



THE LAW SOCIETY  
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

## BUILDING BLOCKS FOR FLEXIBLE WORKING

If your firm is interested in providing employees with the option to work flexibly, it is worth considering what you can do to create an organisational culture that facilitates flexible working.

### Commitment

It is important to communicate internally about the types of flexible working arrangements that your firm wishes to offer employees and in what circumstances. The information provided to employees about types of flexible work arrangements that are available should be consistent. Flexibility should be consistently promoted and role modelled by senior leadership to empower staff to engage with flexible working.

If you do not have one already, your firm should develop a policy that supports flexible working arrangements and outlines the associated procedures for your firm. The policy could include a template for a Flexible Work Plan, to be developed with individuals when their request for a flexible working arrangement is approved. The policy should set out the process for reviewing a flexible working arrangement so that adjustments can be made as required by the employee and/or the firm.

### Support managers

To ensure that the policy can be implemented in the best possible way, it is important to provide managers with training on managing employees who work flexibly. This should include the business case for flexible working, how to assess applications for flexible work arrangements and how to supervise employees who are working flexibly (shifting focus from managing and judging performance based on 'desk time', to output based management).

Managers should be made aware that it is important that they consciously work towards managing employees in a consistent and objective manner when considering and assessing flexible working arrangements. It is also critical to the success of a flexible working policy that all managers actively practice flexibility and demonstrate supportive behaviours and trust of staff to deliver on professional obligations.

Flexibility works best when it is promoted as a professional enabler rather than an incentive or performance management tool.



## Encourage people to think about working flexibly

You may wish to actively invite employees to consider how they want to work and where. If they identify that they would like an opportunity to work flexibly, employees should be encouraged to have open conversations with their manager about what would be needed to make this happen and how the arrangement would look.

Ensure the workplace culture supports frank and clear communication and disclosure regarding accessing flexibility so that staff accessing flexibility feel supported and not tentative or nervous about potential adverse impact on their career progression. Successful flexibility programs promote the concept of 'flex for everyone', males and females, senior and junior staff, for whatever reason, without judgment regarding the need for flexibility.

## Build organisational support

It is critical to ensure that your firm has effective access to technology to make working flexibly offsite a practical reality. In many firms, existing moves towards electronic document management systems will assist this.

A communications plan may assist an employee who is working flexibly so that colleagues and clients know when and how he or she is contactable. This will help the team to get in touch with team members at appropriate times and assist the employee to maintain a barrier between personal and professional life, even when working remotely.

If your organisation has limited experience with employees working flexibly, you may wish to consider initially trialling flexible working arrangements for a period of time. At the end of this time, the success and challenges of the period can be assessed both in relation to the individual employee and also the systems in place within your firm.

Celebrating and promoting flexible working arrangements within your firm and with clients can help to promote a culture of flexible working. This can be a good way to articulate your firm's commitment to flexibility.