

Fact Sheet 10: Flexible Hiring That Works

A practical, plain-English guide for SMEs

The Problem SMEs Are Facing

Many SMEs want to hire but feel they:

- Don't have enough work for full-time roles
- Don't have the budget
- Don't have time to manage someone

Key Message

You don't need to hire full-time to start building capacity.

Flexible Hiring Options

Part-Time Employees

- 1–3 days per week
- Immediate support
- Lower monthly commitment

Part-Time Apprentices

- Minimum ~16 hours per week
- Training funded (95–100%)
- Longer duration but lower cost

Project-Based Roles

- Fixed task or short-term
- Clear deliverables
- No long-term commitment

Placements / Trial Opportunities

- Short-term, low risk
- Opportunity to test the role

What This Means in Practice (Costs)

Option	Typical Monthly Cost	What You Get
Part-Time Employee	£700–£1,200	Immediate output
Part-Time Apprentice	£650–£900	Learner + growth
Full-Time Apprentice	£1,300+	Long-term capacity
Project-Based	£500–£1,500	Defined output
Placement	£0–£500	Trial / low risk

Key Message

Flexible hiring allows you to match cost to your actual workload.

Remote & Hybrid Working

Flexible hiring often works best when combined with flexible working.

What works well:

- Clear working hours and expectations
- Weekly check-ins
- Named manager or buddy
- Task-based work (not vague roles)

SME Tip

Hybrid (some in-person time) often improves confidence and learning.

HR & Setup – What You Actually Need

- Contract with clearly defined hours
- Payroll setup
- Right to work checks
- Pro-rata holiday entitlement
- Apprenticeship agreement (if applicable)
- Basic remote working expectations

Key Message

Part-time and flexible roles use the same core processes as full-time, just scaled down.

Where to Start (Avoid the Confusion)

Start Here (Hands-On Support)

- Training providers – design the role and manage setup
- Local support teams – candidates, funding, guidance
- Brokerage support – match you with providers and simplify

Use for Information Only

- GOV.UK – rules and funding
- FSB – general advice

Common Concerns

“We don’t have enough work” → Start with 1–2 days per week

“We can’t afford it” → Flexible roles reduce monthly cost

“We don’t have time” → Start small and build gradually

The Bigger Picture: Cost vs Capacity

What SMEs often fear:

- “What if it doesn’t work?”
- “We can’t afford the risk”

What works in practice:

- Starting small reduces risk
- Structured support improves outcomes
- Flexible hiring builds confidence over time

Recruiting for Flexible & Part-Time Roles (How to Attract the Right Candidates)

When recruiting for non-full-time roles, the wording you use matters. Many candidates are motivated by learning, flexibility, and experience — not just salary.

What to Emphasise in Your Job Description:

- Opportunity to gain hands-on experience
- Exposure to real business projects

- Ability to grow with the business
- Flexible working arrangements
- Support, mentoring, or buddy systems

Suggested Wording SMEs Can Use:

“We’re looking for someone who wants to build experience while contributing to real work.”

“This is a flexible, part-time opportunity ideal for someone looking to develop their skills alongside other commitments.”

“You’ll gain hands-on experience, learn directly from the team, and have the opportunity to shape how the role develops.”

“We value what you bring — your ideas, perspective, and willingness to learn.”

“This role is designed to grow over time as both your confidence and our business needs develop.”

SME Tip

Be clear that the role is flexible but meaningful — candidates are more attracted to roles where they can learn and make an impact, even if hours are limited.

Summary

Flexible hiring allows SMEs to grow in a way that is manageable, affordable and realistic, turning hiring from a risk into a step forward.