

SPEAKOUT

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THINKING OUTSIDE THE WORKFORCE BOX

Options and considerations for attracting and retaining allied health staff



The challenge of attracting and retaining allied health staff was traditionally more of a concern in rural and regional areas. However, the pandemic has had a sweeping impact on healthcare and community care, with many employers now facing skilled workforce shortages.

Private practice owners, in particular, struggle to compete with the salaries and incentives offered by larger organisations, making it even more difficult to find the right candidate and secure their long-term commitment to the team.

This article provides private practice owners with an opportunity to think outside the box by considering a range of options and incentives aimed at attracting and retaining staff. This information can also provide a useful reference for speech pathologists and support staff who are contemplating or discussing employment options with a current or prospective employer.

In each of the following examples, it's important to know and comply with the relevant minimum employer/employee obligations. However, the key message of this article is that practice owners can choose to take best practice initiatives and offer incentives above and beyond their minimum legal requirements, in an effort to retain skilled staff and make their practice a more appealing workplace.

Employer-funded paid maternity and parental leave

Paid maternity and parental leave is a targeted incentive that can attract early career graduates, experienced practitioners or administrative staff who may be considering or planning to start a family.

Under the Fair Work Act, employees (including long-term casuals) who have worked with their employer for more than 12 months are entitled to take unpaid parental leave when they or their partner give birth or adopt a child. They can also request up to a total of 24 months of unpaid parental leave. This minimum legal requirement includes a guarantee that the employee can return to their job after they complete their leave.

Practice owners can show support and loyalty to employees by providing a period of employer-funded paid parental leave. You can also consider other benefits, for example:

- paying an employee's superannuation contributions while on leave;

- allowing employees who are dads or partners to access paid leave at the time of birth or adoption, or when the other parent returns to work;
- topping up an employee's pay so they get their full wage when accessing government-funded parental leave pay; or
- allowing the option of taking annual leave or long service leave at half pay during parental leave.

It is important for private practice owners to have a workplace policy that outlines your approach to parental leave. This should include details on the employee's leave entitlements, requirements on giving notice, the transition arrangements for taking leave and returning to work, the communication process for keeping in touch during the leave period, and the options for flexible working arrangements.

Flexible working arrangements

Safety jurisdictions around Australia agree that flexible work arrangements can help create a mentally healthy workplace and improve employee motivation and productivity. The pandemic has impacted many employees' work arrangements and normalised the option of working from home. As employees transition back to the workplace, we have seen a significant trend towards employees wishing to maintain flexible or hybrid work arrangements.

The Fair Work Act outlines rights for certain employees around requesting flexible working arrangements, and obligations for how the employer manages these requests. At a minimum, employers must consider any written request by a person who is a parent or carer, living with a disability, aged 55 or older, experiencing family violence, or supporting a family or household member experiencing family violence.

An employer can only refuse these requests on reasonable business grounds, such as the arrangements being too costly, too impractical, or likely to result in significant loss of efficiency or productivity. But anyone is allowed to request flexible working arrangements and the Fair Work Ombudsman encourages employers take a best practice

approach by considering all requests and providing flexibility where possible, to support employee work-life balance.

Practice owners who are struggling to attract and retain skilled staff may benefit by offering more personalised work arrangements. A recent article, [The hyper-personalisation of work is coming and it could benefit all employees](#), published by ABC Radio National explores the trend towards 'job crafting' and work 'hyper-personalisation' to ensure that employees' individual experience suits their optimum performance and satisfaction profile.

Practice owners can take this on board by discussing with prospective or existing staff how they work best, what they find engaging or meaningful, where their strengths lie and their desired job requirements and responsibilities.

Practice owners can choose to offer flexibility in a range of different forms, for example:

- flexible start and finish times or working more hours over fewer days
- part-time work, casual work or job sharing
- working from home or another location
- flexible rostering or taking rostered days off as 2 half days.

It is important for private practice owners to have a workplace policy that outlines your approach to flexible working arrangements and any employer/employee rights and obligations. This should include details on the types of arrangements that could be available in your workplace, how to make a request, how requests will be managed, how the arrangements will be monitored and reviewed, and record keeping requirements.

Staff development

People can often be drawn to employment in a particular role or organisation when they see opportunities to develop their career goals and aspirations. These kinds of incentives and benefits can take various forms, such as employer-funded training and upskilling programs, mentorships, leadership development and succession planning.

The organisational benefits of training and developing your staff are widely recognised, such as increased productivity and job satisfaction, reduced employee turnover and fostering a healthy workplace culture.

In today's new 'covid-normal' working landscape, it has become even more important to ensure that staff are supported to cope with workplace stressors, comply with various regulations and continue to perform well during times of change. The provision of regular training and development opportunities should be considered a key measure for retaining skilled staff, managing the work culture and mitigating the risk of staff issues or incidents.



It's important to note that staff training, leadership and mentoring programs offered by the employer are considered work activities, so the employee must be paid for their time. Other options for supporting staff development may include:

- providing a buddy program or career pathway program
- allowing employees who need further education or certification to access paid or unpaid leave
- allowing employees to attend an annual industry conference or expo during paid working hours.

Taking a broad-minded approach to workforce attraction and retention can open up a wide range of best practice initiatives and employee incentives which can be provided at the practice owner's discretion. To ensure that such incentives comply with employment regulations, it is advisable to seek professional workplace relations advice, whether this be through the [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) or an HR consultancy that works closely with the allied health sector such as [WorkPlacePLUS](#).

All SPA members receive special SPA member benefits through WorkPlacePLUS for support with HR and IR issues. For more information, contact Anna Pannuzzo on (03) 9492 0958 or visit www.WorkPlacePLUS.com.au.



Members who are interested to hear more about this topic can watch the recording of the ethics collaborative held on 28 February 2022 (SPA Learning Hub). The discussion during this collaborative identified the positive benefits of developing business structures, processes and professional supports to attract and retain staff.

The collaborative is free for members to access, and can be useful when planning for, or reflecting on, business management activities that support the development of positive and respectful relationships with staff and colleagues.

Online Resource GUIDE

SPA's Online Resource Guide 2022 is now up!

Find **TOOLS** and **RESOURCES** for speech pathologists and the public!

Submissions are still being accepted!

Free first entry for members and not-for-profit organisations.

New resources from the Ethics Team

The Ethics team are pleased to release two new resources which will provide practical information for members, applicable across a range of contexts.

1. Gaining informed consent

The first resource is an FAQ reflecting questions frequently asked regarding consent. Members will be able to read more information about what constitutes informed consent; what needs to be considered when the process of gaining consent is not clear cut; links to external resources and organisations that can assist; and a decision-making tool to guide members in complex cases. Members can access the FAQ on the SPA website's [informed consent page](#).



2. Ethical advertising

The second resource is an online self-paced learning module on the topic of ethical advertising. The course is designed for all members who advertise their services in any context, i.e. private, public, NGO, or other.

The module provides information on SPA's advertising policy; easy to read diagrams which summarise key important information that support reflective thinking on why ethical advertising is important for the communities we serve and our profession; and how advertising is undertaken.

The module also provides an online workbook which supports members to review their own advertising material or to plan how they will develop new advertising materials.

Members can access the module through the [SPA Learning Hub](#).