

Fair Work Ombudsman launches flexibility and diversity courses for small business

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New Online Learning Courses on Workplace Flexibility and Diversity and Discrimination from the Fair Work Ombudsman seek to help small business understand the law.

The courses also identify opportunities for offering flexible conditions in a way that can potentially benefit both employees and the performance of their business.

The new courses, Workplace Flexibility and Diversity and Discrimination, are now available in the Fair Work Ombudsman's Online Learning Centre at www.fairwork.gov.au/learning (<http://www.fairwork.gov.au/learning>).

Launching the courses today, Fair Work Ombudsman Natalie James says the easy to understand and follow courses will help small businesses identify opportunities for flexibility in their workplace and understand the rules, and comply with law around offering employees flexible working conditions and discrimination.

"We know and acknowledge that many small businesses have concerns about meeting their obligations when it comes to flexibility in the workplace," Ms James says.

"That is why we have worked with small businesses when developing these courses, so we can be aware of the specific concerns and challenges facing them. The courses cut through the complexity and provide employers with the information, advice, tools and templates they most need.

"We want to make it as easy as possible for businesses to know and meet their legal obligations, and we want to show business the benefits that can result from a small business implementing the right flexibility opportunities and capitalising on their diversity.

"Those benefits include attracting good quality staff, improved attendance, better retention of talented employees and having employees who are more engaged, productive and committed," Ms James says.

"The courses are interactive and video based and are built on stories of people and workplaces – in a way that we hope is real and resonates with small businesses. Users can progress through at their own pace, and we've made the ideas scalable so they can fit every individual business.

"Because in the end it's about businesses and employees having a conversation, understanding the needs of individuals and the workplace, and agreeing to something that will balance all these interests.

Ms James says by offering flexible work conditions, small businesses show a commitment to the wellbeing of employees and acknowledge the contribution they make to the business.

Flexible working conditions can include job sharing, working from home, rostered days off, flexible rostering, compressed hours and flexible start and finish times.

The Workplace Flexibility and Diversity and Discrimination courses were developed in partnership with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).

The Diversity and Discrimination course highlights the benefits of workplace diversity and provides advice on preventing unlawful workplace discrimination and addressing unconscious bias.

Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins welcomed the launch.

"It is vital for workplaces of all sizes to adapt to meet the needs of the modern workforce," said Commissioner Jenkins.

"Technological advances have given us the tools we need to increase flexibility, but there remains some reluctance to accommodate requests for flexible working conditions, particularly at more senior levels.

"The inability to access flexible work can be a major barrier to participation and progression for parents and other employees with caring responsibilities."

"The Courses launched today will help debunk some common misconceptions and demonstrate the benefits of flexible working

conditions, particularly when it comes to employee retention and recruitment.

“I am glad to see that there is an increasing understanding of the mutual benefits that come with increasing workplace participation.”

The Courses launched today join the five existing courses in the Online Learning Centre and have been developed in consultation with small business employers and managers.

When completing the courses, managers can pause and resume, access assessments and download completion certificates.

Earlier this year, the Online Learning Centre became the only Australian organisation (www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/archived-media-releases/2016-media-releases/april-2016/20160428-fwo-wins-online-award) to receive the “Best in Class” status in the legal category of the Interactive Media Awards.

The Online Learning Centre has attracted more than 50,000 users since it was launched in 2013. The Online Learning Centre is part of a range of free tools and resources provided by the Fair Work Ombudsman for small business owners.

Employers and workers seeking advice and assistance can also call the Fair Work Infoline on 13 13 94. Small business callers to the Infoline can opt to receive priority service through the Small Business Helpline.

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