

Human Resources

Flexible Work Telecommuting Supplement



THE FLEXIBLE WORK GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Principle	Which means
<i>Flexibility is valued and supported</i>	<p>The case for flexibility in your workplace is understood and supported</p> <p>Planning and decision-making occur with an open mind and can-do attitude to flexibility</p> <p>Leaders apply a strategic and proactive approach to flexible work and employee Work-Life Balance</p> <p>Leaders use supportive management skills - communication, feedback, mentoring, trust, respect and consistency</p>
<i>Flexibility aligns with the achievement of business outcomes</i>	<p>The achievement of business goals is a priority; it must be addressed in flexible work decision-making and work design and scheduling</p> <p>The impact on all stakeholders is understood</p>
<i>Flexibility is a two-way process – considering individual and business needs</i>	<p>Flexibility requires organisational accountability and individual responsibility</p> <p>Leaders put business goals at the heart of decision-making</p> <p>Employees take responsibility for positive outcomes in their written proposals and collaborate to make implementation work</p> <p>Flexibility should not be a barrier to career progression</p>
<i>Flexibility is available to all employees, and decisions are made on a case-by case basis</i>	<p>Flexibility for work-life balance is an option for all employees (this includes men, women, managers) but case-by-case decisions based on individual, organisational and legal considerations are required</p> <p>An equitable process does not mean that all requests for flexible work will result in the same outcome</p>
<i>Flexibility requires open communication and transparent, fair and sound decision-making</i>	<p>Information on flexible work options is widely circulated</p> <p>An open conversation is critical for evaluation and assessment of requests for flexible work arrangements; however, the final decision rests with the manager</p> <p>Documentation of key outcomes from discussions is important to avoid future misunderstandings</p>
<i>Flexibility requires room for review and change</i>	<p>Flexible arrangements must be able to be altered, to meet changing circumstances in the workplace or for the employee</p> <p>Flexible arrangements need to be regularly reviewed</p>

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CONTENTS	PAGE
The Flexible Work Guiding Principles	1
Introduction	3
Purpose of the Telecommuting Supplement	5
Telecommuting Considerations – OH&S, Equipment, & Insurance.....	5
Occupational Health and Safety	5
Equipment	6
Insurance and Indemnity	6
Preparing, Evaluating and Implementing Telecommuting Proposals.....	8
Telecommuting Costs and Benefits	9
Assessing Suitability for Telecommuting	9
Telecommuting Agreements	11
New arrangements - trial periods.....	11
Evaluation - Ensuring Telecommuting Works.....	13
Identifying success.....	13
Supportive management	13
Evaluating established telecommuting arrangements	13
Employee Effectiveness.....	14
Further assistance	16
Key References.....	17
Telecommuting Agreement Template	Error! Bookmark not defined.

INTRODUCTION

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development actively promotes flexible work arrangements to build workforce capability and to support the achievement of better outcomes through modern and attractive workplaces. Telecommuting is one possible option for a flexible work arrangement.

Telecommuting means the regular performance of part of the employee's work at a remote workplace during designated work hours on a regular basis. This frequently requires the use of electronic communication resources. It is also sometimes referred to as 'teleworking' or 'working from home' when the work is being undertaken at home.

The Case for Telecommuting

Telecommuting is a response to the demand for flexible work in the Australian workforce.

Advances in ICT capability enable Telecommuting to operate as a highly effective work mode. Telecommuting can transform the way work is done, contributing to cost effective work practices and expanded options for service delivery.

In addition, telecommunicating encourages enhanced ICT skills and promotes the use of enabling technology, which can impact positively on work outcomes.

Organisational and individual benefits

Telecommuting which supports and promotes the needs of the individual and the Department can play an important role in:

- Attracting and retaining highly skilled and competent employees
- Improving employee productivity
- Increasing levels of employee engagement
- Tapping new and diverse sources of talent
- Reducing environmental impact through reduced travel
- Developing an innovative and tech savvy workforce
- Reducing absenteeism
- Contributing to employee health and well-being
- Improving work/life balance
- Saving commuting time

Myth: Telecommuting is revolutionary and exceptional

Reality: Before employees worked in offices located in crowded cities, most people worked in or near their homes. Telecommuting is evolutionary, building on changes in both society and work and capitalising on advances in technology and management. It is already a normal mode of working for many Australians and is becoming accepted as an effective way of responding to modern business pressures, including work-life balance, competitiveness and staff retention.

To ensure that telecommuting enhances organisational goals, arrangements need to be based on reciprocity, proactive planning, personal accountability and informed judgement - the *Guiding Principles* are designed to support an effective implementation process.

Roles and Responsibilities

Manager/Principal responsibilities include	Employee responsibilities include
<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Taking a strategic approach to telecommuting and ensuring that the achievement of business objectives drives flexible work planning.▪ Building a climate of trust, accountability and responsibility to support telecommuting.▪ Applying the Flexible Work Guiding Principles and following the processes set out in Department policy.▪ Considering the impacts that telecommuting arrangements may have on colleagues and other stakeholders and working to address them openly and transparently.▪ Consistent and transparent decision making.▪ Setting reasonable and realistic performance indicators.▪ Ensuring that the proposed remote workplace meets Occupational Health and Safety requirements.▪ Implementation and review following a trial period.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Complying with the conditions agreed to in the Telecommuting Agreement, including work schedules and hours of work.▪ Clearly delineating work and domestic commitments (if working from home).▪ Ensuring security and confidentiality of work undertaken remotely (eg at home).▪ Maintaining appropriate communication links with the primary workplace.▪ Keeping up to date with developments and information relevant to the workplace.▪ Considering the impacts that flexible work arrangements may have on colleagues and other stakeholders and working with managers to address them openly and transparently.▪ Advising the principal/manager of changes to relevant details such as contact information.▪ Taking reasonable care of personal health and safety at home, consistent with Occupational Health and Safety legislation.

It is important be aware that telecommuting arrangements:

- Can only be undertaken with mutual agreement.
- Are not a substitute for child care or other family 'carer' arrangements.
- Require an assessment of personal and task suitability for the arrangement.
- Require that a specific and limited area of the home be designated as the work area/office.
- Should be documented in accordance with this *Supplement* to ensure the arrangement is clear and mutual understanding of expectations and responsibilities of Principals/managers and employees.

Myth: Telecommuting is a cheap and easy solution for childcare

Reality: Telecommuting is not a solution to childcare in itself. It is important to plan for child care when telecommuting. However, telecommuting may support childcare arrangements by saving time through reduced commute times or enabling greater flexibility in childcare arrangements.

Research suggests that maintaining face to face communication with colleagues, managers and clients is essential to the success of telecommuting arrangements. As a general guide, it is recommended that employees spend no less than 50% of their working time in the primary workplace.

Purpose of the Telecommuting Supplement

The purpose of this *Telecommuting Supplement* is to provide managers, principals and employees with additional specific information in relation to developing and implementing telecommuting arrangements.

This Supplement is to be used in conjunction with either of the following Department documents

- *Flexible Work in Corporate Workplaces, or*
- *Flexible Work in Victorian Government Schools*

TELECOMMUTING CONSIDERATIONS – OH&S, EQUIPMENT, & INSURANCE

Occupational Health and Safety

Managers and Principals have obligations under the Department's [Occupational Health and Safety policy](#) and are accountable for the health and safety of employees under their management.

Managers and Principals need to ensure that the proposed remote workplace is a safe and healthy environment in which to work and that employees are provided with instructions, information or training so that they can perform their work safely and without risk to their health. It may be necessary to arrange a safety inspection where concerns have been raised regarding the remote office.

Managers and principals must ensure that employees have a safe and healthy environment in which to work.

Employees are obliged to take reasonable care of their own health and safety and the health and safety of others who may be affected by their acts and/or omissions.

General information about OH&S is available from the Department's [Safety, Health and Wellbeing website](#).

Employees are expected to cooperate with their employer to ensure the requirements of Occupational Health and Safety legislation are met. As a minimum, employees should complete the 'Work Area Checklist' included in the Telecommuting Agreement. This short checklist has been compiled from the 'Office Safety Checklist' by WorkSafe with home offices in mind. See ["Officewise – A guide to Health and Safety in the Office"](#)

Employees will also have to provide their employer with access to their remote workplace at pre-arranged times for the purposes of conducting safety inspections if required, and repairing and maintaining equipment. In addition, the employee may be required to attend appropriate Occupational Health and Safety training programs.

The following provisions must be met in any telecommuting arrangement:

- tasks performed must be relevant to the employee's role and must not include work which has an associated potential health and safety risk
- safe access and egress to the remote workplace must be available
- there must be no evidence of risk from fire, chemical or other environmental hazards in or near the remote workplace

In the event of any concerns being raised in relation to OH&S issues, further assistance should be sought from the DEECD Employee Health Unit **prior** to proceeding with the proposed arrangements.

Necessary improvements or modifications to the remote workplace will be the responsibility of the employee.

Equipment

Details of all Department equipment to be located in the remote workplace must be included in the Telecommuting Agreement. Any changes to the equipment arrangements must be reflected in the Telecommuting Agreement.

Insurance and Indemnity

If an employee suffers an injury while telecommuting, and the employee's employment is a significant contributing factor to the injury (within the meaning of the *Accident Compensation Act 1985*) benefits will be payable in accordance with that Act.

Standard procedures for reporting and lodging claims for compensable injuries under the *Accident Compensation Act 1985* will be covered by the Department's WorkSafe insurance policy. The Employee must comply with the Department's policies and procedures for notifying and managing compensable injury set out in the DEECD [WorkSafe Management Manual](#).

In some instances travel between the designated workplaces will be considered work-time and have occupational health and safety implications. To lessen this risk, trips between worksites should be minimised. Work related travel requirements should be documented in the Telecommuting Agreement.

In the event that an employee is held liable for injury arising from telecommuting, and such liability is directly related to the employee's employment (in accordance with and subject to limitations contained in the *Public Administration Act 2004* and Regulations and any Departmental policies and work practices) the Department will indemnify the employee for that liability.

To minimise the Department's exposure to public liability claims from people injured by Department owned equipment or in a Department workplace, it is necessary to define an area in the remote workplace as a Designated Work Area and to limit access to this area. This includes excluding children and others from the remote office during working hours and restricting use of DEECD's equipment to work related tasks only. This means that telecommuting employees must adhere to DEECD policies including the Acceptable Use policy.

School or work unit equipment located in the remote workplace is covered for loss or damage by the Department's insurance schemes on the understanding that 'reasonable care' is taken by the employee and that the loss or damage was caused by:

- fire or explosion
- burglary (through forced entry)
- storm and tempest
- lightning and thunderbolt
- vandalism
- electric power surge
- action of insects or vermin in plague proportions
- any other disasters

Important: Employees must not allow clients or members of the general public to attend the remote workplace during designated work hours. Work related meetings should not be held at the remote workplace.

Important: As public liability provisions of household insurance vary, employees are advised to check their personal home and contents insurance to determine public liability coverage and whether working from home invalidates their policy.

In this context 'reasonable care' is defined as a responsible approach to security by individuals including appropriate storage arrangements for equipment and the physical security of the location.

Loss or damage to equipment will not be covered if there are no signs of forced entry or the damage does not fall within operational guidelines of the Department's insurance schemes.

PREPARING, EVALUATING AND IMPLEMENTING TELECOMMUTING PROPOSALS

Managers/Principals and employees should work through the appropriate [Flexible Work For Work-Life Balance](#) resources (either Corporate or school-based according to their workplace) when preparing, evaluating and implementing a proposal for a telecommuting arrangement.

The following seven steps summarise the approach used in the Guides.

Step 1. Put systems and processes in place

Providing access to relevant information on flexible work, and having processes for recording and tracking individual requests ensures legal compliance, informed access for employees, and aids in transparent and strategic decision making.

Step 2. A written proposal is required

A formal, written proposal for telecommuting supports legal compliance and encourages individual responsibility for ensuring proposals are realistic and consider any issues underpinning the proposal.

Step 3. The proposal is assessed

A well considered proposal deserves to be thoroughly assessed. Careful planning and consideration will contribute to good consultation and pave the way for sound decision-making.

Step 4. A meeting to discuss the proposal

It is important to clarify and understand all the circumstances relating to the proposal. It helps to know about the “whole person” – work, life and family needs and work styles. Each party needs to make sure the proposed telecommuting arrangement is a good fit between employee and workplace needs.

Step 5. Make a decision

The *Guiding Principles* assist in sound decision making.

Sometimes a request has to be modified or refused if evaluation determines that the proposed arrangement would pose major difficulties in relation to delivering work outcomes. A refusal must be based on reasonable business grounds. (See the *Flexible Work Guides for advice in relation to assessing requests for flexible work.*)

Step 6. Decision is communicated in writing

A written response is provided within 21 days of submission of the proposal. This is a legal and DEECD policy requirement. In cases where the request is refused or modified reasons need to be provided.

Step 7. Turn the proposal (if accepted) into an agreement

Confirm the arrangement with the team leader (if any). The Telecommuting Agreement and the ‘Office Safety Checklist’ must be completed and a trial period established.

Telecommuting Costs and Benefits

Managers/Principals and employees should carefully consider both the costs and benefits of telecommuting proposals. Arrangements should be 'cost neutral' with any costs outweighed by resulting benefits.

Benefits for the workplace can include:

- recruitment and retention of valuable employees and skills
- minimising costs associated with recruiting and training new employees
- greater flexibility in work schedules
- increased efficiency and productivity arising from concentrated and uninterrupted work time
- effective use of available technology

Benefits for employees can include:

- increased flexibility with carer responsibilities and other personal life commitments
- reduced travelling time and costs associated with commuting
- increased motivation and job satisfaction
- improved wellbeing and work-life balance

Costs can include:

- the provision of equipment
- changes that may need to be made to the remote workplace to meet OH&S requirements and
- utilities, including phone calls, faxes etc.

The manager/Principal and employee should discuss the proposal to ensure that the needs of both the employer and the employee are considered. Managers/Principals will not be able to agree to all requests, however all proposals should be evaluated with the involvement of the applicant. Feedback must be provided for both successful and unsuccessful proposals. Other options may be developed including a recommendation that the proposal be resubmitted at a future time.

Assessing Suitability for Telecommuting

Role suitability

Tasks suitably undertaken in a telecommuting arrangement are generally discrete pieces of work which can be worked on by one person. Examples include project work, policy analysis, research, report writing, data analysis, planning or scheduling and computer-based tasks. This list is not exhaustive and does not preclude other tasks that managers/Principals consider suitable for a telecommuting arrangement.

Tasks that require face to face interaction, direct supervision and regular access to hardcopy files or other resources located in the primary workplace would generally be considered unsuitable. However, as technology improves, accessing information online, virtual meetings, remote collaboration and video conferencing will become part of the way we do business. Assumptions need to be constantly reviewed.

Role Suitability Checklist

To be completed by both manager/Principal and employee

1=never; 4=always

- | | | | | |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Part of the work can be done away from the primary workplace | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. The work requires minimal face to face contact with colleagues, etc | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Access to materials and resources can be arranged | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Workflow can be scheduled | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Regular telecommuting (home-based work) time can be allocated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. Output/outcomes are measurable (qualitative and quantitative) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Employee suitability

Employees who are able to efficiently manage their own time and workload, resolve problems independently and complete tasks on their own and with minimal supervision (high self-accountability) are more likely to be successful in a telecommuting arrangement.

Myth: Telecommuting means I won't know whether my employees are working.

Reality: Employees can continue to produce the work that is expected of them, wherever they are. Research shows that most can actually produce more and even higher quality work. By monitoring the work produced, managers will know whether their employees are working effectively.

Employee Suitability Checklist

To be completed by both manager/principal and employee

1=never; 4=always

- | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Is self motivated | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 2. Shows initiative and accountability | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 3. Has a positive attitude to work and telecommuting objectives/outcomes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 4. Is able to work independently to achieve deadlines and outcomes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 5. Has the technology skills required for telecommuting | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 6. Is able to plan and manage a work day | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 7. Can work in isolation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 8. Can work with minimal face to face supervision and feedback | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 9. Communicates effectively | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| 10. Has sufficient job and organisational knowledge | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |

Telecommuting Agreements

Once a proposal for telecommuting has been accepted, managers/Principals and the employee work towards the completion of a Telecommuting Agreement using the Department's Telecommuting Agreement template. The Agreement confirms mutual understanding of the specific arrangements in each case, OH&S regulations and legal responsibilities. The Agreement is a record of the terms and conditions and defines the responsibilities and obligations of both parties.

A **Telecommuting Agreement** Template can be downloaded from the HRWeb [Flexible Work for Work-Life Balance](#).

The Agreement addresses the following areas:

- Variation to terms of employment
- Commencement & Review of agreement
- Trial period
- Work arrangements
- Communication
- Security
- Occupational health & safety
- Child/dependant care
- Access to remote workplace
- Insurance & Indemnity
- Email/internet policy
- Equipment & supplies
- Reimbursement of expenses
- Performance management & review
- Termination of telecommuting agreement

Managers and Principals should generally ensure that the appropriate OH&S arrangements have been put in place prior to signing the agreement. The items included in the Work Area Checklist (below) are also included in a checklist attached to the Agreement.

New arrangements - trial periods

A trial period of three months is required to assess the effectiveness of the arrangements and to provide an opportunity for fine tuning.

The telecommuting arrangement should be reviewed at least two weeks prior to the end date of the trial period in order to confirm the success or otherwise of the arrangements, confirm the continuation of the arrangements and to identify any changes that may be required.

The manager/Principal may terminate the Agreement at any time during the trial period (providing at least two weeks' notice is given in writing) if an employee's performance is unsatisfactory or the needs of the school/work unit have changed or not been met.

WORK AREA CHECKLIST FOR TELECOMMUTING

The following should be established prior to signing the Telecommuting Agreement. *Note: A checklist is included in the Telecommuting Agreement Template.*

1. General Layout

- Capacity to block off work area during Designated Work Hours

2. Workstation Desk

- Desk height between 690-720mm
- Keyboard can be used with both feet flat on the floor and forearms at right angles

3. Computer, monitor & mouse

- Monitor away from direct outside light and no light direct light from behind the screen
- Monitor at least 1 arms length away from the user
- Normal gaze – upper 1/3 of screen
- Keyboard at comfortable tilt for typing with forearm support
- Mouse placed beside keyboard – no over-reaching to use mouse

4. Workstation Chair

- Height and seat/backrest tilt adjustable so thighs slightly less than 90 ° angle
- Lumbar support positioned at lumbar level and backrest at comfortable angle to provide support for the user

5. Workstation Elements

- Document holder used where appropriate – transcribing from hard copy to computer
- Telephone in easy to reach position

6. Workstation Environment

- Noise levels acceptable
- Adequate lighting
- Adequate ventilation
- Electrical equipment in good condition – no frayed cords, no double adaptors, adequate electrical equipment ventilation
- Safety switch must be installed
- Adequate rest breaks every 30 minutes
- Smoke alarm installed and fire extinguisher available
- Emergency exit plan – emergency phone numbers located near phone
- First aid supplies

Identifying success

Successful telecommuting arrangements:

- Are structured and supported as voluntary and mutual agreements.
- Are available as a normal flexible work option, however, some roles might not be suitable (eg teaching roles), and the requirements may not suit some employees.
- Are supported by collaborative approaches and 'management by outcomes', not by location-based work measurements.
- Control when and where work takes place in order to maximise benefits and avoid possible issues.
- Structure workload to ensure a balance of time spent at the remote location and at the primary workplace.
- Have clear organisational and individual objectives that are known in advance. These objectives are the basis of the implementation process and guide the arrangement.
- Are built on a culture of trust and accountability for outcomes.

Supportive management

Managers play a key role in developing and maintaining a work culture supportive of telecommuting.

Supportive managers:

- Actively support flexible work including telecommuting.
- Remember that physical attendance at the office is not the only way to be productive.
- Support employees interested in telecommuting by assisting them to develop proposals for telecommuting arrangements and advising of the criteria and processes for assessment of these proposals.
- Ensure employees are well informed of the work unit's needs and goals and the requirements of its clients/stakeholders/service users.
- Develop communication systems to keep telecommuters in the loop.
- Focus on accountability and outcomes.
- Reward performance and productivity.

Evaluating established telecommuting arrangements

Once established, telecommuting arrangements should be evaluated regularly against key individual performance criteria and workplace goals. This can be a simple process including feedback from both employees and managers directly involved in telecommuting arrangements.

Some key indicators to consider are:

- work completed
- achievement of objectives
- hours worked and individual productivity
- client satisfaction
- employee well-being and morale
- absenteeism

The manager/Principal may terminate the telecommuting arrangement at any time, providing at least **four weeks** notice is given if an employee's performance is unsatisfactory, or the needs of the school/work unit have changed or not been met.

Employee Effectiveness

To ensure telecommuting works well, special attention should be paid to time management, handling distractions, communication with the primary workplace, and agreed outputs.

Practical Tip: Maximising personal effectiveness in a telecommuting arrangement

Time management

- Plan the workload
- Measure how time is spent
- Focus on completing priority tasks
- Handle incoming items only once
- File as you go
- Ensure you have sufficient supplies in stock

Handling distractions

- Establish and agree guidelines with family and friends
- Organise workspace to minimise the need to take breaks
- Balance work and other responsibilities
- Do not procrastinate

Communication with primary workplace

- Ensure communication methods and times are clear and adhered to

Agreed outputs

- Make sure outputs are understood
- Meet deadlines, or if they cannot be met give prior notice

Summary Checklist - Telecommuting

Check whether you understand:

- The relevant *Flexible Work Guidelines*
- The range of flexible work options (including telecommuting) available
- The need to check that telecommuting is the best option for you and the workplace
- The systems and processes for managing requests for flexible work arrangements
- The *Flexible Work Guiding Principles*
- Your role and responsibility in relation to telecommuting
- Key success factors in implementing telecommuting arrangements

Check whether you feel confident to:

- Develop a case for telecommuting
- (Employees) Complete a self-assessment of work-life balance needs
- Assess task and personal suitability for telecommuting
- Assist with/complete a telecommuting arrangement proposal
- Actively participate in a meeting to discuss the proposal
- (Managers/principals) Make a decision in accordance with DEECD policy and school/work unit objectives (Using the Proposal Evaluation Template)
- (Managers/principals) Inform employees of decision in writing
- (Managers/principals) Express reasonable business grounds for declining a proposal
- (Employees) Explore avenues available if unhappy with a refusal
- Develop a Telecommuting Agreement and complete 'Office Safety Checklist'
- Follow up any issues raised in 'Office Safety Checklist'
- Ensure implementation plans are realistic and supported
- Review individual arrangements and make improvements where necessary

FURTHER ASSISTANCE

Managers and staff in corporate workplaces can obtain advice, assistance or further information by contacting their [Corporate HR Services Consultant. \(Word - 285Kb\)](#).

Principals and staff in school locations may obtain advice or assistance on any matters related to flexible work by contacting Schools HR Services on 1800 641 943.

KEY REFERENCES

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Victorian Human Rights Commission, [Employers Home Page](#) (http://www.humanrightscommission.vic.gov.au/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=939&Itemid=64)

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