

PSC CIRCULAR

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PSC Circular No. 05/2007

To: Acting Permanent Secretaries, Advisors and Heads of Departments **Date:** 16/02/2007

Subject: **Opening of Government Offices During Lunch Hour (1.00pm – 2.00pm) – Staggered Lunch Break** **File:** 29/220-7

- 1.0 The Public Service Commission has decided that Government offices, especially those providing front line customer services and/or counter services are to henceforth remain open during the official lunch hour from 1.00pm to 2.00pm to continue providing services to the public.
- 2.0 This decision by the Commission is part of efforts at improving both the image of the Public Service and the standard of public services delivery by Ministries and Departments, and the Service as a whole. It is also a necessary move to replicate similar service arrangements by commercial and corporate businesses and companies in the private sector.
- 3.0 Those frontline staff manning the service counters will need to be organized into scheduled and agreed staggered lunch hour breaks between 12.00noon and 2.00pm. It may be necessary, where frontline staff numbers are limited, to use staff from other sections within the Ministry/Department in the staggered arrangement.
- 4.0 To assist and ensure the effectiveness of this new lunch hour service arrangement, including the monitoring of it, addressees are to use the Flexible Working Hours Policy, specifically the flexible lunch hour mechanism in the Policy. For ease of reference, a copy of the Flexitime Policy is attached as **Appendix I**.
- 5.0 There may be need to exempt certain Ministries and Departments from the new lunch hour service due either to its impracticality or non-relevance, whichever the case may be. In such cases, Ministries and Departments are expected to formally seek from the Commission this exemption and giving reasons.

6.0 The Commission will consider conducting workshops for Human Resource Managers and Personnel Officers on this new lunch hour service should this become necessary. Staff from the Commission will be visiting Ministries and Departments to observe the lunch hour service and this will be followed by a survey involving both staff and members of the public to gauge the effectiveness of the new service.

7.0 Clarification

7.1 Any clarification and/or further information required may be obtained from Mr. Peniame Naqasima, Director Employee Relations, Public Service Commission, on telephone number 3314588 extension 407/408 or on email address pnaqasima@psc.gov.fj

7.2 Addressees are requested to give this Circular the widest possible coverage and attention especially to all frontline customer service staff/counter staff and to display this Circular conspicuously on notice boards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tom Lee', is positioned above a vertical line that extends downwards.

Tom Lee

**Acting Permanent Secretary for the Public Service and
Public Sector Reform**

FLEXIBLE WORKING HOURS

[Flexitime]

Introduction

The introduction of flexitime working hours [flexitime] formed part of the Government's civil service reform commitment to new approaches to people management. Combined with the organizational management reform's focus on managerial autonomy, accountability, the achievement of goals and objectives, and performance, flexible working hours encourages better management practices while improving the productivity of the workforce.

The introduction of flexible working hours also formed a part of the three-year Industrial Relations Framework (IRF) (1997 – 1999) that was agreed to between the Public Service Commission and the Public Service Unions in November 1997.

At its meeting on 21st September 1999 the Commission approved the piloting of flexitime in selected ministries and departments and the accompanying Policy. A Steering Committee was established to monitor and evaluate the pilot project. It was expected that following successful piloting, service-wide implementation would commence.

Flexible Working Hours in the System

Unlike the fixed working day, which strictly specified times of arrival, departure and lunch, the flexible working day allows employees to vary starting, lunch and finishing times so that personal and family responsibilities can be met conveniently. The system also allows employees up to a maximum of one day off, every four weeks for extra time worked. Employees may choose their daily working hours within the policy limits, though they are expected to arrange their time schedule in consultation and with agreement of supervisors and management.

The key features of flexible working hours in relation to the piloted Policy are:

1. **Bandwidth** - runs from 7.00am to 6.00pm and is the period during the working day when staff may record time worked.
2. **Core time** - from 9.00am to 3.00pm and is the period of the day, excluding lunch break, when all employees are required to be at work.
3. **Lunch period** - *employees are entitled to a 1 hour lunch break taken between 11.30am – 2.00pm. An employee is entitled to a lunch break of one hour, but may reduce or extend the period to a minimum period of ½ hour or to a maximum period of 2 hours. The lunch hour is, however not part of the flexitime.*

4. **Contracted attendance hours** – the number of hours an employee is contracted to work in a settlement period, a total of 148 hours.
5. **Recorded hours** – all time worked by an employee (except overtime during the settlement period).
6. **Settlement Period** – Four-week period, consisting of 148 contracted hours, during which recorded hours are accounted for. During this period, the general aim is that employee recorded hours should be approximately equal to the contracted hours for the same period (subject to any carry-over balance allowed). 148 hours is arrived at by multiplying the current 37 hour week by 4 weeks.
7. **Creation of a Credit/Debit** – Occurs when an employees recorded hours exceed (credit) or fall short (debit) his/her contracted attendance hours at the end of a settlement period.
8. **Carry-over balance** – Employees are allowed to carry forward no more the ten (10) debit or credit hours from one settlement period (four weeks/one month) to the next.
9. **Time Recording** – Attendance under flexitime is recorded on a Flexitime Record Sheet (Flexisheet) which includes the whole four-week settlement period. Employees are required to fill in their arrival and departure times and the length of their lunch breaks. Periods of absence from the officer for personal reasons should also be entered so those non-working periods of time can be debited from an employee's recorded work hours for the day.
10. **Flexi leave** – Daily-recorded work hours are cumulatively added as the settlement period progresses to arrive at the total recorded hours of work at the end of the period. This difference in the total contact hours and 148 contracted hours determine whether the employee is in debit or credit at the end of the period. Credit or debit hours not exceeding 10 hours are then carried over to the next settlement period (4 weeks) in which the employee either utilizes credit or make up debit hours.
11. **Overtime** – Under the existing system, overtime begins at the end of the bandwidth i.e 6.00pm. Time worked within the bandwidth is credited to the employees daily recorded hours of work. Employees will not be eligible for overtime unless directed to work beyond 6.00pm.

12. **Important** – Flexitime arrangements are subject to adequate services being maintained at all times. Employees may therefore be required to be at work at a certain time, or required to work for the duration of the daily contract hours (7 ½ hours Mon – Thurs, 7 hours Fridays). **Remember : Flexitime is a privilege, not an entitlement, which management may take away if abused.**

13. **Responsibilities of Management**

- Priority must be given to the operational needs of the Ministry or Department
- Arrangements should be made to allow flexitime arrangements to be available to all employees (except those specifically excluded)
- Flexitime requires active monitoring by supervisors/managers
- Flexitime arrangements are at the discretion of management but should also not be unreasonably withheld.

14. **Responsibilities of Employees** – Flexitime arrangements are subject to adequate services being maintained at all times. Employees may therefore be required to be at work at a certain time, or required to work for the duration of the daily contract hours (7 ½ hours Mon-Thurs, 7 hours Friday). The element of trust is very important in flexitime and the onus is on the employee to maintain this.