



Flexible leave arrangements

Work life balance fact sheet 4

What is flexible leave?

Flexible leave allows employees to take leave at times that fit with their personal and family commitments and which are also convenient to the employer. This may involve using leave in small amounts – such as 1 day for a special event – or extending leave entitlements to enable longer absences from work.

Benefits of flexible leave

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

- providing greater flexibility in workforce management;
- reducing unplanned absences and employment related costs;
- responding to workload peaks and troughs;
- minimising the need for relief to cover long absences;
- attracting and retaining key employees; and
- increasing employee satisfaction and commitment.

Flexible leave options

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

Flexible annual leave

Employees can take individual days or even half days of annual leave or allow leave to be taken at very short notice to accommodate family and life commitments. This may reduce unplanned absenteeism, assist with the clearance of annual leave, and minimise the need for relief arrangements for longer absences.

Flexible long service leave

Employees are able to take long service leave in single weeks or even single days. This may help employers to manage long service leave liabilities and minimise the need for relief arrangements for longer absences.

Ceremonial / cultural leave

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other employees have access to annual leave or unpaid leave to meet traditional law, custom, cultural and family obligations, or to participate in ceremonial, cultural and religious activities. This may help reduce unplanned absences.

Purchased leave / self funded leave

Employees work their normal hours at reduced pay and take additional paid leave during the year. The income earned for the reduced weeks worked is averaged and paid over the full year.

The most common arrangement is 48/52 where employees forgo 4 weeks of earnings to gain an extra 4 weeks annual leave (giving a total of 8 weeks). Some larger organisations offer a 4/5 years scheme where employees receive 80 per cent of their normal income for a five year period - they work for 4 years then take the 5th year off as purchased leave.

Other options such as taking a three or six month period of leave can also be arranged.

A simple arrangement for self-funded leave is for employees to take leave without pay as single days or for a longer period to cover school holidays or other personal/ family needs.

Leave without pay

Employers may approve employees taking a period of unpaid leave for personal reasons such as to care for a seriously sick partner, child or parent or for other family responsibilities, religious or cultural reasons, study purposes, competitive sports, travel or other personal reasons. Employers will need to be able to provide employees with a suitable job on their return from leave. Employers may require that all annual leave entitlements are used before employees take leave without pay.

As for all periods of extended leave, employers should make arrangements for employees to keep in touch with developments at work through regular contact, newsletters, and social activities.

Implementing flexible leave arrangements

All flexible leave arrangements should be 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 website www.worklife.wa.gov.au