



Co-op Flexible Working Manager FAQ's

1. Can you help me work through the things I should consider for the different types of requests referred to in the Flexible Working Policy?

Below are some of the things to consider for the different types of requests you may receive. If you are unsure, contact [ER Services](#) for advice.

Type of request	Considerations
Reduction in working hours; this could be a reduction in the number of days worked, or a reduction in the length of the working day	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Can the work that the colleague would have completed be absorbed elsewhere, either by other team members, by another team or can the business cope with the work being done more slowly?• Has the colleague considered the impact to their take home pay and whether this is affordable for them?• There must not be an expectation that colleagues working part time should work unpaid overtime to get the job done
Job - Share arrangement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• See the separate Job Sharing Guide for more information
Compressed Hours	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Think about whether there would be enough work available during the hours the colleague proposes to work.• Think about whether there would be a negative impact on the level of service provided; i.e. the impact of the colleague not being available on the proposed non-working day.• Consider how urgent work and meetings would be covered by other colleagues on the non-working days and any possible negative impact on them to do so.• Think about how any negative impacts could be mitigated – for example if a

	<p>different non-working day would work better.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about whether efficiency could be negatively impacted by longer working days; for example, productivity declining later in the day or other colleagues not being around for early or late meetings. Linked to this think about impact on colleague's wellbeing working such long days. • Consider the arrangement from a safety perspective – for example has physical safety been considered for the colleague if travelling earlier in the morning or later at night especially in winter months. • Think about the regular working days of others in the team on non-compressed hours. If they are likely to be similar you should consider carefully why this is and try to create a better balance in working hours for everyone.
Working reduced hours spread over more days	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider how workloads can be absorbed/re-distributed. • Think about whether there is enough work available during the hours the colleague proposed to work. Consider possible negative impact on service if colleague is not there for the whole day. • Has the colleague considered the possible financial implications (for example, increased cost of travel to work).
Change in working hours (but not a reduction in hours) to fit with caring responsibilities such as an earlier start and earlier finish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Think about whether the role needs attendance at specific times and if these are compatible with the proposed working hours • If the role does need cover at specific times, consider whether this could be covered by someone else?

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider whether the work could be carried out effectively at the proposed times without negatively impacting or compromising service? • Think about ways in which any negative impact to service could be minimised
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2. What should I do if I receive two flexible working requests at the same time?

Firstly, remember that you should consider each request on its own merits, not in the order which you feel is the most deserving.

Often a solution may be available which satisfies both colleagues. If necessary, discuss with the colleagues and look for a possible compromise solution to enable all colleagues to adjust their working pattern in a way that will suit them and Co-op.

You must take care to avoid any form of discrimination when dealing with multiple requests as colleagues have the right under the Equality Act to not be treated unfavourably on the grounds of sex, pregnancy, maternity, marriage or civil partnership, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age or disability.

It's important to understand the reasons why a colleague wants to work flexibly and ensure you do not decline a request that is likely to be discriminatory. For example, if a colleague makes a request for fixed shift patterns because this helps reduce difficulties with irregular sleep they are suffering due to the menopause, this is likely to be a reasonable adjustment and should be agreed. If a female colleague requests to leave work earlier or not to work evening shifts because of childcare responsibilities, declining such a request could be indirect sex discrimination. If you're unsure you can always contact ER Services for advice.

3. One of my team has asked for the same flexible working arrangements that one of their colleagues has in place. Does this mean I have to say yes?

No, it doesn't. Every request should be considered on its own merits at the point you receive it, You can only turn down a request for a genuine business reason, but you do not have to approve a request simply because others in the team have previously had a request approved for the same or similar arrangements.

4. In my team several colleagues already work part-time. If I receive another request for part-time working, do I have to accept it?

No. Please see the answer above.

5. Can I suggest an alternative arrangement to the one that has been proposed by a colleague?

Yes. It is okay to explore alternative options and this is encouraged as a way of reaching a compromise if you can't agree to their original request. For example, if they've requested certain hours of work that the Co-op cannot accommodate, you can propose different hours that may work for all.

6. A colleague has asked to work compressed hours but I'm uncomfortable as part time colleagues often work unpaid overtime in the team and I'm concerned about unfairness. Do I need to consider the request?

Yes. You must fully consider all flexible working requests that you receive and only turn down a request for one of the 8 genuine business reasons listed in the Flexible Working Policy. There may be good reasons to turn the request down, for example if cover is needed on the day the colleague wants off and the work cannot be absorbed elsewhere.

You should also consider the separate issue of part time colleagues regularly working unpaid overtime as this should not be an expectation. It would be good practice to discuss workloads, priorities and smarter ways of working with you team to address this issue.

7. Can you bring to life the 8 reasons for refusal?

Below are some examples to bring some of the reasons to life.

Reason for Refusal	For Example,
It would cost the business more	If another colleague needs to be recruited to cover the work. If a colleague wanted to change their hours which means cover is required and the work could not be absorbed by existing colleagues.
We wouldn't be able to recruit an additional team member and/or The quality of your team's work would be likely to suffer/it would have a negative impact on you or your team's performance	If the colleague has particular expertise which no one else in the business has/or wouldn't be able to cover due to their own workloads, and it wouldn't be possible to recruit the same expertise for a role offering only 1 day a week.
It wouldn't be possible to reorganise the work amongst the rest of the team	If a colleague asked to not work on Fridays and the team is a small team which already has two colleagues that don't work on a Friday. In this situation you may be able to offer a different non-working day.
It would have a negative impact on the service we provide to our customers/it would have a negative impact on your or your team's performance	If a contact centre colleague requested to a later start and earlier finish time but this conflicted with the busiest time for customer calls to the contact centre.

There wouldn't be enough work to do at the times you want to work	If a colleague asks to work school hours 9-3 only, but peak demand for the work they perform is outside of these hours.
There's an organisational change planned which will impact your role or your team	If a colleague makes a request to work compressed hours but there is a restructure planned which may put the colleague/some of their team at risk of redundancy.

8. I have a team member coming back to work from maternity leave and they want to work flexibly, what's the process?

You may already be in regular contact with the colleague but if not you should make sure you contact them 12 weeks before they are due to return to talk to them about their return to work [Maternity leave process - Co-op Colleagues \(coop.co.uk\)](#) During this conversation ask them if they are looking to change their working hours/pattern on their return and guide them to the [Flexible working policy](#) Consider any request in line with the flexible working policy and contact ER Services if you need support.

9. When would you recommend a trial period and what sort of things do I need to think about during a trial period?

A trial can be especially beneficial when there is some doubt as to whether the request will work for the team. It can provide an opportunity to review whether the arrangements work in practice and whether or not they are likely to create any practical difficulties on a longer-term basis.

10. How long should a trial period last?

The length of a trial period will vary and depend on the type of change. The trial duration, although generally between 4 and 12 weeks in length should be agreed between yourself and the colleague. The most important thing is that it gives you both time to assess the arrangement. If you know from the outset that you'll need longer than 12 weeks to be able to fully assess the proposed arrangements, then agree upfront a meaningful duration. You can always extend a trial if need be, but we'd recommend that you try and limit this to one extension.

During the trial period it's important to consider several things including the level of service being provided to customers and that the service hasn't changed. Consider whether the change has had any impact on the team's performance; this may be easier if SLA's and KPI's are in place that can be measured.

Also consider if the work being successfully picked up by others/spread across the team.

A further consideration is whether the colleague is managing to stick to their new working pattern or are they finding they have excess work and are working late into the evening or doing extra hours to compensate for non-working days. You may have advertised for another member of the team to cover extra hours – in this case part of the trial period would be considering whether recruitment has been successful.

It's important during the trial period, that you have regular meaningful check in's with the colleague about how the trial is working. You may find it useful to take notes at these contact points especially if you think the trial may not be successful and remember you can call ER Services to discuss at any point.

11. How often should I review a flexible working arrangement?

Once a request is agreed and the trial period (if one is put in place) is concluded the change is a permanent change and there is no right to require a colleague to return to their previous working arrangements. This is why it's really important to have a meaningful trial.

This doesn't mean that you and your colleague cannot discuss and mutually agree to change things in the future.

12. One of my team has said that they would like to work as part of a job share. Where do we start?

We have a separate guide for colleagues taking part in a Job Sharing arrangement which can be found [here](#)

13. One of my team has been working mornings only for the last three years which we informally agreed. They've now asked to make this a formal change. Should we follow the flexible working process?

It is likely that we would need to consider this request as reasonable due to the length of time the informal arrangement has been in place but If you are in doubt as to whether you can just accept this request, please give ER Services a call to discuss.

14. One of my team hasn't worked weekends for the last two years but we're really struggling for weekend cover. How do I go about undoing this arrangement?

Discuss the situation with your colleague in the first instance to see if they are open to working weekends again. If your colleague isn't comfortable to do so, please contact ER Services for advice.

You can find more examples of flexible working requests and manager considerations and responses below:

A colleague who works in a customer care team from 10am to 6:15pm asks to change their working hours to start at 8.00am and finish at 4.15pm. The customer care team operate during the hours of 8am to 8pm and the busiest times are 8am to 10am, lunchtime and after 5pm.

The manager considering this request will need to think about many things including the hours of coverage required in the customer care team and likely future demand.

This request could leave the customer care team understaffed at the end of the day but may benefit the team from extra coverage from 8am. The manager might need to think about coverage times and ask if any other members of the team would like to consider changing their hours.

There are many possible outcomes of this situation. A compromise may be reached where an earlier start and earlier finish is agreed to allow the manager to have cover from another colleague for the rest of the day until 8pm. If the colleague cannot accept this and/or there are no members of staff who can work a later shift, the manager may have to reluctantly turn down the request.

A Full time Funeral Arranger requests to work 37.5 hours over 4 days instead of 5 days (compressed hours). They would like their day off to be a Friday or a Monday. The other two team members are part-time, and one does not work Fridays and the other does not work Mondays.

There are many considerations the manager will need to make including the individual's role, the level of cover required in the Funeral home and the hours of cover required each day.

The Funeral Home needs to open 9am to 6pm Monday to Saturday with someone available to meet and greet clients at all times. A colleague who works longer hours over four days a week will be beneficial in providing a longer period of office cover. However, the requested non-working day will clash with the days off that the part-time colleagues already have and mean that there is one day a week where no one is in the Funeral Home which will be unhelpful for their clients.

The manager could ask the team to discuss the request and the increased need for cover together and come up with a possible solution themselves. The colleague making the request could be asked to have a Tuesday, Wednesday, or Thursday as their non-working day and so relieve the issue of Monday or Friday not being covered as a solution ensuring the home remains open as required

Two colleagues apply for a post that has been advertised as a full-time role as a job share and both request to work 3 days a week.

The manager dealing with this request would need to consider a number of things including whether the role they have applied for would suit a job share arrangement and whether there are particular benefits that would arise from having the role filled by two people. Read more about job sharing [here](#)

In this example both colleagues have asked to work 3 days a week which equates to more than the full-time role that was advertised. The manager would need to consider the extra costs this would bring and should consider this alongside the benefits of having an increased number of hours dedicated to the role.

Depending on the nature of the role, it may be that no cross-over time is required for handover. If the manager believes that a job share arrangement could be beneficial but cannot afford the costs of the post 6 days a week, a compromise may be offered where the colleagues may be asked to consider working 2.5 days each, or one works 2 days and the other 3 days.

