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Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reforms

13 April 2004

Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reforms
Circular Letter No.19 of 2004
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From: Senior Chief Executive, Ministry of Civil Service Affairs and Administrative Reforms

To: Heads of Ministries/Departments

Introduction of Flexitime in the Civil Service

The Pay Research Bureau has at paragraph 15.5.7 (b) of its 2003 Report recommended the introduction of a flexitime pattern of work as a measure to combat tardiness. The concept of flexitime and its implications for management has been explained at paragraphs 15.5.11 to 15.5.16 of the Report - relevant extract is enclosed.

2. Government has decided that the issue of flexitime in the Civil Service be examined and concrete proposals be submitted for the introduction of an appropriate scheme with a view to providing civil servants with a congenial working schedule and enabling the public to tap into the resources of the public service in a more flexible manner.

3. Flexible working arrangements would normally be determined within defined parameters such as core time bands and flexitime bands within a bandwidth period, which represents a total working day. These parameters could be defined as -

- Bandwidth which would be the earliest time at which staff could start work up to the latest finishing time. The bandwidth should be specified because whilst allowing flexibility, there need to be some limit to the earliest and latest times staff could work to suit operational needs. The bandwidth period could be, for example, from 0715 hours to 1730 hours.
- Core time during which all staff should be in attendance, unless on approved leave. could be between 0930 hours to 1200 hours and 1400 hours to 1600 hours.

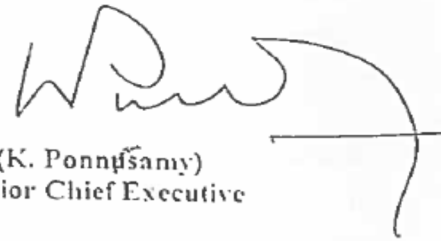
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- Flexitime during which the staff might vary the time of starting work in the morning and/or the time of ceasing work in the afternoon could be from 0715 hours to 0930 hours and 1600 hours to 1730 hours.
 - Flexible lunch breaks of a minimum of 30 minutes and a maximum of two hours during the flexitime bands of 1200 hours to 1400 hours.
 - Excess/deficit hours could be credited/debited in a bank of hours over a fortnight. It would thus be possible for any officer who has accumulated sufficient time to take a day off every fortnight.
4. The normal contractual weekly hours which officers are required to put in would remain unchanged. Any officer who prefers to continue his/her present pattern of attendance (0845 hours to 1600 hours) with half an hour for lunch, will be allowed to do so.
5. The onus to manage and monitor flexible working arrangements, and maintain appropriate control measures would be the responsibility of Heads of Ministries/Departments. In order to ascertain that operational requirements do not suffer as a result of flexible work arrangements. Heads of Ministries/Departments would have to ensure that sufficient officers are available to keep offices open during the flexitime period to meet operational needs.
6. It is extremely likely that the use of an electronic time-keeping device will have to be introduced simultaneously with the inception of the flexitime system.
7. Flexitime would normally not be applicable to certain categories of officers due to the nature of their duties, for example, -
- officers operating on a shift system, roster basis and staggered hours
 - officers in the manual grades
 - officers in the disciplined force
 - officers in the education sector
8. To enable this Ministry to come up with concrete proposals for the introduction of an appropriate flexitime scheme, Heads of Ministries/Departments are requested to submit the following information by Thursday 29 April 2004 -
- (i) the sections/units where flexible working arrangements could readily be applied, suggesting core times and starting and finishing times which might be appropriate;
 - (ii) the sections/units where flexible working arrangements cannot be implemented stating the reasons therefor; and

(iii) the categories of officers other than those mentioned at paragraph 7 above, which should also be excluded from the flexitime scheme stating the reasons therefor;

9. In this connection, Heads of Ministries/Departments are strongly advised to consult all categories of staff and to take into consideration the nature of services provided, the standard hours of work, the office coverage needed at any particular time and the control measures to be introduced.

10. Your entire collaboration on the matter would be appreciated.



(K. Ponnusamy)
Senior Chief Executive

Copy to: Secretary to Cabinet and Head of the Civil Service

- 15.5.10 On the other hand, employees, up to a certain level, who are required to work in excess of their basic week should be properly compensated for the excess hours. This issue is addressed in the section dealing with overtime and extra duty allowances.

Flexitime

- 15.5.11 Since its 1993 Report, the Bureau has been advocating the introduction of flexitime in the service i.e. the system of working a fixed number of hours with flexibility in the time of arrival and departure of the employee provided he attends office within a core time during the working day. However, up to now, we are not aware of its application in any Ministry or Department or any other public sector organisation.
- 15.5.12 The Bureau still maintains that the introduction of flexitime has several advantages and would be beneficial to both employees and organisations. It would relieve officers of their routine stress and help them to better manage the balance between work commitments, family responsibilities and lifestyle choices to the advantage of the service. Today's workforce increasingly consists of women, and workers in alternative family structures, such as single-headed and dual-earner families. Faced with more pressing demands from both the workplace and home, these employees must often divide time between these two competing interests. Among those most likely to benefit from greater workplace flexibility are prime working-age women, women household heads, and employees in two-earner families. Employees who would prefer this work pattern should, if possible, be allowed to make that choice which would help them to better cope with both the work and the household and child care responsibilities.

Recommendation 3

- 15.5.13 We again recommend that, subject to the approval of the Ministry of Civil Affairs and Administrative Reforms and after consultation with the Staff Side, Ministries/Departments/Organisations should expedite the introduction of flexitime where demand exists and resources permit.

15.5.14 It must be pointed out that the application of flexitime would involve the following responsibilities for management:

- (a) introduction of irregular workweek whereby employees have early arrival times and late departure times;
- (b) ensuring that there is adequate office coverage during official hours and that customer service and work requirements are not adversely affected by employee participation in alternative work schedules;
- (c) ensuring that employee participation in alternative work schedules is equitable and consistent across work units within the organisation;
- (d) complying with all procedural requirements on certification of time and attendance and work schedules;
- (e) communicating and seeking mutual agreement with the employee on work schedules;
- (f) planning office workflow to ensure that there is productive work for employees to perform;
- (g) suspending an employee's alternative work schedule when workload requirements, temporary duty, or training preclude participation;
- (h) informing employees as soon as practicable of any modifications in work schedule; and
- (i) making a concerted effort to schedule office meetings during core hours.

15.5.15 It would also be the responsibility of management to ensure monitoring and supervision in establishing work hours, prohibit abuses and take correcting measures if abuses occur.

15.5.16 Employees on the other hand would be responsible for:

- (a) complying with all procedural requirements regarding certification of time and attendance and work schedules to which they are assigned;

- (b) communicating and seeking mutual agreement with the supervisor on work schedules; and
- (c) maintaining records of daily time and attendance in accordance with office procedures.