Flex-connect framework

weall**belong**
embracing workplace inclusion, equity and diversity
FLEX-CONNECT

Queensland
Government

Message from the Director-General

I am pleased to share the department's new Flex-connect framework and practical resources for teams, managers and employees. Embedding the framework and using the resources will support the equitable and consistent application of contemporary flexible working practices across the department.

As a department, we seek to optimise flexible working arrangements by taking business needs and strategic imperatives, such as workplace inclusion and diversity, into consideration. Embracing flexible work increases workforce participation and opportunities for career development, enhances work-life balance and job satisfaction, and ensures we have a workforce well positioned to deliver on our vision of a progressive, high-performing education system. Flexible work conversations also serve as an excellent opportunity to agree on clearer service delivery expectations and performance measures, and refine our focus on organisational outcomes.

I encourage you to start with team conversations focused on what is important for your team as a whole, including a robust assessment of the service delivery standards that ensure you are contributing to a high-performing system. Taking a team-based approach to flexible work acknowledges that individual arrangements will likely impact the whole team, and as such, options and solutions should be considered with everyone in mind.

It is important that flexible working has a positive or neutral impact on team outcomes and balances workplace coverage across the working week, team commitments and deliverables, accessibility of team members and the impact on stakeholder relationships. While we embrace the benefits of remote working, we also acknowledge that working in the office fosters connection, collaboration and innovation, enhances belonging, and supports the positive working relationships and culture that are fundamental to both the performance of our teams and the wellbeing of our employees.

The Flex-connect framework and the Managing flexible work guide support managers to operate productively in this context.

I look forward to the improved wellbeing and service delivery outcomes that can be achieved by refining our approach to flexible work.

Michael De'Ath
Director-General
Department of Education

Introduction

The Department of Education is committed to fostering a supportive workplace culture prioritising workforce diversity, inclusion, wellbeing and productivity.

This framework outlines the department's commitment to agile and flexible work, and the principles that support successful implementation of flexible work approaches.

Flexible work is here to stay. Both employees and employers have experienced its benefits and it is now a common part of modern employment approaches.

Importantly, flexible work is not just about working from home and it is not just for 'office workers'—with many options available for non-frontline and frontline employees.

Designing inclusive, outcomes-focused, flexible workplaces requires a whole-of-department approach.

Success is achieved when teams connect and discuss flexible work approaches that balance individual, team, customer, leader and department needs.

The sector's Working for Queensland survey data shows wellbeing correlates with teams and managers that discuss and design appropriate flexible work approaches together.

Teams should regularly discuss flexible work approaches that will deliver better outcomes for customers and stakeholders as well as for all team members, the team as a whole and the department.

By providing clarity, guidance and vision about the department's commitment to flexible work, we will reach fairer, more transparent outcomes. This will benefit current employees, as well potential new recruits.

Flexible work arrangements have significant benefits for employees and workplaces, including:

- enhanced capacity to attract and retain people with critical capabilities and in-demand roles

- reduced employee turnover, resulting in lower recruitment costs and better return on investment for training

- improved employee health and wellbeing, reduced absenteeism and improved output

- increased workplace collaboration, commitment and motivation

- greater job satisfaction, better work performance and increased productivity

- creation of a fair and equitable workplace culture

- flexibility in responding to employees' changing life circumstances

- effective service delivery through a representative workforce and ability to meet customer demand for agile, adaptive and responsive services.

Principles

The 6 main principles that guide flexible working are:

1. Equity

Flexible work supports equity and inclusion, recognising that we do not all start from the same place and, by engaging in conversations on a case-by-case basis, we can make adjustments to support inclusion. Some level of flexibility is available to all employees. All requests are open for consideration.

2. Teamwork

Teams design approaches that suit all. The best approach is where everyone in the team understands and balances their individual role and collective obligations to deliver outcomes.

3. Balance

Approaches are considered in the context of individual circumstances, such as obligations to culture, community and family, along with the needs of the team, customers and leaders, and organisational priorities.

4. Wellbeing

Integrated, proactive approaches to health, safety and wellbeing, including psychosocial hazards and cultural safety, are prioritised.
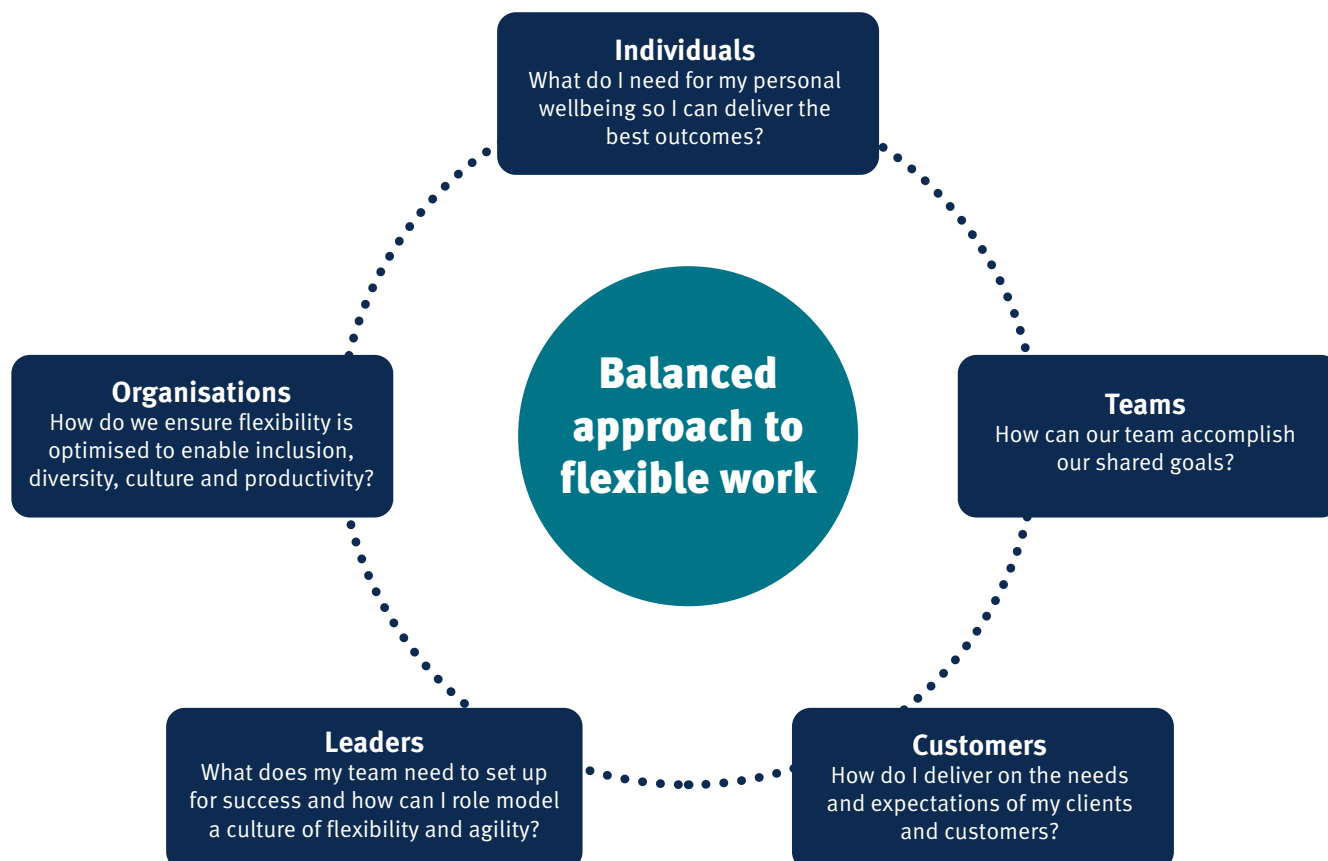
5. Performance

Employees work together to build a progressive, high-performing education system to realise the potential of every student.

6. Leadership by example

Senior leaders role model flexible work and seek innovative and practical ways to embed access across the organisation.

The most successful flexible working is where the needs of individuals, teams, customers, leaders, and organisations are balanced.

Individuals
What do I need for my personal wellbeing so I can deliver the best outcomes?

Teams
How can our team accomplish our shared goals?

Customers
How do I deliver on the needs and expectations of my clients and customers?

Leaders
What does my team need to set up for success and how can I role model a culture of flexibility and agility?

Organisations
How do we ensure flexibility is optimised to enable inclusion, diversity, culture and productivity?

Balanced approach to flexible work

Evolution of flexible work approaches

Given the diversity of workforces across the sector and different approaches to date, organisations will be at different stages of evolution in how they approach and embed flexible work. The Flex-connect framework provides the outcomes towards which the sector should aim.

	Traditional	Developing	Flex-connect framework
Employees	• Initiated by employees and addressed in private. • Priority is given to parents/carers. • Limited autonomy in how, when or where work is done.	• Requests accommodated to achieve work-life integration. • Limited development opportunities for employees working flexibly. • The benefits of workplace presence are ambiguous. • Limited leadership participation.	• Everyone can request flexible work approaches. It is the norm. • Employees show personal agility and resilience to adapt to changing contexts. • Cultural safety is understood and recognised in flexible work agreements. • Collaboration is optimised and positive culture is prioritised and built.
Teams	• Distrust. • Excessive hours seen as a badge of honour. • Limits development opportunities.	• Workload management is not adapted to different modes of working across the team. • Team discussions are brief and limited.	• Teams are proactive and engaged in providing input into the design of flexible work approaches, and are supportive of co-workers' flexible work arrangements. • Outcomes address the principles of equity, teamwork, balance, wellbeing, performance and leadership. • Solutions require culture, capability, policies and systems as enablers. • Improved ways of managing flexibility are factored into team practices (e.g. meeting protocols and planned social engagement.)
Managers	• Formal and static approaches. • Risk averse and bureaucratic approval processes. • Health, safety and wellbeing is not prioritised. • Outdated performance measures. • Low participation by managers or senior leaders. • Limited role modelling. • Inconsistent decisions.	• Agreements convenient to individuals and their manager. • Managers responsible for managing risks. • Flexible working is used as a benefit or reward for high performance. • Health, safety and wellbeing are organisational priorities.	• Managers are confident that the team will thrive and deliver quality outcomes. • There is some flexibility for all roles, including frontline. • Managers and leaders actively model flexible working. • Performance is managed and assessed on the outcomes and quality of the work.
Organisations	• Regulated approach. • Technology hampers progress. • Recruitment offers designated workplace location. • Workspaces designed for 9-5 worker with limited collaboration spaces and technology.	• Workplaces designed with collaborative spaces. • Technology and infrastructure available. • Access to diversity and latent talent pools improved. • Promoted during recruitment and as a business and employee benefit. • Some use of distributed work centres.	• Approaches are mutually beneficial and aligned with service delivery requirements. • Workplaces are designed for collaboration and optimal workplace presence. • Strategic workforce planning enables mixed modes of flexible work. • Information about options available is promoted to job seekers and discussed with job applicants. • Storytelling is regularly used to reinforce the benefits of flexible work. • Distributed work centres thrive and offer cross-agency collaboration. • Technology eliminates bias and enables effective remote work.

Enablers of flexible work

Culture

- Support – is demonstrated at all levels to successfully embed flexible work practices.
- Trust – is the default and all parties agree to a shared responsibility.
- Role-modelling – flexible working is visibly led by senior leaders and managers.
- Balance – harmony between work and life is a key goal.
- Communication – is frequent, open and honest between individuals, teams and managers.
- Exploration –pilot approaches, and challenge assumptions so you can continually adapt and improve.
- Engagement and team contribution – the best outcomes come from teams working together to design balanced flexible working approaches.

Capabilities

- Collaboration – co-design and sharing of expertise will achieve better outcomes.
- Information sharing – innovation and networking across the organisation and the sector will improve practice.
- Cultural capability – flexible work can support the cultural needs and obligations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.
- Digital literacy – is fundamental, requiring focus on reskilling and upskilling employees.

Systems

- Technology – hardware and software investment necessary to enable flexibility.
- Workplace design –allows for creativity, connection, technology access, safety and convenience.
- Job design – provides role clarity, accountability, appropriate authority and autonomy, and a sense of contribution and accomplishment.
- Quality data – a system to capture information from entering and exiting employees about the value of flexible work.
- Evaluation and review – is embedded as practice for consistency, equity and capturing the realised benefits of flexible work practices.

Guidelines

- Employment frameworks – provide the relevant legislation and industrial instruments.
- Flexible work guidelines – are clear and available to employees.
- Positive performance management – elevates high performance as a business priority.
- Health, safety and wellbeing frameworks – focus on creating healthy and safe workplaces, where people can thrive and achieve their best.
- Workforce planning – supports workforce stability and the ability to deliver services.
- Recruitment – information is available to jobseekers and employees about the availability of flexible work.

Flexible working in practice

Teams and workplaces are encouraged to take shared responsibility, collaborate and seek fair solutions that balance work and personal needs. This framework provides the principles to guide flexible work practice that will enable the management of business imperatives, team and individual performance. Embedding the framework into practice will require a shift in approach for many. Conversations about flexible work will cover a variety of options and each may have their own industrial instruments, policies and procedures which should be used to assess requests.

Flexible working options

The department offers a variety of work arrangements which may support flexible working. Different options suit different service delivery requirements, roles and different employees' needs and circumstances. Types of arrangements which may support flexible work include:

- Part-time
- Job sharing
- Remote working
- Compressed/flexible/accrued hours
- Purchased leave (non-teaching employees)
- Deferred salary scheme (permanent teachers).

Part-time work

Part-time employees work less than the prescribed full-time weekly hours. They accrue benefits such as leave on a pro-rata basis.

Part-time work is one of the most frequently used flexible work options in the department. It may be used to support family or caring responsibilities, study, a phased return to work after parental leave or other extended leave, or to facilitate retirement on a graduated basis.

Employees who are returning from parental leave are legally entitled to request part-time work until their child is school age under section 74 of the Industrial Relations Act 2016.

Likely benefits include:
- employees are better able to balance work, life and family responsibilities
- reduced absenteeism
- retention of skilled employees.

Possible issues for consideration include:
- implications for work redesign
- continuity of service delivery
- consideration of whether a job-share arrangement is needed.

Keys to successful part-time work include:
- clear roles and responsibilities with an agreed workload that is consistent with the part-time fraction
- management and other staff attitudes are positive and supportive
- part-time employees feel they are making a full contribution to the workplace — this includes participation in staff meetings and work events
- part-time employees have equitable access to professional and career development opportunities
- regularly reviewing the flexible working arrangement with open two-way communication.

Flexible working in practice

Job sharing

Job sharing involves the sharing of duties and responsibilities of one position between 2 employees. Job sharing arrangements can be very flexible and tailored to suit a variety of circumstances, for example 2 x 0.5 positions, or a 0.3 and a 0.7 position. Some job share arrangements have 2 x 0.6 positions and this provides for an overlap of time when both employees are at work.

Likely benefits include:

- multiple skills and experience for (close to) one salary
- diverse perspectives on the one job
- mutual support, peer review and development opportunities
- ability to cover for absence where possible.

Possible issues for consideration include:

- ensuring the role has been designed so it can be shared effectively
- increased management and coordination load
- the success of a job-sharing arrangement hinges on matching the compatibility of the 2 employees — understand that not everyone is suited to a job-share arrangement
- need for additional communication mechanisms between job sharers, team members and manager.

Keys to successful job sharing include:

- job share partners jointly negotiate the arrangement matching their skills and capabilities
- managers/principals clearly communicate work tasks, expectations and goals for job sharers
- the role has been well designed and clearly split into 2 sets of accountabilities
- agree on the basis for sharing use of the same desk, telephone, computer or other equipment (as required)
- arrangement between job sharers is regularly reviewed.

Remote working

Remote working means working away from the central workplace — this could be employees working from home or at a regional office location. It can be for short periods or as part of a long-term arrangement, and can occur on set days or as the work demands.

Employees who are working remotely need a dedicated work area where they can work undisturbed. All the equipment and resources needed to do the job safely should be accessible.

Likely benefits include:

- improved work–life integration
- reduced commuting time and reduced costs as employees can work closer to home.

Possible issues for consideration include:

- employees require a dedicated work area with appropriate technology to allow seamless integration and communication with colleagues and customers
- number and spread of days to be worked in a remote working arrangement considering the impact on team members and team productivity

Flexible working in practice

- the ability of an employee to work autonomously without direct supervision
- if this option is suitable for the operational requirements of the business unit.

Keys to successful remote working include:

- trust between manager/employee and negotiated deliverables
- technological savviness and the ability of the employee to manage their own connectivity
- high-quality technology and equipment
- regular communication with the team, ensuring all employees can participate in meetings, either virtually or in the office
- equitable access of team members to remote working opportunities, including sharing of 'popular' remote working days
- presence of at least a portion of the team in the normal workplace on any normal work day to facilitate cross-team and customer relationships and service.

The Flexible working OnePortal page provides further information and resources for employees and managers to help guide the development of flexible work agreements, and to embed practices that will help teams create a flexible, collaborative work culture.

Compressed/flexible/accrued hours

Compressed hours involve working standard full-time hours over fewer days than normal, for example, working a 4-day week or 9-day fortnight.

Flexible working hours involves agreed start and finish times using accrued time (also known as flex-time). These arrangements have no impact on entitlements and there is no change to the total hours that employees work.

Start and finish times can be negotiated between employee and manager. Employees may use this arrangement for a specific purpose such as to start late or leave early on certain days utilising their accrued hours or flex time.

Likely benefits include:

- hours can be tailored to meet changing or fluctuating needs of employees and the workplace
- increased availability of services due to longer office hours and increased time to work without interruption
- full-time positions can be retained while balancing multiple responsibilities
- effective way of covering work at peak times.

Flexible working in practice

Possible issues for consideration include:

- the need for a clear business requirement for an employee to accrue hours — this needs to be defined in the flexible working arrangement
- ensure sufficient staff available during core business hours
- if this option is suitable for the operational requirements of the business unit
- supervisory implications of employees working over a greater span of hours.

Keys to successful compressed/flexible hours include:

- consider safety and security of employees working later hours
- regular review of arrangements.

Purchased leave (non-teaching employees)

Purchased leave provides public sector employees with access to additional annual leave and an annualised salary. This flexible work option assists eligible employees with family responsibilities, study commitments, personal necessity or where workloads fluctuate through the year. Purchased leave may particularly suit the needs of employees with family responsibilities to spread their annual leave to match school holidays.

Purchased leave is effectively unpaid leave but the salary reduction is spread over 12 months. Further information on these purchased leave options is set out in the Purchased leave and deferred salary scheme procedure.

Likely benefits include:

- employees can access additional leave without loss of service continuity
- leave is planned well in advance so staffing arrangements can be organised
- helps to attract and retain employees who require additional leave.

Possible issues for consideration include:

- plan relieving arrangements to cover absences
- need to ensure employees understand the financial implications of the arrangement as there is a loss of salary each fortnight; taxation and superannuation will be affected.

Keys to successful purchased leave arrangements include:

- ensuring a written application is provided for each 12-month period of purchased leave; applications are accepted twice yearly for the commencement of each calendar and financial year (that is, May and November for commencement in July and January)
- review and monitor arrangement each year.

Flexible working in practice

Deferred salary scheme (permanent teachers)

The deferred salary scheme allows all permanent state school teachers to defer part of their annual salary over 4 years. The deferred salary component is then paid to an employee during the fifth year while they access a pre-approved period of sabbatical leave.

This flexible work option assists eligible state school teachers to pursue further study or other personal activities over a period of one year's leave.

Likely benefits include:

- teachers can access additional leave without loss of service continuity
- leave is planned well in advance so staffing arrangements can be organised
- helps to attract and retain teachers who want to access a sabbatical period and then return to their teaching role.

Possible issues for consideration include:

- need to ensure teachers understand the financial implications of the arrangement as there is a loss of salary each fortnight; taxation and superannuation will be affected
- plan appropriate staffing arrangements to cover absences during the sabbatical year leave period
- new principals need to be made aware of the agreement if the teacher changes locations or positions throughout the 5 years.

Keys to successful deferred salary arrangements include:

- teachers undertake prior financial planning
- ensuring a written application is provided to take part in the scheme as per the Purchased leave and deferred salary scheme procedure.