
BBC LEARNING ENGLISH

6 Minute English

Flexible working

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This is not a word-for-word transcript

Georgina

Hello. This is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Georgina.

Neil

And I'm Neil.

Georgina

In this programme we're going to be talking about the world of work.

Neil

Ah yes, travelling to an office five days a week, sitting at a desk all day, and then going home.

Georgina

Neil, it's not always like that. Office work doesn't have to be such a **routine** – the usual, fixed way of doing things – it is much more flexible these days.

Neil

That's true. During the pandemic, we've all had to have a more flexible approach to work.

Georgina

Yes, we have. And it has, perhaps, changed our attitude to working flexibly. But even before coronavirus, there was an opportunity to work flexibly, and we'll be discussing that soon.

Neil

But there's one thing that can't be changed and that's you setting a quiz question for me!

Georgina

Ah yes, I hadn't forgotten. So, Neil, I know you work very hard. But according to

data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development – the OECD – workers from which country work the longest hours? Is it...

- a) South Korea
- b) Germany, or
- c) Mexico?

Neil

Well, as I'm not on the list, let's go for c) Mexico.

Georgina

OK, Neil, we'll find out if that's right at the end of the programme. But let's talk more about flexible working now. Different countries have different laws about working flexibly – but here in the UK, for last 14 years, employees – workers – have had the right to request flexible working.

Neil

But what does it mean to work flexibly? Sarah Jackson is a workplace consultant and visiting professor at Cranfield University School of Management. She spoke to BBC Radio 4's Woman's Hour programme about what it means exactly ...

Sarah Jackson, workplace consultant

Because of the pandemic, now everybody thinks flexible working means working from home - it doesn't, it's about **common sense**, what does the job need in terms of when where, how long, and what do you need and what does your family need - and how do the two **match**? So, flexibility really means having choice and control over when, where and how long you work, and agreeing that with your manager.

Georgina

So, flexible working is not just working from home – something we've got used to during the pandemic. It is about **common sense** – using our judgement to make sensible decisions.

Neil

So, requesting to work for two hours a day is not sensible – but being able to work from 12 until 8 instead of 9 to 5 might be. Of course, this depends on the needs of the business. And as Sarah said, you need to match your needs with that of the business. **Match** here means to work equally on both sides.

Georgina

Getting the working conditions that suit you does require some negotiation with your manager. You need agreement from him or her – and that can be difficult if your manager is **inflexible** – not willing to change.

Neil

But of course, in the UK at least, an employee has a right to request flexible working, and this must be considered by the employer. This law initially was just for parents with a child younger than 6 years old – or a disabled child less than 18.

Georgina

But since 2014, everyone has the right to request flexible working. And that includes men.

Neil

Which is an important point, as Sarah Jackson explains. Fewer men seem to have their requests for flexible working accepted – let's find out why...

Sarah Jackson, workplace consultant

Men, when they do ask, are more likely to be turned down, so there's a real **bias** there in the system and the most important thing that needs to happen here, I think, is for employers to really actively say to their men, 'we know you want to be **active** fathers' - because there's a whole generation of young men who do want to be active fathers - 'please use the right to request flexible working, work flexibly if you can' because until men are enabled to be active fathers, we won't get equality at home and we certainly won't get equality in the workplace either.

Georgina

OK, so men are more likely to have their request turned down – or rejected. And Sarah says there is a **bias** in the system – unfairness, treating one group of people more favourably than another.

Neil

And this is unfair because it can prevent some men being **active** fathers – actually being involved with childcare. But having more active fathers can lead to equality – or fairness – at home and in the workplace.

Georgina

It sounds like something that needs to be looked at. But now, Neil, let's get the answer to my question: According to official data, in which country do workers work the longest hours?

Neil

And I said Mexico.

Georgina

Which is correct, well done! According to the OECD, the average Mexican spends

2,255 hours at work per year – the equivalent of around 43 hours per week. Germans, on the other hand, clock up the fewest hours.

Neil

Well, my working day is nearly over, so let's just recap some of the vocabulary we've discussed. Starting with **routine** – the usual, fixed way of doing things.

Georgina

Common sense is our judgement to make sensible decisions.

Neil

When you need something to **match** it has to work equally on both sides.

Georgina

And when someone is **inflexible**, they are unwilling to change – sometimes we say they won't budge!

Neil

Bias is unfairness, treating one group of people more favourably than another. And being **active** with something means being involved with it.

Georgina

Well, there's no flexibility in our 6 minutes so we're out of time. We have plenty more 6 Minute English programmes to enjoy on our website at bbclearningenglish.com. And check us out on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram.

Neil

Don't forget that we have an app too, which you can download for free from the app stores. We help you learn English on the move! Grammar, vocabulary, and interesting topics – we have them all!

Georgina

Bye for now.

Neil

Goodbye.

VOCABULARY

routine

the usual, fixed way of doing things

common sense

our judgement to make sensible decisions

match

work equally on both sides

inflexible

unwilling to change

bias

unfairness; treating one group of people more favourably than another

active

involved with (something)