



Libby Lyons  
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## Flexible Work in a Post-COVID World

Women's Network Webinar  
with Libby Lyons

THURSDAY 1 OCTOBER 2020



### OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

[Roads Australia](#) seeks to champion a diverse, inclusive, sustainable and values-led organisation and industry. Our [Diversity and Inclusion \(D&I\) Strategy](#) encompasses four Streams and is incorporated across all RA programs and policy activity. You can learn more about our D&I Program [here](#).

### EVENT SUMMARY

On 1 October 2020, senior leaders from around Australia joined our webinar featuring [Libby Lyons](#), CEO, [Workplace Gender Equality Agency](#) for an interactive discussion about their experiences with flexible work practices during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Our discussion explored recent trends, some of the lessons learned and what more needs to be done to enhance flexible work practices as Australia begins to emerge from the pandemic – and how we avoid going backwards.

The conversation was co-hosted by RA's D&I Committee Deputy Chair [Katriina Tahka](#) and Committee member [Kelly Maslin](#).

### INSIGHTS FROM WGEA

Libby Lyons began by setting out the way flexible work practices are being adopted by Australian workplaces and explaining areas that need careful management to ensure continued progress post-COVID. The major points were:

- Almost **73 per cent** of organisations [reporting to WGEA](#) advise they have instituted policies to facilitate flexible work practices. While this is encouraging, there is still an action gap between establishing policies and the lived experience of employees.
- **Only 5.6 per cent of organisations report having a target** for flexible work practices – and a mere **2.3 per cent have established a formal target for their male workforce**, which is where the real challenge lies. Indeed, prior to COVID, male employees requests for flexible work were denied at twice the rate for females.
- Although the overall share of [organisations in the construction sector](#) with flexible work policies is lower (56 percent), more of them have set specific targets for flexible work practices (6.5 percent, with 4.3 per cent having targets for their male workforce).
- It is possible the experience of COVID will help to drive positive change in this respect. The necessity of working from home has **demonstrated that employees can and should be trusted to deliver on their work commitments**, without necessarily having to be physically present in a traditional office environment.



- **This enhanced trust between employers and employees should now be leveraged to** further promote flexible work practices in the post-COVID economy.
- **This is a vital consideration in terms of gender equality.** For every hour of unpaid domestic care undertaken by Australian men each day, one hour and 46 minutes is undertaken by Australian women. If this imbalance is to be addressed and women empowered to achieve their career goals, it follows that more employers need to support flexible working arrangements for their male employees.
- As COVID restrictions are eased, **the return of employees to offices must be managed in a gender-neutral fashion.** The least desirable scenario is one in which the bulk of male workers return to offices or project sites and female employees overwhelmingly work from home. It is essential that female employees are able to take part in decision-making processes and informal colleague discussions that invariably occur on-site.
- As part of this, it is important to understand that **flexible work does not simply mean working from home.** Organisations need to appreciate there are a raft of measures that can be adopted to support flexible working among employees – including **job share arrangements, flexible start and finish times, compressed working weeks and offering time-in-lieu.**

## WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Through an interactive discussion, webinar participants identified opportunities for leaders within organisations to promote flexible working.

- **Managers should lead by example.** Employees will often feel compelled to remain physically present in the office if their senior managers are there. Managers need to embrace flexible work practices for themselves, signalling to their wider workforce that the practice is encouraged.
- **Board reporting of flexible work uptake.** Targets must be accompanied by accountability – and experience shows regular board reporting on levels of flexible working encourages uptake – and increases female representation in senior management roles.
- **Be aware of language used to discuss flexible work.** Webinar participants noted the value of avoiding terms such as a ‘part-time’ when discussing/advertising roles, and instead talking about capacity.
- **Presenteeism vs outcomes.** Employers should be encouraged to measure performance based on delivery of agreed outcomes, rather than monitoring hours in the office or on a site.
- **Industry itself can drive change.** Private companies hold significant power and influence in the delivery of infrastructure projects for governments. They should not be afraid to use this power to have governments address gender equity and flexible work practices in procurement policies.

## NEXT STEPS

- RA’s D&I Committee is working to progress recommendations in the new [Roads Australia Procurement Reform Report](#) to develop a framework to measure and enforce culture and inclusion performance, which can then be embedded in the procurement process.
- RA will also continue to share knowledge about best practice around flexible work practices via promotion in RA publications, online resources and the development of case studies.
- If you are willing to share your leading Flexible Working Policy with the RA Members, please contact [Marlie Curtis](#).

