

Ministers to give workers immediate right to request flexible working

Employees of all companies will be able to request flexible working arrangements when they start new jobs under proposals to be published by ministers.

Sky News understands that the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) plans to allow millions of workers to request flexible working from day one at a new employer, replacing the current 26-week period.

The move, which one industry source said could be announced in the coming days, has been planned since before the 2019 general election but has been thrown into sharp relief by the pandemic's profound effect on working patterns.

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One insider pointed that employees would be given the right to request – rather than demand – flexible working, encompassing the time, location and hours of work.

That right, after six months in a new role, has been in place since 2014, although the proportion of the workforce actually allowed to work flexibly is reported to have stagnated.

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Millions of people have been forced to work from home during the coronavirus crisis, and ministers signalled this week that a renewed spike in cases during the winter could trigger further government orders to do so.

The government's proposals are separate to those published by the Flexible Working Taskforce earlier this year, and are expected to receive a mixed response from major business groups.

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“Flexible working can make work more accessible to under-represented groups such as women, disabled people, parents and carers, giving employers access to a wider pool of talent,” a Whitehall source said.

A government spokesperson said: “As is set out in the 2019 manifesto, the government is committed to consulting on making flexible working the default unless employers have good reason not to – boosting business productivity and helping even more workers to join the labour market.”

“Our proposals will be published shortly.”