

Armed Forces (Flexible Working) Bill

Key Q&A

Q: This is just a savings exercise.

No, there is no savings target attached to these measures. Our main driver is giving Service personnel more choice over how they serve, and ensuring that we retain their knowledge, skills and experience; and attract future joiners. Of course, retaining skilled people is more efficient than recruiting and training new ones, but there will be some costs in managing these new flexibilities as well as some efficiencies: for example, some requests could only be approved where some form of backfill is provided, whereas others will not require this. As the Services deliver capability more efficiently through optimising a workforce comprising of Service personnel on different arrangements, Reservists, civilian staff and contractors, those efficiencies will benefit the Services.

Q: Commanding Officers will not allow people to work flexibly.

Leaders and managers will understandably see the challenges of allowing people to work less where there are outputs to deliver, but these local leaders will also be incentivised to support the individual needs of their people, because this leads to immediate benefits of increased motivation and morale and the longer-term benefits of retaining talented people. Commanding Officers will provide critical recommendations on flexible working applications, but the final decision will lie with an approvals authority at the Headquarters of each Service. This will ensure a more strategic approach to considering applications, informed by the employing organisation, manpower planners, the Chain of Command and other experts, which can take account of potential solutions that are not available to Commanding Officers.

Maintaining operational capability will be at the forefront of the authority's decision making.

Q: These new arrangements are for women only.

No. The new arrangements will be open to everyone in the Armed Forces and we expect a cross section of people to make use of them. They are designed to attract, recruit and retain more people from a more diverse cross section of society, with the knowledge, skills and experience we need to deliver operational capability. That said, evidence from part-time working elsewhere, shows us that women see it as particularly attractive, but they are not our sole focus.

Q: Working part-time suggests a lack of commitment.

The Armed Forces have used forms of flexible working successfully since 2005. Service personnel who have taken advantage of these options have shown great commitment, by continuing to serve their country, whilst balancing this with managing a change of circumstances in their private lives. It is also important to remember that these arrangements will be for a temporary period and personnel will be expected to return to a full-time commitment afterwards. Furthermore, part-time working is the very essence of Reserve Service and their commitment on operations has never been in any doubt. Similarly MOD civilian staff, who can also choose to work flexibly, have continued to provide invaluable support for the Armed Forces.

Q: Our ability to deliver operational capability will be compromised by the introduction of these new flexible working arrangements.

The need to maintain operational capability is implicit within the design of the new arrangements. Also, it will be a key consideration to the granting of any flexible working (including the nature of the individual's unit, his or her role and the operational situation). The new arrangements will not change the Services' ability to deliver

operational capability, but they will provide a wider range of modern, flexible tools with which to allow some of our people to continue to serve and thus to improve the talent available to deliver that capability. Where the decision is taken to allow an individual to temporarily reduce their commitment, the MOD will retain the ability to recall them should circumstances arise, such as a National emergency.

Q: There isn't a demand for this. The MOD is forcing it on people.

Service personnel consistently tell us in surveys that, the effect of Service life on their family and personal lives, is the main factor influencing their thinking about whether to leave. We have listened and responded by developing these new, modern, flexible working opportunities aimed at retaining people who might otherwise leave, including people who often possess valuable knowledge, skills and experience that we can ill afford to lose. These arrangements are the latest in a series of policy changes that have offered other types of flexible working, such as career intermissions, flexibilities in leave arrangements and opportunities to vary start and cease-work times. Personnel will not be forced into these new arrangements. It will be an entirely voluntary application process. These changes have been designed by the Services for the Services.

Q: Personnel will be obligated to work part-time when this is introduced to help the MOD save money.

Not true. There are no savings targets attached to these measures. Introducing these new, enhanced flexible working options is about providing opportunities for our people who want to work more flexibly. Thus, personnel will be able to apply for part-time working if they want to, Defence will not require it.

Q: Initiatives like this can never work in a disciplined Armed Forces.

We've already proved that we can make flexible working work! We've been successfully providing our people with flexible working options since 2005, through

periods of significant operational commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan. The options already available include variable start and finish times, compressed hours, working from home, and leave options which include career intermissions of up to a maximum of three year's duration. We simply want to enhance these options by allowing Regular Service personnel to apply to work part-time, for a temporary period, and or limit the amount of time they are separated from their home base. We have been successfully trailing this with the Flexible Duties trial.

Q: Allowing Regular Service personnel to work part-time will damage Military ethos and cohesion.

It won't damage it – we expect that it will enhance it over time. Flexible working helps us to retain more of the people we need to keep – people who may currently leave when their circumstances change, because their needs cannot be easily accommodated in the current system. Keeping these personnel will be good for them – they maintain their careers, and good for Defence – we retain their knowledge, skills and experience. We believe that adding new options to the flexible employment framework will help make the Armed Forces a more modern employer and meet the career needs of more of our people.

Q: Choosing to work flexibly will damage career progression prospects.

Choosing to work flexibly will not in itself damage someone's promotion prospects. However, it may delay the development of skills and experience, which will be a consideration for individuals on applying, and the impact will vary depending on the stage of their career. The new arrangements are underpinned by a number of core principles, aimed at ensuring fairness. These include: making sure we avoid intentional and unintentional career penalties; creating the opportunity for individuals to maintain or regain career momentum; and maximising accessibility of transfers between Regulars and Reserves in both directions. Service personnel will continue to be promoted on the basis of their performance and potential. Furthermore, as a matter of policy, promotion Boards will be directed to assess fairly all candidates for

promotion on the basis of their merit and future potential, irrespective of any period of flexible service.

Q: There is no evidence that these new arrangements will work

We have collected plenty of evidence, which proves that flexible working works. This includes: research literature; comparison with other nations (including Australia, Germany, New Zealand, Canada, and Denmark); on-going consultation with our people; surveys; and a flexible duties trial. The evidence tells us that: the top three most frequently cited benefits of flexible working are that: it helps employees to reduce stress/pressure; it enables better work life balance; and it encourages people to stay with their current employer. The majority of UK employers already offer flexible working. We need to do the same if we are to be more competitive in the jobs market. The Services have reported positive results from our flexible duties trial, particularly from those who have children. Their wellbeing has improved as their childcare worries are eased, which in turn has improved their motivation and concentration at work.