flexiblebydesign

Framework 2020-2023

Queensland
Government

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Message from the Director-General

The Department of Education (the department) is committed to fostering an inclusive and high performing workplace culture that is responsive to current and future needs. Flexible work is a strategic tool for us to deliver high quality service by attracting and retaining capable people, and enabling career and service delivery continuity.

In an evolving global environment, it is essential the department becomes increasingly adaptable, innovative and responsive. The framework provides a roadmap toward proactively implementing flexible work across the department, recognising that this will require each of us to play a role.

Vision

Every one of our people has an opportunity to experience a healthy work-life blend, enhancing their wellbeing and performance, leading to better service outcomes: *giving all children a great start, engaging young people in learning, creating safe and inclusive workplaces, and building Queensland's communities.*

Through mutually beneficial flexible work arrangements we:

- Attract and retain quality people that value results-driven and innovative approaches to service delivery.
- Create inclusive workplace cultures that support a diverse workforce that represents the communities we serve.

This framework has flexible work conversations at its core, to align individual needs with role requirements, service delivery outcomes, and team priorities. This approach optimises overall performance and results. Flexible work is for everyone in the department – we all have a right to make a request. It starts with a conversation about flexible work.

Department of Education context

Department of Education Strategic Plan 2020-2024
Flexible work is a key enabler of improvement, inclusion and collaboration—principles for what we aspire to be as an organisation.

People and Executive Services - Human Resources Operational & Recovery Plan 2020-2021
Human Resources is committed to shaping capable and confident people delivering responsive services; and to be an employer of choice. Building the capability and confidence of our workforce to adapt to new ways of working and minimise future disruption to service delivery aligns with the Flexible by Design framework.

We All Belong framework
Flexibility underpins our approach in the We All Belong workplace inclusion and diversity framework, through fostering an inclusive culture that supports our people to participate fully in the workplace. We value diversity of thought, experience and perspective and recognise that an inclusive workplace culture contributes to our success.

Flexibility as a solution

1. Retention of high quality people

Work-life balance

We know that flexibility is linked to higher engagement, lower stress and lower turnover in employees[1]; and that work-life balance is the number one factor that employees seek in Australia[2]. Flexible working fosters work-life balance and in-turn can increase wellbeing and reduce factors such as stress[3]. Providing flexibility can also support employees in growing skills, so we can retain and develop quality staff.

Working for Queensland survey indicates that of people intending to leave the organisation, 18% nominated balancing work and life commitments as a reason to leave[4].

In a geographically dispersed workforce, perception of work-life balance varies across the state. In school-based staff, there are variations of up to 7% among regions (in positive responses) when staff were asked about their workplace culture supporting work-life balance[5].

Flexible work culture

Previously, flexible work culture has been centred on the traditional view of an 'ideal worker'[6] and perceptions that flexibility is only for women with caring responsibilities. In fact, employees across all life stages seek and prioritise flexibility above other factors such as pay[7].

Working for Queensland survey shows that in 2019, 18% felt that their commitment would be questioned if they chose to work flexibly; and only 56% indicated that their manager proactively discussed flexible work arrangements[4].

Each year, approximately 150 teachers who have taken some type of maternity leave resign[8]. Retention can be enabled through staff accessing flexibility over resignation.

In school-based staff, perceptions of flexibility are gendered with females answering more positively in regard to flexible work (82%); and work-life balance (81%), as opposed to males responding to questions relating to flexible work (80%); and work-life balance (78%). Responding lowest in regard to flexible work were staff who identified as Gender X (57%) and work-life balance (49%)[5].

This trend in gendered perceptions of flexible work and work-life balance is also evident in non-school-based staff[4].

2. Attraction of capable and agile people

For the department to be positioned as an employer of choice for capable and agile people, flexibility is a key attraction driver.

To meet the needs of a shifting work environment, agile and flexible working is key to being responsive. With an increase in student numbers, changes to the curriculum and career mobility trends[9], the department will need to position itself as an employer of choice.

For example, in circumstances where positions are hard to fill, applying some flexibility to the role can help to attract quality applicants. A healthy work-life blend alongside choice and flexibility has been identified as a key factor in attracting quality people[10].

3. Service delivery continuity and improvement

To respond to shifting expectations of our community and to keep up with technological advancements, it is essential to innovate and create a culture of inclusion and wellbeing that enables different ways of thinking and working[10].

In 2020, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic directly impacted the workforce when remote working and learning was temporarily implemented. Longer lasting impacts will be evident in new ways of working to ensure we adapt to changing contexts now and in the future. COVID-19 has re-confirmed the critical role that our people have in the community and the ability of our workplaces to adapt to evolving environments and improve service delivery. Agile and flexible working are strategic imperatives to respond to complex problems and the shifting environmental context[10].

Improvements to performance achieved through a proactive approach to flexible work and supporting people to achieve balance, can offset absenteeism. When improving school performance, teacher wellbeing is an important consideration[11]. In a recent case study, the Royal Women's hospital found that supporting flexibility increases team stability and more reliable attendance with a reduction in unplanned leave[12]. As research has found that students are impacted when their 'usual class teacher' is absent[13], flexibility can play an important role in learning continuity by providing staff with an opportunity to increase their balance and sustain peak performance. For example, a teacher may be able to find greater balance through flexible work arrangements, which would allow for part of the class to be covered by another consistent teacher who is involved in the planning process, and collaboratively learning continuity is restored.

In 2019, 59% of corporate and regional staff indicated that they were using flexible work; and 18% were unaware of flexible work arrangements available in their team[4].

In 2019, 18% of school staff disagreed that their workplace offered flexible work arrangements[5].

Having a conversation about flexibility

In the department, there is a diverse range of roles and workplaces. Different arrangements suit different roles and different employees' needs and circumstances. Due to differing needs of employees, a 'one-size-fits-all' approach is no longer most effective[14]. A proactive, open and collaborative approach supports our workforce to continue delivering high quality service.

Flexibility starts with a conversation.

Flexible work conversations enable teams to create mutually beneficial flexible work approaches that align with:

- **role** and service delivery needs
- **team** priorities and outcomes
- **individual** needs

Role

Flexible work conversations

Individual

Team
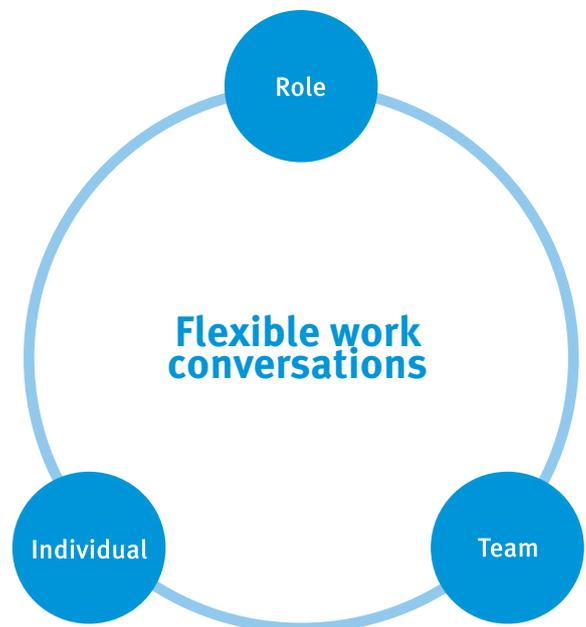
Flexible work conversation

Flexible work possibilities

- Part-time
- Job sharing
- Telecommuting
- Compressed/flexible accrued hours
- Purchased leave
- Deferred Salary Scheme

To find out more about the flexible work possibilities, view the Flexible by Design Toolkit.

Roadmap

The Flexible by Design framework provides clear direction to enabling flexible work conversations across the department. It is recognised that some schools and workplaces have been proactively implementing flexible work and are already realising its' benefits. As we shift from being responsive to immediate challenges faced through COVID-19, this brings an opportunity to reimagine what flexibility looks like now and in the future.

The adoption continuum is aimed at each one of us considering where we are at – some of us may see flexible working as an opportunity or a risk. Those who view the positive potential, will adopt flexible working and realise its benefits. While the right tools, policies and processes play a part in making flexibility work – progressing from 'emerging' to 'proactive' will be most supported by each one of us having a mindset to grow, create a culture of flexibility and realise the benefits of a proactive approach.

Consider: Where do you see yourself on the continuum?

	Emerging ››	Developing ››	Proactive
How is flexible work applied?	Flexible work requests are initiated by employees and are implemented as a reactive measure	Deliberate emphasis on flexible work, with application siloed and segmented.	Openly discuss flexibility; understanding the value of attracting and retaining our people; innovative and contemporary approaches to work are valued.
Who is flexible work for?	Flexible working is seen as being only available for staff returning from parental leave and not for leadership roles.	Managers accommodate individual requests, so work-life balance is considered.	Managers proactively discuss flexible work arrangements regularly in team meetings, workforce planning and people discussions.
How are arrangements managed?	Time and tasks used as primary measure of performance.	Teams accommodate arrangements, but feel others have to pick up the load left by flexible work arrangements.	Teams create mutually beneficial flexible work approaches that align with service delivery outcomes, team priorities, and optimise and overall performance and results.
How is health, safety and wellbeing impacted?	Rigid approach where work-life balance is not viewed as a consideration.	Managers and employees understand health, safety and wellbeing priorities.	An individual's health, safety and wellbeing is valued in flexible work conversations and solutions.

What role do you play?

Each one of us can play a role in fostering an inclusive and high performing workplace culture.

Managers	Individuals	Team
As a manager, I will be:	As an individual, I will be:	As a team, we will be:
Flexible – I will accommodate flexibility wherever possible and be innovative in designing roles.	**Flexible** – I understand I might need to occasionally change my arrangements to meet urgent service needs.	**Flexible** – We revise our ways of working, recognising colleagues may be on different schedules or in different locations.
Fair – I will treat all employees fairly, reasonably and consistently.	**Fair** – I understand arrangements that significantly impact service delivery are unlikely to work.	**Fair** – We are willing to change how we communicate so everyone can participate.
Collaborative – I will continue to discuss arrangements with all affected employees and design flexible working arrangements as a team.	**Collaborative** – I will continue to discuss my arrangements with those who might be affected.	**Collaborative** – We work together to develop flexible working arrangements that align with service delivery needs, team priorities and outcomes.
Transparent – I will have regular and effective conversations on agreed outcomes, service to be delivered and performance with people in the team.	**Transparent** – I will prioritise service needs, and have conversations on agreed outcomes, service to be delivered and performance.	**Transparent** – We will participate in team planning and discussions on team outcomes and service to be delivered.

Bringing flexible work to life

To make applying flexible work easy, use the following resources and tools:

Flexible by Design Toolkit

For managers and employees on implementing flexible work.

Flexible work arrangements policy and procedure

Departmental policy and steps on applying for, and responding to flexible work requests.

Flexible by Design online community*

Regular updates and learning opportunities, tips and examples of best practice flexible work.

How to have a flexible work conversation for managers and employees

Practical steps on having a conversation about flexible work.

Real examples

Stories and practical tips on implementing flexible work.

Performance

Positive performance management and flexibility.

Job sharing solutions

An innovative tool for job sharing arrangements.

Flexible by Design page summary

A quick summary of what you need to know, if you are short on time.

*register for the Flexible by Design online community using Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge

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Success measures

Through the department's staff School Opinion Survey and the Working for Queensland Survey, we will monitor the following success indicators:

1. Satisfaction with flexible working arrangements
2. Workplace culture supports flexible working

The legal context

Industrial Relations Act 2016

Queensland Government and local government employees are entitled to request flexible work arrangements for any reason under the *Industrial Relations Act 2016*. Flexible work arrangements may not suit every business or every situation. If this is the case and flexible arrangements cannot be accommodated, employers must be clear about the reasons for this when advising employees, within 21 business days of the request.

Human Rights Act 2019

The rights of employees to be treated fairly and to not be discriminated against are protected by the *Human Rights Act 2019*. This Act places obligations on public entities, which includes government departments and public servants to act and make decisions which are compatible with human rights. It protects 23 human rights and makes it unlawful for actions or decisions to be made in a way which is incompatible with those human rights and to fail to consider relevant human rights in decision making.

Anti-Discrimination Act 1991

If a reasonable request for flexible work arrangements is made because a worker has an attribute under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (such as disability, parental responsibilities, family responsibilities, religious belief) it may be unlawful discrimination if the employer refuses the request.

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2. Randstad (2020). Randstad employer brand research global report 2020. https://www.randstad.com/workforce-insights/employer-branding/research-reports/
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4. 2019 Working for Queensland Survey (n = 3,289 non-school-based staff). Note: n indicates total respondents of survey – not all questions are mandatory, and this number does not account for variance in individual question response counts.
5. 2019 School Opinion Survey (My workplace culture support people to achieve a good work-life balance n= 48,338 school-based staff; My workplace offers flexible work arrangements n=45,670 school-based staff). Note: n indicates total respondents of each survey question.
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