

# What Matters to You?



## How flexible working has improved morale, wellbeing and our service offer

By Odeth Richardson,  
Head of Occupational Therapy

“Being able to work flexibly makes a huge difference to staff morale and wellbeing. However, our teams in Therapy Services told us in the NHS Staff Survey, and also verbally, that our department wasn’t flexible – so we knew we needed to address this.

“The Therapy Services team spans over 800 staff in very diverse roles – including psychology, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech and language, dietetics and podiatry. We knew that different teams had different needs from the outset and that this would require much more than a single solution for everyone.

“We began by holding some listening events with staff – where everyone brought their ideas and we talked through options together. I think it’s so important to allow everyone to be creative and listen to each other in an open way - you come up with the best solutions by working together.

“There are of course instances where suggestions from staff just aren’t practical for their service, but we talked these through together and teams had a real sense of being listened to.

“We have introduced a number of new practices within our teams, which were very much shaped by staff. This included a nine day fortnight for some teams – whereby people alternative between spreading their hours across a five then four day working week. This has made a huge difference for the team – with one member of staff saying she no longer needs to pay for childcare.

“There were also specific changes needed to meet the needs of particular teams. For instance, our Community Paediatrics Team reported that their working hours were not practical around meeting with school age children, or their own family lives. We introduced a working day that spans 10am until 6pm – which means the team can fit in more appointments after school and can take their own children to school every morning too.

“Feedback from the Therapy department has been overwhelmingly positive since these changes were introduced and I’d like to share some of their comments and experiences.

Our experience of flexible working has been incredibly positive and I’d urge other departments to investigate the options available with their teams. You can also access advice, support and tools on how to start and develop flexible working conversations with your teams as part of the What Matters to You Programme by emailing: [nuth.whatmatterstoyou@nhs.net](mailto:nuth.whatmatterstoyou@nhs.net).

**Alex Wiles, Lead for SALT Early Years, said:** “I work 3.5 days per week, with alternative weeks four full days and three full days. This working pattern offers me so much more flexibility as it gives me one day per fortnight when I do not need childcare and I can save on the cost of travel to work.”



**Lucy Paterson, Lead for SALT School Age, said:** “With the flexibility to take a longer lunchbreak from work, and make up the time later on - I have enjoyed occasional walks and jogs during the day. This has helped me to maintain my physical and mental wellbeing, as well as giving me an energy boost for my afternoon’s work activities. “This feels particularly helpful during winter months when I might be starting and finishing work in the dark, with no other opportunity to go out in daylight.”




**Victoria Mitchinson – Operational Lead Paediatric Physiotherapy/ Specialist Physiotherapist Children’s Home Ventilation Service, said:** “Working a nine day fortnight has made a huge difference to my work/life balance as it has stopped me from leaving late so regularly whilst giving me a full day off every other week. “It has also allowed me to adjust my hours to meet the clinical demand i.e. I work later two days each week on my clinical days. As the team have moved to this pattern we can meet patients’ needs much easier by offering greater availability for home visits after school.”



**Christine Baker, Psychology lead, said:** “Agreeing a rotation that included remote working from home and shifting between bases, has increased our ability to be flexible and also enabled us to manage our tight space and social distancing effectively. “Staff can also shift their start and finish times to fit around transport and carer responsibilities, and around work/life balance issues without it impacting on service delivery - drawing on careful work-planning to ensure that clinic slots and expectations are still met.”



**Alan Macdonald, Head Of Physiotherapy, said:** “Working a nine day fortnight allows me to have a day off once a fortnight on a Thursday and work a school day once a fortnight. This flexibility allows me drop and collect my children from school once a week which has greatly improved my work/life balance and quality of parenthood by being able to be part of my children’s lives. “I work longer working days to accommodate this.”



**Annie Ross Clinical Team Lead Physiotherapist, said:** “The nine day fortnight means I am now able to plan my working weeks ahead. The earlier starts and later finishes mean I can spend the first and last hour of the day working through the urgent day-to-day non-clinical matters. I can then be fully present on the wards whether clinically or in a supporting role, which has resulted in a greater clinical presence across the wards and has consequently increased the amount of clinical support I provide to the team, which is my favourite part of my job. “In addition, I have used my Job Plan to enable agile working from home for one day every 1-2 weeks depending on need and staffing. I save up the larger pieces of work for WFH days and I am significantly more productive. “Not only have I as an individual benefited from the flexibility, but the service and team have benefited directly and indirectly as well. There has been a dramatic change in my work-life balance. “Flexible working means I now can be the best of me and I now look forward to coming in to work every day! It has resulted in a sustainable way of doing my job and I am excited moving forwards knowing the balance is so much better.”



**James Callaghan, Dietetics Manager said:** “We decided recently to trial an arrangement for flexible hours / WFH / TOIL across Dietetics which has been well received by our staff. “This was prompted as a bridge between the extra flexibility around covid (social distancing and minimising staff in the offices) and the eventual return to normal office working / work-life balance.”

