

Flexible work

Flexible work arrangements can assist men and women to remain in the labour market and can facilitate sharing of care for children or other dependents within families; it is a key enabler of parents' labour force participation.

Flexible work arrangements offer more opportunities for employees and employers and make good business sense for attracting and retaining skilled labour. International studies indicate that flexible work is commonly regarded as a business retention tool and one which, if used strategically, can also improve both the productivity and profitability of a business. One way of improving retention of women, particularly in senior roles, may be to change the business model so that men and women are able to fit their work responsibilities around their other life responsibilities.

Better for bottom line: a case study on the benefits of flexible work for businesses

In 2010 the Ministry conducted research on workplace flexibility in the accounting sector. Two of the firms interviewed (both medium-sized businesses), were successfully using flexibility as part of a total business model. At these firms, flexible work arrangements were universally available and were nearly universally taken up – for a range of reasons, not only childcare. The two firms found that the flexible practices business model was working in terms of staff retention, productivity and firm profitability. However, the study found that flexible working practices were not yet widely adopted in New Zealand accounting firms in any systematic way.

The research found that in accounting, like engineering and other industries, working long hours tended to be the pathway to partnership or senior management positions. This has a negative impact on women having career breaks and/or working part-time due to managing their care responsibilities.

Even where workplaces have flexible working conditions available, using these provisions was seen as being on the 'mummy track' and can be career limiting. Both male and female participants interviewed across a range of firms were of the view that caring for children and being a partner in a firm were mutually exclusive; and that, because of the demands of both these jobs, it was not possible to do both.