

# More funds available to help companies offer flexi-work

**Joanna Seow**  
Manpower Correspondent

More companies will be able to tap government funding to offer staff flexible work arrangements like part-time work or working from home.

The budget for the Work-Life Grant is being raised to \$100 million, up from \$30 million, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Low Yen Ling said yesterday.

The grant provides up to \$2,000 a year for each regular user of flexi-work arrangements, capped at \$70,000 per firm over two years.

Companies can also claim up to \$3,500 per user for job-sharing arrangements for full-time professionals, managers, executives and technicians, capped at \$35,000 over two years.

Flexi-work arrangements can include staggered working hours, telecommuting and sharing a job load among workers.

These can support the employment of older workers, who may want to continue working but at a slower pace, said Ms Low during the debate on the Manpower Ministry's budget.

"As we move towards a more inclusive work culture and mindset, we will be better placed to make the best of our talents," she added.

"With family-friendly workplaces, employees can contribute their fullest potential without compromising their responsibilities to their loved ones. And age-friendly work practices let our seniors pass on valuable experience and knowledge as they work at their preferred pace and intensity."

The Work-Life Grant was rolled

out in 2013 and was enhanced last year to make it easier for employers to qualify and to raise the quantum that can be claimed per employee.

Ms Low said last month that the enhanced grant has received more than 340 applications in five months.

She said that to raise awareness about job sharing, a less well-known form of flexi-work, the ministry and the Singapore National Employers Federation will launch a guide for employers in the first half of this year.

Job sharing has been used in the Accountant-General's Department in the Ministry of Finance, for example, where two mothers, Ms Lim Yu May and Ms Emily Kao, shared a job in cash management and payment processing.

Ms Lim took the morning shift so she could be home in the afternoon for her two primary school children, while Ms Kao preferred to work when her toddler took his afternoon nap under her mother's watch. They spent their overlapping hour at noon to hand over information and discuss what needed to be followed up on, said Ms Low.

The job-sharing arrangement lasted from December 2013 to June 2015, and both women continue to work in the Accountant-General's Department today.

Providing an update, Ms Low also said that, as at end-January this year, about 1,300 employers with 400,000 staff have adopted the Tripartite Standard on Flexible Work Arrangements - guidelines which employers can be recognised for adopting. The standard was launched in October 2017.

joseow@sph.com.sg



## More family time with job sharing

Every Monday, instead of heading to her office at the Nanyang Academy of Fine Arts (Nafa), Ms Jessica Ong spends an extra day with her six-year-old daughter.

She takes her to school and reads to her during the day, and is also able to fetch her 10-year-old son from school.

Ms Ong, 41, a marketing and sponsorship manager, shares her job load with another colleague.

She had been working full-time with a telecommuting arrangement since 2012, when her daughter was born with a medical condition and needed more attention.

In 2017, she approached her supervisors to see if she could reduce her workload and was pleasantly surprised to find out about the job-sharing option. This allowed her to work three days a week.

"It's been a real blessing. I get to spend more time with my daughter and relieve my elderly parents who look after her while I'm at work," said Ms Ong.

This year, as her daughter is older now, she has started working four days a week. Her pay and benefits are pro-rated accordingly.

Ms Ong said her colleagues accommodate her schedule when planning meetings, while her boss lets her take her day off on a different day if she has to go in to the office on Monday.

Although Nafa faculty members occasionally request to reduce their teaching load by half when they want to spend more time on their professional practice, Ms Ong is the first administrative staff member to be on a formal job-sharing arrangement.

Ms Sim Choo Lee, Nafa's head of human resources, said such flexibility helps the organisation retain staff who may otherwise need to choose between family commitments and work.

"Colleagues also value the trust given to them by management, and may want to contribute to the organisation even more. They feel a sense of pride at working for a progressive employer," she said.

For Ms Ong, the arrangement lets her enjoy the best of both worlds. "I can spend time with my children, but I still want to be in the workforce and contribute to society and to the family income," she said. "I hope more companies will embark on this to support their staff."

Joanna Seow

Nafa marketing and sponsorship manager Jessica Ong has been on a job-sharing arrangement for the last two years so she can spend more time with her daughter, who is now six. ST PHOTO: KELVIN CHNG