

Flexible working rules extended

Legislation that from April this year will enable more than a million carers in the UK to apply for flexible working will force small and medium-sized legal practices to change the way they operate, a leading employment specialist has said.

The Flexible Working Regulations 2006 – introduced as part of the government's plans to extend family rights under the Work and Families Act 2006 – mean that employers will be obliged to consider requests for flexible working hours from employees who care for a spouse or partner, a near relative or someone who lives at the same address as the employee.

This extends to a further 1.4 million people the current rights available to employees with children younger than six or with disabled children younger than 18. Near relatives



Photograph: Rex Features

Carers: right to flexible hours

will include in-laws, uncles, aunts and step-relatives.

Ronnie Fox, founder of City law firm Fox, said the 'eminently sensible, family-friendly policy' behind the regulations will lead firms to adopt much more of a team approach.

'An employee has to put forward

a business case to apply and will therefore have to be more conscious of how they fit into the team,' he suggested. 'We will see much less of the 9.30 to 5.30 day among lawyers and support staff and hours will be adjusted, but overall firms may provide services for longer.'

Elizabeth Lang, a senior associate at City firm Bird & Bird, advised firms to ensure they were aware of the procedure they needed to follow and the reasons for which they could legitimately refuse requests.

Mr Fox added that firms will still be able to deny requests, for instance where there would be a detrimental effect on the ability to meet client demands or an inability to reorganise work among the workforce, but he said any request must be considered seriously.

Catherine Baksi