

Why flexible working matters for older people



Liz Vercoe looks at the rising trend of flexible working, and considers why this can be a good thing for older people.

On the 5 October 2012, we reach the last date [Tweet](#) 10 [Like](#) 3 that anyone will retire on the grounds of reaching 'the default retirement age'. A change in the law in 2011 means firms can no longer ask employees to leave on grounds of age alone. So, if you wish, you can carry on working past 65, if you're a man, and whatever your [pension age](#) is, 60+, as a woman.

This is great news for people who enjoy their work, have the energy to continue, and/or need the income. Around 10% of people already carry on working, some remaining with their employer full time, others part time, or taking up new or [self-employment](#).

Britain already has one of the highest post-retirement-age working populations in Europe, and it looks as if this will grow further now that compulsory retirement is a thing of the past. A report by The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development in 2010 (CIPD) revealed that 41% of workers plan to work past what would have been retirement.



Meet the flexible workers

Geoff and Penny have already taken the plunge, and changed their work arrangements so they can work more flexibly.

Read why they decided to make the change, and how they did it.

[Read Geoff's story](#)

[Read Penny's story](#)

Flexible working is on the rise

But for some people approaching pension age the prospect of working full time, 8 hours a day, week in week out for the foreseeable future is too daunting.

In fact, there has been a trend for employees as young as 50 to increasingly seek opportunities for flexible working. In 2005, 30% of employees aged 50+ worked flexibly, by 2010 the proportion had increased to 38%.

Demand to work in this way will undoubtedly grow with the pension age being raised to 66 by 2020.

Employers are already reporting benefits from offering flexible working arrangements to younger staff - such as parents of children aged under 16 and carers, who are entitled to apply for such arrangements. These reported benefits include:

- improved productivity
- higher staff retention
- increased skill-sharing
- better customer relations

The Institute of Directors reports that 86% of companies offer flexible work arrangements and the mood is growing that everyone should be able to ask about ways of doing their job more flexibly.

What is 'flexible working' anyway?

Basically, flexible working means you have more choice over when and where you work than a standard contract.

There is a wide range of work that can be termed flexible, but often it's the nature of the work that dictates what's possible. Being self-employed at home gives the most flexibility, but it can be more insecure than a permanent job and might not offer the same social contact.

- **Time flexible:** Here you might have flexitime, where you can vary when you start and finish your working day or work extra hours to build up flexidays of extra leave. There are 'compressed hours', such as doing your job in a 9-day fortnight. Alternatively, it may be possible to reduce your hours by working part time, or job sharing.
- **Location flexible:** Perhaps you can work from home all or part of the time, or be on call from wherever you want to be based, or work in different branches if you sometimes need to be near a relative, [care home](#) or hospital.

Obviously the options only count as flexible if chosen or agreed by the employee and not something, such as reduced hours, the employer simply imposes.

Why flexible working matters for older people

Having such flexibility within a job can help older people stay in work, because it allows them to accommodate other things in life such as:

- caring responsibilities
- [health issues](#)
- a desire to take up new [hobbies](#) or [learn something new](#)
- [travel plans](#)
- the wish to spend more time with a partner

It's been noted that couples tend to dovetail their dates of retirement and post-retirement working patterns.

Possibly the most important reason to carry on working in some way is to create a 'bridge' into retirement, because the shock of suddenly stopping work often makes people feel [depressed](#) and unmotivated, and can even affect physical health. Other reasons why people often want to continue in employment include:

- the need to pay the mortgage,
- the desire for mental stimulation,
- plans to improve a pension,
- and because it's hard to start again once you stop.

Flexible working makes an extended working life much more attractive.

Meet two older people who've embraced flexible working:

Read how flexible working allowed Geoff to care for his wife

How flexible working helps Penny to support her family
