

Flexible hours

UK employees with children can now request more flexible working hours from their employers. However, these new rights often involve agreeing to less favourable conditions.

- 1 What do you understand by the term “flexitime”? Discuss your experience of flexitime with a partner.
- 2 New regulations state that parents with a child under six can ask employers for a change in working hours, day or location of work, so long as they have been with the employer for at least six months. Read the six letters from the letters page of a UK magazine on personnel issues. Decide which are for and which are against the new regulations. Explain your decision.

<p>(A) Dear Sir or Madam</p> <p>There are now more women in work than ever. I think that employers cannot ignore the many benefits of flexible working, especially for staff morale and retention.</p> <p><i>Jane Gledhall, Stratford</i></p>	<p>(D) Sir</p> <p>In my opinion, flexible working is great for people who have children. But what about everyone else? In my company, those of us without kids get left with all the antisocial hours – and that’s not fair.</p> <p><i>John Lyle, Cambridge</i></p>
<p>(B) Dear Editor</p> <p>While I agree with the idea of flexible working, the current rules are not fair. In order to do a four-day week, my employer has asked me to take a salary cut and to consider a demotion. It seems that the only way I can help with childcare is to take home less money and do something I did years ago – hardly motivating.</p> <p><i>Jamie Dawson, Hants</i></p>	<p>(E) Dear Editor</p> <p>The new legislation has helped me enormously. I can see more of my daughter at the time I need to most – during her first few years. I have much more flexibility in when I get to work and when I leave, and my quality of life – and therefore my work – has definitely improved.</p> <p><i>C.R., London</i></p>
<p>(C) Dear Sir</p> <p>Eight out of ten employees so far have had their requests for flexible working granted. However, the situation now is that you have the “right to ask” only; what would be even better for parents is the actual right to flexible working hours.</p> <p><i>Mark Smith, Edinburgh</i></p>	<p>(F) Dear Sir or Madam</p> <p>The effect of this new legislation on small businesses is huge. In my firm, I have just one person in every key department, but no cover. So, if I adopt flexible working, how can the company run when someone is away? It’s fine for bigger companies, but not for small businesses.</p> <p><i>Pete Haddon, Managing Director, Computer Consultants</i></p>

- 3 Find words or expressions in the letters from the following definitions:

- a the amount of enthusiasm employees feel about their situation (Letter A)
- b the ability to keep workers from leaving a company (Letter A)
- c the opposite of promotion (Letter B)
- d working times which make it difficult to meet people and have normal relationships (Letter D)
- e an arrangement where a person does the work of someone who is away from work (Letter F)

Some definitions based on *Macmillan English Dictionary*. Text © Bloomsbury Plc 2002.

- 4 Discuss the following questions in small groups and report your ideas to the class.

- a Which letter(s) do you agree with most?
- b What is the position on flexible hours in your own company/country?
- c Are you for or against flexible working?