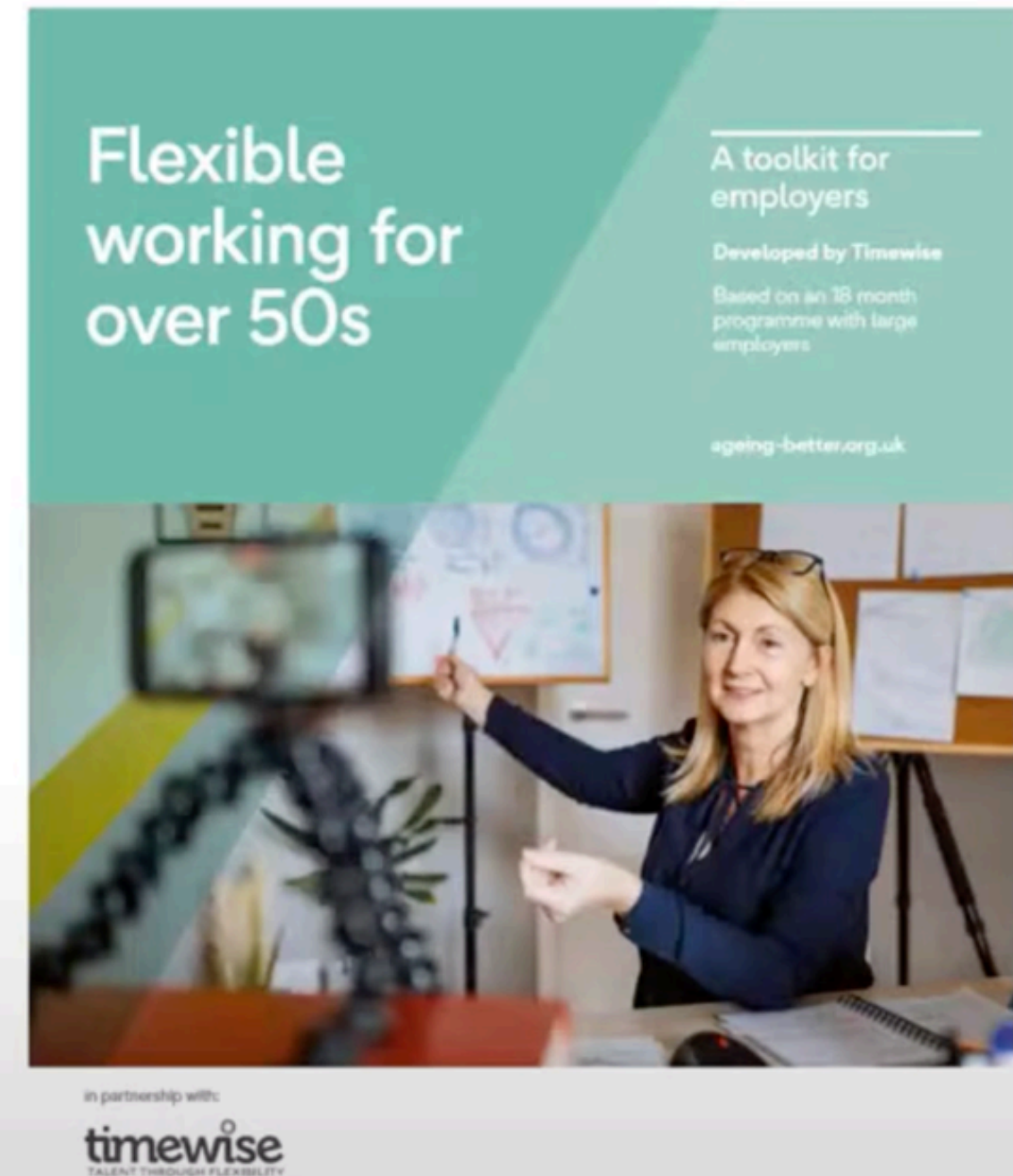
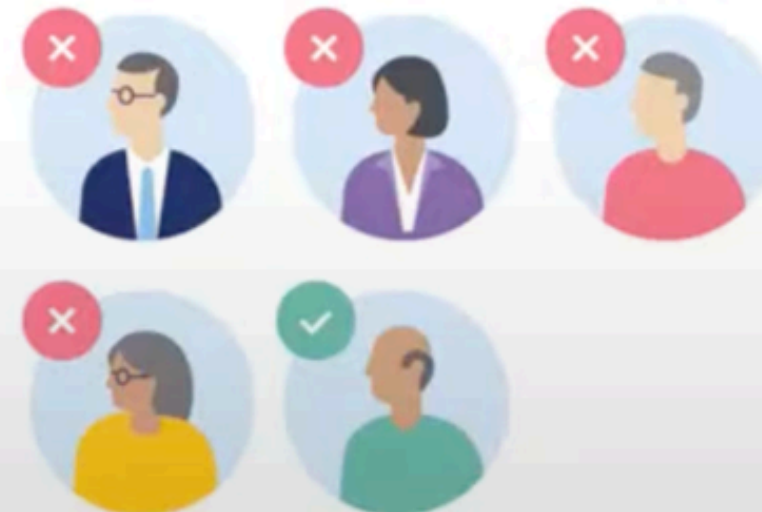


Low levels of proactive approaches to flexible working

**4 in 5**

line managers have never  
proactively raised flexible  
working at annual appraisals

[timewise.co.uk/article/proactive-approaches-flexible-working](https://timewise.co.uk/article/proactive-approaches-flexible-working)



# HOW...

## RESEARCH, KING'S FUND 2021: BARRIERS TO FLEXIBLE WORKING

Perceptions about the nature of work includes myths around the “ideal worker”, not meant for “workers like me” and the primacy of the needs of the service.

Gender norms impacting on the uptake and perception of FW ( Flexible Working).

How staff perceive themselves or their role in the organisation (or within society) may affect their willingness to take up FW (e.g. compromises their perceived status or skill).

Perceived impact on career progression, fuelled by stereotypes about commitment and motivation.

Perceived hierarchy of need (some reasons, particularly childcare, seen as more important) may discourage staff without “good reasons”.

Complex team dynamics- camaraderie, guilt, favouritism and seniority all impact uptake.

Perceptions, training and competence of line managers.

Tensions between the needs of the organisation and the needs of individuals, particularly in times of staff shortages and constrained resources.

Staff may see FW as benefiting the needs of the organisation rather than the employees.

Uptake of FW may be influenced by factors outside the control of employer and employees such as transport and childcare infrastructure.

# HOW...

## RESEARCH, KING'S FUND 2021: SOLUTIONS TO FLEXIBLE WORKING

Policies for FW need to be universal rather than segmented by gender, age, parenthood or other specific demographic to embed a more general flexible culture. Use terms other than “family-friendly” tied to more neutral organisational priorities e.g. around diversity and inclusion.

Clear, consistent direction setting from leaders enables effective implementation and a more positive culture.

Senior leaders who both model and champion FW demonstrate achievability, show possible career progression and dispel myths.

Informal solutions can help develop an authentic flexible culture.

How language is used to describe FW can signify organisational intent and attitude.

Balancing of organisational and individual needs may best be done at team level, using discussion and negotiation among frontline teams to help match staff needs with the constraints of service and finance. Take an “adult to adult approach” between staff and collective and compassionate leadership.

Shift the perceptions and resistance from managers through training, senior role modelling, constructive challenge and reward, sharing good practice and practical support. Train managers to deal with the complexities around FW.

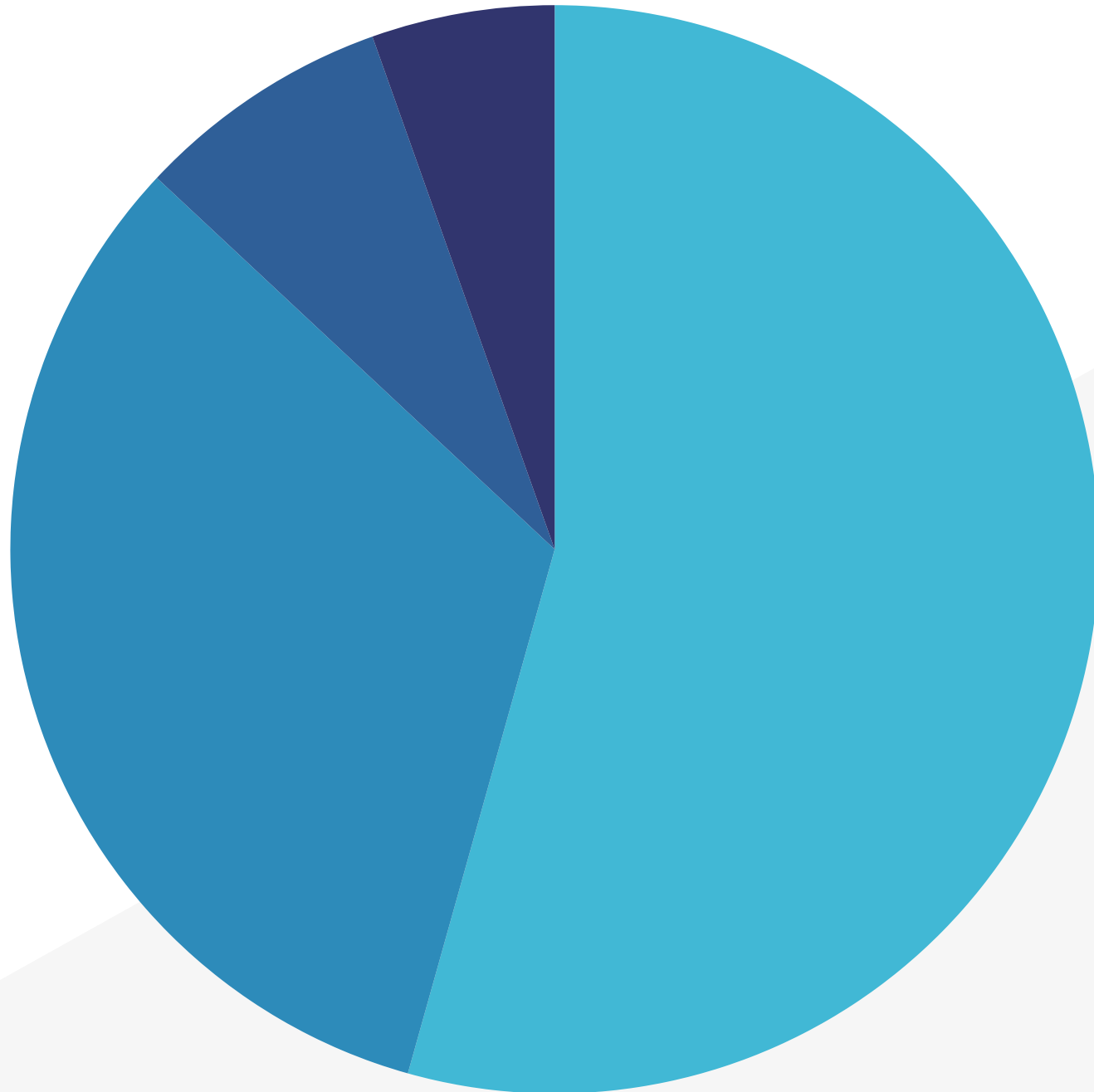
Once FW arrangements are implemented, they require a culture of trust between organisation and employee to be sustained.

# HOW TO ASK FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

## STEP 1: CONSIDER WHAT WOULD BE YOUR BEST WORK - LIFE BALANCE?

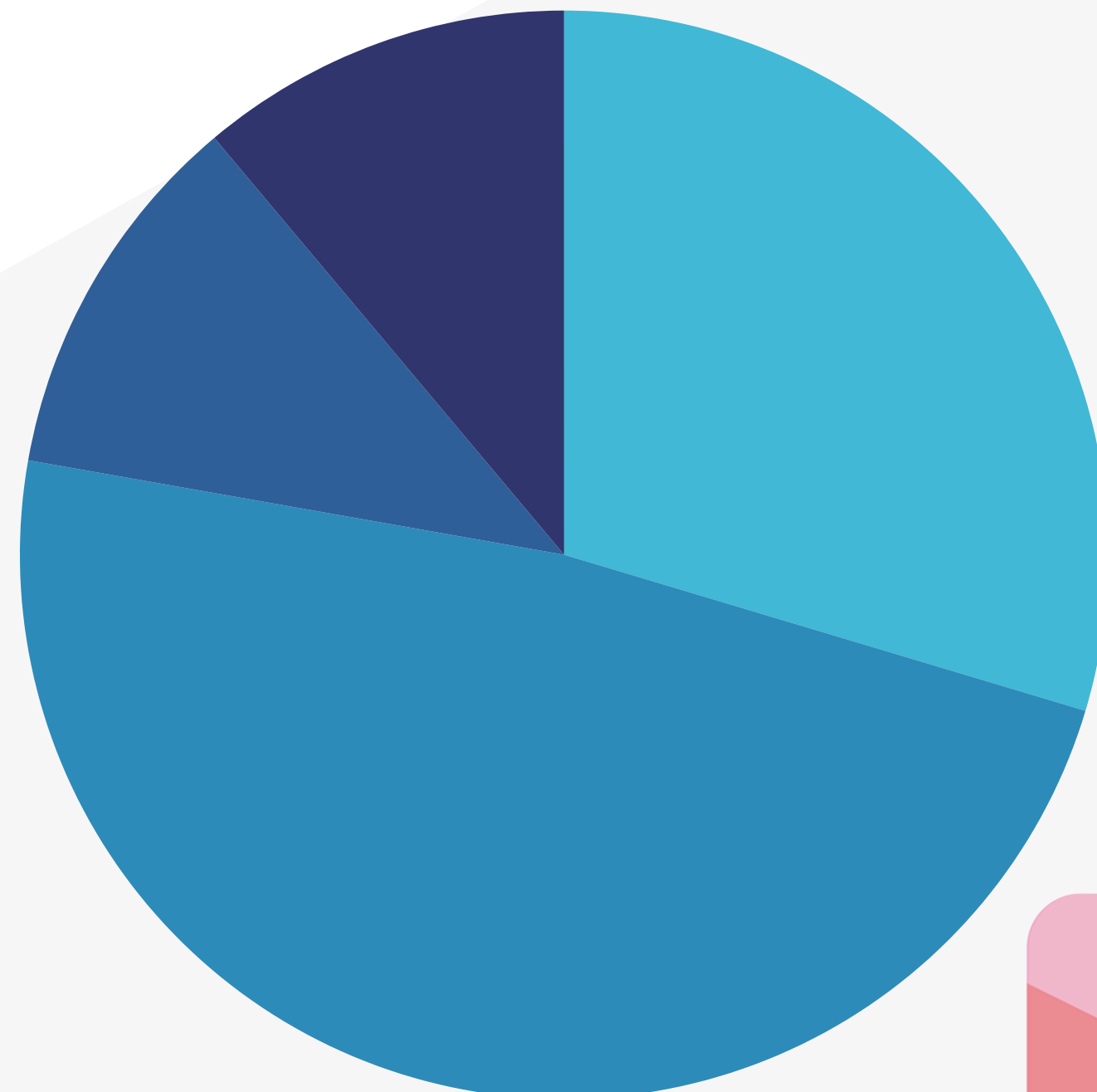
**CURRENT WORK SPLIT**

Work Family Fun with friends  
Health and Well-Being



**MY IDEAL TIME SPLIT**

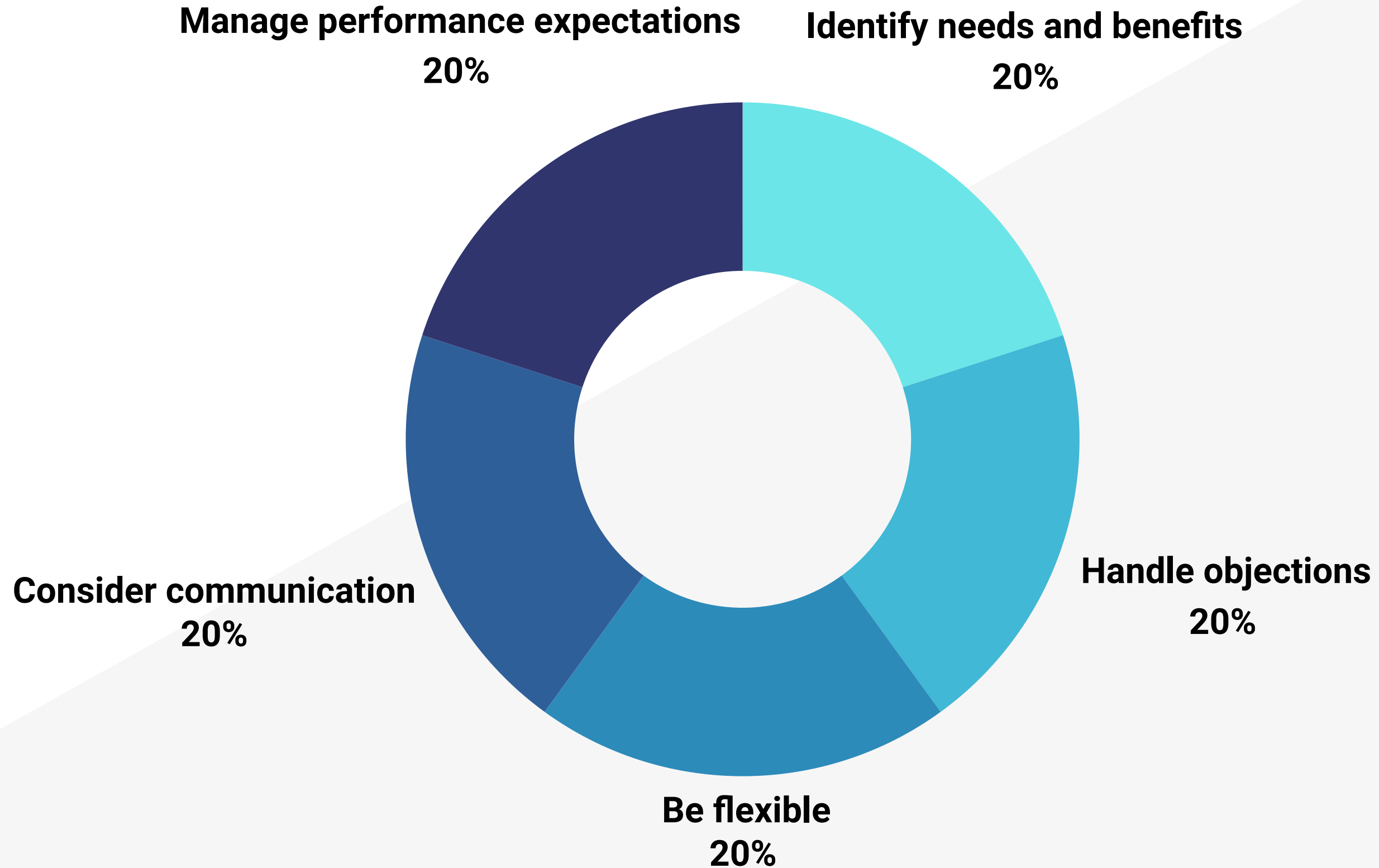
Work Family Fun with friends  
Health and Well-Being





# HOW TO ASK FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

## STEP 2: CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF YOUR PROPOSED FLEXIBLE WORKING ON YOUR PATIENTS, TEAM AND ORGANISATION



# HOW TO ASK FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

## STEP 3: CONSIDER HOW WHAT YOU ARE SUGGESTING COULD WORK FOR YOUR TEAM

'Working from home will expand room availability at the practice.'

'Passing responsibility to my deputy one day a week will help them to develop.'

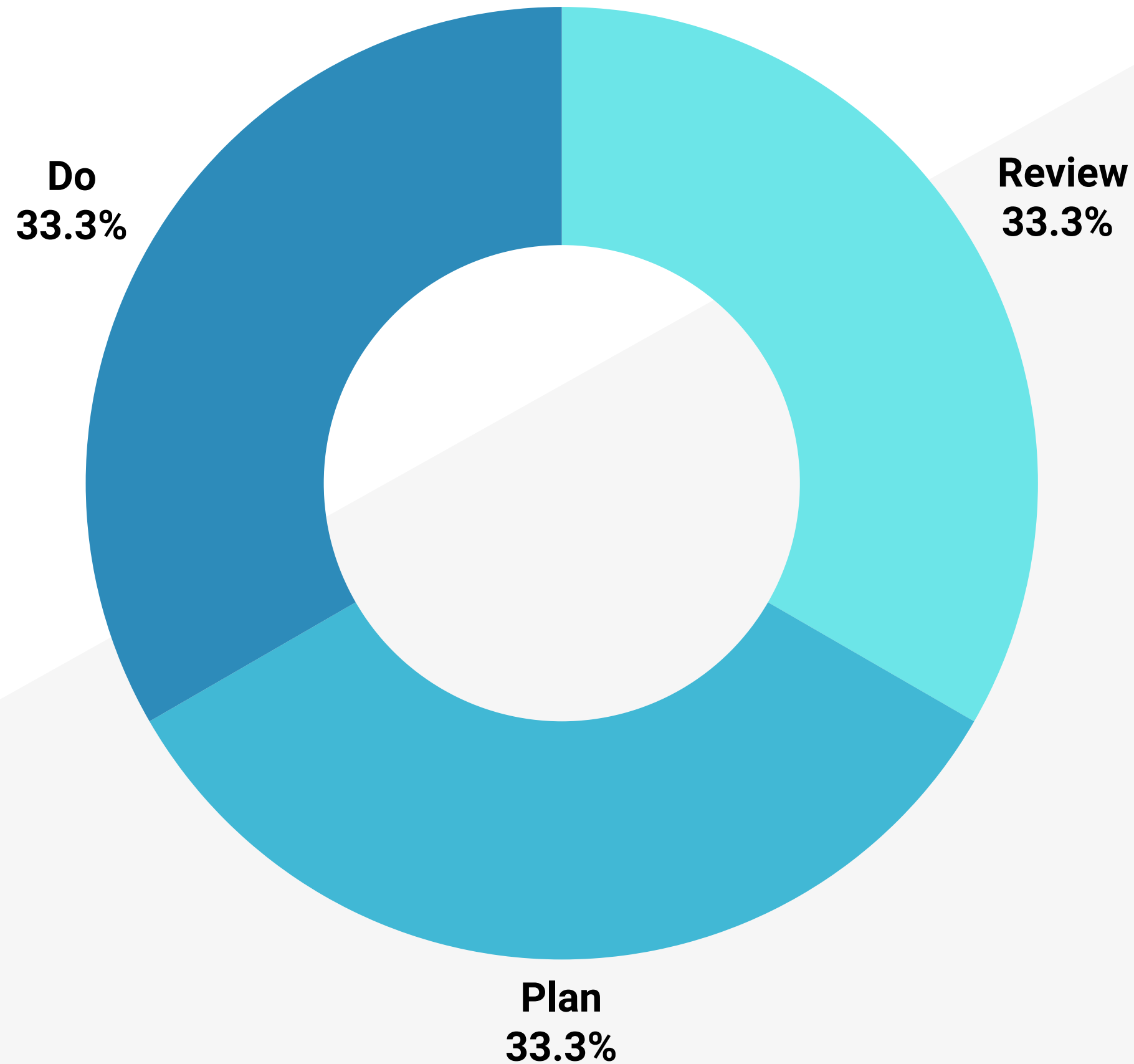
'I will always be available at the busiest time for our patients, 3-5pm.'





# HOW TO ASK FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

## STEP 4: ONCE INITIATED: REFLECT, DISCUSS AND MODIFY



**Trialling,  
learning and  
improving**

# EMPLOYEES INFORMATION PACK

## QUICK OVERVIEW

First, consider what flexible working arrangement would work best for you.

Then consider the impact of this flexible working arrangement on your patients, team and organisation.

Think through how the flexible working you are suggesting might benefit your team and patients.

Once you are working flexibly continue to reflect, discuss and improve this arrangement.

When you are ready to understand more and use a framework to guide you through the whole process please [click here](#) for The National Flexible Working People Policy Framework, February 2023.

# MANAGERS INFORMATION PACK

The most complete document to guide you and your team through understanding and expanding Flexible Working is The National Flexible Working People Policy Framework, February 2023. For more information, please [click here](#). - (*Within this document the main managers' section is Appendix 6.*)

# THE FLEXIBLE WORKING NETWORK

The Flexible Working Network, hosted by the Flexible Working Team at NHSE on 31/10/23, produced an excellent summary of shared common barriers and solutions to implementation and expansion of flexible working.

## Behaviours required



**1.Openness and Communication:** Promoting open and honest communication, transparency, and active listening between managers and staff to understand individual needs and concerns.

**2.Compassionate Leadership:** Encouraging compassionate and inclusive leadership that treats each individual as unique and considers their specific circumstances and preferences.

**3.Team Collaboration:** Emphasising the importance of collaboration and problem-solving across the team to manage implications and find solutions that accommodate flexible working needs.

**1.Willingness to Explore Solutions:** Cultivating a culture of being open to exploring new ways of working, thinking outside the box, and trying innovative approaches to accommodate flexible working.

**2.Conflict Resolution and Mediation:** Recognising that there may be conflicts or challenges in implementing flexible working and being prepared to address these with conflict resolution techniques, coaching styles, and open discussions.

**3.Fairness and Equity:** Applying fairness and equity principles to the review of flexible working arrangements, ensuring that decisions are consistent, reasonable, and just.





## Burning Questions & outstanding issues

Question	Response
Manager, HR, OH, policy, toolkits.	<a href="#">NHS England » Flexible working: toolkit for individuals and line managers</a> <a href="#">Flexible working - FutureNHS Collaboration Platform</a>
How do you work through a situation where you are able to say yes to some and no to others? Inconsistency across teams/departments/organisation	Flexible working cannot be 'one size fits all' and variation will naturally occur dependent on the specifics of the flexible working request. Having an org-wide approach should help to ensure that all teams are open to flexible working requests even if they can't all be approved.
What is the impact on the employee if the request can't be supported?	Not all requests can be accepted but each situation should be looked at on its own merits. Even if it is not possible to accommodate a request, the conversation between the line manager and individual can continue in 121s to allow the request to be revisited at a later date as the situation may change.
Staff who are unwilling to make changes / accommodate others in the team	This all about developing a flexible working culture with 'give and take'. Team rostering can be a good way of empowering teams to take ownership and support each other's requests.
Is there a pecking order to flexible working requests	This is about balancing requests on their own merits against the principles of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Maintaining safe, high quality, efficient services that are appropriately staffed.</li> <li>- Providing the best experience for patients/service users, their families and carers</li> <li>- Maintaining the work-life balance of colleagues.</li> </ul> As a manager you are not alone in managing different flexible working requests. Speak with HR Occupation Health (OH) colleagues.
Managing conflicting pressures e.g. flexible working vs KPIs. The 'jigsaw' of working patterns, will not always work	Please see above. Natural staff attrition and turnover will also provide opportunities.
How do we incentivise whilst working with Agenda for Change (enhancements)?	Point to other benefits where they are available locally e.g. flexible working due to childcare, the trust might offer a creche as part of the Employee Value Proposition.
Look wider - could staff work agilely and from home? Do they have to be in the hospital? Are there other ways to support the staff member?	This is all about having an open conversation with the individual (and wider team if appropriate) to understand the request and explore workable solutions.
Reasonable adjustments challenges- managers think they have to agree	Open dialogue with HR and OH colleagues. We will endeavour to include this as an area of focus in future network meetings.
How do you influence a change of mindset	Our <a href="#">Making it happen webinar</a> and <a href="#">slides</a> talked about the barriers, enablers and solutions when seeking to establish a flexible working culture in your team.
Education of people professionals /OH	As above we will try and pick this up in future network meetings.

# FLEXIBLE WORKING - EXAMPLE OF BEST PRACTICE

[PLEASE CLICK HERE FOR VIDEO CLIP](#)

## Summary of video clip: current flexible working in one practice

- 15,000 patient practice

### Doctors

- 4 GP partners -variable hours, mostly full time

### 6 salaried GPs:

- 1x term time only 5 sessions/week
- 1x 4 sessions /week remote working from Devon
- 1x 1.25 sessions /week annualised contract to allow work on cruise ship
- 1x 8 sessions/week with 1 day a week from home
- 2x 4 sessions/week GP Retainer Scheme with one working term time only

### Nurses

- Annualised hours for 2 years after retirement
- Split role across two practices

### Reception

- 3x returning from parental leave to flexible working hours
- 1x workflow working outside college hours while retraining to become a social worker
- 1x workflow working remotely over weekends whilst at medical school
- 2x part time secretaries working remotely



# TOOLKITS

National Flexible Working People Policy Framework Tool Kit

Flexible Working Toolkit for Individuals

Flexible Working Toolkit for Managers

Top Tips for Advertising with Flex

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All of the information shown above has been sourced from The FutureNHS Flexible Working Workspace. Please register and visit this site to access and contribute to their excellent network, forum, webinars, articles and toolkits.

# REFERENCES

**Reference 1:** Primary Care Intention Survey

**Reference 2:** Moen, P. et al (2016), “Does a Flexibility/Support Organizational Initiative Improve High-Tech Employees’ Well-Being? Evidence from the Work, Family and Health Network”, American Sociological Review, Vol 81/1, pp 134-164.

**Reference 3:** Wood, J. (2019) World Economics Forum 14/08/2019

**Reference 4:** Implementation of flexible working-King’s Fund  
Literature Review 2021