



Flexible hours arrangements

Work life balance fact sheet 5

What are flexible hours?

Flexible hours allow employees to work at times that fit with their personal and family commitments and which are also convenient to the employer. This may involve varying start and finish times, taking time off during the work day, or having rostered days off.

Benefits of flexible hours

Flexibility in the hours worked allows employees to better manage work and life commitments. It also makes good business sense by:

- providing greater flexibility in workforce management;
- responding to workload peaks and troughs;
- reducing absenteeism;
- reducing overtime and unproductive time;
- attracting and retaining key employees; and
- increasing employee satisfaction and commitment.

Flexible hours options

Flexible hours can be achieved in a number of ways, depending on business and employee needs.

Flexible start and finish times

Based on customer and business requirements, employers could prescribe the core hours of the day when employees have to be at work (e.g. between 10am & 4pm). This gives employees flexibility within the non-core hours at the beginning and end of the day (e.g. before 10am & after 4pm) so that they are able to meet personal/ family commitments without penalty, provided the missing hours are made up within that week or month.

Increased span of hours

Increasing the span of ordinary working hours involves allowing employees to start earlier and finish later (e.g. before 8am and after 6pm). Starting and finishing times can be negotiated so that they suit an employee's family/ personal responsibilities and meet work commitments.

Rostered or accrued days off

Employees could be allowed to work additional hours during the week in order to accrue sufficient hours to have a rostered day off once a fortnight or once a month. This does not change the total number of hours worked by an employee, only when the hours are worked.

Consultative rostering/ shift exchange

Rostering arrangements should be made in consultation with employees, taking into consideration both work requirements and employees' family responsibilities. Employees should also be allowed to exchange shifts to help them meet their family responsibilities.

Compressed working week/ extended shifts

The hours in a work cycle could be compressed into fewer, but longer shifts, e.g. 10 hour shifts so employees could elect to work their ordinary working hours over four days rather than five days.

Banking and making up time/ time in lieu

Employees can accumulate extra work hours and take time off in lieu of payment when it is convenient to the employer and employee. Employees are given the equivalent time off on an hour-for-hour basis for the additional hours worked. If employees have not banked enough hours to cover a particular absence, they will be required to make up the time within an agreed timeframe. Accumulated hours could be banked for school holidays, or for ad-hoc or unexpected family matters such as medical appointments, pupil free days, school or sporting events.

Records will need to be kept of additional hours worked. Employers may wish to consider placing a ceiling on the number of hours or days that can be accumulated, and a time limit for the clearance of accrued hours to prevent it becoming a leave liability.

Annualised hours

Employees work the same number of hours over a full year but have flexibility as to when the hours are worked. The hours of work may be expressed on an annual basis or monthly basis rather than a daily or weekly basis. Employees receive their normal weekly pay every week regardless of the number of hours worked. At the end of an agreed period, the actual hours worked are reconciled with the required hours for that period. Any shortfall in hours worked will need to be made up, and any excess could be cleared or carried over to the next period.

Implementing flexible hours arrangements

Employers should ensure that any flexible hours arrangements are consistent with obligations under the award, agreement, or contract of employment in the workplace. It is important to have clear policies relating to flexible work arrangements and it is best if these are documented and accessible to all staff. The criteria and the processes for requesting and approving flexible work arrangements need to be open and understood by all staff. Policies should provide employees with information about what arrangements are available, and provide managers with guidance on assessing requests from employees.

Where to go for more information

Further information about work life balance strategies is available from the Department of Commerce work life website www.worklife.wa.gov.au