



# Flexible work mini-guide



**WAIHANGA ARA RAU**  
Construction and  
Infrastructure  
Workforce Development Council



# Introduction



## *Flexibility in the trades?*

## *Is that even possible?*

This mini-guide provides some options to consider for your businesses and your teams.

In a world where the workforce is increasingly asking for more flexibility - even by staff who are on the tools for a living - let's explore the possibilities.

Sometimes life throws us curveballs, whether it's needing to pick up kids from school, looking after parents or other people who need you, getting to a doctor's appointment, having a tradie come to your house, or something else. That's where flexible work guidelines come in.

Flexibility doesn't mean slacking off, when it's done well it can assist with attracting and retaining good staff, without sacrificing quality or efficiency.

Communication is key for any flexible arrangement, whether it is permanent, or a one-off. Setting clear expectations and keeping an open dialogue is fundamental.

So, what are we talking about when it comes to flexibility in the trades?

Let's break it down.

*Looking for a quick fix for your flexibility questions?  
Use our top five tips to get you started:*

# Top five tips for flexible work

## 01 **Choice matters.**

Flexible work is about giving people some choices or flexibility in relation to their hours, days and/or place of work. It's much more than just working from home.

## 02 **Team approach is the key.**

Regular team conversations are the key to finding out what options could be attractive to your staff, and how they might work.

## 03 **Focus on what you can flex, not what you can't.**

The work people do often determines what kind of flexible work is viable. If you are looking to introduce or increase flexibility in the team, then it helps to focus on what type of flexibility you can offer in different roles (rather than what you can't).

## 04 **Design jobs and teams with flex in mind.**

Can you tweak the design of your team's roles with flexibility in mind? For example, could some start early and finish early, and vice versa? If you can offer what other employers are not in a competitive market, it may help you attract and retain the people you need.

## 05 **Lead flexible work, don't just let it happen to you.**

Just like hard work, flexible work is more successful when it's led in the right way. Don't get left behind, or passively let it happen to you. If you can show it working for you and the business, that will set a good example for the team.

# 1.0 What is flexible work?



Flexible work is more than just working from home.

It’s about creating flexibility around things like:

- Hours,
- Days, and/or
- Place of work

Offering staff some options in relation to at least one of those three variables, qualifies as flexibility.

In this section of the mini-guide, we’ll take a look at the different types of flexibility that can work in different types of roles.

**Keep in mind**

Employees can formally apply for flexible working arrangements under the Employment Relations Act 2000, and there are deadlines to respond and only a limited list of reasons employers can refuse these requests.

You can read more [here](#).

We understand that the nature of work often determines what kind of flexibility is possible, and it can be hard to accommodate – but there’s usually a way to achieve it.

Flexibility is possible in any role, but not all types of flexibility are possible in every role.

We’ve included a summary of some common types of flexibility and what types of roles they’re more likely to fit. With any of these options, you’ll need to make sure you are following correct processes, documenting agreements and making sure leave continues to accrue and be paid for accurately – take advice!

Flex type	Description	Potential fit for:	
		Site-based	Office-based
Flexi-hours	Working daily or weekly hours in a flexible way, such as flexing start and finish times, or taking a longer lunch break. May include core hours in the middle of the day.	●	●
Part-time	Regularly working a fixed portion and fewer hours than the standard full-time working week	●	●
Compressed hours	Working agreed weekly hours in fewer days, such as full-time hours over four days or a nine-day fortnight.	●	●
Job share	One full-time role delivered in a shared way by two part-time people, with an overlap for handover	●	●
Shift swaps	The ability to swap shifts with others across the team	●	●
Remote work	Working from home or from somewhere other than the office/workplace some or all of the time		●
Hybrid work	A combination of remote work and working from the office/workplace.		●
Flexi-leave	This is a creative option, where employees can buy additional paid annual or other leave to be used to reduce working hours or days without impacting pay. Some employers use it to allow more time off for certain employees in school holidays.	●	●





## 2.0

# Flexible work benefits

Flexible work can achieve:

- Lower sickness absences
- Higher levels of productivity and performance
- The attraction and retention of the right people in the right jobs
- Improvements in health and wellbeing
- Reduced stress levels
- A place of work where more people feel they belong
- Lower carbon emissions

Here's a little more detail to help bring flexibility to life in some different types of roles and a 'Future Flex' process you may want to explore with your team.



# 2.1 Future flex

Before jumping in to offering everyone any or more flexibility, start with talking to your team about what kinds of flexibility people actually want.

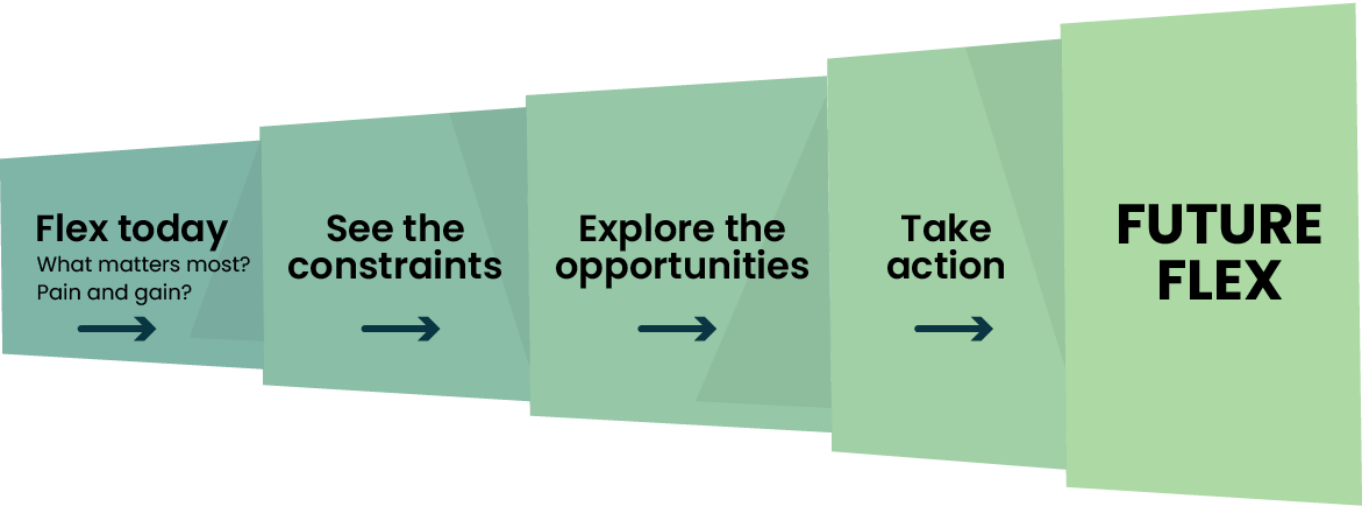
When you know what matters most to people in the team, you’re more likely to put energy into enabling the types of flex that will give you more tangible benefits.

Remember - not everyone will speak up in a group, consider a team meeting, a suggestion box, emails, one on one meetings – you know your team best so consider how they may feel ok with sharing ideas.

Once you have ideas, you could try introducing some temporary arrangements (get advice to make sure it really is temporary). You could introduce a flexible work policy for what works well, or what you are open to as a business.

Then, keep the conversation open over time, maybe check in every six months. In that time, business needs might have changed and for the teams, there will probably be new faces who might have different ideas and preferences. Also, the same people six months later might have changed what they would like from flex

Following this simple structure can help you through introducing flex and keeping the conversation open over time with your team and individual team members.



## Flex today

On many work sites there are already elements of flexibility built in, e.g. if weather conditions deteriorate employees knock off early (if there isn’t other work to do on the yard) or if the project is behind schedule employees might work weekend days to catch up.

Some employees may already have flexibility to manage childcare and other arrangements that works for the business and the team.

Begin with finding out what people are experiencing from flexibility (or the lack of it) from a positive and negative point of view; the “pain and gain” of flex.

Once employees who have a view share their views, it’ll become clear what kind of changes matter most to the team.

For example, if someone in the team wants to regularly drop their kids at school in the mornings and someone else needs to reduce their hours to manage a health condition, you can make informed choices about what to explore and maybe offer.

Flexi-hours and part-time could be options, and those two employees may be able to find a way to balance out each other’s hours and needs, if given a chance.

## See the constraints

If flexi-hours and part-time work are what matters most to the team, the next step is to look at what might prevent implementing that straight away.

Perhaps the constraint to someone starting later than everyone else after school drop off is that they’d miss the daily toolbox meeting to set them up for the day, miss transport to site, or would leave the crew one team member down.

Perhaps the person who wants reduced hours will complete their work over a longer period of time, having a knock-on impact on everyone else’s productivity.

These constraints are real so it’s worth taking time to identify them.

## Explore opportunities to overcome constraints

The people closest to the work often have the best ideas about how to solve the problems.

Just by asking the right questions, the team (as a group, one on one, or via written suggestions) may well come up with ideas to achieve more flexibility and get beyond the constraints.

### Questions to ask include:

- What would it take to have more of the flexibility we’d like?
- How big is this constraint?
- How permanent is this constraint?
- What could we do if we didn’t need to resolve this immediately?
- Who else would we need to involve to make this work?
- What else could we try?

## Take action

Once the ideas have been fully explored and there are (hopefully) options on the table, you can decide on the action you take.

Some of the actions you take might have an almost immediate impact on the access to more flexibility.

For example, you might decide that the toolbox meeting can be recorded on video and the person who wants to start work later can watch the video when they arrive on-site, making sure they are up-to-date like everyone else before they begin their day’s work.

Other actions might take longer, such as recruiting a second part-time person to cover the reduced hours of another part-time team member.

It is achievable, but it isn’t something you can tick off overnight.



2.2 Informal flex

In your conversations about what type of flexibility people want, many are likely to want informal, short-term or ad-hoc flexible arrangements, rather than permanently changing their work pattern.

These arrangements might be so people can go to medical appointments, attend their children’s school events, or enable them to do more at home for a few weeks. As a business, you will need to decide how much short-term or ad-hoc the customers and team can manage.

However, where you can, finding ways to enable informal ad-hoc and short-term flex can assist with employees feeling valued and supported, meaning they’ll be more engaged and productive when they’re at work, as well as stay longer in their job with you, knowing they might not get the same treatment elsewhere. Just make sure you are consistent – the ad-hoc approach can sometimes generate finger-pointing and allegations of favouritism, so keep an eye on that.

2.3 On-site only roles

For on-site only roles, workplace flexibility is much harder to accommodate.

If you want to try to offer flexibility, then focus on what can be done, especially around hours and days of work. The table of common types of flexibility earlier in this guide can help you.

People in on-site roles often want to be able to have more autonomy and choice over the hours and days they work. If you find ways to make this possible, you’re more likely to stand out as an employer of choice. Options such as varied start and finish times, compressed hours such as a 9-day fortnight, or part-time work are likely to be welcome ideas for many.

There are some things you can do to explore working from home in some on-site roles. If a role has some element of paperwork and planning, can some of that be done from home, perhaps one day per fortnight?

Alternatively, if someone has some formal training or certification to complete that involves bookwork, can some of that reading and learning be arranged to be done from home?



*We offer our staff flexible start times so they’re able to drop kids off at school, deal with traffic or utilise quiet time in the office. We believe that without healthy workers no work can happen so we also give our staff ‘blue sky time’, which is time when they can do life admin like go to the bank, physio or doctor during work hours. Giving them flexibility means we have an engaged team who feel valued as people. We find that when we look after our staff, they look after our customers”.*

*- Lyall Jellyman, BR Flooring*

2.4 Office-based roles

For people in predominantly office-based roles, there is an increasing expectation these days that hybrid work will be on offer. They may well expect to be able to work part of their week from home and some from the office.

There is a lot to be gained when hybrid work is done well. Many people find they can be highly productive and efficient at completing their to-do list when they’re at home.

For example, they may face less interruptions and distractions from colleagues. However, too much working from home comes with downsides too. People can become isolated and lonely, it can be harder to collaborate and teach other staff, which can create a negative impact on wellbeing and the business.

There are two important factors to focus on when considering the hybrid work opportunity:

**Learn to do the right work from the right places,** not just doing any work from anywhere

**Make decisions in consultation with relevant staff,** so the office has the right people, doing the right work on the right days, and people can be extra productive on their working from home days.

This checklist may be of use for your office or partly office-based roles:

Work from the office	Work from home
Focus on team connection (to combat isolation).	Focus on individual work.
Focus on ‘loose ties’ connecting with people you don’t often work with (to get creative).	Focus on tasks and urgent work.
Prioritise important over urgent.	Prioritise deep thinking work that is best done without interruption.
Create space for the unplanned (so others can connect with you).	Enjoy the dopamine hit of ticking off the to-do list.





## 2.5 Combined roles

For those who have a combination of office-based work and on-site work, they might find it difficult to make flexibility work, even where you may have agreed to it with the relevant staff member.

They often have to fit around what needs to be done, by when and for whom.

Planning ahead, as far as possible, even if only a few days at a time can be useful.

Flexibility also means the employees being willing to adapt to unexpected needs of the business; it is not a one-way street and that needs to be made clear.

*“Some of our people start late and/or finish early to fit around their family lives. We also offer a 4 day apprenticeship so that people can fit it in around other commitments or jobs. It’s not always easy to make work, but if you want to get and keep good staff then you need to offer perks.”*

- Jesse Sullivan, JGrae Building Ltd

*“Some of our teams have worked out flexible rosters where they each have different work patterns, which allows work to continue smoothly as only one person is away at a time. We also offer different types of flexibility, like when people come back from parental leave we pay them 100% for 80% hours for 12 weeks. We are committed to supporting flexible working, as long as it’s balanced against operational needs.”*

- Jo Prigmore, Fulton Hogan

## 2.6 Job design

So far this guide has talked about flexible work being about giving people some choices about hours, days and place of work. Increasingly though, flexible work is becoming more proactive than that and making its way into the design of jobs, before a person is even employed.

When a new job needs to be filled, or a project is being scoped, it can be worth stopping to think about how jobs and the work can be designed and tweaked to enable some, or more, flexibility. By tweaking the design of a job you might be able to make it more appealing to top candidates, giving you a really important head start when it comes to recruiting the ideal people.

For example, if you know in your team people would love to have one day per fortnight working at home, how can you design a job with that built in from day one? Perhaps that day is set aside for catching up on paperwork, which otherwise piles up when they try to do it on-site and are forever interrupted.

Alternatively, do all jobs need to be on-site at the same time? Are there important overlaps that can be designed into the jobs, but also space for people to have some autonomy outside those core overlapping hours?

These are important questions that will become more commonplace as more people seek flexibility in their work and more employers offer these choices, lifting the industry standard across the board and experience the benefits.



# 3.0 Role of leadership

How can you lead the introduction of flexibility into your workplace and business?



Here's a few tips to lead it well:



## Mindset matters most.

Leading changes at work will not always be smooth.

Creating more flexibility can create challenges for the business and the team. So, if you are wanting to explore flexibility, entering the process recognising that and being open to learning lessons along the way, both good and bad, should help.



## Talk about “why”.

Creating more flexibility in your team and your business can have many benefits.

Being clear for yourself and your teams about the benefits you're focused on achieving (and measuring) will help keep everyone on track. It can also help to keep the team supporting one another (as noted above, some team members may not embrace flexibility, or others having flexibility, and that needs to be managed carefully).



## Review regularly.

People change and their work changes.

That means that flexible work arrangements need to keep up with both those variables. Introducing a broad policy is a good idea, and then keeping in touch with individual team members to see how they are going and talk about how the business is going with any arrangements is helpful. This isn't a 'one and done' exercise, but it becomes an integral component of your planning cycle.



## Consistency matters.

If you're leading a small business, this is something you can lead with your team as regularly as you need to.

Because you're the constant, you've got an advantage of setting a consistent message, tone and practice around flexible work. If you're leading a larger organisation, consistency can be harder to achieve. Training managers on how to do this well helps achieve that consistency, which in turn gives you more reliable results with the benefits you want to achieve.



## Where to get more support

Check out some of the following resources to find out more about flexible work and how to do it well:

[Employment Relations Act 2000, Part 6AA](#)

[MBIE Flexible Work employer obligations and guidance](#)

[Flexperts resources from Gillian Brookes](#)

[Timewise UK Construction Pioneers Pilot Report](#)

[Timewise UK recorded webinar: Practical Solutions for on-site flex in Construction](#)