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3HR Legal Weekly

HR

Flexible Working Explained—part 2

In Part 1 we explained your obligations as an employer with regards to your employees' right to request flexible working. In this part we review the research on how this right to request flexible working is affecting employees and organisations.

Review of the Research into Flexible Working

Uptake of various types of flexible working

The CIPD reports that, in all, 54% of employees nationally use at least one form of flexible working. Part-time working is the most commonly used form of flexible working, with nearly three in ten employees reporting they work in this way (29%). The next most commonly used forms of flexible working are: flexi-time (19%), working from home on a regular basis (14%) and mobile working (7%). Options such as term-time working (1%), job share (1%) and compressed hours (3%) are very rarely used.

Benefits of flexible working to employees

The CIPD asked employees to identify the five biggest benefits to them of flexible working. The top three most frequently cited benefits are that: it helps employees reduce the amount of stress/pressure they feel under (29%), it enables a better work–life balance (54%) and it has been a factor in them staying with their current employer (28%).

Benefits of flexible working to employers

The Family Friendly Working Hours Taskforce reports that the evidence demonstrates that there is a strong business case for flexible working. The reported benefits include falling absenteeism and higher retention, leading to a reduction in costs – 65% of employers said their flexible working practices had a positive effect on recruitment and retention, thus saving on recruitment, induction and training costs. Another reported benefit is increased productivity – 58% of small to medium sized enterprises reported an improvement in productivity as a result of flexible working.

A further benefit is an increased ability to recruit from a wider talent pool – 42% of employers reported that flexible working had a positive effect on recruitment in their establishment. Finally, 70% of employers noted some or a significant improvement in employee relations, interpreted as a greater loyalty amongst staff. It is widely believed that as a result of the changing demographics of those working in our society, employers will need to find ways to accommodate more employees with, for example, caring responsibilities for their parents, as well as for young children.

Barriers to flexible working

It is thought that one of the biggest obstacles to more flexible working are the cultural misconceptions about employees who want to work flexibly. Some employers may perceive that employees who want to work flexibly (and in particular part-time) are less committed to their jobs than full-time employees. Linked to this, there is the perception that flexible working is still seen primarily as something for women and in particular mothers and not men (and fathers). There also appears to be a cultural tendency to solely design and advertise jobs on the basis of hours worked rather than considering whether or how the role could accommodate flexible working in some way, while still achieving the necessary outcomes. Employers worry about their ability to manage staff working remotely, and about issues such as the legal implications of employees accessing confidential client data by using technology from home.

If flexible working is something you feel could benefit your organisation and you require practical help to implement such working practices, please contact your usual 3HR consultant.



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