



# Are organisations walking the talk on flexibility?

## The Flex Able Certification story

### Summary

Flexible work options contribute to good work-life balance and mental health, and many businesses claim to provide flexibility at work, but is it all talk? A Flex Able Certification process is now available to assess the extent to which an organisation is actually providing a flexible work environment that will attract and retain a broad and diverse workforce.

#### Why is flexibility important at work?

Flexibility at work is important for a number of reasons: it helps address the gender pay gap (by enabling women to maintain and progress their careers); it supports people who have family responsibilities; and it allows people to pursue interests outside of work.

But importantly, flexibility at work helps reduce the stress caused by the many demands placed on people in their work and private lives. Flexible work options assist people to manage full-time work where there are also family responsibilities or study commitments. Employees who know that their organisation will assist them when they need some flexibility are more likely to maintain their mental health.

#### What is Flex Able Certification?

Flex Able Certification involves an audit of an organisation's policies and initiatives to determine what they are doing to provide flexibility options for employees and job seekers. While many organisations say they 'do flexibility', the audit reveals whether they 'walk the talk'.

One criteria for certification is that the organisation trusts their employees to deliver the work, no matter where they work from.

Flex Able Certification tells job applicants and employees that the organisation provides a truly flexible work environment, and that they can be confident about negotiating flexible work arrangements with them.

#### What does the Flex Able audit look at?

The starting point for the audit is the attitude at the top of the organisation. Support by the CEO for flexibility policies and initiatives needs to be strong, if they are to be meaningfully implemented.

The audit looks at what sort of flexible options are available: part-time or full-time work with flexibility, or job-sharing; and when, where and how a person engages with and completes their work. The audit also reviews the organisations website and annual reports to determine what the organisation says they're doing, and to what extent they are actually doing it.

Specifically the audit looks for evidence in the organisation of:

- \* aspirations to implement flexibility initiatives;
- \* existing support for implementation of flexibility initiatives;
- \* effective communication to staff about flexibility initiatives and options available to them;

- \* training for all levels of management on how to make flexibility work for everyone
- \* specific examples of employees who are accessing flexible work options, and how the organisation worked to assist them; and
- \* employee satisfaction (measured through surveys) that they have the flexibility they need to manage work and life commitments.

### What size organisations get certified?

All kinds and sizes of organisations achieve certification, and the process is tailored with their size in mind. For larger organisations, evidence of flexibility initiatives and procedures should be formalised. For small businesses that often don't have HR positions, the process is to work with the employer to assess if the business has a positive attitude towards flexibility, and whether it is reflected throughout the business. While a small business may not have policies, if they show evidence of a real willingness to consider a range of flexible work options for staff because they value them, they should be able to achieve certification.

### Advice for employers

In one small business that achieved certification, each of its six employees worked different hours and times, according to their needs. As a result, they were highly committed to their work, and the business was successful.

Another small business rewrote a job advertisement as a flexible, three days a week position after they couldn't find the

right person when it was advertised as a full-time position. The employer was amazed at how many quality candidates applied, once the job was flexible and part-time.

### Flex Able tips for employers

- \* Many workers want flexible work options, so organisations need to adjust their practices, if they want to access the best talent.
- \* Flexibility is not about casualisation. People want part or full-time work with flexibility, and all the rights and conditions that come with regular full-time work.
- \* Most people see flexibility as a privilege, and take responsibility for their work outcomes.
- \* Flexible options include: job-sharing, flexible start or finish times, working away from the office using technology, and a compressed work week. In each case, the focus should be on the outcomes, rather than the hours.
- \* Managers need to trust staff to come up with the right flexibility solutions to suit their needs, and deliver the work.
- \* If an organisation tries to prescribe how flexibility will work, it's not flexibility.
- \* Offering flexible work options is unlikely to spiral out of control; many employees still prefer a regular nine to five work day.
- \* Good managers know if a worker is delivering, whether they are sitting at their desk full-time or working from elsewhere.

## Where to find out more about workplace flexibility

Diverse City Careers administers Flex Able Certification (<https://www.diversecitycareers.com/>)

Queensland Government Flexible work arrangements web page (<https://www.business.gov.au/info/run/employ-people/equal-opportunity-and-diversity/flexible-working-arrangements>)



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