

SAGE Cygnet Awards application

Flexible working arrangements



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Acknowledgement of Country

The Baker Institute acknowledges and pays respect to the Traditional Custodians and Elders of this nation, past and present, and the continuation of cultural, spiritual, and educational practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

1. Key barrier

The Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute (Baker Institute) has identified a lack of formalised flexible working arrangements as a key barrier affecting our ability to attract, retain and progress the careers of women and potentially other under-represented groups in STEMM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Maths and Medicine). Research shows that flexibility in employee work time, patterns and locations is beneficial for both employers and employees¹, can improve gender equality in the workplace and the home², and that younger workers are demanding greater flexibility over when and where they work.³ With women more likely to be the primary carers within families, the formalisation and normalisation of flexible working arrangements would particularly assist with their retention, productivity, and wellbeing. Flexible working arrangements, however, support everyone to manage competing priorities in life.

2. Evidence of barrier

2.1 Lack of formal work/life balance policies in Enterprise Agreement

While Baker Institute staff have, as per the Fair Work Act 2009, been able to request flexible working arrangements, these arrangements have typically been negotiated in an informal or ad hoc way between individual employees and their supervisors. This has meant that these arrangements have not been viewed as available to all or only available to those who feel confident enough to ask. The 2017 Baker Institute Enterprise Agreement (now superseded by the 2021 Baker Institute Enterprise Agreement) did not contain any reference to work/life balance and there were no formal policies or procedures regarding flexible work arrangements. The only flexibility arrangements specifically mentioned in the 2017 Enterprise Agreement were the purchase of additional leave (48/52 arrangement) and a clause stating that those returning from primary carer leave could, for the first four (4) weeks upon return to work, work 75% of their agreed return hours.

2.2 Informal use of flexible working arrangements

In our 2020 culture survey, we asked respondents (n=199) whether they had requested any change in their contracted work arrangements for more than a month (such as number of hours, variation in core hours or days, and location of workplace). Figure 1 below shows that 39% of women (51) and 14% of men (9) had requested a flexible working arrangement in 2020. The majority of those requests were granted (77% for women and 89% for men). The low proportion of men using flexible work arrangements mirrors other research exploring Australian men's use of these options which found that norms around masculinity and the 'ideal worker' remain a significant barrier to men utilising work/life balance arrangements.⁴

¹ Hokke, S., Bennetts, S.K., Crawford, S., Leach, L., Hackworth, N.J., Strazdins, L., Nguyen, C., Nicholson, J.M. & Cooklin A.R. (2021), Does flexible work 'work' in Australia? A survey of employed mothers' and fathers' work, family and health, *Community, Work & Family*, 24.4: 488–506.

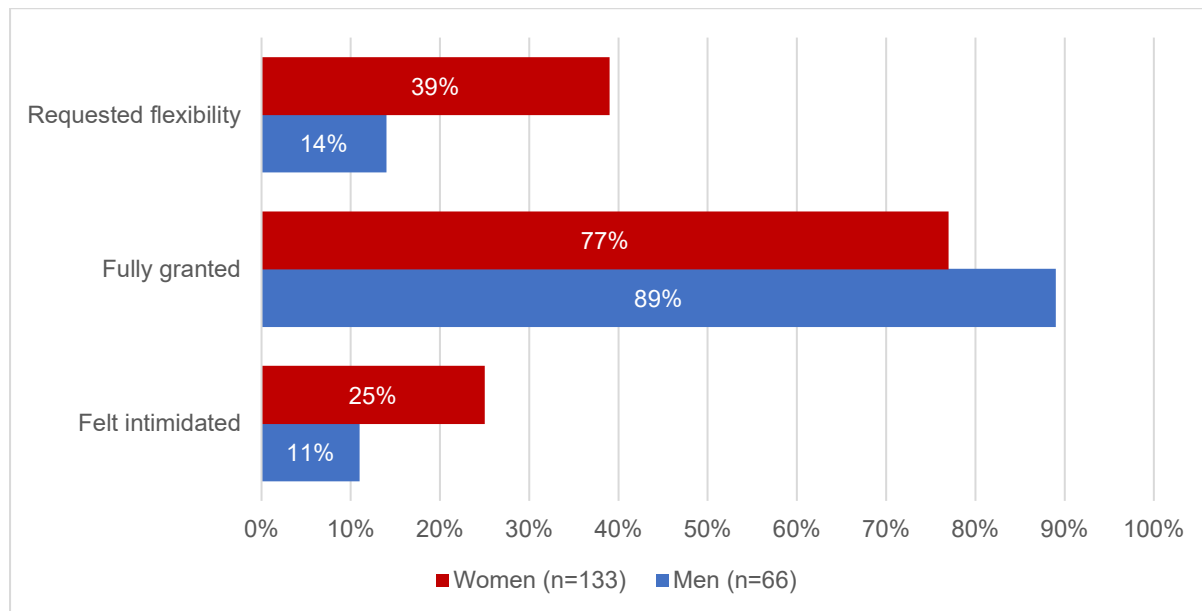
² WGEA (n.d) *Flexible Work: The Business Case for Flexible Work*, viewed 26 November 2021, available: <https://www.wgea.gov.au/flexible-work>

³ Black, Euan. (31 August 2023). Gen Z aren't lazy. They just don't want to live to work. *Australian Financial Review*.

⁴ Borgkvist, A. (2022). 'It Would Be Silly to Stop Now and Go Part-Time': Fathers and Flexible Working Arrangements in Australia. In: Grau Grau, M., las Heras Maestro, M., Riley Bowles, H. (eds) *Engaged Fatherhood for Men, Families and Gender Equality. Contributions to Management Science*. Springer, Cham.

The 2020 culture survey also explored intimidation as a potential barrier to applying for flexible working arrangements. Figure 1 below shows that 25% of women (1 in 4) and 11% of men (1 in 10) felt intimidated when asking for a flexible working arrangement.

Figure 1: Requests for flexibility by gender, 2020



2.3 Resignations rates during and after parental leave

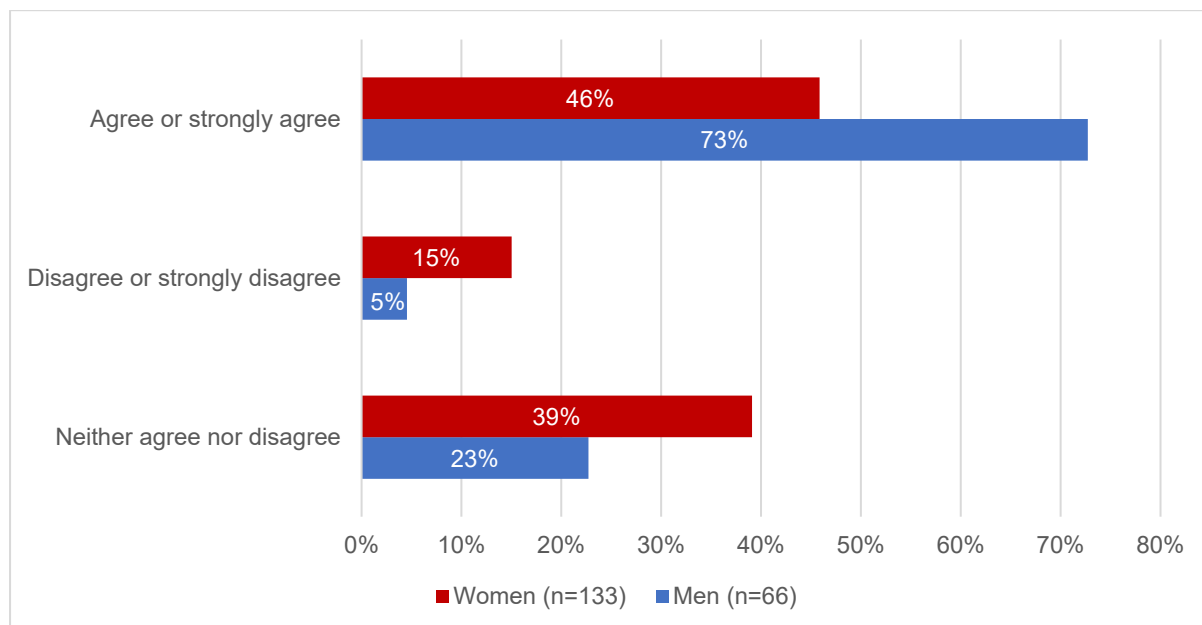
Information obtained for our Bronze SAGE Award submission indicated that of the 51 women who took parental leave between 2013 and 2015⁵ (referred to as ‘maternity leave’ at the time), 13 (25%) did not return to work while a further 15 (29%) returned to work but resigned within the following year. This suggests that for some women, returning to work was deemed to be too difficult with small children.

2.4 Beliefs about flexibility and career development

In the 2020 culture survey, respondents were asked to agree or disagree with the statement that who work part-time or flexibly in my team are offered the same career development opportunities as those who work full-time. Figure 2 shows that less than half of all women (46%) agreed with this statement. Some women (15%) were clear that working part-time or flexibly resulted in a career penalty. In 2020, 73% of men thought those working part-time or flexibly had the same career development opportunities as those who work full-time. Thirty nine percent of women and 23% of men neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement.

⁵ Our 2018 Bronze award application used data from 2013–2015. Given the age of this data, we have chosen to use more up-to-date data for this Cygnet to provide a more realistic picture of the changes occurring at the Baker Institute since our submission.

Figure 2: Staff who work part-time or flexibly are offered the same career development opportunities, 2020



3. Actions and outputs

3.1 Flexible work arrangements included in Enterprise Agreement

In late 2021, the Institute undertook a round of enterprise bargaining, with flexible work arrangements being one of the key items to be negotiated successfully. The Institute’s current Enterprise Agreement now states that it recognises the importance of assisting employees (including eligible casuals) to balance their work and personal responsibilities. The Enterprise Agreement outlines the types of arrangements that employees may use to achieve that balance. These include, but are not limited to, part-time employment on a temporary or ongoing basis; flexible start and finish times; job sharing; purchased leave; working from home; periods of unpaid leave; and part-year employment on a temporary or ongoing basis. The Agreement also outlines the process for applying for flexible working arrangements.



Care was taken in developing the flexible working arrangements clause in the Enterprise Agreement to ensure that these options were available to everyone within the organisation, regardless of position or demographic. The Agreement states that employees should discuss the arrangement they are seeking with their supervisor before making a formal application for a work/life balance arrangement to the Human Resources team. It also states that in making decisions about access to these measures, the Institute will give consideration to employees achieving work-life balance and will only refuse on reasonable operational grounds. Prescriptions of how the options would look for individual employees were avoided so that all staff members, including those who may face intersecting and compounding barriers in balancing work and personal responsibilities, would not be disadvantaged when requesting flexible working arrangements. Equitable access to flexible working arrangements

is also underpinned by the Institute’s *Equal opportunity policy* which prohibits discrimination in employment conditions on the basis of protected attributes including sex, disability, age, carer and parental status, race, religious belief and activity, and gender identity and expression.

3.2 Increasing awareness of availability of flexible work arrangements

A number of activities were undertaken to increase awareness of the availability of flexible working arrangements, with the aim of encouraging employees to use these options and lessen any sense of intimidation related to applying. Information about the Baker Institute’s commitment to flexibility has been widely disseminated and includes promoting the availability of these options to all staff regardless of their position and accommodating of their diverse needs. Table 1 describes some the activities undertaken to promote flexible working arrangements.

Table 1: Actions taken to increase awareness of flexible working arrangements

Statement on the Baker Institute website careers page	Working at the Baker Institute provides the opportunity to be part of novel scientific discoveries and meaningful developments in medical care, which help Australians live healthier for longer. We are also proud to offer a positive workplace culture with strong career support, flexible working, professional development, and many other staff benefits.
Statement in job advertisements	The Baker Institute is an Equal Opportunity Employer, and we encourage interest from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders for roles within the Institute. We value diversity, inclusivity, gender equity and we promote family friendly practices. We are a proud recipient of an inaugural Athena SWAN Bronze Award from Science in Australia Gender Equity (SAGE).
Information in new starter pack	Information about the availability of flexible working arrangements is included in the Baker Institute’s new starter pack.
Staff forums	Presentations by the OHS Manager in 2021 and 2022 were conducted which included information about flexible work arrangements and the processes involved.
Intranet	Information about flexible working arrangements and the process for requesting them is provided on the Intranet.
Staff Bulletin and Agenda	Flexible working arrangements have been promoted regularly in our monthly staff bulletins and fortnightly Agenda messaging system.
Information for supervisors	Members of the Gender Equity and Diversity Committee (GEDC) have targeted supervisors in increasing awareness by presenting at Science Faculty meetings. Emails were also sent to managers asking them how many of their staff had signed up for remote work options.

To assess whether employees and students were aware of the range of flexible working arrangements available to them, the 2022 culture survey included questions regarding awareness of these options. The response rate was very good with 186 respondents and included a diverse range of employees (researchers and professional staff) and students. Our results showed that a very high percentage of both women and men were aware that the Baker Institute had introduced: flexible working hours (78% and 80%); remote access of data and servers (83% and 82%); Zoom meetings (84% and 88%); and recorded seminars and hybrid presentations (78% and 78%).

3.3 Short and long-term changes due to COVID-19

Flexibility during the pandemic

While the global COVID-19 pandemic was devastating and disruptive, it also created opportunities for the normalisation of flexible working arrangements at the Baker Institute. The Director wrote to all staff in August 2020, and again in August 2021, acknowledging the challenges of the pandemic and stating that the Institute would be as flexible as possible. The Director acknowledged the juggling act involved in combining work with caring for and home-schooling children, stating that he recognised that this may result in reduced productivity and response times. He sought feedback from staff on novel approaches to flexibility. The letters also reminded staff that during COVID-19, the Institute was supporting working families or those with carer duties during the lockdowns by allowing for 1.0 FTE to be paid for 0.75 FTE work hours.



Research has shown that women disproportionately shouldered the care burdens associated with COVID-19.⁶ Acknowledging this difficulty, the Institute provided the opportunity for 6 months of home tutoring to children of staff using an external provider. By helping children directly, the program freed up time for the parents and enabled them to better manage the demands of work, domestic responsibilities, and caring/home-schooling duties. Nineteen children were enrolled, and the feedback received was extremely positive.

“My girls have commenced their tutoring sessions, and the experience so far has been very positive. The tutors and management team are all very friendly and responsive. The sessions run smoothly, and the standard of work appears good.”

Medical research was classified as essential work but those who could work from home were encouraged to do so and those working in labs were required to adhere to density limits and rotational rosters to keep numbers onsite low. To support those who were working from home during the pandemic, the Baker Institute provided ergonomic workstations, extra computer monitors and access to the Institute’s servers when offsite. Zoom software was purchased enabling remote and hybrid meetings and seminars. Seminars and meetings were also recorded and made available for all staff and students.

Flexibility after the pandemic

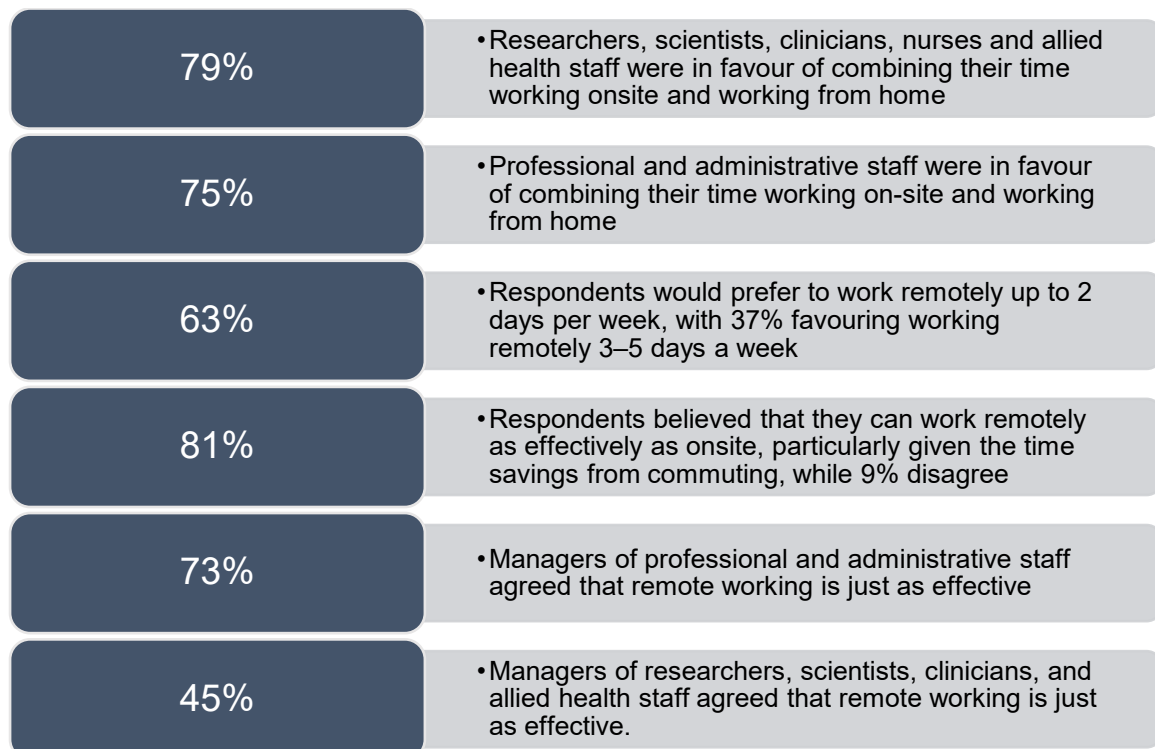
An Institute-wide survey was conducted in October 2020 and asked Baker Institute employees how they would like to return to work following the relaxation of COVID-19 lockdown restrictions. Responses were obtained for 227 individuals (more than 80% of the workforce) and included 70 managers/supervisors, 122 workers, 27 students and 8 affiliates. The survey results showed that, following the relaxation of lockdown restrictions, many staff supported the idea of combining onsite work with remote working options and believed that they could



⁶ Dinella, L.M., Evans, K., Levinson, J.A. and Gagnon, S. (2023). Women disproportionately shoulder burdens associated with COVID-19. *Journal of Social Issues*, 79, 1057–1087.

work as effectively at home as onsite. While managers of professional staff were highly supportive of hybrid working arrangements (73%), managers of researchers, scientists, clinicians, and allied health staff were less likely to agree that remote working is as effective as working on site (45%). These results, however, are unsurprising given that many scientific staff are required to spend a significant proportion of their time working in a laboratory or clinic.

Figure 3: Return to work survey results, 2022



Following the presentation of these results to the Director and with the return to essentially normal working hours in early 2022, the Institute formalised how staff could apply for remote working arrangements. A *Remote work request policy* and an online *Remote work agreement form* were developed to assist workers with balancing the demands of work with their personal responsibilities. In accordance with this policy, approval may be given for a worker to undertake a variety of remote working arrangements including all work being done remotely, a hybrid model where work is done onsite and at home, and an arrangement where the worker may apply to work remotely as required on an ad-hoc basis. The policy and process were communicated to staff at the Scientific Group meeting (bimonthly) and at all staff meetings in 2022. Details of the policy are also included in the new starter pack and on the Intranet.

4. Outcomes

4.1 Requests for flexible working arrangements

Figure 4 below shows that fewer women and men requested flexible working arrangements (such as flexible start and finish times) in 2022 compared to 2020. For example, in 2020

39% of women requested flexible working arrangements compared to 29% of women in 2022. This appears to be an interesting result. However, the 2022 survey also included a specific question regarding requests for remote working. A total of 27% of women and 26% of men requested a remote working arrangement in 2022 following the lifting of lockdown restrictions. Most requests for remote working were granted (women 87%, men 95%). We suggest that the lower number of requests for flexible working arrangements (such as start and finishing times) was the result of more than a quarter of all staff requesting remote working arrangements.

Figure 4: Requests for flexibility by gender, 2020 and 2022

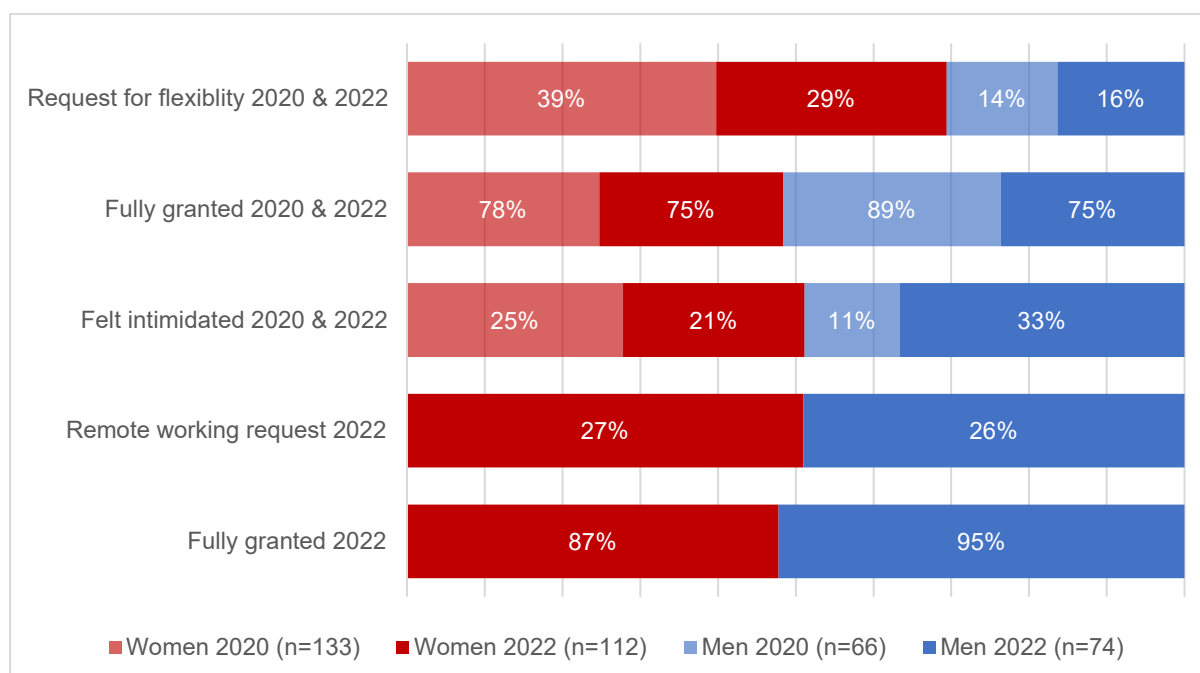


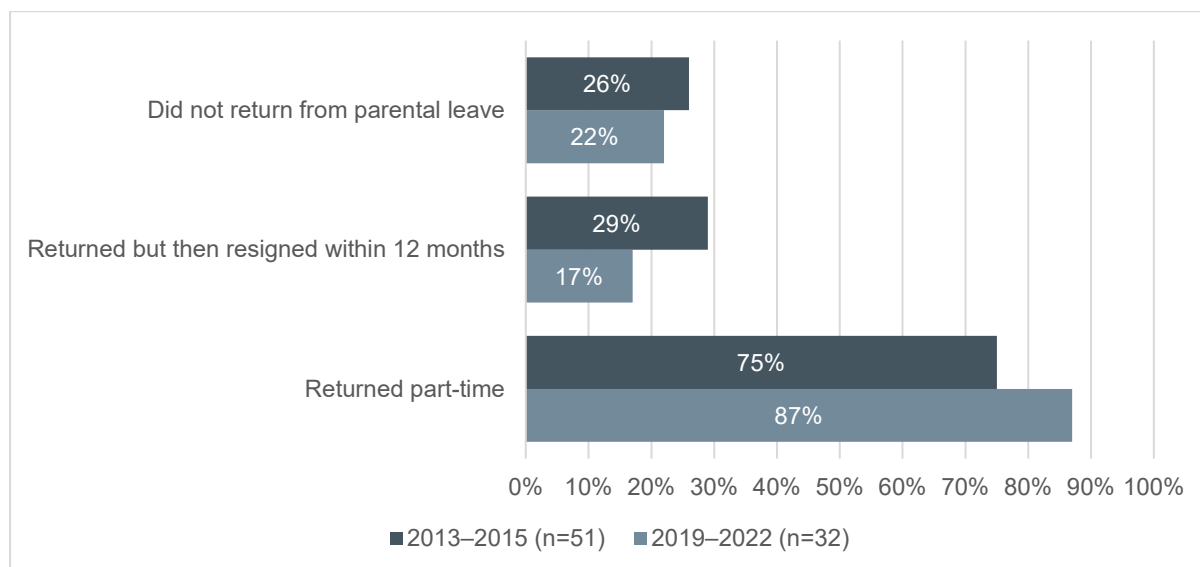
Figure 4 above also shows that women were less likely to feel intimidated in 2022 than in 2020 (21% vs 25%) while men were more likely to feel intimidated in 2022 than in 2020 (33% vs 11%). The results for men, however, are based on small numbers. A total of 12 men requested flexible working arrangements (as opposed to remote working) in 2022 and four of these felt intimidated. These results may suggest that the pandemic had ‘normalised’ the concept of remote working for both women and men. We do not specifically know if perceived cultural expectations around masculinity and men at work continue to exert an influence on men’s use of other types of flexible work arrangements and will explore this notion in future surveys of staff and students in 2024/2025.

4.2 Resignation rates during and after parental leave

Our parental leave data shows improvement. In our Bronze application, we found that 26% of those taking parental leave resigned during their leave and did not return to work. In 2019–2022, the proportion of those leaving during parental leave had reduced to 22%. An even greater improvement was seen in the rate at which those taking parental leave returned but subsequently resigned within 12 months. In 2013–2015, nearly 30% of all those returning left within 12 months. In 2019–2022 however, only 17% resigned within 12 months of returning from parental leave. The take-up rate of part-time work after parental leave has

also improved with nearly 90% of all staff returning from parental leave in 2019–2022 returning at a part-time FTE, compared to 75% in 2013–2015. Some of the improvements seen in our return from parental leave data may have been affected by COVID-19 so future tracking of this information is important.

Figure 5: Resignation rates during and following parental leave 2013–2015 and 2019–2022

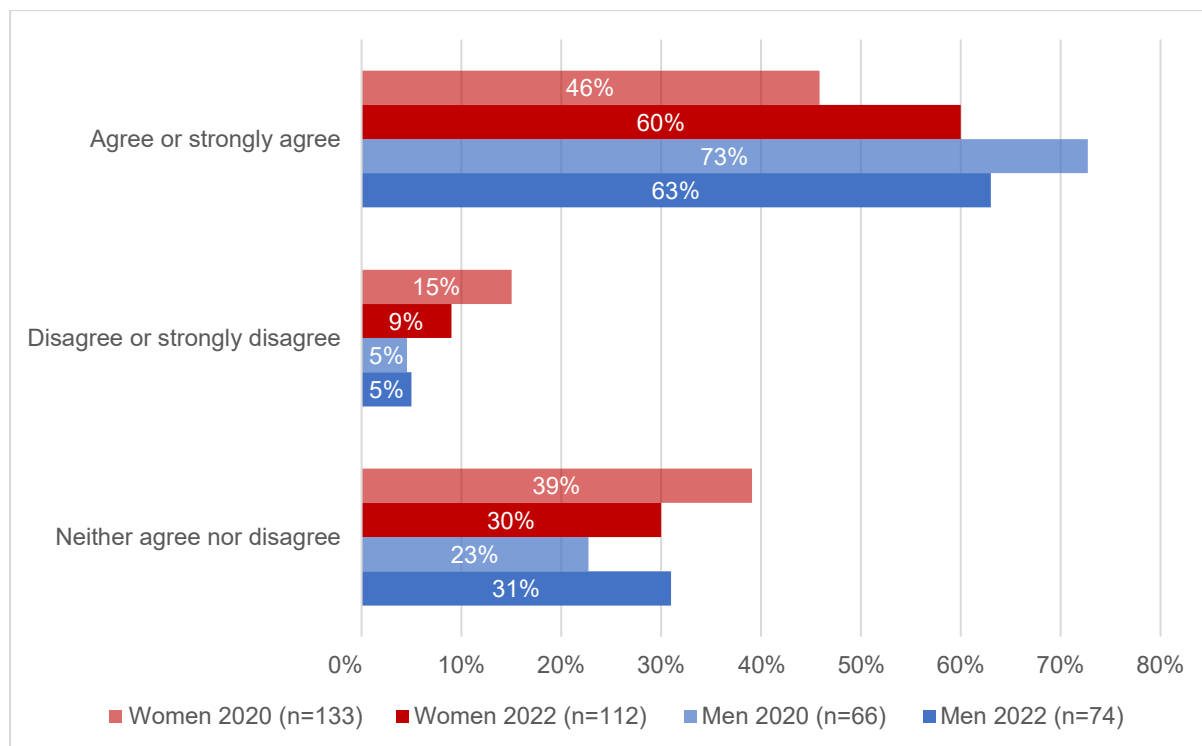


4.3 Beliefs about flexibility and career development

In the 2022 culture survey, staff were asked again whether they agreed with the statement that those who work part-time or flexibly in my team are offered the same career development opportunities as those who work full-time. Figure 6 shows that the proportion of women who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement rose from 46% in 2020 to 60% in 2022. In contrast, the proportion of men who agreed or strongly agreed with this statement dropped from 73% in 2020 to 63% in 2022. We are unclear as to the reasons for this outcome for men. In 2020, 49 out of 66 men agreed with the statement while in 2022, 47 men out of 74 agreed with this statement. The rather small number of men completing the culture survey (66 for 2020 and 74 for 2022) means that small changes in numbers can produce large changes in percentages – a 10% difference in this case. On a more positive note, this change may reflect men’s growing awareness that the workplace is gendered and that those most likely to work part-time or flexibly (women) are likely to pay a price for using these arrangements.

In both 2020 and 2022, the proportion of people who disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement that staff who work part-time or flexibly in my team are offered the same career development opportunities as those who work full-time was low. Fewer women disagreed with this statement in 2022 (9%) compared to 2020 (15%) while the proportion of men disagreeing remained the same (5%). It is difficult to interpret the findings regarding those who neither agreed nor disagreed with this statement although once again, fewer women in 2022 (30%) were in this category compared to 2020 where 39% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Figure 6: Staff who work part-time or flexibly are offered the same career development opportunities, 2020 and 2022



5. Impact

5.1 Flexibility focus group results

In the second half of 2023, we undertook a series of focus groups to further investigate flexible working arrangements at the Baker Institute. This investigation was done at approximately 2 years since the introduction of the 2021 Enterprise Agreement, and the development of the *Remote work policy* and a focus on activities aimed at raising awareness of the availability of flexible working arrangements. Staff from a variety of units and roles were invited to participate. Four focus groups were held with a total of 13 participants. A total of 11 women and two men participated in these groups which included both scientific and professional staff. Separate focus groups were held for those who faced long commutes to work (n=4); working parents (n=4); those who had used the home tutoring service during the pandemic (n=2); and supervisors of staff using flexible working arrangements (n=3). Key findings from the focus groups are presented in Table 2, while quotes from the focus groups are presented in Table 3.

Table 2: Key findings from 2023 flexibility focus groups

1	Participants felt that flexible working arrangements were an important initiative provided by the Baker Institute, and that the tailoring of these arrangements to the individual and their team is vital.
2	The application process, including navigating the system to apply for and process a request for flexible working arrangements needs some improvement.
3	There is varied visibility and understanding of flexible working arrangements.

4	The importance of the supervisor role in flexible working arrangements was discussed with participants noting that having a supportive supervisor enabled the success of flexible working arrangements.
5	Participants spoke of a cultural pressure to work onsite that is external to the actual policies. For example, there was some discussion of individuals' flexible working arrangements not being respected by other staff members with in-person meetings being scheduled during a work from home day.
6	Some participants acknowledged that whilst there is not an impact on the work itself, there are emptier office spaces (especially on level two), and that they are missing casual conversations with other staff members.

Table 3: Flexible working arrangements focus groups quotes 2023

Positive feedback	<p>“Most of my flexible working was during Covid working late at night. Listening to seminars while I was taking them out for a walk. Very creative stuff. Yeah. No, we did anything we could to keep it going.”</p> <p>“I was having some back problems with the chair I had at home and after an assessment with OHSU, they let me bring my actual chair from Baker home. So yeah, we've kind of got a couple of people in my team who have had, you know, issues with only having the one screen being able to provide them with the second screen at home and that sort of thing and set up get correctly. Yeah, I definitely think that the Institute's been able to help.”</p> <p>“I do pick up and drop offs on the days that I work from home and on the days that I'm in the city as I said I leave my house at 6:00 AM and that's not a good time to get a six year old out of the house and drop them at school, so my wife does drop off and pick up on the days when I work in the city.”</p> <p>“I'm set up here at home and yeah have that flexibility to be able to work and continue to deliver and perform what's needed for my role.”</p>
Application process	<p>“I thought it was pretty straightforward. The online application process that we have, and the approvals workflow was straightforward and easy to use and all the information than was required seemed to be there.”</p> <p>“The system of applying is a bit clunky, like the sort of, you know how you've got to get approvals for and you've got to send the forms, but I think that's the same with anything through any big organisation, that's never smooth.”</p>
Supervisors need to inform all staff of options	<p>“So, I joined the institute as the first lockdown was starting. So, I didn't hear about this arrangement, you know, and they might have told you, the institute said you could be paid full-time FTE but work 0.8 for example, I wasn't aware of that? And eventually I heard about it, and I thought that's fine, I'm trying to set up a lab and move, I don't think this is going to be very good for me, but it seemed, like [they] said, very flexible, very easy because this was happening during Covid they tried to make it as easy as possible.”</p>

	<p>“I mean, the policy is fairly good. It's there. I mean one way perhaps is to remind folks that there's that option to be able to have that flexible work. Management. Some people are like older and because we've had some new staff join the team and they're like, oh, do I need to come into the office every day? I don't know. Not every day. And here's the options to. So, I guess it's just for us, the supervisors reminding them that that option is there and that post-Covid it still is an option. And still available to them rather than oh do I have to be in the office you know? Every day of the week.”</p>
<p>Cultural acceptance of flexible arrangements</p>	<p>“It's a cultural thing, isn't it, you can't really put it in the policy. I think it has to be a top-down kind of thing, like if you see your lab head or the director turn up at 7am and leave at 6pm. You're kind of like, well, crap. I feel bad if I'm getting there at 10 and leaving at, you know, whatever. Even if it's agreed upon, it changes the feeling of having the freedom of flexible work arrangements.”</p>
<p>Missing face-to-face contact</p>	<p>“I do feel like not in terms of productivity, that's not in question, but I think, yeah, that's what's missing is just those really casual conversations. I'll pop down and or I'll pop up and see [them] and ask that face to face.”</p>

5.2 Challenges ahead

The results of this Cygnet indicate that further work needs to be done to formalise and normalise the use of flexible working arrangements at the Baker Institute. Despite many staff wanting to use these options, particularly the remote work option, it appears as though acceptance of flexibility as a legitimate form of working may not be a position everyone takes. There may be some reluctance by men to make full use of these options to achieve work/life balance and this may be tied to larger cultural issues held by both men and women around masculinity and notions of the ideal worker. Levels of awareness of flexibility arrangements amongst supervisors and staff requires further action. This information needs to include the potential benefits to both employers and employees, as well as ways to reduce any mental health impacts and a sense of isolation for those working remotely.

6. Further actions

Ref	Rationale	Action and Outputs	Timeframe	Responsibility	Accountability	Success indicators
1	Staff report not being informed of the availability of flexible working arrangements by their supervisors and/or of supervisors being unaware themselves of these options for themselves and their team members.	Increase knowledge of flexible working arrangements and their benefits amongst supervisors and managers. Include information about processes for supporting flexible working arrangements amongst all staff regardless of position or demographic.	2024–2025	Gender Equity and Diversity Committee (GEDC) and HR	Institute Director	<p>Package of information for supervisors developed and information dispersed widely across the Institute.</p> <p>Knowledge and discussion of flexible work arrangements within teams included within the performance development of supervisors.</p> <p>2026 culture survey results indicate increased awareness amongst supervisors of flexibility arrangements.</p>
2	Some confusion remains about the flexible work application process. While a formal policy for remote working exists, the process for applying for other types of flexibility remains vague.	Incorporate all possible flexible working arrangements into one formal policy and fine tune the application process so that it is simple to request changes to contracted work arrangements.	2024	HR Manager	IMC Chair	A single formal policy and procedures for all flexible working arrangements is developed, the online application process user-friendly and it is widely

						promoted across the Institute.
3	Not all staff, including new and existing staff, are aware of the availability of flexible working arrangements at the Baker Institute.	Develop a communication strategy, which includes a review of induction/onboarding material, to raise awareness of the availability of flexible work arrangements at the Baker Institute and the processes for requesting this. Include information about the options being available to all staff, regardless of position or demographic.	2024–2025	GEDC and Communications team	HR and PR managers	A range of communication activities around flexible working arrangements have been put in place. 2026 culture survey results indicate increased awareness amongst staff of flexibility arrangements.
4	There is some ambiguity around remote work, including what is in place. There is currently no review process.	Create greater rigour by ensuring messages are pushed out within the software system to managers asking them to review their existing RW arrangements with staff and create sign-off process for managers that they have reviewed RW arrangements.	2024–2025	OHS and Data manager	Facilities Manager (reporting line for OHS)	Messages asking managers to review remote work (RW) arrangements within their team are sent regularly and appropriate sign off on these arrangements is monitored and reported on by the OHS team on an annual basis.
5	Higher than desired resignation rates during parental leave and within 12 months of returning from parental leave.	Investigate the reasons for resignation during and after parental leave by conducting interviews and/or distributing questionnaires to those	2024–2025	GEDC and HR	HR Manager	Report generated and presented to the IMC, MRT and Board, on reasons why those on or returning from

		leaving to identify key reasons for departure.				parental leave choose to leave the organisation and relevant strategies implemented to reduce parental leave resignation rates.
6	The number of men using flexible work arrangements (other than remote working) remains low.	Increase the number of men using flexible working arrangements by having other men, including senior men, model and encourage these behaviours.	2024–2025	GEDC and Communications team	Senior males within the Institute acting as “champions of change”	Stories of men, including senior men, are published on the Baker Institute’s digital platforms highlighting the benefits of flexible working arrangements for men.