



Ministry
of Defence

Flexible Service

Flexible Service became law on 1 April 2019, allowing Regular personnel of the Armed Forces to ask to temporarily work part-time and/or restrict their separation from home base.

Flexible Service in brief

- Society's expectations are changing, so the MOD has modernised the flexibility of its offer to help recruit and retain people in an increasingly competitive employment market. Flexible Service is the latest step in the journey, following the introduction of Flexible Working policy in 2005, and the Flexible Duties Trial which have shown there is a real appetite for this type of change.
- Flexible Service allows regular members of the armed forces to request:
 - Part time work, reducing work routines by 20% or 40% equating to 1 or 2 days in a 5-day working week.
 - Restricted separation from home base for no more than 35 days a year.
- Both options can be taken together
- Applications can be made for any reason but are limited in length to no more than 3 years continuously and no more than 4 years total in a 12 year rolling period. The arrangement can be varied, suspended or ended if needed.
- Flexible Service is not guaranteed for those who ask and operational capability will come first. While most benefits are unaffected; pay, pension and, in the case of part-time working, leave are reduced proportionately.
- Flexible Service succeeds the Flexible Duties trial, which ended on 31 March 2019. The arrangements for Service personnel transitioning from the Flexible Duties trial to Flexible Service are set out in [2018DIN01-112](#).
- Flexible Service is not for everyone but it offers more choice to a broad cross-section of the Armed Forces. It provides a new opportunity to balance busy committed careers with personal responsibilities and changing circumstances.



Flexible Service: The detail

Regular personnel of the Armed Forces can apply for Flexible Service to work part-time and/or restrict their separation from home base, subject to operational need.

Increasing flexibility for our people



The UK Armed Forces places unique demands on its personnel. Flexible Service provides more options for its people (you) to adapt to changing circumstances and commitments, both in the Service and in your personal life.

By allowing you to adapt your working and personal life in the short-term, Defence seeks to retain your valuable knowledge, skills and experience, and so preserve operational capability and reduce Defence costs. The Flexible Duties Trial showed us that the ability to temporarily reduce commitment provides respite and encourages retention.



Giving you this increased element of flexibility is not only good news for you and your families. It's a positive step for Defence and it will enable better use of the knowledge, skills and experience of a broader range of Service personnel.

Part-time working



Those who apply for Flexible Service can request a 20% or 40% reduction in their normal working pattern, equating to one or two days reduction in a five-day week. This includes a proportionate reduction in weekend/stand-down duty liability, equivalent to one or two weekends in five. The arrangement will include an agreed working pattern and reductions can also be applied to shift workers.

Restricted separation



Personnel can also apply to restrict the amount of time they spend away from their normal home base (where they have their residence at work address) for no more 35 days per year. This is intended to protect the Service person from lengthy periods away.

Restricted separation can be combined with part-time working.



Flexible Service: The detail

Effect on benefits



During a Flexible Service arrangement, there will be pro-rata reduction to pay (and leave) for part-time work and a reduction in X-Factor for restricting separation; with a consequent adjustment to pensions. Accommodation and allowance entitlements will not change if existing eligibility rules are met. The Service will also continue to provide medical and dental care to ensure operational fitness.

See how Flexible Service would affect your benefits with the 'Discover Flexible Service' web app: <https://flexibleservice.mod.gov.uk>



Flexible Service is not guaranteed

All personnel will have the right to apply by law, but not necessarily the right to undertake a Flexible Service arrangement. Access to Flexible Service is subject to meeting eligibility rules and all decisions are subject to the Service's ability to meet its operational capability requirements.



Flexible Service is temporary

The majority of a Service person's career will continue to be at full commitment, so part-time and restricted separation will be for no longer than three years (with a three-month minimum) and no longer than four years in a 12 year rolling period.



Controls

The Services retain the right to assign or return their people to full commitment to maintain operational capability. Arrangements can be varied, suspended or terminated by either the Service or the individual. Usually such changes will be at 90-days' notice but they can be immediate in the most urgent operational circumstances.

Application

Personnel can apply via JPA, through the chain of command, unit HR, and Career Manager, before an independent Approvals Authority makes the final decision. An approved application will state the quantity of part-time non-duty days and/or maximum separation available during the arrangement.

See full details in [JSP 750 chapter 2: Flexible Service](#)





Flexible Service: The detail

More choice



Flexible Service is not for everyone but it offers more choice to a broad cross-section of the Armed Forces. It provides a new opportunity to balance busy committed careers with personal responsibilities and changing circumstances. Flexible Service fits in with the broader range of Flexible Working and Flexible Leave types already available to personnel.

For more information about Flexible Working see [the Flexible Working and You booklet](#).



Want more information?



Search Flexible Service on gov.uk or defnet
Contact your Unit HR



Read JSP 750, Chapter 2.



Flexible Service: Figures and quotes

What are people saying about Flexible Service

"I'd been deployed overseas which hadn't been easy for my wife and two young children – When I returned, conversation turned to leaving the Army. The opportunity that the Flexible Duties Trial provided for some stability was very attractive. In future, I think Flexible Service will be an enabler for long military service."

[Maj Claydon]

"Flexible work is key to retaining our expert personnel who we've invested in during their military career. Personnel have told us they want more flexibility and we have listened."

[Minister for Defence People and Veterans, Rt Hon Tobias Ellwood]

"The Service personnel we have consulted have given us useful and positive feedback, asked lots of interesting questions and given us a firm steer on the sorts of options that will appeal. Flexible Service will not be for everyone, but the very fact that the option exists will be something to be proud of."

[Chief of Defence People, Lieutenant General Richard Nugee]

Useful flexible working stats

96% of UK employers already offer flexible working for some of their employees and research has found that offering flexible working encourages people to stay with their current employer.

[CIPD Flexible working provision & uptake report]

The top three most frequently cited benefits of flexible working are that it helps employees reduce the amount of stress/pressure they feel under (29%), it enables better work–life balance (54%) and it has been a factor in them staying with their current employer (28%).

[CIPD Flexible working provision & uptake report]

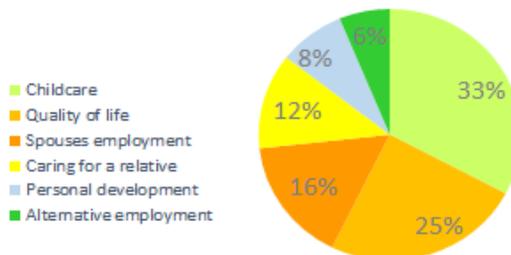
When Service personnel who said they were ready to take up FES were asked why, the top reason was Quality of Life (51.2%), Childcare (48.4%) and Spouse or Partners employment (28.3%).

[FES Survey, 2017]

Of all survey respondents, the highest proportion have expressed that their top preference is to take either half or a full day off work, as well as 60 days restricted separation.

[FES Survey, 2017]

Most likely reasons for Flexible Service (FES Survey 2017)





What are people asking?

Questions you might ask or be asked; talking points and myths that might need busting.

What evidence is there that Flexible Service 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); ongoing 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 and improve diversity. The Services have reported positive results from our Flexible Duties trial.

How will these new flexible working options encourage greater diversity in the future Armed Forces?

The unique nature of Service life and its effect on the family is often cited in our internal surveys as one of the main reasons why our people choose to leave. A more modern, flexible approach to the terms of Service we offer our people will help to attract recruitment from a broader spectrum of society. We know that Service life can be incompatible with broader caring responsibilities and exit data shows that we lose a lot of personnel at these times.

How can initiatives like this 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 trialling this with the Flexible Duties trial.

Who can apply for Flexible Service?

There are some eligibility criteria, such as minimum service and operational readiness, but all personnel are able to apply, irrespective of branch or trade. Inevitably there will be some cohorts where we think it will be very difficult to grant applications. An obvious example is those serving at sea, in a high-readiness unit or serving in a unit that is on the brink of deploying. But this is not to say that Flexible Service cannot happen at another time, during an operational stand-down or future assignment.

Is there a limit on the numbers of Service personnel across the Armed Forces who can serve on the new flexible working options?

No specific cap has been put on the numbers of Service personnel across the Armed Forces who can take up these options. However, the Services will closely manage approvals to ensure that Operational Capability is maintained. This is likely to mean that some applications will be turned down and care will be taken to manage expectations. Preliminary feedback suggests modest levels of take up, of less than 1%.



How will applications for flexible working be administered?

Commanding Officers will make a recommendation on applications to work flexibly, but will not make the final decision. They will be considered by an approvals authority within each Service at Headquarters level, which will be informed by advice from the Chain of Command, manpower planners, career managers and other relevant parties.

Will I be able to choose any form of part-time working that I want?

By extending the range of flexible working options we want to offer as much freedom as we can, but there will have to be limits on time off and the duration of the agreement based on the impact on the unit (to make sure operational capability is not undermined). These new options will work hand in hand with other flexible working provisions under JSP 750, including home working and compressed hours.

You will be able to reduce your current working routine by 20% or 40%. For those on a 5-day typical working week that equates to 1 or 2 days but may be slightly different for those who shift work. However, the pattern of work can be in many forms, such as routine patterns of regular non-duty days, groups of days (ie whole weeks) up to 31 days, irregular patterns, or even taken ad-hoc. All that matters is that the routine is set out in your application and decided upon subject to operational capability.

What does restricted separation mean?

Existing legislation already makes provision for Regulars to serve in a particular area. Flexible Service extends these provisions so that Regulars can serve with a further protection that ensures they are not separated from their normal place of residence or home base beyond a maximum of 35 days per year. The underlying idea here is to protect these regulars from being deployed overseas for a long time during the length of their Flexible Service arrangement. Restricted separation can be used by itself or in combination with part-time working.

Will personnel be obligated to serve part-time to help the MOD save money?

Absolutely not. There are no savings targets attached to these measures. Introducing Flexible Service 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 mandate it.

Could someone serving under these new flexible working options seek secondary employment?

Yes. Existing regulations already control the ability of Regular service personnel to undertake secondary employment and personnel will have to seek CO's authority. Service duty will take precedence over other forms of employment.

Will those who take Flexible Service be paid less?

Yes, of course. If someone has a 20% reduction in their liability for duty, they will receive 20% less pay. This is fair and legally necessary. Restricted Separation will also see a reduction in the level of X-factor paid.



In what circumstances could someone be recalled from Flexible Service?

The Services retain the right to recall their people to full commitment if they consider operational capability to be at risk. The Services will maintain a strategic overview and will only recall personnel where it is necessary given the seriousness of the circumstances, either immediately in some limited circumstances in the national interest, for example in a time of national crisis, or at 90 days' notice. This notice can be used by service person or service to suspend or terminate an arrangement.

Will this mean that personnel will be able to avoid being deployed on operations?

Technically yes, for limited periods when this can be accepted. However, the new arrangements have been designed to ensure that full-time commitment will remain the default position for the majority of Service personnel. The Services will judge whether they have the right mix of personnel to achieve their objectives. Furthermore, the process for considering new flexible working requests will take account of the imminent operational situation, such as heightened tensions and transitions to war.

Won't Flexible Service create even more gaps on the frontline?

We know that Service personnel leave because they struggle to balance work/life issues and we need to modernise the terms of Service we offer to help retain our people. Gapped posts are difficult to fill because people with knowledge, skills and experience leave because they feel they don't have access to short term flexible working options. Decisions will be made by a body which can take a strategic overview, and consider the individual circumstances.

Won't this mean more work for those who do not take-up Flexible Service?

It is important to remember that this is not about making other members of a unit, base, or section do more work to compensate. It is about arranging people's time in a more satisfactory manner. It is unrealistic to suggest that changes to the work commitments of one member of a team will not have some impact on other team members, but this can be managed. Commanding Officers manage such issues already to cater for absences caused by detached duty, maternity, illnesses and posts gapped until a suitable replacement is found.

What will happen to my progression prospects if I choose to work flexibly?

Career progression is based on a number of factors, most importantly on future potential. We've given the impact of flexible working on career development a lot of thought, and will continue to do so as the project continues. We don't anticipate significant changes to the way career paths are managed in the future.

Why is Flexible Service not being offered to Reserves?

Reserve service already offers different commitment levels ranging from spare-time and part-time to full-time, with varying restrictions on separation from the home base. Reserves can choose to move between full time and part-time assignments. As the Reserve service commitments are working well and terms of service have already expanded to meet developing Service needs for flexible employments, there are no plans to change them. However, we expect the new Regular flexibilities to provide additional opportunities for Reservists to serve in different roles and integrate further with Regulars by offering their knowledge, skills and experience to backfill Regular capability gaps or as part of a job share.