

**WESTERN SYDNEY**  
UNIVERSITY



# Flexible Working Business Case

Office of Equity & Diversity 2019

## Executive Summary

As an 'Employer of Choice', Western Sydney University is committed to maintaining its long standing reputation for fairness, equity and inclusion in the workplace. From 2019 the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA) requires that an organisational business case for Promoting Flexible Work be endorsed and communicated by the Vice-Chancellor to all employees at least once every 12 months. Flexible working has considerable benefits in promoting diversity and inclusion, for women and other equity groups, and in reducing the gender pay gap. Research shows that it has benefits for all employees and for the performance of organisations at large.

As the Vice-Chancellor acknowledges, "The University has long supported flexible work, recognising that providing flexible working options at our University plays an integral role in developing opportunities for increased staff satisfaction, retention, engagement, and sustained organisational knowledge. A flexible workplace is one that recognises the competing demands of its employees in balancing work commitments with personal priorities. Our University has many options available to staff who require flexible working arrangements. When properly managed, flexible working arrangements serve to benefit the overall productivity of our University."<sup>1</sup>

Flexible working delivers quality services to students and other stakeholders by:

- creating a work environment based on performance, mutual achievement and trust,
- attracting and retaining a diverse and high-performing workforce,
- enabling teams and individuals to work productively and deliver strong organisational outcomes and
- enhancing employee engagement and job satisfaction.

## Reasons for Requesting Flexibility

There may be a range of reasons a staff member may request flexible work. These may include:

- caring for family members
- managing health needs
- contributing to the community
- maintaining general health and wellbeing
- studying
- transitioning to retirement
- managing the amount of time spent commuting

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<sup>1</sup> Glover, B., (2018) Western Sydney University website

## Introduction

Flexible work is the new “normal” in many workplaces. It is no longer simply a benefit, but a necessary approach to attract and engage the next generation of employees, to accommodate the needs of an ageing workforce, to ensure we address workplace inequalities and see more women and staff from diverse backgrounds emerging into leadership roles. Flexibility as the norm provides the structural foundation to build diverse and inclusive workplaces from which organisations and our society benefits. To that end, flexible work benefits everyone.

The University proactively supports flexible work practices which enable it to attract and retain high quality staff. Flexible workplaces benefit both employees and employers, as they make good business sense.

The University also has statutory obligations to ensure that members of staff are not subject to discrimination due to their family responsibilities and that staff have a right to request flexible working arrangements in certain circumstances. Flexible working arrangements need to meet the needs of an individual, and the University.

In support of national improvements in the provisions of flexibility in Australian workplaces, the Australian National Employment Standard in the *Fair Work Act (2009)* applies to all employees covered by the national workplace relations system and includes a right for certain employees to request flexible working arrangements from their employer. An employer can only refuse such a request on “reasonable business grounds”.

This Business Case outlines these measures and sets out our plans to continue improving workplace flexibility into the future.

## Flexible work options

The University has developed a number of policies, procedures, programs and practices in place to promote and support flexible ways of working for academic and professional staff alike, including staff in senior roles. Indeed, modelling of flexible work options by university leaders is critical to the success of the strategy.

Flexible work arrangements may be grouped into three categories, being those that provide flexibility in terms of hours of work, patterns of work and location of work, including arrangements such as:

- Part-time work
- Purchased leave
- Unplanned leave
- Parental leave beyond statutory requirements
- Flexitime
- Compressed working weeks/hours
- Time in lieu
- Job-sharing
- Flexible career management

- Working remotely

## Organisational benefits of flexible working

Flexible work delivers benefits and savings in a myriad of ways:

- Improved staff productivity arising from greater employee motivation and engagement; from work environments more conducive to focussed work; and from employees working at the time and place in which they are most effective.
- Enhanced ability to attract quality employees including both employees who require flexibility and employees who are attracted to the organisation because it enjoys a reputation as an employer of choice
- Enhanced ability to retain experienced staff due to greater job satisfaction and commitment to their employers as well as the ability to manage major life changes such as the birth of a child or caring for aging parents
- Improved employee health, safety and wellbeing due to lower stress levels and healthier lifestyle practices
- Reduced absenteeism due to improved health, safety and wellbeing and due to the ability of employees to readjust their work schedule to meet other commitments or to work from home if they choose without the risk of infecting colleagues
- Greater workforce diversity and, in particular, diversity in terms of gender, age and ability/disability due to better options for people who find it difficult to work a conventional Monday to Friday, nine to five working week in the office<sup>2</sup>
- Enhanced customer service arising from a sense of reciprocity among employees, which leads to a greater effort to meet the needs of customers
- Greater innovation capacity which may result from being able to work during quiet times and through greater autonomy which engenders a stronger sense of empowerment and provides the circumstances and motivation to innovate.
- Reduces the gender pay gap by offering the opportunity for women to juggle their unpaid work with paid work.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Office for Prevention and Women's Equality, (2018) 'Flexible work, good for business?'

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

## Improved productivity

Significant research exists that identifies the positive connections between flexible working arrangements, improved productivity and revenue generation. Flexibility results in increased employee engagement and performance, with its concomitant improvements in the financial success of organisations. Some can have very significant impacts on productivity.

88% of Australian businesses surveyed by International Workplace Group (IWG) confirmed that productivity has increased in their business because of greater flexibility. What's more, 60% of those surveyed report that businesses that tailor the work environment to the work function of staff improves productivity.<sup>4</sup>

Productivity increases can be significant. In 2017, the New Zealand financial firm Perpetual Guardian trialled a four-day working week on the condition that employees continued to meet their performance targets. The company reported that employees were happier and that productivity had increased by 20%. The company has now made the four-day week a permanent option for all of its full-time employees.<sup>5</sup>

Harvard University documented a working from home trial at a Chinese travel agency called Ctrip, employing 16,000 staff. After nine months of providing for call centre staff to work from home, Ctrip recorded a 13% increase in productivity and performance. Employees attributed the productivity boost to quieter working environments at home. They did 9.2 % extra minutes per day due to starting work more punctually and taking less break time during their shifts due to easier access to amenities such as toilets or a kitchen. They also took fewer sick days. And for the small minority of workers who had not performed as well at home, when they voluntarily returned to the office environment their productivity returned to previous levels.<sup>6</sup>

## Attracting and retaining talent

The quest for talent is also greatly enhanced by the provision of flexible working opportunities. The global workforce is now more mobile than ever before, meaning that universities are competing for talent nationally, and increasingly on an international level. Most organisations are very aware that access to flexibility is a key driver of employee attraction across age groups, gender and types of employment.

The preference for flexibility amongst employees is clear from the research. A large cross-cultural survey of professional workers showed that 85.9% of employees prefer to work for an employer who offers “flexible hours.”<sup>7</sup> Research conducted by Robert Walters Consulting amongst 500 hiring manager and more than 1500 professionals across Australia and New Zealand found that the vast majority of professionals (88%) are more likely to consider a role if flexible work

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<sup>4</sup> International Workplace Group 2019

<sup>5</sup> Coulthard Barnes, Perpetual Guardian, (2019) White Paper – Guidelines for an Outcomes Based Trial  
The University Of Auckland, Auckland University of Technology

<sup>6</sup> International Workplace Group 2019

<sup>7</sup> bayt.com (2017) '85.9% of Job Seekers Look for Companies with 'Flexible Hours'

arrangements are advertised. 40% said that they would turn down a job offer if the organisation could not meet their need for flexibility. Furthermore, 70% of employees said they would be less likely to look for roles outside their current organisation if flexible working arrangements were available.<sup>8</sup> An IWG survey found that over one third of Australians (38%) said that flexible working is so important to them that they would prioritise it over having a more prestigious role.<sup>9</sup>

Research consistently demonstrates that the benefit most valued by women was flexible working arrangements. A study of the finance sector shows that 50 per cent of female respondents listed flexibility as the most important benefit in attracting and retaining their talents. Interestingly, 48.5 per cent of men also listed flexibility as a highly valued benefit.<sup>10</sup>

## Reduced Absenteeism

Engaged and satisfied employees who feel supported to balance their work with their other responsibilities are less likely to be absent. A large survey published by the Australian Industry Group (AIG) in 2015 estimated that absenteeism directly costs organisations \$578 per employee per day of absence. In direct costs alone, the loss to the economy is said to be in excess of \$44 billion per annum.<sup>11</sup>

Research from the respected Hallis *Turnover and Absenteeism* study showed that those taking the least amount of sick leave were satisfied employees who felt they had a comfortable workplace and a good relationship with their boss, employees with multiple dependents, and higher income earners.<sup>12</sup>

## Enhanced student experience

The benefits of flexible working in increasing employee engagement, commitment, productivity and job satisfaction have shown to also be reflected in improved customer service generally. For example, using flexible start and finish times, where these are varied across members of a team, enables the organisation to provide even better customer service as support is available over a longer work day.<sup>13</sup> Different faculties and divisions may develop and implement 'local practices' depending on the nature of the student group, and the workforce. As more students juggle study with employment, schools may need staff who are accessible in a more 'round the clock' pattern, therefore needing additional flexibility in their dealings with University staff.

## Improved gender equity

Flexibility is particularly important for women. ABS data shows that in 2015-16, women took 95% of primary parental leave used by non-public sector employees.<sup>14</sup> Women are also more likely than men to have other caring

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Walters Whitepaper (2018) 'Driving and Implementing a Flexibility-at-Work agenda'

<sup>9</sup> International Workplace Group (2019)

<sup>10</sup> Laundon, M. and Williams, P., *Flexible Work: Barrier to Benefits?* (2018)

<sup>11</sup> Boylan, A., (2017) 'How to reduce Absenteeism in Your Workforce' Australian HR Institute

<sup>12</sup> Hallis Recruitment, (2004) 'Best Possible Fit'

<sup>13</sup> Donaldson, D., (2018) 'Flexible work saving government millions annually, study finds' The Mandarin

<sup>14</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017) *4125.0 - Gender Indicators, Australia*. AGPS

responsibilities. In 2015 the proportion of women who provided primary care to a person with a disability was twice the proportion of men. Flexible work arrangements enable women with caring responsibilities to participate in the workforce. Encouraging men to use flexible work provisions is an important means of sharing unpaid household work and reducing the gender pay gap.

Women continue to be responsible for the bulk of unpaid work and care duties and often lose out on higher paid positions that may unnecessarily demand a rigid presence.<sup>15</sup> By normalising and valuing flexible work, both men and women are encouraged to advance their careers and take up these options, increasing the opportunity for men to contribute more to unpaid caring and household work. Greater sharing of unpaid work helps to equalise the pay gap and address the historical loss financial disadvantage to women because of societal expectations and gendered parenting roles. These stereotypical roles impose unequal unpaid responsibilities on women, and require them to shoulder the burden of time off work for caring or to settle for part-time work or lower career aspirations.<sup>16</sup>

## **Individual benefits of flexible working**

For individuals, flexible working creates the ability to participate in the workforce for people who may otherwise not be able to participate due to caring responsibilities, health issues, their location or other personal circumstances.

- Improved work-life balance by making it easier to balance work with responsibilities and interests outside of work
- Increased job satisfaction and a greater sense of autonomy for one's own work
- Greater opportunities for success at work for people who require flexibility.

## **Western's record on providing and supporting flexible working options**

Western Sydney University has a range of flexible work information, policies, practices and services including:

- Flexible Work at Western Sydney University online training module to assist managers and their staff better understand flexible work at Western Sydney University
- Flexible Work for Staff Fact Sheet
- Flexible Hours of Work Scheme for Professional Staff (Flexi-Leave)
- Part-time employment
- Job Share options
- Purchased Additional Leave (PAL) Scheme

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<sup>15</sup> Hero, E., (2019) 'Guide to Flexible Work'

<sup>16</sup> Victorian Government Report (2019)'Case study: Flexible work reduces the gender pay gap and saves money'

- Parental leave – 52 weeks maternity (20 weeks paid), foster care (6 weeks paid), adoptive and primary carers’ leave (8 weeks paid, 50 weeks unpaid)
- Reduced hours return to work option after parental leave
- On-site childcare centres
- Salary sacrificing to accommodate staff who have children in on-campus childcare
- Support for staff with children and breastfeeding mothers including 17 private breastfeeding rooms across nine University campuses (Western is accredited by the Australian Breastfeeding Association as a Breastfeeding Friendly Workplace)
- Supporting Parents Toolkit
- Centralised Maternity Leave Replacement Fund
- Late Career Transitioning to Retirement schemes

There are also a range of leave options available to assist staff balance work, family and life demands including personal leave to meet family, cultural, religious or special needs, or to meet care for a dependant or a member of immediate family.

## Recommendations for the future

Several important measures have recently been endorsed by the Executive Committee to progress the *Gender Equality Strategy and Action Plan* Goal 5 of “Building a flexible workplace that enables staff to balance work and life commiteemen’s”, including:

- Building on the “Flexible Work at WSU” online training that is now established, regular bi-annual reporting to the Senior Executive Committee on formal flexible work arrangements currently utilised at School/Divisional level will be monitored and analysed
- A survey will be conducted in September 2019 to measure staff engagement and satisfaction with flexible work options at the University.
- Messages and encouragement from University leadership to promote the use of flexible working across the University
- Wherever possible, build capacity of western people managers to adopt contemporary flexible working management strategies



**RECOMMENDATION: For approval**

	Date & Time
<b>Reviewer</b>	<b>Approval received</b>
Michelle Falconer	5/9/19
Angelo Kourtis, Vice-President (People and Advancement)	17/9/19
Barney Glover, Vice-Chancellor	