

Coalition For Quality Flexible Work

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Fact Sheet 2 : Why is flexible work good for older people?

Flexible working hours are good for employers, employees and their families and communities. There are particular benefits for older New Zealanders, and for those who care for them.

1. Why do we need more older people in the workforce?

- New Zealand currently has a skills and labour shortage, which could be significantly reduced by encouraging the participation of older New Zealanders in the workforce.
- Half the New Zealand labour force will be older than 42 in 2012 compared with a median age of 36 in 1991. The labour force aged 65 years and over is expected to increase from 61,000 in 2006 to 102,000 in 2021.^[1]
- The OECD has highlighted the need for employment policies that accommodate the needs of older workers and overcome barriers to their participation.^[2]
- We need quality flexible work for older people if we are to achieve the aims of the NZ Positive Ageing Strategy –in particular its goal to eliminate ageism and promote flexible work options.^[3]

2. What strengths do older people bring to work?

- Older workers bring skills and experience to workplaces. 80% of those surveyed in a recent EEO Trust survey believe older people bring the following skills to workplaces: reliability, good customer service, communication skills, commitment to careers, skills in training people and initiative.
- The survey concluded it is important for our economy that we maximise the potential of older workers, continually upskill and train valued staff, effectively transfer knowledge, and plan for succession^[4].

3. What would encourage older people to remain in the workforce?

- Many retired people would like to continue to do paid work. They are most likely to want to continue working past their expected retirement date if they are offered quality part-time work (66%) and flexible working hours (64%)^[5].
- Most of those still in the workforce say the ideal transition from full-time work to retirement involves part-time work or more flexible hours^[6].

^[1] Statistics New Zealand. National Labour Force Projections (2001(base)–2051 update) Series 5M. 26 September 2005.

^[2] OECD (2000) *Health of Older People in New Zealand : A Statistical Reference*, Wellington : Ministry of Health

^[3] The NZ Positive Ageing Strategy Annual Report July 2005-July 2006 and Action Plan 2007

^[4] EEO Trust Work & Age Survey 2006

^[5] EEO Trust Work & Age Survey 2006

^[6] EEO Trust Work & Age Survey 2006

- International research predicts that businesses which do not adequately prepare for an older workforce will face significant economic costs, which will in turn affect the growth of national economies.^[7]
- At the moment, however, most retiring employees go straight from full-time work to full retirement.^[8]
- Most people who were surveyed by the EEO Trust did not know whether their employer offered any sort of retirement planning or transition initiatives, or were sure they did not^[9].

4. What retirement initiatives do employers offer?

- According to the EEO survey, the majority of employers do not offer flexible working arrangements for retiring employees
- Seventy-one per cent of those already retired said their employers did not offer any retirement-oriented initiatives and 38% of current workers said their employer offered nothing. A further 25% didn't know if their employer offered anything.

5. Why do we need flexible working hours legislation?

- Legislation would enshrine to right to request flexible working hours and help to change the working hours culture so that older New Zealanders could be encouraged to stay in the workplace by flexible working arrangements.

6. What about caregivers of the elderly?

- Many older people are dependent on caregiving they receive from their extended family and community.
- Increasingly older people are choosing to stay at home and government policy supports older people "ageing at place".
- This means that many older people, often with significant disabilities or chronic health conditions, remain in their own homes in the community, even if they have extensive needs for care and support.^[10]
- Much of that care is voluntary and the caregiver fits the care of elderly relatives and friends around their paid work.
- A New Zealand survey^[11] found that eldercare has a considerable impact on the carers in reducing their opportunities for rest and relaxation outside working hours. Where weekends and holidays were devoted to eldercare (especially when considerable travel is involved), employees often returned to work unrefreshed, affecting their productivity.
- Flexible working hours would enable caregivers to better manage their caring responsibilities and their paid work.

^[7] Robson, W.B.P. (2001) *Aging Populations and the Workforce: Challenges for Employers*, Winnipeg: British-north American committee

^[8] EEO Trust Work & Age Survey 2006

^[9] EEO Trust Work & Age Survey 2006

^[10] Dr Judith Davey, New Zealand Institute for Research on Ageing

^[11] Department of Labour *Future of Work*, 2003