

Flexible Working Guide for Employees and Managers

This guide outlines how Royal Mail Group can support employees to manage their work life balance through a variety of flexible working arrangements. It outlines the process for employees to request to work flexibly and how managers should deal with requests.

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Getting help

Contact your manager if you have any queries about this guide

Managers can obtain advice by:

Calling the HR Services Advice Centre on 0845 6060603 / 5456 7100

Managers working for Parcelforce Worldwide should call 0845 604787 / 5456 4747

For web access go to:
<https://www.psp.royalmailgroup.com>



Flexible Working

Guide for Employees and Managers

Overview

This guide explains who is eligible to apply for flexible working and how they can apply. It also sets out the criteria managers should use when considering a request.

The guide is divided into two parts – a guide for employees and managers about how a request should be made and the process to be followed, and a supplementary guide for managers about managing the process. There is also an annex to this guide which sets out some detail about examples of different types of flexible working arrangements, and a further annex which sets out some detail about two specific forms of flexible working, job sharing and term time working.

This guide should be read in conjunction with the *Flexible Working Policy*. It does not form parts of contracts of employment. Royal Mail reserves the right to amend this guide at any time.

PART 1: GUIDE FOR EMPLOYEES AND MANAGERS

What is flexible working?

Employees can request flexible working patterns that involve a change in:

- the hours they work
- the time they are required to work
- location

Flexible working has potential benefits for both employees and Royal Mail's business (see Annex 1 for a table of examples of flexible working arrangements and the benefits those arrangements bring to both Royal Mail and employees).

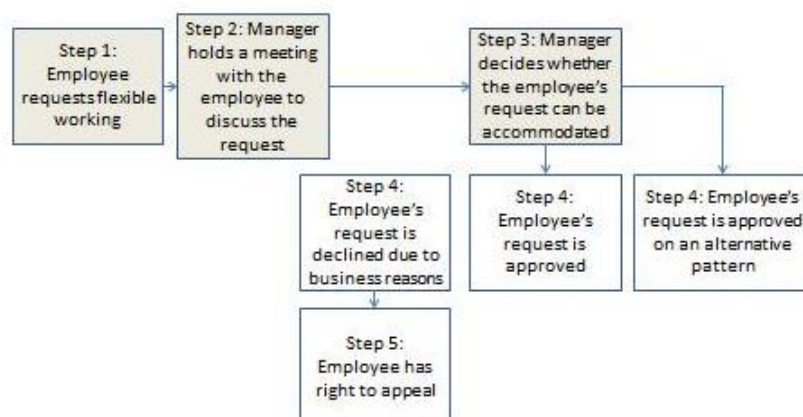
Who is eligible?

An employee will be eligible to apply for flexible working if:

- They have worked for Royal Mail for at least 26 weeks at the date on which the application is made; and
- They have not made a formal application for flexible working within the previous 12 months, whether for a permanent or temporary contractual change

Agency staff, contractors and self-employed workers are not eligible to apply for flexible working.

Process overview



Timescales

Managers must deal with flexible working requests within 3 months of receiving the application. This includes completion of any appeal process. An extension to this timescale can be made at any point provided the employee agrees. This agreement should be confirmed in writing.

Types of Request

There are three types of request – a permanent contractual change, a temporary contractual change and an informal non-contractual arrangement.

Request for permanent contractual change

It will be assumed that a flexible working request is for a permanent contractual change unless it states otherwise.

Request for temporary contractual change to working patterns

Employees who wish to request a temporary contractual change should make this clear in their flexible working request. These changes should have an end date agreed from the outset and should not be for periods of longer than one year. Employees should be aware that they will not be eligible to make a further formal request to work flexibly for a 12 month period from when the application is made.

Informal (non-contractual) arrangements

If the flexible working arrangement requested will not lead to a change to an employee's terms and conditions of employment, such requests can be agreed locally with an employee's manager. The manager should keep a record of the arrangement and provide a copy to the employee. Employees should be aware that informal arrangements are expressly non-contractual and can be varied by Royal Mail at any time.

Step 1: Formal Request

Where an employee has access to PSP they should make a formal request for flexible working through 'Me at Work' by selecting and completing a Flexible Working Request.

Where an employee does not have access to PSP they should ask their manager for a *Flexible Working Request Form* and when completed the application section should be handed to the manager and the registration section sent to HR Services.

Employees will be asked a number of questions to:

- Consider how the change in working pattern is likely to affect Royal Mail's business and colleague(s)
- Consider alternative working arrangements if the request cannot be fully implemented, e.g. dividing some of the job duties among other team members or recruiting a job share partner

If a request is not completed with sufficient information (as noted on the form), the manager has the right to ask for it to be resubmitted

Formal flexible working requests

Any requests made through this route will be considered a formal flexible working request and will result in a permanent change to the employee's terms and conditions of employment (e.g. reduction in pay because less hours are being worked, change to working days), unless the employee requests a temporary change and the manager approves (see below).

Any requests that lead to a contractual change must be requested through the formal process.

Temporary arrangements

For temporary changes, an end date must be specified by the employee and agreed by the manager. At the end of the period, the manager must ensure that the employee reverts back to their original working arrangement. The arrangement should not be for a period of more than one year.

Step 2: Meeting

Once an employee has completed the appropriate form, the manager should invite the employee to a meeting to discuss the request, normally within 28 days of receipt of the request.

If this is not possible, managers can request a time extension. The manager should send the employee a *Time Extension Letter* explaining why the meeting cannot be held and when it will take place.

What is the purpose of the flexible working request meeting?

- To discuss the employee's current working pattern and the requested changes
- To discuss the reasons they have requested flexible working
- To make sure the employee understands that any changes to their working pattern could result in a permanent variation to their employment contract
- To understand the impact the flexible working request may have on the wider team if the request is approved
- To discuss alternative solutions if the requested pattern cannot be accommodated due to business and operational reasons (see examples below)

The factors that the manager should consider are set out in the Flexible Working Policy and Part 2 of this Guide.

Step 3: Decision following meeting

Outcome of the meeting

Following the meeting the manager should decide whether the flexible working request can be granted, having considered the details of the request and the needs of the business. Even if the requested pattern cannot be accommodated there may be other options that can be explored with the employee. A compromise may suit both Royal Mail and the employee's needs.

The manager should put the decision in writing to the employee, normally within 10 working days of meeting them.

Requests from more than one employee

Both employees and managers should be aware that if a flexible working request is approved, it does not necessarily mean that future requests (whether a similar or different arrangement) will be able to be accommodated. The business situation changes every time a request is received, which is why every single request must be considered on its own merits at the specific time.

The right to appeal

Employees who have requested flexible working can appeal against a decision to refuse their request. This must be made within 5 working days of the decision not to grant their request for flexible working.

Withdrawal of a request

An employee can withdraw their application any time before they have signed their new contract of employment or started their new flexible arrangements, by notifying their manager in writing. If an employee withdraws their request for flexible working they will not be eligible to apply for flexible working in the next 12 months.

Employees who knowingly mislead the business

If an employee has knowingly misled Royal Mail in their application for flexible working, either because they do not meet the eligibility criteria above, because of information contained in their application or for any other reason, they may be subject to formal action under the *Conduct Policy*.

Review (trial) periods

For permanent changes, parties are encouraged to agree a review period (a trial) to establish if the new pattern is working adequately for the business, before the arrangement is given final approval. A review period can be beneficial to both parties, particularly where there has been uncertainty whether the arrangement will work in practice.

The suggested length of the period will be at the manager's discretion, but is expected normally to be three to six months. If a review period is agreed, managers should set a date for the end of the review period and put this in writing to the employee along with any conditions of the arrangement. If, in Royal's Mail's view, the review period is unsuccessful, then the employee will go back to their original working pattern.

Informal arrangements should also be reviewed regularly (e.g. every 6-12 months) to make sure they are working effectively for both parties.

PART 2: GUIDE FOR MANAGERS ABOUT MANAGING THE PROCESS

Myths and misconceptions about flexible working¹

The following are common misconceptions that people across various organisations have about flexible working. Managers should bear these in mind when considering flexible working requests:

- **Colleagues will resent it** – most people want and need to work full-time. If managers consider and manage flexible working arrangements effectively, the burden shouldn't fall to colleagues
- **Work won't get done** – managers need to think creatively, e.g. look at re-organising work across their whole team. Certain tasks may be done differently from before
- **Work won't be a priority for working parents** – there is no evidence to suggest this. In fact, working parents and carers are some of the most loyal and hardworking employees
- **If managers agree to one request they will have to agree to all** – this is not the case. Whilst managers should accommodate as many requests as possible, providing they meet business needs, each request has to be considered on its own merits at that specific time. For example, a manager may approve a request from an employee to work early start/early finish, but a similar request from another team member two months later may not be possible because having two colleagues working that same pattern will not meet business needs.

Managing the flexible working request meeting

How should a flexible working request meeting be managed?

Before the meeting

The manager should send written notice to the employee at least 48 hours before the date of the proposed meeting to confirm the date, time and location. A template for this letter can be found on Managing My Team. The meeting should normally take place within 28 days of receipt of the request.

¹ Working Families website: 'Flexible work myths', 19 March 2010

During the meeting

The manager and employee should discuss:

- The reasons the employee has requested flexible working
- The suggestions contained in the flexible working application
- The impact of the proposed working pattern on the business, and how this may be overcome
- Changes that can be made at work to support the employee
- Alternative patterns that would be suitable for both parties (see examples in Annex 1) if there are concerns about the arrangement requested

Considering a request

It is important to be open-minded when dealing with requests. Manager should start by carrying out a job analysis to assess:

- Main tasks and duties of the role
- Key accountabilities
- How the work is carried out, e.g. does it have to take place on site?
- Whether the role involves supervising others
- Skills and knowledge required
- Key behaviours required

Managers should think about the wider team's roles as certain work may need to be re-organised across the team to accommodate flexible working.

Managers must seriously and objectively consider the application. The request may only be refused there is a negative impact on one or more of the business reasons set out below applies:

- Cost
- Ability to meet customer demand
- Ability to re-organise work amongst existing employees
- Ability to recruit additional employees
- Impact on quality and performance
- Ability to allocate an appropriate level of work during the period the employee proposes to work
- Planned structural changes

Once these different factors have been considered the managers should consider if the flexible working arrangement requested can be accommodated. If it cannot be accommodated managers should consider if there are any other flexible working options that could be accommodated that might fit the employee's requirements. Examples of different flexible working arrangements are set out in Annex 1.

Where the manager is uncertain whether the request should be granted, they should seek advice from either their manager or HR Services Advice Centre.

Managers should confirm the outcome in writing to the employee using one of the letter templates available on PSP.

Dealing with multiple requests

On occasions, managers may receive requests from more than one employee around the same time. It is important to be aware that approving one of the requests will change the business situation. Therefore, it may not be possible to agree to all the requests. In such circumstances, before agreeing to or refusing a request, managers are advised to discuss the situation with employees to see if there is a compromise that can be reached.

Managers could consider asking for volunteers from existing employees on flexible working arrangements to convert back to their original pattern to allow new requests to be considered. For example, if an individual had originally asked to work flexibly to collect their child from school, but the child is now old enough to travel to/from school on their own, the employee may be prepared to revert back to working full-time. This would create capacity for other requests to be approved. However, managers cannot require employees in these circumstances to change their working hours.

Dealing with an appeal

Having received an appeal request, the employee's manager should Create an Appeal via Managing My Team and should identify an appropriate manager to hear the appeal (not a member of HR).

Notes from the flexible working request meeting and any supporting evidence should be sent with the *Case Paper Despatch Header* to:

HRSC Archives
Royal Mail
Pond Street
Sheffield
S98 4HR

The appropriate manager should access the case papers through PSP and should produce and send an Invitation to Appeal Decision Meeting. This letter will invite the employee to an appeal hearing during which their request for flexible working should be re-considered.

Following the appeal hearing, the appropriate manager should make a decision based on the evidence provided and should notify the employee through the Appeal Decision Letter. This should normally be within 10 working days of the appeal hearing, and must be within 3 months from the date of receipt of the flexible working request.

If the appeal manager's decision is to accept the flexible working request then they should contact the first manager to arrange for the necessary adjustments to be made to the employee's working hours.

Withdrawals

A withdrawal should be recorded on the employee's record via *Managing My Team* and all of the paper work associated with the flexible working request should be sent HR Services Archives to be included in the employee's personnel record.

Keeping records

Records should be kept locally for all informal and formal meetings and subsequent action plans.

It is important that these records are confidential (and therefore kept secure) and that they are not retained for longer than necessary.

Records should:

- Be accurate and up to date
- Contain details of all absences and discussions between the manager

and the employee

- Be held securely and locally in accordance with the Data Protection Act

More information on good record keeping can be found in the *Keeping Records Guide*.

Letters

Managers can find letter templates associated with flexible working requests on PSP under *Managing My Team*.

The Getting Help box, on the front of this guide tells you where to find further information.

Where to go for further information

The following guides should be read in conjunction with this document:

- Flexible Working Policy
- Right to be Accompanied Guide: explains the legal rights to be accompanied, who may be a companion and the role they can take
- Keeping Records Guide
- Flexible Working Recruitment Guide
- Remote Working Policy
- Remote Working Guide

The following forms can be found on the *Policy & Information site* on PSP:

- Request to Work Term Time Form
- Request for Flexible Working Form (for non-PSP users)

Annex 1: Examples of flexible working patterns, their benefits and points to consider

Flexible pattern	Business benefits	Employee benefits	Points to consider
Job-sharing: Two employees share work normally done by one employee. See Annex 2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two employees rather than one can bring increased skills and expertise Peak periods of demand can be covered more easily Sick leave and absence can be covered Savings made on overtime 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More time for caring responsibilities or other commitments Regular and defined hours allowing personal arrangements to be made in advance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased costs of benefits such as, training Compatibility of job-share partners is key. Regular and effective communication All parties must be clear on what might happen if one partner leaves
Part-time working: An employee works less than the standard contractual hours, e.g. starting later and finishing earlier; working 3 days per week	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can retain the skills of women after maternity leave or others who might otherwise leave Levels of employees can be increased during peak times by using part-time employees Retain employees who want to reduce their hours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Can fit paid work around caring commitments More time for caring responsibilities or other commitments 	
Term-time working: An employee opts not to work between 4 and 13 weeks a year to have more time off during school holidays. See Annex 2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recruitment and retention of individuals with childcare commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Removes the problem of finding childcare during school holidays Regular salary throughout the year 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May put other colleagues under pressure during the school holidays if work isn't re-allocated fairly and effectively
Staggered hours: Employees have different start, finish and break times – often to cover longer opening hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Staff cover can be extended beyond normal hours Employees are less likely to take sick days to look after a dependant 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows parents to drop off or collect their children from school Travel to and from work on off-peak times is cheaper and easier No loss in pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring adequate cover both at the start and the end of the day
Swapping hours: employees can swap shifts or hours with colleagues doing the same type of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cover isn't affected so customer needs are still met Employees are less likely to take time off to look after a dependant Minimal manager involvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Occasional changes can be organised, e.g. to attend a child's sports day, be at home for a delivery or have repair work done 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> It may not be possible for employees who are paid at different rates – a solution would need to be worked out and clear communication throughout
Royal Mail examples of how some areas arrange their working patterns			
Shift working: Employees work on their rest days over a 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Cover shouldn't be affected so customer needs are 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More time for caring responsibilities or other commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensuring there is appropriate cover on the week off

<p>week period so that they accrue and are taken as a week's block on the 6th week; or</p> <p>Employees work one week on and one week off</p>	<p>still met</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Employees are less likely to take time off to look after a dependant • Recruitment and retention of individuals with childcare commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No loss in pay 	
<p>Temporary change to start/ finish time for 6 weeks to accommodate childcare commitments during summer holiday period</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cover isn't affected so customer needs are still met • Staff cover can be extended beyond normal hours • Recruitment and retention of individuals with childcare commitments 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More time for caring responsibilities or other commitments • No loss in pay 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring adequate cover both at the start and the end of the day

Annex 2: Job sharing and term time working

Job sharing

In job sharing two employees share one full-time job rather than performing different part-time jobs. There are several potential job share patterns:

- Employees work separate times during the week than their job share partner
- Employees have times when they overlap in working hours with their job share partner
- Duties are split according to skills and knowledge of the job share partners rather than by tasks

How does a job share work?

Where two employees job share, they are expected to perform the same duties as one full-time employee. They receive a share of the pay a full time employee earns based on their proportion of the full-time job.

How to arrange a job share

The employee and their manager must follow the same flexible working procedure as outlined above.

The employee should look at how the job could be divided and approach their manager with proposals in writing for discussion. Often employees have already identified a suitable colleague for job sharing, and in this case the proposal should include the name/s of any other job share parties, with both employees completing the form.

If the request for flexible working is supported by business needs and the employee has not identified a suitable job share partner, the manager should try to make reasonable effort to find them a suitable partner. However if no suitable job -share partner is found the flexible working request will be denied.

To arrange a job share, managers and employees should follow the procedure for arranging flexible working. The criteria as to whether the request for job share is reasonable, is the same as for all other types of flexible working.

Making a job share work effectively

- Job share partners are aware how the arrangement works in practice, e.g. if one resigns the other partner may be asked to increase their hours; if one is off sick or on holiday the expectation is for the other to cover
- Communication between the partners is essential to ensure there is a handover, work is not repeated or not completed
- Compatibility of job share partners. They must be able to work effectively together by sharing responsibilities and covering absence for one another.

Term time working

Term time working gives employees with family commitments more time off during the school holidays by opting not to work between 4 and 13 weeks a year.

How does term time working operate?

Term time workers are paid the same weekly or monthly salary across the year, irrespective of whether they are working (term time weeks) or not working (during school holidays). This makes sure they do not experience hardship during the weeks they have opted not to work.

The employee's pay will be reduced in proportion to the number of weeks that they have chosen not to work and averaged out over the year.

How to arrange term time working

In order to arrange term time working, managers should contact HR Services Advice Centre once they have approved a request.

To qualify, employees must have school-age children who attend school in the United Kingdom.

Term-time working requests can only be submitted between September and February.

Employees starting term-time working need to work for 13 weeks at their new rate of pay before they can take off a school holiday week, so sufficient hours have been worked to cover the school holiday absences. The 13 weeks will start from the date specified in their new contract.