

Parliamentary Counsel's Office

Flexible Working Policy

June 2023

Approved by Parliamentary Counsel, Annette O'Callaghan, [date]



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Policy Owner / Contact

Corporate Services

Review Record

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1. Overview

To help attract people with the best skills and attributes and enable a diverse workforce, the Parliamentary Counsel's Office (PCO) is committed to providing flexible work arrangements to all employees.

The impacts of individual flexible work arrangements should be carefully considered by employees. PCO expects that employees will work cooperatively to ensure flexible work arrangements meet operational requirements and are equitable for all employees given the constraints of their roles.

Employees are also encouraged to consider and discuss the impact of flexible work arrangements on office dynamics, their teams, and the ability to build strong working relationships.

Agreements to flexible work arrangements outside of this policy will require the approval of the Parliamentary Counsel.

2. Definitions

Employees means PCO ongoing, temporary and casual employees, and contractors who carry out work for PCO.

Flex time is the formal mechanism of recording hours for ongoing and temporary employees, working extra hours where required over several days or weeks and then reclaiming those hours as time off (as recording in timesheets).

Pre-sitting week is the week immediately preceding a sitting week.

Remote working means working at a location other than the PCO office. This could include working from home, in a different town, city or region, or in another government building.

Sitting week is the week that Parliament is scheduled to sit.

Team refers to the each of the discrete teams within PCO (the Drafting Teams reporting to Deputy Parliamentary Counsel, the Legislation Editing and Parliament Team, the Access and ICT Team, and the Corporate Services Team).

Team Leader refers to the relevant senior leader for each of the Teams outlined above.

Working from home (WFH) is the term used to describe an employee who performs their role from their home instead of in the office. This can be temporary, or longer-term.

3. Roles and responsibilities

Role	Key responsibility
Parliamentary Counsel	Approves flexible work arrangements outside the parameters of this policy.
PCO team leaders	Agree flexible work arrangements with PCO employees within the parameters of this policy and taking into consideration the operational requirements of PCO and the team for which the team leader is responsible.
PCO employees	Discuss flexible work arrangements with team leaders and within teams to ensure arrangements meet operational objectives and are clearly communicated.

4. Policy

The principles underpinning flexible working at PCO are:

Mutually beneficial: PCO will endeavour to provide maximum flexibility to employees while meeting operational requirements. Flexible working must maintain or improve the quality of PCO's service without increasing labour costs.

Give and take: Flexible work requires compromise between employees, team leaders and teams. Not all types of flexibility will be available for every role. Operational requirements must be appropriately considered as part of any flexible working arrangement. Meetings should provide the option for team members to participate via Microsoft Teams whenever possible to facilitate flexible working arrangements.

Advance notice: Flexible work arrangements are to be agreed in advance between employees and their managers within the parameters of this policy. Flexible working arrangements should be regularly reviewed to ensure they optimise operational needs and the preferences of all PCO employees, including when changing roles or teams.

Clear communication: Employees working from home or remotely should be available and generally keep in touch with team members and team leaders when not in the office. Making extra effort when not in the office could include communicating through Teams channels or chats, making video calls and proactively keeping team leaders or team members updated about the employee's availability, projects and work.

4.1. Office days

Different roles will have different requirements regarding working from the office:

- Each team must have a common day in the office for the team. This does not need to be consistent across PCO.
- The Executive Support Team (Executive Officer and Paralegal) must be in the office during both a pre-sitting and sitting week.
- Drafters and their relevant Senior Executives must be in the office during a sitting week and pre-sitting week if they are working on a bill that is being introduced or debated in the sitting week.
- The Drafting Teams, Legislation Editing and Parliament Team, and Access and ICT Team must provide extended support (generally between 8am and 10pm unless directed otherwise) during sitting weeks on a rostered basis. Unless otherwise agreed, extended support can be performed while working from home or remotely.
- There must be a presence from each team within the office every day during sitting weeks and pre-sitting weeks.
- From time to time, there may be a requirement for all employees to attend office premises to participate in whole-of-office events. This will be communicated to all PCO employees as necessary.

4.2 Regular flexible work arrangements

All flexible work arrangements within the parameters outlined in Section 4.1 should be discussed and agreed at the Team level. Team working arrangements should be reviewed every 3 months to ensure that all members of the team have an opportunity to take advantage of flexible working arrangements in an equitable manner. Regular flexible work arrangements must be published by each Team on Gulbarra.

4.3 Unscheduled or ad-hoc arrangements

From time to time, operational requirements and personal circumstances may require a change in the agreed flexible working arrangement. This may be agreed with the Team Leader for changes that will last for less than 2 weeks in duration.

4.4 Caring responsibilities

Flexible working arrangements allow employees to manage commitments associated with caring responsibilities (such as school drop-off and pick-up). However, caring responsibilities should not ordinarily be undertaken for extended periods while online and working from home or remotely and should not interfere with the satisfactory performance of a role.

4.5 Rostered Days Off

Rostered Days Off (RDO) will continue to be available to all non-SES employees. This is a 'guaranteed' day off and can be taken at any time, including within a sitting week, as agreed within each team. PCO will not request changes to an RDO unless the Parliamentary Counsel considers there are exceptional operational requirements.

4.6 New starters

New starters should aim to work in the office a minimum of 3 days per week for the first 3 months of their employment to facilitate training & development, coaching and building of relationships. Flexible working arrangements are to be agreed with the new starter's Team Leader.

4.7 Remote working

The maximum period of any long-term flexible arrangement is 12-months. After that period, a new request will need to be negotiated considering individual, team and PCO operational needs.

4.8 Communication and visibility of individual member's work from home plan

As mentioned in Section 4.1, regular flexible working arrangements should be published by each team on Gulbarra and updated as soon as these change. Ad hoc changes of less than a week do not need to be updated on Gulbarra but need to be communicated with team leaders in advance of the change.

4.9 Approval for flexible work arrangements

All flexible work arrangements must be approved by the relevant Team Leader after consideration of the operational requirements of PCO and the respective team. All employees who work from home must complete the 'Working remotely WHS self-assessment checklist' (Attachment A), which must be forward to Corporate Services. This form should be updated if there are any changes to the working conditions in the employee's home.

All arrangements to work at a location other than home (where 'home' is within the Sydney metropolitan area) must be approved by the relevant Team Leader for arrangements of less than 1 week and the Parliamentary Counsel for arrangements exceeding 1 week.

4.10 Costs associated with flexible work arrangements

PCO will provide standard equipment to staff (including a laptop and charger) to facilitate flexible work arrangements. Any other costs (for example, set-up for a home-office) are the responsibility of the employee unless approved by the Parliamentary Counsel. Taxation advice, such as the availability of deductions for out-of-pocket costs, will not be provided by PCO.

4.11 Changes in working hours

All proposals to change to working hours (e.g. between part-time and full-time hours) must be agreed by the Parliamentary Counsel.

4.12 Misuse of flexible working arrangements

Employees are expected to be available and to fulfil their work responsibilities within agreed timeframes regardless of where they are working from. Where there are concerns that flexible working arrangements are being misused (for example, employees are not available within normal office hours while working from home), these concerns will be discussed between affected parties and the flexibility available to the employee may be reduced or renegotiated.

5. Attachments

Attachment A: WHS Checklist

Working remotely WHS self-assessment checklist

This form is to be completed by staff members intending to remotely and should be reviewed by the team leader before the staff member starts the arrangement to determine if the work area is appropriate

1. Employee / Team Leader Details

Employee name:

Phone:

Email:

Team Leader's name:

Phone:

Remote work location:

2. Checklist

Room

Lighting is adequate (able to read / refer to documentation without eye strain)

Yes

Noise levels are not distracting from task concentration

Yes

Ventilation (natural or artificial) is adequate

Yes

There is no glare on work surface or computer screen

Yes

Chair

The chair is easily adjusted (Seat back height & angle, seat height)

Yes

The chair supports the lower back

Yes

The forearms and wrists are parallel to the floor or angled down slightly when chair height adjusted

Yes

When chair height is adjusted appropriately, the feet are positioned on the ground or a footrest is available

Yes

Work area (desk/table)

Work area is large enough to complete mixed tasks (computer and/or reading / writing) and avoid frequent trunk twisting /rotation (*at least 1600mm x 800mm*)

Yes

Work area is between 680mm and 735 mm high

Yes

User can sit close to the work area (arms not stretching / enough leg room)

Yes

Computer

Screen is positioned at approximately an arms distance and at an appropriate height (neck should adopt a neutral position)

Yes

Screen and keyboard are positioned directly in front	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Elbows remain close to side of body when keyboard and mouse are being used	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Mouse is at the same level and immediately next to the keyboard	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Separate keyboard and mouse is used if utilising laptop computer for extended periods	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Are documents located between screen and keyboard	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Storage	
Electronic files are stored securely and backed up	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Paper documents are stored securely	<input type="checkbox"/> N/A
Date completed:	
Employee signature:	Team Leader's signature:
3. Actions required:	