

Lets talk flexible working

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In this 24/7 connected world, it's rare that a day goes by where we don't hear about work-life balance, or perhaps more accurately, the lack thereof. It's something that most workers seem to be striving for. In fact, a [YouGov poll commissioned by Acas](#) found that the most important issue in people's working lives this year is balancing work and home life.

Given their important role in addressing this, where do employers currently stand? Fortunately, more and more businesses are waking up to the importance of supporting employee health and wellbeing. The landscape is changing, and many recognise that in order to succeed, more priority needs to be given to taking care of their people. But if work-life balance is high on employers' agendas, it doesn't seem to be translating into practice.

Stigmas remain

In our fight for work-life balance, having the ability to work flexibly, such as at home, is of great value. It can help reduce our stress levels, give us greater autonomy and enable us to better manage family and caring responsibilities. Yet, a recent [poll by the TUC](#) found that one in three (30%) flexible working requests were being turned down. And Timewise's latest [Flexible Jobs Index](#) showed that only one out of seven (15%) job adverts offered flexible working, despite a significant 87% of employees wanting to work flexibly.

This huge mismatch indicates that we've yet to combat the stigma associated with flexible working. We hear the same stories, that most, in particular men, are still too afraid to put in a request for fear it would impact on their chances of career progression.

Flexible working: part of a wider solution

Evidently, for flexible working practices to truly succeed, they must be managed effectively. But the potential gains cannot be ignored. Not only can flexible working help improve work-life balance, but it can be part of the solution to resolving some other key employer and labour market concerns.

For example:

- it can help reduce the prevalence of stress and mental ill health – in a [study by Wildgoose](#), 39% of those who worked flexibly saw a 'noticeable improvement' in their mental health
- giving men the chance to take an equal share of childcare or caring responsibilities can lead to greater representation of women on boards and within the labour market, helping to tackle the gender pay gap
- providing flexible working and implementing it across your organisation makes you an employer of choice – a business which can successfully attract and retain a diverse workforce – and at the same time bridge skills gaps

Legal changes requiring employers to consider flexible working may be on the horizon, but there's no doubt that a great shift in employer perception is needed. Acas is pleased to be part of the government's Flexible Working Task Force to ensure we are all happy to talk about flexible working.