



GUIDE TO FLEXIBLE WORKING

PART-TIME WORK



‘Flexible working’ means any type of working arrangement that differs from the traditional Monday to Friday, nine-to-five model – and gives some flexibility on how long, where, and when employees work.

considerations for both employees and employers, and look at the experiences of firms and solicitors who have benefited from flexible working.

CHANGED WORKING HOURS



Flexible working has been known to increase productivity and can help employers attract and retain talent. Solicitor employees may want to vary their working arrangements for a number of reasons – including family and other commitments.

It is only a guide, however, and it will be a matter for individual firms to decide whether or not flexible working can be facilitated on a case-by-case basis. Unlike Britain, Australia, and the US, Ireland does not have any legislation in relation to flexible working – other than a statutory right to request changes to working hours or patterns of work, which is limited to employees returning from parental leave. Different firms will have different objectives, and flexible working – or certain types of it – may not always be possible.

JOB-SHARING



This guide aims to encourage and support solicitors and firms to develop flexible working practices. It will outline a range of flexible working options, the

WORKING REMOTELY



CAREER BREAK | OTHER UNPAID LEAVE



SHORTER WORKING YEAR



FLEXIBLE BENEFITS AS AN INCENTIVE FOR EMPLOYEES

45%

of **all firms** will be offering flexible benefits as part of a reward package

77%

of **top 20 firms** will be offering flexible benefits as part of a reward package

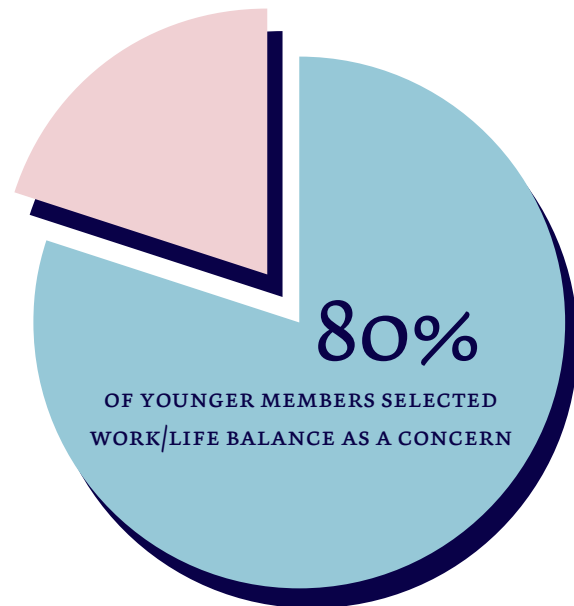
31%

of **firms outside of Dublin** will be offering flexible benefits as part of a reward package

The way we work in Ireland is changing. The 2016/2017 Smith & Williamson survey of Irish law firms found that “**the number one reward firms will be implementing over the coming three years is flexible benefits (45% of all firms, 77% of top 20 firms, 31% of firms outside of Dublin)**”. For the top 20 firms, unpaid leave (**54%**) and sabbaticals (**38%**) are expected to be part of the reward package.

(See www.smith.williamson.ie)

SURVEY RESULTS



In a November 2015 Younger Members Committee survey of Law Society members qualified since 2001, **80%** selected work/life balance as a concern. Younger members in private practice (**86%**) are more concerned about work/life balance than members employed in-house (**71%**) or in the public sector (**79%**).

(See www.lawsociety.ie/committees)

“Having watched the trend for a shorter working week in other European countries – such as Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands – I decided to adopt a flexible approach to how I work. My productivity was not affected by working fewer hours. I deplore the long-hours culture within the law – it hurts individuals and families, and I cannot see any appreciable benefit for the firm or client. Long hours do not mean more productivity.”

Susan Martin, partner, Martin Solicitors, Dublin

CONSIDERATIONS

FROM THE EMPLOYER'S PERSPECTIVE

- ◆ What is the reason for the request for flexibility?
- ◆ What are the needs of the business?
- ◆ Is the arrangement possible given the nature of the role?
- ◆ What are the workload implications for other staff?
- ◆ How do we ensure that we comply with our equal opportunities policy?

“Modern technology has developed and advanced to the stage where it can make working in solicitors’ offices more acceptable and manageable for those seeking to either job share or adjust their hours at work in an office, despite the ever-increasing demands of clients.”

Pat O’Connor, managing partner, P O’Connor & Son, Mayo

“Technology really facilitates flexible working arrangements. For me, being a working mum, getting home to see my family in the evenings means a lot. The ability to forward my desk phone to my mobile and connect to the server at home means that I can do this. We don’t need to be at our office desks to work anymore. Flexible working arrangements can also drive efficiency, as it encourages people to maximise their time, and it can be a real incentive to employees. While there are times when it is necessary to stay in the office, overall we are no longer restricted to one location when working.”

Sarah-Jane Clifford, associate solicitor, Beauchamps, Dublin

FROM THE EMPLOYEE'S PERSPECTIVE

- ◆ Why do I want flexible working?
- ◆ What would work for me and my employer?
- ◆ Will I be able to complete my work on time?
- ◆ What IT and other support would I need?
- ◆ Can I afford any consequential impact on my terms and conditions?

STEPS TO ACHIEVING AN AGREED FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENT

1

Informally discuss flexible working with your manager. Consider what options might work for you and for your employer.

2

Submit a business case to your employer, setting out in detail how flexible working will operate in practice.

3

Engage with your employer to try to find a mutually beneficial arrangement. Consider a trial period.

4

If you and your employer agree to proceed with flexible working, then that arrangement should be formalised and a time for review agreed.

5

If your employer decides not to proceed with flexible working, you should request an internal appeal. The outcome of that appeal will be final.

TOP TIPS

FOR SUCCESSFUL FLEXIBLE WORKING

BE PREPARED TO INVEST EXTRA TIME AT THE BEGINNING, TO MAKE THINGS RUN SMOOTHLY

1

CONSIDER RUNNING A SMALL-SCALE PILOT SCHEME FOR A SET PERIOD OF TIME

2

ESTABLISH CLEAR EXPECTATIONS AT THE START

3

DEVELOP A PLAN DETAILING WHEN, WHERE, AND HOW YOU WILL BE AVAILABLE

4

EMBRACE TECHNOLOGY TO ENSURE ACCESS TO DOCUMENTS ON THE GO

5

IF EMERGENCIES ARISE, THE FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENT SHOULD NOT COMPLICATE THE RESPONSE

6

PUT MEASURES IN PLACE SO THAT DOCUMENTS AND EMAILS CAN BE EASILY LOCATED

7

REVIEW, EVALUATE, AND MAKE CHANGES TO THE ARRANGEMENT AS REQUIRED

8

“The introduction of agile working at William Fry has been a really successful development. It has enabled us to support team members in a really positive way, and we have worked hard to make sure that it is seamless for clients – because there can be no compromise in ensuring that they receive the best service. It is an initiative that needs to be managed carefully, but with the right team members and in the right circumstances, it can work really well for everybody.”

Bryan Bourke, managing partner, William Fry

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