

# 'Flexitime accrual' can work within 'Blended Working' policy - finding

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**The Civil Service Arbitration Board recommends a study across the Civil Service to see how flexitime accrual can be accommodated within the Government's 'Blended Working' policy, without adversely affecting workloads and service to the public.**

One of the studies should involve all eligible employees, regardless of work location, with the second for staff with blended working arrangements when they only work in the office.

The staff panel had suggested that there be just one pilot study, while the management side had sought four such studies.

When the Blended Working policy was first proposed in November 2021, the staff panel sought that flexitime accrual be continued for all grades regardless of where they work. Management said that it needed to ensure there was equity between those working at home and those in the office. In that context it was agreed that a clause would be inserted in the final agreement that the unions would not bring forward any claim related to inequity on behalf of office-based employees.

Management raised operational concerns around flexitime accrual leave for those in blended working arrangements which, it said, could result in less attendance at the office.

## ACCUMULATION OF LEAVE

Flexitime was introduced in the civil service in 1977. It allows staff to stagger start and finish times to suit domestic and/or travel arrangements and allows staff to accumulate leave by working extra hours. Its introduction is at the discretion of management.

Management argued that, to date flexitime accrual has not been used for remote working and so it has no evidence as to how it will work within a blended working policy. It said that, "there are concerns that, taken together with other flexible work arrangements (e.g. shorter working year, job-sharing), the introduction of flexitime accrual for blended workers may create significant difficulty in rostering/scheduling staff cover in areas where a certain level of physical attendance on-site is required".

## "ABSOLUTE" ASSURANCE

Management thus proposed four pilot studies in diverse locations which would allow comparisons between work areas where flexitime accrual for blended workers is not a

feature and those areas where it is made available, which would allow it to make an informed decision as to its future introduction.

“Blended working alongside flexi accrual is a whole new way of working, and management need to be absolutely assured that, if it is to be deployed, it works for all stakeholders and not just employees”, argued management.

The Staff Panel argued that the option of flexitime accrual should be allowed for all employees in eligible grades, irrespective of work location, and should be adopted for all Civil Service organisations partaking in the pilot.

The Staff Side was prepared in principle to consider a pilot and / or a review, but could not agree to an inconsistent approach across the civil service.

“If one organisation could introduce full flexitime and flexi accrual for all its staff then there is no cogent operational reason why others couldn’t”, argued the Staff Panel. It was argued that throughout the pandemic, it was proven that staff could be fully trusted to work remotely and productively. “Access to flexi accrual for blended workers will not change this nor is there evidence to support such a thesis”, it was argued.

## **NO IMPACT**

The Arbitration Board, chaired by Loughlin Quinn with Board members Angela Kirk and David Denny, noted “no changes to the existing structure of the Flexitime provisions including the amount of accrual will occur as a consequence of the introduction of blended working arrangements nor from this Board’s determination in this matter”.

It recommended two options for the structure of the pilot study: (1) Flexitime accrual to be allowed for all employees in eligible grades, irrespective of work location. (2) Flexitime accrual to be allowed for all blended working employees in eligible grades while in the office only. The pilot should operate in all applicable work locations.

The Board added that departments and offices should opt for one or other only of the two approaches, in a pilot to be arranged over the coming months, to be concluded by end December 2022.

It said: “The Board consider that of the four options proffered for piloting, Option 1 (not allowing any flexitime accrual for staff engaged in blended working arrangements) would not offer any additional insights to emanate from a pilot given that it is the current situation. The proposal in Option 4 (permitting 1 day as opposed to 1.5 days carryover) has been well rehearsed in recent years and so the Board would not see any value in revisiting this matter at this time.”