

WORK, FAMILY AND LIFE BALANCE A FRAMEWORK FOR FLEXIBLE WORK PRACTICES AT SOUTHERN CROSS UNIVERSITY

INTRODUCTION

Southern Cross University is committed to creating a workplace environment which supports employees achieving a balance between work and family life, and has facilitated flexible work arrangements that enhance work life for employees.

The University acknowledges that personal responsibilities, including family commitments affect both men and women and may have a significant impact on employment and educational opportunities. In supporting the balance of work and personal commitments, the University recognises that individuals from different cultures have different responsibilities. As an equal opportunity employer, the University is committed to achieving cultural diversity and inclusiveness in the application of its workplace policies and practices.

Employees may request flexible and part-time work arrangements. The availability of flexible work options is subject to University policies, the terms and conditions of contracts of employment, overall work unit needs and will also be considered in the context of legislative obligations.

BENEFITS OF BALANCING WORK, LIFE AND FAMILY COMMITMENTS

For an employer, flexible work arrangements that enable employees to balance work, family and other aspects of their lives assist in attracting and retaining valued employees, and may be a source of increased productivity.

For an employee, a collaborative and adaptable working environment which achieves a balance of work and personal needs and adapts to changes in personal circumstances over time may reduce levels of stress, ill health and encourage continued participation in the workforce.

THE LEGISLATIVE AND INDUSTRIAL FRAMEWORK

The University is bound by extensive federal and state legislation which renders it unlawful to discriminate on a number of grounds, including:

- parental/carer status and/or family responsibilities;
- sex, marital status or pregnancy; and
- dismissing employees on the grounds of their family responsibilities.

The University's [collective agreement](#) and policies and procedures incorporate these legislative requirements and provide flexible working hours and generous leave arrangements as options to assist employees in balancing their work, life and family obligations.

Good Practice Guidelines for Flexible Work Practices at SCU

What are Flexible Work Options?

The range of flexible work initiatives available at SCU can be grouped into the following three main areas:

1) Work time variations

- ongoing part-time work
- temporary variation in working hours
- job-sharing
- part-year employment with or without deferred salary
- short absences from work
- flexible start and finish times

2) Leave provisions

- parental leave
- family leave
- long service leave on full or half pay
- annual leave
- leave without pay

3) Supportive structures, programs and environment

- phased return to work from parental leave
- breastfeeding and baby change rooms
- employee wellness program
- employee assistance program

NEGOTIATING FLEXIBLE WORK OPTIONS

Flexible work options are to be discussed and negotiated between employees and their supervisors, having regard to the following considerations:

- is the proposed flexible work option allowed or prohibited by a relevant industrial agreement or the employee's contract of employment?;
- will the proposed flexible work option provide the appropriate work life balance for the employee?;
- what is the impact of the flexible work option on the employee's role and the requirements of the team and work unit?;
- how will the flexible work option be managed to achieve continuity of work and responsibilities?;
- what are the benefits of the flexible work option to all impacted by the change?; and
- what is the time period for the flexible work option?

Key Principles for Negotiating and Implementing Flexible Work Options

There are a number of key principles underpinning the successful negotiation and implementation of flexible work options. These include:

- *organisational and management commitment to work–life balance*
- *mutual agreement - balancing individual and organisational requirements*
- *transparent decision making and workplace consultation*
- *regular review*

Organisational commitment to work–life balance

In order for flexible work options to be available and accessible in a work environment, support from supervisors is critical. Managing flexible work is part of good management practice. Different flexible work options meet different needs at different stages in a employee's working life. In order for employees to access the most suitable arrangement for their life and work situation, information and consultation is important.

Management support is crucial to the successful implementation and ongoing viability of flexible work options. This support requires planning, collaboration and encouragement.

Mutual flexibility: Balancing individual and organisational requirements through mutual agreement

The ability and opportunity to access any of the various flexible options need not be a unilateral 'top down' or 'bottom up' arrangement. Discussion between supervisors and employees must occur to achieve mutual agreement about the best option for the workplace and the individual. A particular flexible option may not be appropriate in the short term, but could be considered at a later stage. Further, certain flexible work options may be more appropriate for some work units and not others.

Transparent and consultative decision making

Employees should discuss their requirements with their supervisor. before reaching an agreement regarding the changes required. In some cases, if there are concerns about the consequences of a particular work option, a trial period could be introduced to determine whether both employee and work unit needs are being met. Other employees should also be consulted, where appropriate.

Documentation

The documentation required will depend on the type of flexible work arrangement being implemented. If necessary, advice should be obtained from HR Services.

Regular review of flexible work option

Regular review and monitoring of the flexible working arrangement is important to assess the appropriateness of a particular work option for both the employee and the work unit. As individual and organisational needs change over time and unexpected situations arise from time to time, flexible work arrangements may require review.

It is recommended that review mechanisms and methods of assessing feasibility be agreed upon prior to the commencement of a particular arrangement. The impact of the arrangement on the employee's work-life balance as well as the impact on the work unit need to be assessed. It is also important for both parties to consider the impact the arrangement has on the employee's career development, access to training and other workplace benefits. One mechanism for reviewing flexible work options is the employee's annual PMDR.

Staying in contact

Supervisors and employees should ensure the employee continues to be informed of relevant University matters. This may be done in a number of ways such as maintaining email accounts and receiving information on any major changes taking place in the workplace.

Supervisory Considerations about Flexible Work Options

Communication

Problems associated with more flexible working options can generally be addressed through reviewing practices and ensuring that expectations of employees and supervisors are clearly established. The work unit may need to review its methods of communicating to ensure that no employee is regularly excluded.

Organising Meetings

Organising meetings in the work unit during scheduled work days can be difficult if there are a number of part-time positions. Possible solutions to overcoming these problems may involve organising alternative meeting days, nominating a supervisor to be responsible for discussing important matters with absent employees or asking employees to occasionally attend meetings on their 'day off' and to take time-off-in-lieu.

Additional Costs

Before agreeing to changed work arrangements, supervisors need to consider the potential for additional costs.

Continuity

Lack of continuity of client contact has been regarded as a potential difficulty in providing less than full-time employment options. In some circumstances this can be overcome by each part-time employee advising clients of their days at work and making arrangements to brief co-workers on ongoing, current matters. This briefing may be via email, phone, message book, or in person if hours overlap at all. Whichever method the work unit adopts, the solution is to ensure regular, clear and open communication.

Part-time Work

The following considerations apply to various types of part-time work offered by the University.

- **Support:** Part-time employees are entitled to the same University support as full-time employees.
- **Job Design:** The principles of good job design should be adhered to for all jobs, whether part-time or full-time. Part-time work should be designed so that the workload is commensurate with the number of hours worked, offers varied tasks and involves skill development.
- **Relieving Allowance:** Employees who work part-time hours should be regarded as available to perform higher duties; the employee may decline if a change of work pattern is involved, but it should not be assumed that the employee will not be available.
- **Pro-rata Entitlements:** Part-time work attracts similar entitlements to full-time work, on a pro rata basis. Employees are advised to carefully consider the impact on Superannuation benefits if they are seeking to reduce their work hours.

<i>Checklist for Supervisors considering requests for Flexible Work Options</i>	
Understand the flexible work options available at SCU. Consult with your HR Manager, if necessary.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be considerate of the personal circumstances of employees and the possible conflicts they may experience between work, life and family commitments.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider the cost of not offering flexible work options - the competing demands of home and work which may lead to increased stress, lower morale and possible turnover of staff.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Brainstorm advantages and disadvantages of different options with the employee.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Address any employee's concerns that accessing flexible work options may have a negative impact on their career progression.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Understand any work unit barriers that render a particular option difficult to implement.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider other available options and programs that could assist a employee's work, family and life balance. Allow for adequate time to consider all options.	<input type="checkbox"/>
If uncertain about the feasibility of an option, propose a trial of the specific option for a specified period to assess whether there are genuine structural or organisational reasons why the flexible work arrangement is inappropriate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
If, after a trial period, you consider the arrangement is unsatisfactory, provide clear reasons to the employee.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure PMDR reviews take into account the workloads and performance indicators agreed in the context of the work required and performed.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Ensure you have completed the appropriate documentation for the arrangement and have obtained the necessary approvals, if required.	

Checklist for Employees Requesting Flexible Work Options	
Initially, talk to your supervisor to ascertain what flexible options are available and appropriate. Consult with your HR Manager if you require further information.	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be realistic about all the factors that impinge on your work, life and family balance and recognise when life and family issues impact on your work	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consider the implications of a particular work option on salary, superannuation and other entitlements	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be flexible – consider other options that could also meet your work-life balance needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be realistic about the impact of a proposed option on the needs of the work unit and your colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Identify barriers and opportunities to working more flexibly in your particular work unit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Analyse job requirements within the context of workplace needs	<input type="checkbox"/>
When negotiating flexibility, present a considered proposal which identifies the advantages for the team and work unit	<input type="checkbox"/>
Demonstrate your own flexibility by being prepared to 'give' and 'take' during times when work demands are high	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be prepared to address concerns that may be expressed by your supervisor or colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be prepared to trial a particular option for a specific period	<input type="checkbox"/>
Make sure you have a written agreement of the arrangement.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Specific Examples of Flexible Work Practices at SCU

- **Part-time work**

Part-time work is one of the most frequently utilised flexible work options at SCU. Part-time employees have continuity of employment and accrue benefits, such as annual leave, sick leave, maternity leave and long service leave on a pro-rata basis. Part-time work can involve a reduction in hours over a short or medium term. It may be used to enable a phased return from extended leave, or a phased exit before retirement, subject to the capacity of the work unit to vary the employee's time fraction.

- **Job Sharing**

Job sharing is a voluntary arrangement in which one job is shared between part-time employees. Supervisors may use this option as a way to attract and recruit employees with unusual skills, to increase the range of skills available and/or to assist a employee who wishes to reduce their hours of work. Job sharer partners may be employed on a part-time basis, or may be full-time employees who have reduced their level of appointment on either a continuing or temporary basis. Clear goal-setting is essential for each person, with equitable assessment of each individual's performance.

- **Temporary Variation to Working Hours**

Employees may apply to have their working hours varied, on either a temporary or continuing basis. This arrangement often occurs after parental leave to allow employees to readily meet their family responsibilities. However requests for such a change are not restricted to employees with family responsibilities - all genuine requests will receive consideration by the University.

Where a temporary transfer to part-time employment is negotiated, the employee maintains a right of return to their full-time position when the period of the temporary transfer expires.

- **Part-Year Employment**

Part-year employment offers employees a number of weeks unpaid leave per year. This means that employees work a certain number of weeks per year, by agreement with the supervisor, with an agreed number of weeks unpaid leave, and recreation leave on a pro-rata basis. The employee may request to utilise a 'deferred salary scheme' where their salary is spread over 52 weeks per annum.

- **Additional Annual Leave in Lieu of Leave Loading**

As an alternative to receiving payment of leave loading, employees may elect to receive additional annual leave. A full-time employee will receive an additional three and one half days annual leave and a part-time employee will receive a pro-rata entitlement. The three and one half days are non-cumulative and must normally be taken during December of the year in which the payment is due.