

FOREVER FLEX

Making flexible working
work beyond a crisis

**Flex
Appeal.**

Funded by:

**Sir Robert
McALPINE**

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A message from
Sir Robert McAlpine

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**Flex
Appeal.**

A message from Sir Robert McAlpine

It gives me immense pride and satisfaction that Sir Robert McAlpine has supported the creation of this report. At the request of Anna Whitehouse and Matt Farquharson (aka Mother and Papa Pukka), Claremont have produced a comprehensive study into flexible working, and the real life stories of success it contains will hopefully resonate with individuals and organisations. More importantly, it will help to move forward and change the way we work for good.

To me, flexible working is for everyone, because each of us has the right to a healthy work life balance. This is the foundation for anyone to prosper in their professional environment and be happy in their personal life.

There are more specific reasons that explain why I am such a fervent advocate of flexible working and so determined to implement it in our industry. For a start, the number of male suicides in construction is deeply alarming, and despite our best efforts to raise awareness and find ways to eradicate this, the statistics show very little improvement

year on year. So, if enabling a flexible working environment can somehow have a positive impact on mental health and help to reverse this trend, then I am 100 percent committed to supporting it.

We also need outstanding skills and talent in our industry to deliver the world class projects and infrastructure that change the very skyline and functionality of our cities. I truly believe that the way to attract the best people, and keep them, is to offer them a working environment in which they can thrive and be their best. And flexible working has the proven potential to do just that, paving the way to greater inclusion, diversity, and helping to reduce, at last, the gender pay gap.

I know, however, that this is not without its challenges. Finding a flexible working solution that works for everyone and can be sustained will require steadfast determination, unshakable trust and transparency, innovative thinking and a collaborative spirit. These are all traits that our people demonstrate every day delivering our projects, so it is realistic to believe that this vision can become reality.

The Covid-19 pandemic has already put us all to the test and forced remote working conditions upon us. This is not the ideal flexible working that we have in mind, but it has taught us important lessons. For one, we can do much more than we previously thought possible, and so I have every confidence that with our intent firmly set on opening a path to sustainable flexible working solutions, we will get there together.

Finally, this is about empowering people and setting the right example. Sir Robert McAlpine has been a family-owned building company for over 150 years with a culture based on family, respect and fairness. It means we care and support one another. We owe it to our people to pursue what is best for them, and to inspire others to ever higher standards. I believe in flexible working for everyone and I hope this report encourages you to do so too.

Paul Hamer
Chief Executive
Sir Robert McAlpine



What is this?

This report shows how 1,420 employers used flexible working through Covid-19, and how to make flex work for decades to come.

Since 2015, FlexAppeal has campaigned for employers to offer flexible working to all staff. It might be compressed hours, homeworking, flexitime, smarter shift patterns or any other variation, but hundreds of studies have shown flex improves access to work, reduces stress and improves our physical and mental health. And it's good for employers, because it raises productivity, improves loyalty and can cut costs. It has been shown to work in factories, hospitals, shops and offices.

In 2019, social change agency Claremont agreed to look at how different employers use flex and Sir Robert McAlpine agreed to sponsor their research (we don't take any payment).

Then a pandemic struck and millions of people were forced to work from home. How did organisations cope? What worked and what didn't? And how can flex be used for decades to come, for the benefit of all?

These are some early answers.

**Anna Whitehouse and
Matt Farquharson**
Founders, FlexAppeal

**Flex
Appeal.**



Where are we now?



We asked

1,420

employers from across the country how their working patterns had changed during lockdown and what they plan to do next.

Working from home saw the biggest increase, as expected, followed by compressed hours, flexitime, part time and job share.

There was little variation between sectors but size plays a part. Large businesses are adapting more than their medium and small counterparts.

Generally, small businesses already had more flex in place.

In lockdown¹...



58% of employers are working from home more than before covid



40% of employers say they're doing more compressed hours than before



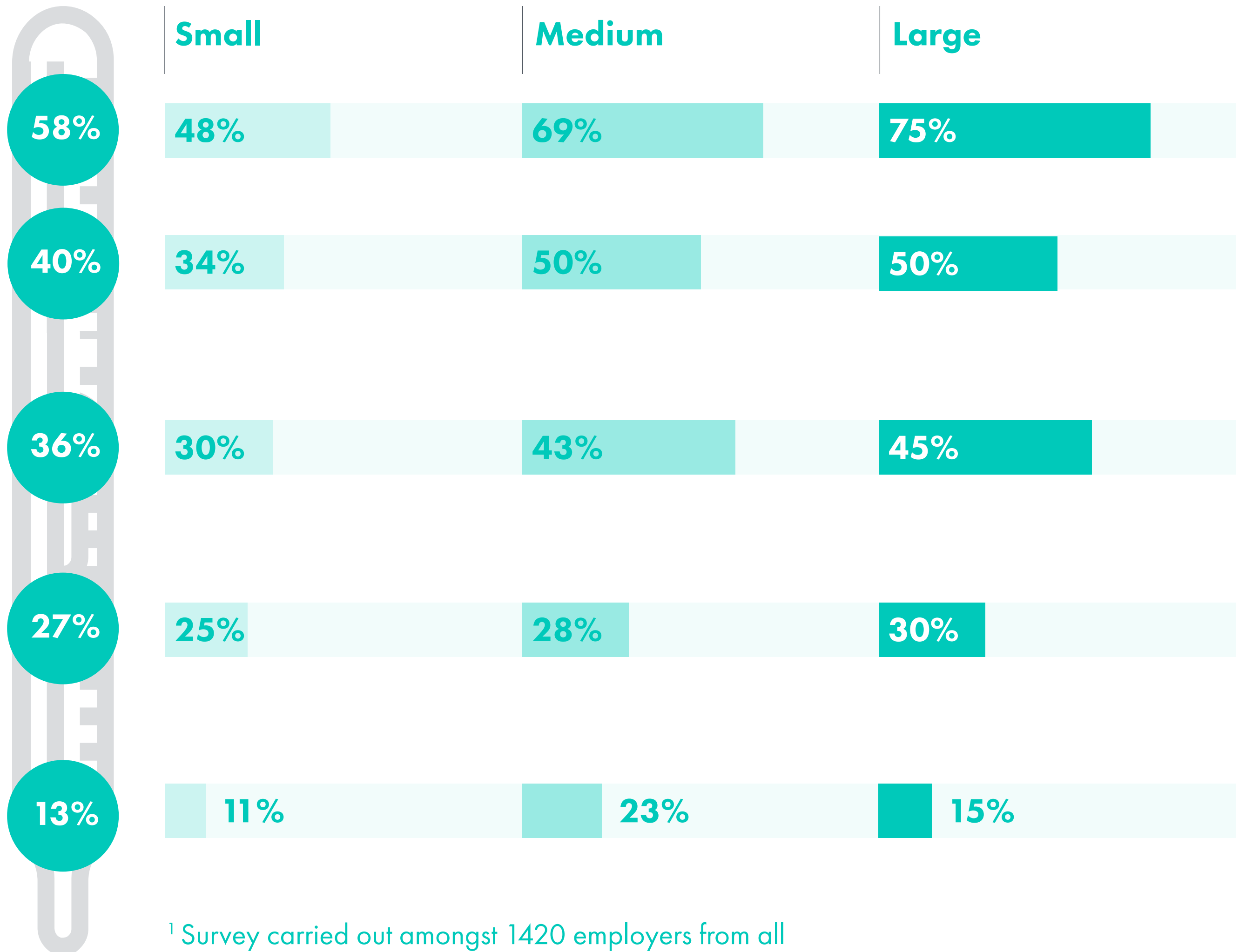
36% of employers have seen an increase in flexitime



27% of employers reported more part time work than before covid



13% of employers had increased job shares as a result of covid



¹ Survey carried out amongst 1420 employers from all sectors, across the UK, conducted by PanelBase

What's next for flex?

Employers have 'flexperimented' and want to stay flexible

72% of all employers want to keep working from home

- 82% Business services
- 66% Primary, manufacturing and construction
- 64% Transport, retail and distribution
- 73% Public services
- 64% Medium sized businesses



70% of all employers want to keep working flexitime

- 79% Business services
- 63% Primary, manufacturing and construction
- 68% Transport, retail and distribution
- 69% Public services



66% of all employers want to keep job shares

- 74% Business services
- 67% Primary, manufacturing and construction
- 56% Transport, retail and distribution
- 62% Public services
- 76% Medium businesses



64% of all employers want to keep part time hours

- 70% Business services
- 65% Primary, manufacturing and construction
- 60% Transport, retail and distribution
- 61% Public services



58% of all employers want to keep compressed hours

- 68% Business services
- 59% Primary, manufacturing and construction
- 55% Transport, retail and distribution
- 56% Public services



What can we do?



Our research showed that

71%

of employers were using flex and 53% planned to continue or adopt it. Now we wanted to know how.

So we did detailed interviews with 32 employers of different sizes and sectors across the country, asking how they make flex work in a healthy, sustainable way.

Three key themes emerged:

Opportunity: how to recognise the chance to change.

Control: how to understand the power dynamics between colleagues.

Beyond Education: how to use inspiration and practical tips to make flexible working work.

Opportunity

When crisis strikes, a window of opportunity opens



Making behaviour change happen isn't easy during business as usual.

Employers often give preference for the current state of affairs. There is a bias to the status quo. Decision-makers are overwhelmed by the options to choose from, so stick with what they know. They're also swayed by loss aversion; the potential losses from doing something different are weighed more heavily than the potential gains.

Our research shows that when it comes to adopting flexible working practices, behaviour change is massively helped along when business is already disrupted, such as during a pandemic.

Change at the top

A new leader takes over and has an appetite for change. The 'new broom' sweeps away legacy practices and gives flexible working a foothold or fresh momentum. Our employers acknowledged that widespread change has to come from the top.

Change of location

An office closes or a campus moves: why go through the trauma of firing and re-hiring when all it takes is a fresh look at remote working and flex? Several employers said a change of space dislodged flexible working inertia.



Money problems

After pay cuts or redundancies, organisations use flex to retain the talent needed to survive. Flexible working is a sensible tactic (e.g. if people choose to reduce their hours) and a way of boosting morale among staff.

Life stuff

Having a baby, caring for a poorly relative, a mid-life desire to move to the other side of the world. Life has a habit of happening in uneven lines and many employers said it was major personal events that forced flexibility into play.

What can we learn from this?



The moment for flex has arrived

Dramatic changes have triggered organisations to question long-established norms. In many workplaces, the pandemic has forced open flexible working's window of opportunity.

Spot smaller chances for flex

Look for less obvious changes in your organisation, like those on the previous page, which could unintentionally create the conditions for flexible working to gain a footing.



Beware 'fake flex'

Many employers are actually in a state of 'accidental flex'. They've had to suddenly adopt radical new ways of working through the crisis. These have not been strategically designed and implemented. Forced home working is not flex. Working all hours to keep a business afloat is not flex. Be mindful that we're not enjoying some of the benefits that come with true flexibility, like better work/life balance and physical and mental health. Employers need help. Getting flexible working right won't be easy. They need to hear from others who've had the benefit of time to fine-tune it.

Control

When flex doesn't threaten someone's sense of control, they're more enthusiastic about it



Our employers told us that trust is the key ingredient for making flex work.

But it's not something that can be turned on and off, and simply telling someone to trust another person doesn't make it happen.

So what builds or inhibits trust?

The more people we spoke to, the more it became clear that the common thread was people's sense of control.

Most workplaces are webs of systems of control. The more sophisticated our understanding of them, the greater chance we have of knowing what to do about those who are impeding progress towards flexible working.

What makes some leaders fear losing control?

Leaders feeling the need to be in control of what the organisation is, where it's going, safeguarding its traditions and what it stands for

– *'flexible working just isn't us, it's for modern millennials.'*

Can lead to permafrost that prevents flex taking root.

Managers feeling responsible for maintaining necessary control of their team

– *'if I can't see them, how do I know they're working?'*

Frequently leads to requests being denied.

Workers fearing losing control of their established routines, habits and working patterns

– *'but I've always done it like that.'*

Can prevent uptake of policies that are in place.

Creating trust

Our interviews showed that we need to find ways of getting leaders, managers and workers to trust each other more.

Key to that is acknowledging that they're not just being closed-minded, but that a lack of trust often comes from fear of losing control.

If we want people to be more open to flex, first we need to empathise – what are they afraid is going to happen once the reins are loosened?

Only then can we begin to find ways of reassuring them that they've nothing to fear.

“When you stop trying to control everything you get more energy, and when you've got more energy, you can do more.”

Ben, Granger Reis
business services
size: small

”

“It's taken about two years to get everybody in that trust mindset. You'd still have some managers who'd want to see people in the office to show that they're busy.”

Catrin, Reward Gateway
business services
size: large

”

“Those in favour would allow their team complete flex but others were against it - this led to fragmentation. Some could work from home whenever they wanted but others had to ask and felt guilty.”

Josh,
Ultimate Finance
business services
size: medium

”

Beyond Education

**Facts and stats
alone won't
create change**



Workplaces are human spaces. Work still tends to be done by people.

When it comes to influencing colleagues to move to flexible working, our employers showed us it's hardly ever achieved through a rational process of educating them with facts and stats.

Many pro-flex employees told stories of expending huge amounts of effort on PowerPoint presentations, business cases, toolkits and draft policies, with little lasting change. For some it even ended up being counter-productive and was a trap to be avoided. As shown in the previous section, there are sometimes deep-seated reasons why colleagues aren't receptive to the idea of flex.

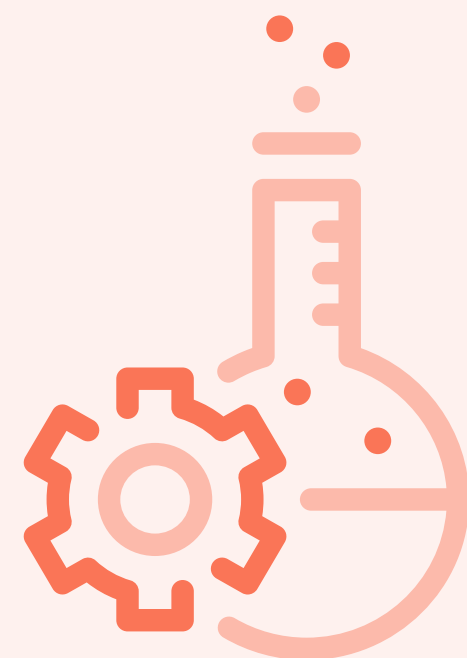
Small steps and human stories

Experiment slowly

Big bangs and grand unveilings are fraught with risk. Manage expectations and give yourself some wriggle room by using the language of piloting, trialling and experimentation. Start small, with a single team or individual, listen to feedback, make changes, try again (but be cautious of only trying it out with the same teams – this can create a sense of have and have nots).

“We did core hours as a summer experiment initially... we were super-clear with the team and said, ‘Look, we just want to see if it works, it’s not going to get written into contracts, it’s not 100% a thing yet. But let’s give it six months.’ And then it means that everyone is also invested in making it work.”

Steve, tails.com
transport, retail and distribution
size: medium

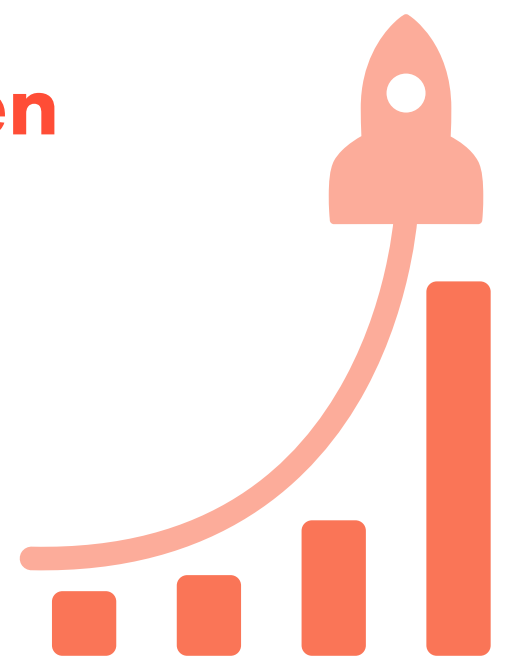


Stories trump stats

Grab the success stories of where a flexible approach has achieved better results and use them to create impact with decision-makers. Stories trump statistics every time. The more human, unexpected and unusual the better.

“I used a male supervisor as an example – a single parent who works in the morning, picks his children up from school and then finishes his work when his children are having tea. He’s a flexible working parent and his results are better than anyone else’s.”

Carol, Amey
transport, retail and distribution
size: large



Flex together

Staff help guide change

Giving ALL colleagues a chance to work out what good flexible working looks like gives them a stake in the process. As a result, it is more likely to stick. Could one team of managers train another? How might colleagues' experiences of flex be used to help others understand its benefits?

"We made a point of engaging a whole bunch of people, the HR department, the board of directors and asking, 'as a business, what does home working mean to us? What does flexible working mean to us? What do we want people to be able to do?'"

Stephen, Stride Treglown
primary, manufacturing and construction
size: large



Go beyond HR

Just having a flexible working policy that sits in HR isn't enough. Workshops and coaching for leaders across teams helps people really understand how and why flex can work. Communicate it well and role model from the top.

"Invest time and energy in your managers: make them brilliant people-managers, able to understand what an individual needs to build trust and feel in control... The moment a manager doesn't buy into it, a team will fall apart."

Mizzy, Mr President
business services
size: small



Communicate clearly and often

Be open and honest

Making assumptions on behalf of colleagues can be catastrophic. Ongoing two-way communication is critical. Talk honestly and openly, and try to share vulnerabilities. Listening is even more important. Where's the rub in your day? What one small thing would improve your working life?

“This working from home experiment has just reaffirmed that talking with our team is the number one thing we should have been doing for the past eight years. It improves trust and is not to be underestimated.”

Cat, Cult
business services
size: small



Give specifics

A flexible approach still needs boundaries. Do you need people to work core hours? Are there certain service levels that must be met? Should people communicate in specific ways? Tell them. Make expectations crystal clear.

“We use EOS – Entrepreneurial Operating System – it's great and simple. It allows people to always know what they are doing and why. People are accountable for things. They are clear on what they need to do in a week or in a quarter.”

Nikki, Quality Compliance Systems
public service
size: small



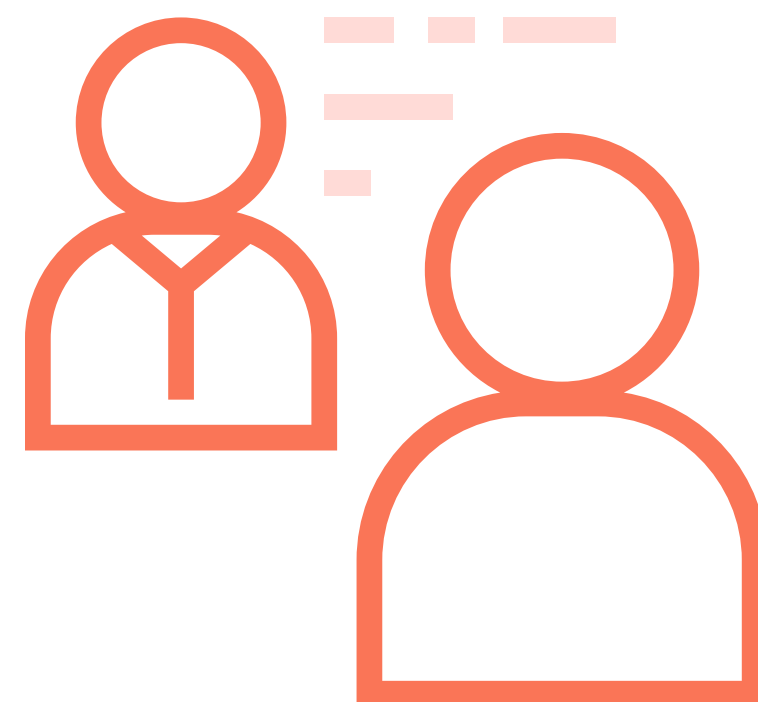
The power of language

Two-way street

Very few businesses use flexible working just to be nice: it makes great business sense if it's done in a balanced way. Is it working for both employer and employee? It's not truly flexible if it only suits one side.

“It's about courtesy and respect... We recognise that life happens to people and there should be no penalty to the living experience. But please, just make sure that you let us know. It's about give and take.”

Karl, Geraghty Taylor
primary, manufacturing, construction
size: small



Reframe the language

The language of flex isn't always helpful. It can sound a bit nebulous or idealistic. Think about reframing flex – maybe even calling it something else that doesn't feel like a massive shift (e.g. agile working). Adjust the terminology to suit your organisation and its priorities. Flex is a means to an end: it doesn't matter what we call it.

“Understand the business case and get your organisation to have a vision behind it that links to what you're doing, so that flex will lead you to whatever it is. As soon as it's linked to strategic objectives, it becomes tangible.”

Kate, Oxfam
public services
size: large



Employers like you



We spoke to

32

employers from across the country about their hopes and fears in their new working worlds.

This is a collection of first-person employer stories.

We've selected four stories from our 32 interviews that tell the flexible working journey – the ups and downs, the successes, failures and ultimately why it's worth persevering.

After lockdown, employers hope...

1. To push the boundaries on what flexibility means for all their teams

“Post covid, I think everything’s on the table, everything’s up for discussion with anyone. We can be even more flexible.

Rachel, & SMITH
business services
size: small

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“My goal is to get to where people don’t feel they have to actually come and ask or make a business case to work at home. I want them to say ‘I’m going to work at home tomorrow, I’m confident enough to put it that way.’”

Andy, Robinson Low Francis
primary, manufacturing, construction
size: medium

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2. To find a balance between employees who don’t want to work as they did before (the majority) and those who do (a minority)

“It’s a mixed bag. Our software developers think we should have a remote-first policy... we’ve got project managers who were used to running around building and miss being quite vocal and interactive.”

Glen, 383
business services
size: small

”

“15% want to go back into office full-time tomorrow, 75% would like to work less in the office, only a small handful of people want to work exclusively from home.”

Josh, Ultimate finance
business services
size: medium

”

3. To use physical space more for collaboration, creativity and culture

“Not everyone has a really lovely home office or an environment where they can work. So we do need a space... But it could look very, very different as a result of this.”

Kate, Oxfam
public services
size: large



“In a recent catch up, they all wanted to come back in for one or two days a week. We’re thinking of trialling that.”

Rachel, & SMITH
business services
size: small



4. To widen their talent pool

“I hope we would be open to anything – that perspective employees would come to us with a suggestion and that our first reaction is ‘how can we make this work?’ Recruitment is an area where we have to be more open.”

Melissa, Fitzgerald and Law
business services
size: medium



“Let’s open the floodgates: it doesn’t matter where you’re located, doesn’t matter what your day might look like, we just care about you doing the work that you love, to your best capabilities.”

Cat, Cult
business services
size: small



Employers fear...

1. Losing a sense of connection

“My biggest fear is how we continue to differentiate ourselves as employers – that’s the bit that keeps me awake at night. How do I make sure that we continue to have our culture?”

Nikki, Quality Compliance Systems
public services
size: small

”

“My fear is losing social ties and bonding.”

Josh, Ultimate Finance
business services
size: medium

”

2. That people will revert to the ‘old normal’

“I worry that team leaders don’t have the skills to manage teams remotely and that because they can’t cope, they effectively bully their staff to coming back into the office.”

Stephen, Stride Treglown
primary, manufacturing and construction
size: large

”

“The time and resources to make flex work could be a barrier to employers...It would be a huge shame to reverse the positive change and behaviours established in lockdown because it is seen as difficult or ‘a bit of a faff.’”

Kate, Oxfam
public services
size: large

”

3. That the pandemic will leave us with 'fake flex'

"Flexibility is so much wider than just working from home. And we didn't want that kind of wider narrative about flexibility to be pulled down."

Lyndsay, Aster
primary, manufacturing and construction
size: large

”

"We call it 'dynamic working' because it's about constantly moving and responding. We did some comms around this, explaining that dynamic working is about flexibility, choice, empowerment. It's not just about working from home."

Jane, TalkTalk
primary, manufacturing and construction
size: large

”

"I worry that businesses may react to the last six months by adopting remote working only as a cost-cutting exercise without due regard for what their employees want."

Josh, Ultimate Finance
business services
size: medium

”

Employer stories



Support service supplier

Location: UK wide

Staff: 1,700



“Overnight we sent 6,500 people home with their chairs and computers.” Carol Elderfield, HR Director

Amey has grown up with a very traditional, male-orientated leadership and a ‘command and control’ operating model. We have always had a flexible working policy but in a command and control environment, it was often a case of, ‘I’ll tell you whether you can work flexibly or not, and if it doesn’t suit me, you’re not going to do it.’

More often than not, requests were turned down by managers – predominantly because of presenteeism and lack of trust. ‘If I can see you in the office, I know you’re working from eight in the morning to five at night. But if I can’t see you, how do I know you’re not actually off looking after your children?’ Work was input driven rather than output driven.

Our new CEO Amanda Fisher came in eight months ago with a very different approach. Her operating model is very much more about empowerment, which has a significant impact on the ability to work flexibly. Her philosophy is that if you give people the freedom to perform, they will meet the challenge.

Pre-Covid, we had been starting to break down barriers by sharing every little nugget of success. Working with our communications team, I constantly shared stories about people who went the extra mile with our values. I used a male supervisor as an example – a single parent who works in the morning, picks his children up from school and then finishes his work when his children are having tea. He’s a flexible working parent and his results are better than anyone else’s.

I kept chipping away. Every time I hit a barrier, I would go back with another little nugget of success. Anything that is worthwhile is hard – you just have to persevere.

Covid has accelerated everything.

Overnight we sent 6,500 people home with their chairs and computers. In the areas where we can monitor productivity, like our call centres, we've been able to show that productivity has gone up considerably. We've demonstrated to the naysayers that people aren't just sitting at home not doing any work – they are working really hard because they are enjoying the accountability we've given to them.

Moving forward there's a real emphasis on increased communication. Every one of those 6,500 people working at home will have a one-to-one with their line manager to find out how they want to work beyond the pandemic. The early results show that the majority want to work in an office two or three days a week, not five, which means we'll only

need about 60% of our office capacity. More importantly, we know that 15% of our people are desperate to get back to the office, so we're making sure our offices are Covid-secure so that those people can return as soon as possible.

We will also resurrect our change-maker group – 250 employees from all levels of the business who are genuinely passionate about working for Amey. They volunteer to come to focus groups and talk to us about what we need to do differently.

For leaders who are resistant to change, we are asking a range of employees – including women, people of colour, members of the LGBTQA community and neurodiverse people – to share stories of how it feels to be different in Amey. We want to make the uncomfortable comfortable. By encouraging people to speak up and getting others to really listen and hear what's being said, we believe we can make a real change.

“We've demonstrated to the naysayers that people aren't just sitting at home not doing any work.”

Carol Elderfield, HR Director

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For me, flexibility, inclusion, well-being and social value are all intrinsically linked. We need to keep painting a holistic picture – it's not about just banging the drum for being diverse, or banging the drum for being flexible. It's about saying, 'We've got to treat people well – and here are the things we need to do to achieve that.'

Employer stories

GRANGER REIS :

Executive search and consultancy services

Location: Bristol

Staff: 27



“Our revenue got to £6 million, our NPS score is currently +61 and our completion percentage is 83%.”

Richard Milsom, Managing Partner

Ben: In 2016 we had been through a difficult time as a business and we needed to make some big changes.

We said to our people, “Look, we’ve been through a tough period. We’ve made some redundancies. You guys are still with us. What kind of business do you want to work in?”

Richard: I feel that I am pretty well informed when it comes to employment and culture.

When flexible working was first suggested and people started talking about coming and going as they pleased, wearing board shorts and flip flops in the office (this did not actually happen – we’re casual but not that casual!), I thought they were having a laugh. But we were at a low point – I had lost the war. I needed to surrender to the wishes of the employees.

Ben: When things aren’t going well, there’s a tendency to think, ‘If I can see it, I can control it. I need to have my hands on it’.

But there comes a time when you have to let go. When you stop trying to control everything you get more energy, and when you’ve got more energy, you can do more. When you’re trusting other people to do their jobs, no matter where they are, that has an effect.

So we listened to what our people had to say and we made some changes.

We relaxed the dress code, introduced hot desking and invested in the right equipment and software so that staff could work remotely. For the first six months, we kept asking ourselves if we had done the right thing. But after that, it started to feel really natural. The concerns we had over productivity dissipated because we kept reminding ourselves to focus on outcomes, rather than hours worked.

People started becoming a lot more honest and open about what they were doing.

We'd see 'going to the gym' in people's diaries, rather than just 'working from home'. Someone would have a bike ride in the middle of the day but they would balance that with something work related in the evening. And significantly for us – as we try to be really supportive to parents – people stopped feeling they needed to hide from their colleagues the fact that they were going to pick up their children.

Richard: We were upfront about our expectations.

We had three clear KPIs for that first year of working flexibly. First, our revenue had to be at least £3 million, so we were still profitable and could continue to invest in growth. Second, our customer satisfaction – measured by NPS (Net Promoter Score) – had to be at least +40. And third, our completion percentage, which is how many people we place, had to be over 70%, which is above our industry average.

Well, we've blown all the metrics out of the water. Our revenue got to £6 million, our NPS score

is currently +61 and our completion percentage is 83%. This has surprised me but shown me that if you trust people and allow them to do what's expected with clear KPIs, you can achieve so much more.

Ben: Some people perceive flexible working as a very millennial, very liberal, free-flowing way of doing things.

That can make them fearful of it in a way, because they see themselves as quite traditional.

But the reality is that flexible working doesn't define your culture.

You can work flexibly, but your business can still be very demanding and very exacting. Because you've got less physical day-to-day management, you're driven towards hiring people that will take on responsibility and accountability.

“So flexible working isn't something to be worried about. It won't change who you are as a business – it will just change where you are.”

Ben Hewlett, Partner

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Employer stories

PROCTOR +
STEVENSON

Digital marketing
agency

Location: Bristol

Staff: 70



“We did workshops, interviews and surveys with the whole company.” *Caroline Beardkins, HR Manager*

Over a relatively short period we went from 28 to 68 staff, with the majority of growth in digital. Tech people tend to work flexibly – they can start work at any time as long as they get the job done. Our creative and client services team hadn’t worked like that before, which held us back from talking about flex for quite some time.

But the more tech people we were hiring, the more of a blocker our lack of flex became. We’d hear comments from candidates and recruitment partners like, ‘You can offer me a web developer role with no flexibility or I can get one elsewhere for the same pay with total flexibility’. Really good people were leaving and telling us that the lack of flexibility was part of their decision to go.

In the end, retention and attraction were the triggers that made the board and our senior managers see we should put some time and effort into working out how flexibility might look, and work, in our business. So, in Autumn 2018 we joined forces with a flexible working consultancy.

We did workshops, interviews and surveys with the whole company. We talked to everybody – people with kids, people with sports interests, people who volunteered for charity, people with lengthy commutes. It was about making sure everyone could reap the rewards of whatever came out the other end, while ensuring there was no compromise in our service to clients or negative effect on our business.

There were still some worries from some managers. ‘What if everyone wants to work flexibly all the time? Have our staff thought through the consequences for the business? What if there are only three people in the office? How’s it going to affect our clients?’

But without exception, employees had thought through the consequences.

It was really interesting to see how realistic everyone was about flex. Initially some people wanted us to consider banked hours – working 37.5 hours across three days and then taking two days off. But by the end of the research process, everyone agreed it wouldn’t work for our business, even those who’d been very keen at the beginning. It was hugely helpful to us to have consulted everyone in this way.

In March 2019 we presented a flex policy to the whole company, spending time talking through what it would mean for different people. We introduced home working and flexitime, with core hours of 10am until 4.30pm. We made it clear that there were two forms of flex: informal and formal. Only around 15 people

had flex written into their contracts at that point (I think there will be more post-lockdown). We explained to the team that this would be a continually moving feast – our team’s personal circumstances and roles are ever evolving and we expect to continue the flex conversation forever in order to keep pace with that.

We decided our catch phase would be ‘calendar is king’. Flex would only work if people put their hours and location into their calendars. Everyone committed to this, but it didn’t quite play out that way at first. Some people who hadn’t actively used their calendars before took some time to get into the habit, while others would email a dozen people to say, ‘I’m coming in at 10 today.’ That was a legacy of how we had operated up until that point. But six months later, it had all evened out.

People are so much happier and relaxed as a result of flex and we’ve had two additional benefits to the company that we weren’t expecting. Because employees have the ability to flex, they now attend doctor and dentist appointments in

“If you asked our clients, they’d say they haven’t seen any change in the service, and I put that down entirely to flex and the fact that we had it in place, and working successfully, already.”

Caroline Beardkins, HR Manager

”

their own time – and we’ve made significant savings as a result. The other benefit is that our international clients are happier because we’re more available at the times that suit them.

I think we’ve hugely benefited from having launched flex last year. We’ve remained efficient during lockdown – it’s been seamless.

Employer stories

TalkTalk

For Everyone

Telecommunications

Location: Salford

Staff: c2,000



“Dynamic working is about flexibility, choice, empowerment – it’s not just about working from home.”

Jane Garnsey, People Operations Director

When we decided to relocate 1,200 employees to a brand-new campus in Salford, it felt like an exciting, progressive move for the company. But a lot of people would now face a commute along an awful stretch of the M62 and M60, with a 15-mile journey taking two hours or more at peak times. Parking was also going to be a problem. The nine to five day wasn’t going to work for us – we needed to think differently.

That was the catalyst that led to us revamping our flexible working and homeworking policy. There was lots of talk of millennials and what they wanted from the world of work. So we relaunched flexible working as ‘next generation working’. We introduced the concept of core hours of 10 to three, not nine to five, with an emphasis on trust and empowerment. We also encouraged car shares.

During 2016 we ran mandatory ‘next generation working’ workshops for every single one of our people leaders.

We didn’t position these sessions as training – we positioned them as discussions in which people could share their fears and get hints and tips on how to set expectations about how we wanted to work going forward.

The workshops were eye-opening. We would have a group of managers in a room and their responses ranged from ‘I’m really up for this new way of working, I’m really excited, my teams are going to love it’ to ‘No way – I can only know what my teams are doing if they are sat in front of me.’

The best thing about the workshops was that they became self-regulating.

I remember sitting at the back and letting things unfold. Managers who were up for it were challenging managers who weren't, telling them that they were stuck in their ways and that in a few years' time they would have a highly disengaged team. The managers who weren't up for it would then throw out another challenge that the other person hadn't thought about. It was a very interesting experience and an important part of the process.

Over four weekends in June 2017, we moved 1,200 people into our new office. It was very different from what we'd had before in Warrington and Irlam, which was mainly just rows of desks. Now we had lockers to help enforce the clear desk policy and lots of collaboration spaces.

People wanting the best of both worlds was an issue. They liked the option of working from home but when they came to the office, they wanted to sit in the same place every

time, next to their team. We just don't have the space for that. I'd have daily emails from managers: 'Jane, I don't have enough desks for my team.' But it's a serious issue for some people – walking through the door and not knowing where you're going to sit can be quite anxiety provoking for shy or introverted people.

Closing our London office in 2018 was another big catalyst for change. It meant another 400 people in Salford, but we didn't have the capacity to fit them all in the building. The only way we could make it work was by moving the dial on flexible working again.

In 2019 we replaced our 'next generation working' policy with 'dynamic working' guidelines. We chose 'dynamic' because it's about constantly moving and responding. We did some comms around this, explaining that dynamic working is about flexibility, choice, empowerment. It's not just about working from home – it's about being able to do whatever you can to better manage your work/life balance.

“You'll come to the office for a specific purpose – to connect and communicate. We will need to make sure the office space reflects that.”

Jane Garnsey, People Operations Director



In particular we wanted to talk to disgruntled front-line staff who felt they were missing out because they had to be office based. We pointed out that as shift workers, they already had that dynamic working. If they wanted to, say, drop their kids off at school every day, they could request permanent late shifts.

Post-lockdown, the workplace will look very different. We've worked out that with one metre social distancing, we can have 600 people in the office, so desk space won't be a problem. In the future I think home will be where you sit at a desk and work. You'll come to the office for a specific purpose – to connect and communicate.

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