

## TO ATTRACT A DIVERSE COMMUNITY OF STAFF WE NEED TO CONSIDER FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Flexible working arrangements acknowledge that people have different work styles, personal responsibilities, lifestyles, values and wellness needs. As a health promoting and inclusive employer the University recognises that to attract, recruit and retain a diverse community of talented staff we need to consider 'flexibility' for staff. Our New Zealand workforce is changing, which is driving changes to how people choose to work:

- People are working longer beyond traditional retirement age, which leads to more part-time Employees. <https://www.stats.govt.nz/news/labour-force-will-grow-and-age>
- Drop in fertility rate in NZ means less young people entering the workforce and skill shortages.
- Financial restraints (housing crisis and pension pressures) require people to juggle more than one job.
- Flexible working is expected by potential Employees, and many organisations (including our competitors) advertise roles as flexible. Job boards such as Getaflex are used to promote part-time and flexible jobs <https://www.getaflex.co.nz/>

Also, the suicide rate in New Zealand is shockingly high. One effective strategy for promoting safe mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is by offering flexible work options. Flexible work arrangements recognise that staff need to juggle multiple stressors in life, balance work with other demands and priorities. <https://www.lawsociety.org.nz/practice-resources/personal-and-career-development/mind-and-body/the-benefits-of-working-flexibly-for-mental-health-and-wellbeing>

## TO LEARN MORE

<https://idealog.co.nz/workplace/2019/06/dont-worry-about-robots-extract-how-navigate-future-work>

<https://www.getaflex.co.nz/megatrends/>

## WHAT IS FLEXIBLE WORKING?

Flexible working can be related to work location, working hours, role scope and leave options, and be a temporary or permanent arrangement. Alternatively, trialling an arrangement for 6 months or more, can be initiated to ensure the arrangements meet the needs of both the employer and Employee. Forms of flexible working include:

- **Change of hours** – reduced hours, flexible (start/end) work hours, staggered roster hours for different times of the year, condensed hours and over-time/time in lieu
- **Part-time** and part-year work
- **Job share** (an arrangement where two or more Employees share the responsibilities of a single role. Compensation and benefits are received on a pro-rata basis).
- **Roster** patterns changes
- Remote working or change of **location**
- **Leave flex** – Unpaid leave, domestic leave, enhanced sick leave (over statutory 5 days), bereavement leave, and extended parental leave, Public holiday transfer leave (where an employer and Employee agree that an entire public holiday will be observed on another day for the Employee), Purchased or salary sacrifice leave - sacrifice part of their salary in return for extra annual leave. Study and examination leave - a paid leave arrangement for Employees who need to take time off to study for and/or take an examination.
- **Transition** work plan (where Employees gradually return to a full-time role through a phased approach, e.g. returning after sickness, or reduce to part-time leading to retirement).

## FACTS:

- 46% of New Zealand workers in the 31-45 age group work flexibly (Diversitas/OCG survey 2016).
- One in five workers (21%) of New Zealand's labour force works part-time.
- Over 70% of part-timers are women (Stats NZ). Millennial graduates rank a family-friendly work/life balance as their most important aspiration after being in good health (NZ Universities Graduate Longitudinal Study).

## EXAMPLES:

- A staff member is primary carer for an elderly relative and is frequently required to be available to help them during normal working hours. Reduced hours and flexibility on their start/ finish time enables them to balance their work and personal priorities. By agreeing this arrangement and setting times one week in advance, the Manager is able to plan the team work better.
- A mature staff member is struggling to sustain full time work, they enjoy the work and is a valuable member of the team. Gradual reduction in hours to 0.5FTE part-time over three years as transition to retirement, enables them to manage their work better. The Manager is able to back fill the hours with another part-time staff member and productivity has increased.
- A staff member travels for 60 minutes to and from work each day, and the travelling takes it toll over the week. Working from home one day per week enables them to reduce travel and use the time more effectively to do their work. The Manager is seeing that the person is less tired, more innovative and uses the time at home wisely to undertake concentrated work.

## BENEFITS AND REALITIES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING

### FACTS:

Research consistently shows that flexible working boosts Employee satisfaction. Employee satisfaction links to increase in retention, productivity and Employee loyalty. An example of this is the 4 day working week trials by Microsoft and Perpetual Guardian.

[https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/world/117165032/microsoft-trialled-a-fourday-week-in-japan-productivity-soared-40-per-cent?fbclid=IwAR2f3Q\\_8lRxsqUXnc-7NP16lkvZHusxTN4VitPnZbyLOFXmpMQ6lp2XYeM](https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/world/117165032/microsoft-trialled-a-fourday-week-in-japan-productivity-soared-40-per-cent?fbclid=IwAR2f3Q_8lRxsqUXnc-7NP16lkvZHusxTN4VitPnZbyLOFXmpMQ6lp2XYeM)

<https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/102741507/perpetual-guardians-fourday-working-week-trial-going-well>

## Pros

- Increase workforce with more part-time workers allows for better opportunity to cover absenteeism. Increases diversity of thought and enables business continuity solutions.
- Increases productivity, engagement and Employee loyalty see fact below.
- Less Employee fatigue – linking to increase productivity, reduces absenteeism (Eleven Recruitment, September 11, 2018).
- Improves employer brand- demonstrates empathy, better place to work, builds trust. Offering staff flexibility means allowing them to work in ways that fit in with their outside life.
- Attracts greater talent pool, increase in female candidates (Zurich UK saw 45% increase in female applicants to senior roles when vacancies were advertised as part-time job share options – Report 2019).
- Many employers have already adopted flexible working arrangements because it makes good business sense.
- Sustainability benefits from less mandatory commuting days.
- Efficiencies with use of facilities, equipment and fuel.
- Potential for extended business hours - good for customer service.
- Better balance of low/high workload periods.

## Cons

- May increase direct report numbers, with managers having more staff to manage.
- Creates a need for the team to adopt and maintain a team working structure and approach that work for everyone. E.g. Meeting scheduling and modes of communication need to factor in Part-time staff and remote workers.
- Employees may consider inequality and favouritism.
- Perception of a set precedent to manage.

## Reality

- The legislation guides Managers to focus on reasons not to approve rather than reasons to change.
- Flexible practice needs to be considered from opportunities perspective.
- With technology and digital access so readily available flexible work practice should be possible and easier now.
- Flexible work arrangements require value-based behaviour from all parties – responsibility, empathy, respect, integrity, fairness, and flexibility.

## WHO CAN ASK FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS?

All staff members can request at any time to change their working arrangements. The employer (which includes the Manager with delegated HR authority) has a legal obligation under the Employment Relations Act (Amendment 2014) to consider a written request and respond within 30 days. For more information go to the MBIE website <https://www.employment.govt.nz/workplace-policies/productive-workplaces/flexible-work/> and seek advice from your HR Adviser.

**Remember:** The Employer (Manager) cannot impose change of arrangements onto an Employee (staff) without their agreement first.

# Practical Guide to Flexible Working Arrangements

The request for flexible work practice needs to be initiated by the Employee (staff member). It is recommended that before a formal written application is submitted the Employee talks with their Manager, whānua, family/partner or support person to carefully consider options including pros and cons.

## EMPLOYEE RESPONSIBILITY

**STEP ONE: THINK AHEAD** – and ask yourself these questions

- ✓ What is not currently working for you?
- ✓ What could remedy the situation?
- ✓ What are the financial consequences? E.g. less money, increase in travel costs/bills?
- ✓ What are the impacts (positive and negative) on others, e.g. service to customers, team members, role?

**STEP TWO: DECIDE ON THE SOLUTION...**  
What will your request be?

### *What do you require?*

Plan what you need to cover off in a conversation with your Manager (based on Step One reflection)?

- ✓ Do you require a permanent or temporary arrangement?
- ✓ When would you like it to start and end?
- ✓ What are you able to compromise on or exercise flex e.g. swap days off to participate in the annual planning sessions or staff Christmas party?

### *How will this work in practice?*

- ✓ Be able to articulate impact on others and have suggestions on how your role duties will be delivered and by whom?

## STEP THREE: HAVE A CONVERSATION WITH YOUR MANAGER

(Before you start discussing with your team colleagues). Set a suitable time and place where you are both able to have a productive conversation. Discuss with your Manager whether you would like this to remain confidential.

**i TOOLS TO HELP:** To help navigate the conversation use the courageous conversations FORM & CALM model.

## STEP FOUR: MAKE FORMAL REQUEST

- ✓ Prepare a written request to your Manager, this can be by letter or email. A template is available on the MBIE page: <https://www.employment.govt.nz/workplace-policies/productive-workplaces/flexible-work/how-to-apply/request-for-flexible-working-arrangements-checklist/>
- ✓ Explain clearly the request (Cover items in Step Two) and refer to any previous relevant conversation(s) already undertaken with Manager.
- ✓ Identify whether you consider there are any benefits to the work area, impacts on you and others.
- ✓ Mention challenges you have considered and suggest mitigations that the Manager could consider.
- ✓ Identify what arrangements you can be flexible on and what would need to be fixed.



## EMPLOYER (MANAGER) RESPONSIBILITY

**i REMEMBER: Our Values GOLDEN RULE**  
Treat everyone as you would like to be treated if you were in their shoes.

### WHEN APPROACHED BY AN EMPLOYEE...

- ✓ Consider the request in good faith.
- ✓ Manage your personal biases. Learn more about how these play out, especially negative and similarity bias (see link below).
- ✓ Be Empathetic and listen to their story.
- ✓ Treat every request individually even if it has not worked before – people are different!
- ✓ Try not to jump to conclusions or respond before you have had time to reflect on the situation. Openness to change develops over time.
- ✓ Think about opportunities before losses? Ask yourself -would the request provide opportunities for the team/ business unit, e.g. career development for another member, adoption of different processes, vacant FTE that could be used strategically, or cost savings?
- ✓ Take time to familiarise yourself with your obligations under the Employment Relations Act.

### **i TEST YOUR BIASES:**

Undertake an 'implicit association test (IAT) Harvard implicit bias test. The IAT measures implicit attitudes and beliefs and helps us to better understand our own biases. This tool was developed by a group of researchers from Harvard University and has proven validity. Here is a link to a test: <https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>

**The Manager needs to acknowledge receipt of the request as soon as possible, then consider the request.**

- ✓ Decide whether others in the team need to be involved. If so, ask permission of staff member before sharing information.
- ✓ Consider whether request is manageable or do further discussions need to take place to agree to a tweaked arrangement.
- ✓ Confirm response to request or negotiated arrangements in writing. This needs to be within 30 days of request.

**Remember:** You would need to have a good reason to decline a request.



# Guide to successful flexible working from a different location

As described, one form of flexible working is for staff to work at a different location, e.g. from home, another office, public library etc. For remote working to be successful, it needs to be built on the principles of mutual trust between manager and staff, adaptability, and be outcomes focused. Ongoing conversations to build and review agreements between staff, managers and the teams are important to support effective remote working. When working remotely, it is important to stay socially connected to your team and other colleagues. As well as this, it's vital to have clear expectations for reporting to your manager and team communication.

Prior to commencing a remote working arrangement, conversations and agreement should occur between the staff member, manager, and team members to reduce ambiguity. Discuss, agree, and confirm the following:

## ARRANGEMENTS

- ✓ What work are you able to deliver and when are you able to deliver it?
- ✓ What are the priorities that need to be delivered?
- ✓ How can work be delivered? Can you collaborate with someone else? Can you provide input via other means such as email or phone rather than in meetings? It is important that arrangements are understood by all staff involved, and there is a mutual understanding, between staff members and their manager, of work expectations, priorities, opportunities, and limitations.
- ✓ Outcomes that the staff member will focus on during this time (e.g. completion of a project plan, respond to shared service inbox, review file management)

## COMMUNICATION

- ✓ How will you maintain virtual human connections? E.g. If you had your morning coffee with a colleague, can you still agree to make a cuppa and get together via video or phone call for your morning break.
- ✓ How often will the staff member need to contact their manager and colleagues to enable work to continue effectively across the team (e.g. check in at the start of each day, at the end of the day or for team meetings)?
- ✓ How will communication occur? Examples include virtual face-to-face with Office 365 Teams, Zoom, by telephone, email, or meet at an agreed venue

- ✓ How often will the staff member report on their progress and how will this be done (in one-on-one meetings, team meetings, in shared documents, etc.)?
- ✓ How will the team share resources, updates, and support each other (e.g. Office 365 Teams, SharePoint, etc.)?
- ✓ Do the team need to share private phone or mobile phone numbers to maintain connectivity if University devices are not available for all?

## PERSONAL WELLBEING

- ✓ How will you create a safe and manageable location to work effectively?
- ✓ How will you remember to take rest breaks and look after yourself?

## DATA SECURITY AND PRIVACY

- ✓ It is important to maintain appropriate confidentiality and maintain data security. When working remotely where other people are around, be mindful of the University's legal obligations that personal or sensitive information is not improperly disclosed to anyone outside the organisation.
- ✓ How will you ensure you maintain the correct level of security? Do you need to set up VPN to access university systems? See setting your IT up to work at home for more information.