

# FLEXIBLE WORKING AT ECU

A strategy to increase awareness and access to flexible work.

Approved by University Executive 13 September 2017

## The Case for Workplace Flexibility at ECU

Achieving the strategic vision outlined in ECU Strategic Plan 2017-21 – World Ready will depend on the contributions and the performance of all of our staff, Academic and Professional. Attracting, developing and retaining dedicated and talented employees will enable ECU to continue to grow our reputation internationally. ECU has also affirmed a commitment to diversity and gender equality and recognises the resulting benefit provided to innovation, creativity and productivity, as well as the broader social gains.

ECU has a strategic objective to “recruit and retain high performing, talented Academics and highly-skilled Professional staff”<sup>1</sup>. Building upon existing flexible working arrangements and developing an organisational culture that genuinely supports flexible working will ensure that ECU continues to attract quality applicants in an internationally competitive employment market and be an ‘Employer of Choice’ on a range of measures. The benefits for employers are through maintaining a productive and engaged workforce, while employees have access to improved work-life balance. Flexible work is considered one of the most effective interventions in advancing gender equality and increasing female participation in the workplace<sup>2</sup>.

Flexible work is also a core element in providing a healthy workplace which promotes physical and mental wellbeing. It assists those employees with existing health issues to adopt work arrangements which enable them to effectively manage their condition and sustain their workplace performance.

Access to flexible working arrangements and leave options have been a feature of ECU working conditions for a considerable period. However, as other employers embrace and expand their flexible working arrangements, particularly with technological advancements, ECU risks losing its competitiveness as an employer if it fails to remain abreast of the changing work environment and new opportunities for flexible working arrangements being provided through new technologies.

Many organisations are adopting flexible working principles that assume roles can be filled through flexible working arrangements on a default basis (i.e. the norm as opposed to the exception) including banks, insurance services, consultancy firms and public services<sup>3</sup> as a means of attracting the best staff by providing more freedom and self-determination around when, where and how work is undertaken<sup>4</sup>. Flexible work has also been cited as empowering employees to work smarter, deliver better services and be open to continuing change<sup>5</sup>.

In assessing the current levels of flexible working at ECU, available data is limited to *part-time work* and the uptake of *purchased leave* but doesn’t capture what we anecdotally understand is a large number of informal arrangements. This partial dataset does however highlight that 85% of “flexible workers” are female in a context where less than 30% of all jobs across ECU are part-time (excluding casuals). Low levels of male participation in flexible working arrangements are attributed to the negative perceptions part-time work and shortened working hours has on work commitment and the flow-on effect into salary, career and promotional opportunities. Actively promoting flexible working to males is one way to overcome these negative perceptions by encouraging leaders,

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<sup>1</sup> ECU Strategic Plan 2017-2021: World Ready

<sup>2</sup> Boston Consulting Group ‘What’s Working to Drive Gender Diversity in Leadership’ May 2017

<sup>3</sup> Australian Public Service along with NSW, Vic and Qld state public services have adopted ‘an all roles flex’ principle,

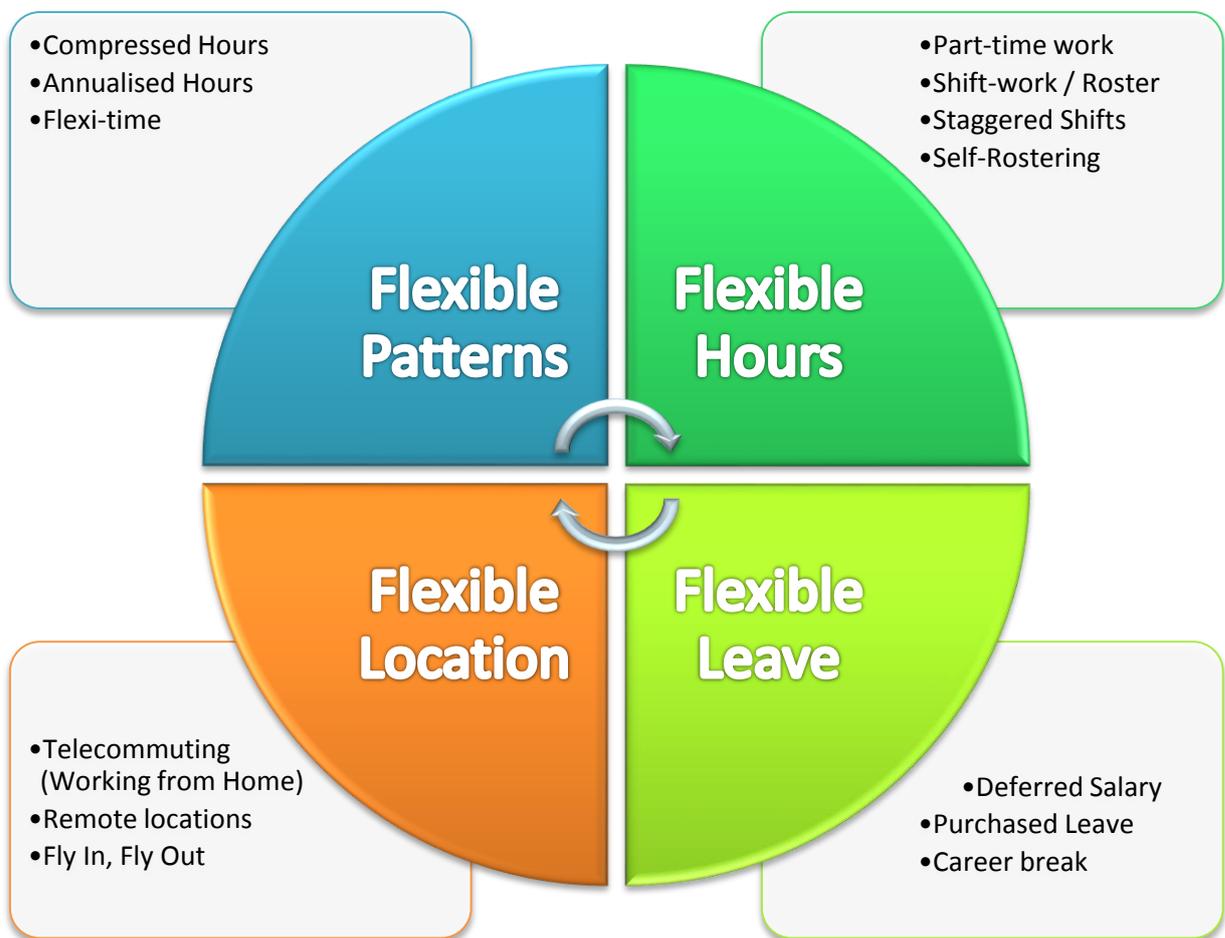
<sup>4</sup> ‘PricewaterhouseCoopers ‘trusts’ staff, makes all roles flexible’ Australian Financial Review 3 August 2015

<sup>5</sup> Flexibility.co.uk ‘The Smart Working Handbook 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition’ September 2015 accessed at <http://www.flexibility.co.uk/SmartWorkHandbook/index.asp> accessed 27 January 2017

managers and employees to explore together as to how jobs can be designed to be more compatible with flexible working arrangements. For reticent managers/supervisors, formalised 'Individual Flexibility Arrangements' may provide the means to confidently agree to specific requests and arrangements.

**What is flexible working?**

Full-time work is well accepted as the standard working pattern in Australia, with 7.5 to 8 hours being worked every weekday at the employer’s premises. Flexible working arrangements seek to change this and are considered to include any working pattern that gives some degree of flexibility on how long, where and when an employee works, enabling employers and employees to agree to working conditions that meet the needs of both.

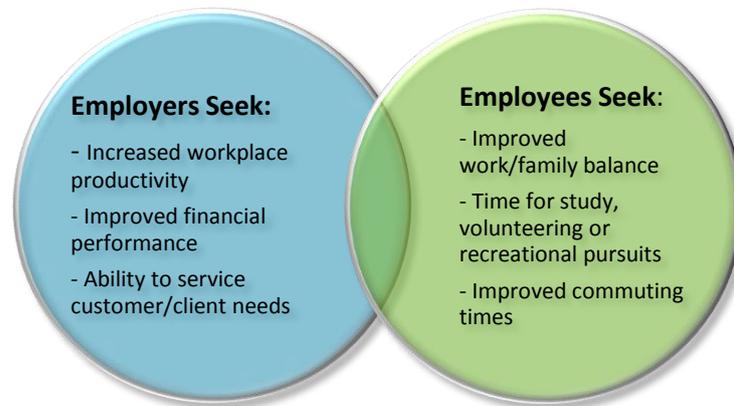


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All Australian employees are already provided with the ability to request flexible working arrangements through the *Fair Work Act 2009* (Cwth) in specific circumstances, including parents of school aged children and employees aged 55 or over. Employers are required to genuinely consider any request, with reasonable business grounds being the basis for refusal. Similar obligations also exist in equal employment opportunity legislation.

<sup>6</sup> Adapted from Career Inside Track "Flexibility Kit: Making Flex-work Work for You – Flexible Work Day 2017" Accessed 1 June 2017

It is important to acknowledge that employers and employees approach flexible working from different perspectives. The goal in providing effective flexible working arrangements is to balance these to achieve a 'win-win' outcome for both.



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### **How does ECU strengthen its position as an 'Employer of Choice' for all genders?**

The self-directed nature of an academic career ensures academic staff already enjoy a high degree of flexibility in their work, outside of timetabled commitments, with a focus on the achievement of outputs and outcomes. This level of autonomy extends to location of work as well as time, although clashes do occur with teaching and research commitments. However, whilst staff responses in the 2016 Voice survey indicate that 84% of academics agree or strongly agree that they have the flexibility to manage work and caring responsibilities, 49% did not agree that they maintained a good balance between work and other aspects of life. The Athena SWAN evaluation process will assist to inform the initiatives set out in this strategy to address female participation in STEM disciplines.

Amongst professional staff, schools and service centres the suitability of flexible working is dependent on the nature of the role and the level of direct customer/client interaction. Having an inflexible perception as to how, where and when a role can be performed limits the ability to explore alternative possibilities and new ways of working which potentially improve operational results. As universities engage more with industry and student expectations continue to increase, the concept of working from a fixed work location at a fixed time may need to change to meet these stakeholders' needs.

Flexible working arrangements provide ECU leaders and managers with the opportunity to further enhance their leadership by building the necessary culture of trust within their teams and across the University. Successful flexible work environments are characterised by employees operating with relatively high levels of autonomy, with performance managed through results and outcomes achieved, rather than through a presence in the workplace. While this would be an appropriate description of the academic work setting in most Universities, not so most professional staff workplaces.

This type of organisational culture empowers employees to find smarter ways of working to deliver better services/results and enable employees to organise their work in a way that improves their relationship between work and life. It also needs to be consistent across ECU and its campuses with

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<sup>7</sup> Adapted from Australian Institute of Management "AIM Insights - Managing in a Flexible Work Environment" White Paper November 2012

academic and professional staff knowing their roles and responsibilities in accessing flexible working arrangements. Having a well-defined flexible working strategy will enable ECU to work towards achieving this culture and maintain its position ahead of others as an employer of choice within the broader employment market whilst achieving its strategic goals across teaching, research, and industry and community engagement.

### **A Strategic Direction - Increasing Awareness and Opportunities for Flexible Working Arrangements**

In further enhancing ECU's position as an employer that seeks to accommodate flexible working arrangements where possible, the ECU Flexible Working strategy focuses on increasing the visibility of flexible working, building management capability, and adopting new opportunities for flexible working through:

- Leaders and managers taking the lead and genuinely supporting flexible working in all of its forms as well as being active role models;
- Leaders and managers being supported to effectively manage a flexible workplace to achieve high performance across teaching, research, and industry and community engagement as well as a highly engaged and motivated workforce;
- Greater visibility of the prevalence and availability of flexible working arrangements across ECU is achieved through regular reporting on the frequency of formalised arrangements, captured as 'Individual Flexibility Agreements';
- Academic and Professional Staff being clear as to performance expectations in a flexible working environment and the active role they play in achieving a flexible and trust-based culture within their team; and
- Innovative use of existing and future technologies and built environments to support flexible working arrangements.

Flexible work must be seen as an enabler in achieving ECU's long-term strategic goals including organisational sustainability and business effectiveness.

The following are specific strategic goals which build on these themes and support ECU having a stronger flexible working culture by 2020.

#### **1. Flexibility strategy and policy**

ECU recognises that its overall success relies on the contributions and performance of all ECU academic and professional staff. Flexible working is recognised as positively impacting on staff retention, employee motivation and engagement with employees reporting better work-life balance, being more productive and staying fit and healthy<sup>8</sup>. Ensuring a consistent and visible approach to flexible working arrangements across all schools and service centres is key to ECU recruiting and retaining high-performing, talented and highly-skilled academic and professional staff as well as maintaining a healthy workforce with a strong culture of trust and respect.

- 1.1. ECU recognises the availability of flexible working arrangements as a 'norm' in the new world of work and seeks new opportunities to open up access to flexible working to academic and professional roles, regardless of management level.

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<sup>8</sup> CIPD "Flexible working provision and uptake survey report" May 2012

- 1.2. Flexible working and its benefits are visibly promoted to all academic and professional staff, current and future, and across all demographic groups (incl. leaders and managers).
- 1.3. Staff health and well-being is enhanced through flexible working arrangements which balance the need to achieve the required teaching, research and operational performance, with life goals.
- 1.4. Flexible working arrangements are formalised appropriately via Individual Flexibility Agreements to ensure consistency in application and greater visibility within schools, service centres, teams and across ECU.
- 1.5. Structural and cultural barriers to flexible working arrangements are reduced through managers and employees understanding and collaborating together to arrive at flexible working arrangements which are feasible for both parties.

## **2. Leadership Capability**

Leaders and managers play a pivotal role in achieving a workplace culture that genuinely supports flexible working arrangements, bringing their own values and experiences to their approach in managing staff. Flexible working arrangements present many challenges to managers in being able to balance the needs of the organisation (e.g. work schedules, service delivery, project management, student expectations) and those of employees. Increasing awareness of possibilities, and improving manager capability to manage flexible working arrangements will enable schools, service centres, work areas and individual teams to achieve workable solutions that balance the employee needs with those of the university. The ability of a manager to foster a culture of trust is pivotal to embedding flexible working arrangements at ECU.

- 2.1. Leaders and managers understand and actively promote flexible working arrangements through visible role modelling.
- 2.2. Leaders and managers genuinely consider requests for flexible working arrangements and achieve viable agreements which meet business/operational needs and those of the employee.
- 2.3. Leaders and managers have the knowledge, understanding and capability to effectively implement and manage suitable flexible working arrangements.
- 2.4. Leaders and managers are held accountable for maintaining and improving appropriate workplace flexibility.

## **3. Employee Experience**

Increasing employee awareness of the available flexible working arrangement options assists all employees to evaluate how these may enable them to achieve a work-life balance while sustaining individual performance, physical and mental health, and wellbeing. It is however, important employees appreciate the financial implications of specific flexible arrangements and the flow-on affect to superannuation and taxation. Raising employee awareness also assists to work against the negative perceptions around the impact of accessing flexible work options has on an individual's career development and progression opportunities. Recent studies suggest that in the professional staff context these limitations on career progression are not just

perceptions but confirmed by academic studies<sup>9</sup>. Increasing male participation in flexible working, particularly in management roles, will assist to make flexible working the accepted norm and not one specific to those with caring responsibilities or phasing into retirement.

Encouraging a team approach to exploring opportunities for flexible working arrangements builds greater employee understanding of business needs and the balance that must be achieved in delivering teaching, research and operational activities in a high-performance culture.

- 3.1. All ECU employees have the information and tools that enable them to understand their role and responsibilities in accessing flexible working arrangements as an individual and as part of a team, and the need for a culture of trust.
- 3.2. ECU maintains its positioning as an 'Employer of Choice' by understanding the current and future needs of employees for flexible working and leave options.
- 3.3. In achieving equity in employment, ECU seeks to understand the impact of flexible work arrangements on career development and progression in supporting staff to plan careers realistically and maintain the desired career progression.

#### **4. Supporting Technology and Infrastructure**

ECU makes significant investments in systems and technology to support its teaching, research, and operational activity. This existing capability already supports staff working across various campuses and off campus locations (incl. from home). With technology constantly changing, opportunities provided by future systems will create new flexible working opportunities not yet considered. Remaining abreast of these developments will enable ECU to proactively respond to the changing world of work into the future.

Flexible working arrangements have the potential to impact on the physical work environment. There is the potential for flexible working arrangements to reduce costs associated in providing physical work locations and the ability to consider more flexible workspaces (e.g. hot-desking, 'hoteling' arrangements). Keeping informed on new approaches to office management will assist to identify opportunities for future flexible working options.

- 4.1. Flexible working arrangements are supported by effective and innovative use of existing systems and technology with future innovations which deliver new flexible working arrangements actively considered.
- 4.2. Flexible working arrangements are supported by providing secure access to ECU systems and information technology platforms from non-traditional work locations.
- 4.3. Flexible working arrangements are supported by effective and innovative use of existing and future building infrastructure.
- 4.4. Flexible working arrangements assist endeavours to reduce ECU's carbon footprint.

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<sup>9</sup> See Bailey, J, Troup, C and Strachan G (2017) Part-time work and advancement: a study of female professional staff in Australian Universities, *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 39:3, 282-295.

The following initiatives will assist ECU to achieve greater visibility of flexible working arrangements amongst all academics and professional staff across all campuses, schools, service centres and work areas in 2017-2020.

Priority	<b>Initiative</b> <i>** Denotes requirement for WGEA Employer of Choice in Gender Equality Citation</i>	Strategic Goal	Timeframe	Lead
1	<b>Develop Future Vision for Flexible Working</b> a) Identify future opportunities for increasing access to flexible working arrangements to all roles and understand the structural and cultural barriers by consulting with: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- University Executive;</li> <li>- Professional Staff Leadership Group;</li> <li>- Middle Managers (including Associate Deans);</li> <li>- Staff Representatives;</li> <li>- Various staffing diversity groups.</li> </ul>	1.1-1.4	2017-2018	HRSC
2	<b>Policy Review and Update</b> a) Review existing Human Resources policies and update these to reflect new opportunities for flexible working identified. This work should take into consideration our enterprise agreement and the operational requirements of ECU (incl. working arrangements, safety and health). b) Develop a policy which provides ability for decisions not to approve requests for flexible work to be reviewed by Manager's Manager/Director/Dean/Relevant Line Executive.	1.1-1.4	2018	HRSC
		1.1-1.4	2018	HRSC
3	<b>Enabling Managers and Supervisors</b> a) Develop guidelines and supplement existing leadership and recruitment training for managers and supervisors to build: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- understanding of the role and benefits of flexible work options in staff attraction/retention, work-life balance and workforce planning as well as gender equality;</li> <li>- understanding of the role of work and position design in maximising opportunities for flexible working arrangements within schools, service centres and work areas;</li> <li>- knowledge of management responsibilities under legislation, enterprise agreements and ECU policy;</li> <li>- skills and capabilities in managing the challenges which arise in flexible workplace, including conscious and unconscious biases that may arise;</li> </ul>	2.1-2.3	2018-2019	HRSC

Priority	<b>Initiative</b> <i>** Denotes requirement for WGEA Employer of Choice in Gender Equality Citation</i>	Strategic Goal	Timeframe	Lead
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- capability to develop viable outcomes, using a team decision-making approach where appropriate, in response to requests for flexible working.</li> <li>Consideration be given to flexible delivery methods (e.g. e-learning module)</li> <li>b) Review existing performance management processes (e.g. MPS) to enable managers to better assess individual performance in an ‘all roles flex’ environment (i.e. increased on focus results and outcomes achieved).</li> </ul>	2.1-2.3; 3.1-3.3	2018	HRSC
4	<p><b>Increasing Visibility and Staff Awareness **</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Promote flexible working and its benefits to all staff, current and future, across all schools and service centres through various university-wide channels including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Employment advertising</li> <li>- Employee on-boarding and induction</li> <li>- ECU Matters (e.g. case studies, employee testimonials)</li> <li>- Health and Wellness Forums</li> <li>- Existing Staff/Leadership networks</li> </ul> with consideration to information required at key stages of the ‘employee life cycle’ (incl. relevant financial information) and develop a range of tools to assist with decision-making. </li> <li>b) Develop a guide for employees which outlines their role in seeking and developing flexible working arrangements that meets the business needs of their team/work area as well as their own.</li> <li>c) Seek feedback from all employees to confirm level of awareness and satisfaction with specific flexible working and leave options available at ECU (e.g. Voice Survey 2020).</li> </ul>	3.1-3.3	2018-2019	HRSC
		3.1-3.3	2018	HRSC
		3.2	2020	HRSC

Priority	<b>Initiative</b> <i>** Denotes requirement for WGEA Employer of Choice in Gender Equality Citation</i>	Strategic Goal	Timeframe	Lead
5	<b>Measure, Track and Report Uptake**</b> a) Identify metrics on which the uptake and impact of flexible working practices can be reported by gender to University Executive. Metrics may include things such as absenteeism, employee engagement and organisational performance and to be reported on by school, service centre and work area across all campuses.  b) Report the prevalence of flexible working by gender in ECU's annual report from 2018 (i.e. published in 2019) with comprehensive reporting achieved by 2019 Annual Report (i.e. published in 2018).  c) Establish appropriate targets for leaders and managers in improving access to flexible working arrangements (incl. uptake by men).	1.1-1.4; 2.1-2.3	2018-19	HRSC
		1.1-1.4; 2.1-2.3; 3.1-3.3	2018-19	UE
		1.1-1.4; 2.1-2.3; 3.1-3.3	2017-18	UE
6	Establish a cross-functional collaboration between HRSC, ITSC and FSC to identify opportunities for increasing flexible working arrangements within built environments and assisted through systems, technology and infrastructure (e.g. refurbishments, new building projects, campus-specific requirements (e.g. SW Campus vs. Metro campuses)).	4.1-4.4	2019-2020	HRSC, FASC, ITSC

## IMPLEMENTATION CALENDAR

Priority	2017 Q4	2018 Q1/2	2018 Q3/4	2019 Q1/2	2019 Q3/4	2020 Q1/2	2020 Q3/4
<b>1. Develop Future Vision for Flexible Work</b>							
- Undertake consultation with identified stakeholders							
<b>2. Policy Review and Update</b>							
- Review of existing policies and ID any policy gaps							
- Update policies and implement							
- Develop additional policies and implement							
<b>3. Enabling Managers and Supervisors</b>							
- Develop manager and supervisor guidelines							
- Capability development (incl. training)							
- Assessing performance							
- Gain manager and supervisor feedback							
<b>4. Increasing Visibility and Staff Awareness</b>							
- Develop employee guidelines							
- Develop supporting promotional material							
- Gain staff feedback (e.g. Voice Survey 2020)							
<b>5. Measure, Track and Report Uptake</b>							
- Identify metrics and targets							
- Develop and implement school/service centre reports							
- Incorporate reporting into ECU Annual Report							
<b>6. Cross-functional Collaboration with HRSC, ITSC and FSC</b>							
- Establish cross-functional working party							