

## **Flexible working options**

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### **Working from home part of the week**

Barry works full time as an account manager for a large company and cares for his son who has learning disabilities. Barry has a 1 ½ hour journey to and from work and is finding the long days very hard to cope with on top of his caring responsibilities. Barry makes a request to work three days a week from home. He and his manager work out how they can set up all the systems he needs from home so that office-based staff will be able to contact him easily and that most of the work he does can be done remotely. He will also still be able to attend meetings on the days he is in the office and can be flexible about moving his 'home work days' if necessary.

### **Starting work half an hour later**

Neela is a hairdresser and works in a busy salon. She cares for her husband who has Multiple Sclerosis and requests to start work half an hour later so that she can help him get ready for his day. In her application she suggests that this will have a minimal impact on the business as it is the quietest part of the day and that she will make up the time during the lunch period when it is far busier.

### **Working compressed hours**

Diane works as a sales assistant and cares for her husband who has Cystic Fibrosis. Her husband currently receives care from social services for three days a week, and his sister looks after him for one day a week. Diane now works her 30 hour week in four days instead of five to enable her to look after her husband for the rest of the week.

### **Working annualised hours**

Conrad works in a call centre and cares for his wife who has been diagnosed with manic depression. Conrad's wife's condition is such that her need for support varies; some months she needs very little looking after, other months she needs someone to be with her almost all the time to make sure she is safe. Conrad asks to work annualised hours so that he has some flexibility to meet her needs but can carry on working - from the 2080 hours a year he must work, Conrad has a set pattern of work for 1040 hours (20 hours a week). The remaining hours he agrees on a monthly basis with his employer; during the months his wife is well, he works extra hours, when she is unwell, he reduces his hours.

## **Example: Annualised hours**

Annual or annualised hours contracts can be beneficial for both employers and employees, particularly for those employees juggling their job with caring responsibilities. Clio Springer from Personnel Today provides five key steps to managing them effectively.

### **1. Decide if using annualised hours contracts would be beneficial to your business**

Under an annualised hours contract, an employee's hours are expressed as a total number of hours to be worked during the course of the year. The hours actually worked are likely to fluctuate from week to week and month to month.

Employers that have varying demands for their products or services over the course of the year may find an arrangement like this useful. They can coincide working hours with demand rather than have periods during which employees are under-utilised, or where they have to pay overtime or recruit temporary staff.

Annualised hours contracts can also benefit employees. They offer some flexibility with periods of non-working so that they can pursue other interests, travel or meet family and/or caring commitments.

### **2. Make clear how many hours are rostered and how many are reserve**

Annualised hours contracts are usually made up of rostered hours and reserve hours. Rostered hours are set in advance via a roster that is circulated to staff. For reserve hours, the employee may be called in to work, depending on demand and the employer's needs. The ratio of rostered to reserve hours will depend on the agreement.

Alternatively, annualised hours contracts might be made up of all rostered hours or all reserve hours. An employer that is considering using annualised hours contracts should decide what would suit it best. If it knows in advance that it will need employees to work at a certain time, it should include this time within the rostered hours, to maximise certainty for all the parties concerned. However, if its work requirements are unpredictable, it is likely to utilise reserve hours.

Either way, employers should build flexibility into the agreement to be able to alter the ratio of rostered to reserve hours should they need to do so.

### **3. Make clear terms on pay, holiday and sickness benefits**

As with any employment agreement, employers should set out terms relating to pay, holiday, sickness and other benefits.

Are employees to be paid in equal instalments throughout the year or for hours actually worked during the relevant pay period? When can employees on annualised

hours contracts take holiday and how should they notify their employer about sickness absence?

These entitlements and requirements should be set out when an annualised hours arrangement is agreed.

#### **4. Manage the call-in process for reserve hours**

Employers will need to call employees in to work their reserve hours. They will want to ensure that all annualised hours employees work their full complement of reserve hours and will need to manage the call-in process accordingly to avoid anyone slipping through the net.

Build flexibility into the annualised hours contract so you can alter the ratio of rostered to reserve hours should you need to.

If an annualised hours employee has not worked all of his or her reserve hours by the end of the annualised hours year, this could lead to employees who are paid in equal instalments throughout the year being overpaid. It could also cause resentment on the part of employees who have worked all the required hours.

Therefore, employers should put in place a monitoring system for ensuring that all reserve hours are called-in. They should also make clear to employees the consequences of refusing call-in requests to work reserve hours. Or, where there is some degree of flexibility to refuse requests, the consequences of persistently refusing requests.

#### **5. Keep in touch with employees on annualised hours contracts**

Employees on annualised hours contracts may have lengthy periods during which they are not required to come into work (particularly where there is a high ratio of reserve hours to rostered hours).

It is important for employers to stay in touch with annualised hours employees so that they are kept up-to-date with news and developments and continue to feel an integrated part of the workforce.