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Proposal of a new legislation was announced late last year giving workers in the UK the right to ask for flexible working from the first day of a new job. Aimed at supporting employees who have personal commitments such as caring for children or vulnerable adults, the raft of new measures looks to give employees more control over their working options.

While the nature of “flexible working” has become the norm for many in a post-pandemic world, legislation codifying it as a civil right cements the changing nature of work. With an increase in home working and flexible hours, companies must address flexible working as a real expectation rather than just a perk.

Undoubtedly, the option to work flexibly brings great opportunity and benefit to employees. However, obstacles such as a lack of understanding and even ill-placed attitudes towards flexible working can prevent its benefits being realised for both individuals and businesses. Simply put, flexibility should not be confused with full-fledged remote working. The prospect of a more flexible schedule is undeniably appealing; however, it is critical to be aware of the potential challenges that might come with it. As flexible working becomes *de rigeur*, businesses must carefully weigh their options, including the solutions offered by serviced offices, to provide a balance between flexibility and employee productivity, wellbeing and development.

**Normalise conversations about flexibility**

Flexibility goes beyond where and when people work, encompassing policies around wider benefit packages, technology, and even the ability to move between permanent and temporary contracts. Giving employees greater government over their working patterns can create fairer, more inclusive workplace.

As employees increasingly demand improved work-life balance, businesses need to normalise conversations about flexible working arrangements, especially at the beginning of an employment relationship. Normalisation of these conversations means that both employers and employees should feel comfortable discussing the potential for flexible working arrangements as part of the regular job requirements and expectations, ensuring that the flexible working dynamic serves benefit to both employees and businesses. Clear dialogue, especially at the recruitment stage, will set the basis for a working relationship characterised by mutual openness and honesty that can have significant benefits on individual wellbeing and business productivity.

Check-ins and performance evaluations can also provide an opportunity for businesses and their employees to discuss how flexible working arrangements are impacting employee’s work and the overall business. If done regularly, mutually beneficial arrangements that support the needs of both parties can be found while helping to build a company culture where conversations around flexibility are normalised.

**Flexibility within an organisation’s framework**

Flexible working doesn’t just mean making the switch to remote or part-time work; it can also be a powerful tool to increase workplace satisfaction and productivity, especially when it comes to internal business practices. However, it is vital that new practices don’t backfire, having a potentially negative impact on overall morale, performance and development opportunities for more flexible employees.

When formalising flexible working for an office space, employers should consider creating an environment that offers autonomy and trust in its employees within clear and established parameters. Setting clear expectations around hours expected at work – such as core hours during which all team members need to be available for meetings or check-ins – is essential if teams are going to remain flexible while meeting deadlines and staying on track with projects. Flexibility must also include allowing adjustments due to important events outside of work, so long as those commitments do not compromise job performance or targets set out by management.

**Earning the commute**

Working patterns have changed. Similarly, office design must also adapt to a ‘new normal’ if businesses want to ensure that flexible work does not turn into remote work. With over 64% of employees surveyed believing that the cost-of-living crisis makes it more important that people are able to work flexibly[[1]](#footnote-1), employers increasingly face pressure to ‘earn commute’ into the office – after all, why should employees make the commute if employees are able to perform better at home?

Through intuitive and thoughtful design updates to office design, employers can provide staff with a set up that can mirror the comforts of working from home; this allows them to marry the benefits of working from home, with the perks of being back in the office. Facilities such as more quiet and private spaces, as well as separate areas for social interactions and creative collaborations will allow worker to mimic their productivity at home while also filling that much needed post-pandemic isolation.

To facilitate flexibility within the physical workplace itself, flexible office spaces have become an invaluable asset in providing the necessary amenities to keep employees connected and engaged. These workspaces go beyond traditional desk and cubicles to offer coffee shops, gyms, and even bars, giving employees everything they need to make their time at work enjoyable as well as productive. In addition, these facilities provide a sense of community that helps improve motivation within the workplace. By taking care of all aspects related to working, flexible offices deliver an efficient solution for both businesses and employees alike, enabling them to focus solely on their job without worrying about additional tasks.

While not ratified just yet, proposal of this legislation marks an acknowledgement on the evolution of working styles, and opens the door to a real shift in job design and hiring practices. With 55% of employees willing to leave their role for another with better flexibility, it is not a question of if, but when will businesses implement measures to accommodate changing employee preferences[[2]](#footnote-2). Businesses will benefit from a well-planned strategy to ensure that flexible working arrangements are managed effectively. It’s clear this phenomenon is here to stay; employers should fully embrace this change, adapting to remain ahead of the curve.

1. <https://www.sonovate.com/future-world-of-work-sneak-peak/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/article/1801588/half-working-parents-consider-leaving-job-better-flexibility-study-finds> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)