Kate McGill’s two children were only one and three years old when she was appointed to the demanding post of School Manager in Agriculture, Food and Rural Development.

“They are still really young and it was particularly hard at the beginning,” she admitted, “so I do understand the pressures – and not just for people who have families. We all need a reasonable work life balance. But certainly I wouldn’t have been able to do this job without the support of the Head of School and encouragement of other colleagues. Flexibility and understanding about the occasional emergency has to come from the top.”

Kate manages a number of key office-based staff and she has brought in flexible working for the whole team. Whereas previously admin staff were expected to be at their desks from 8.30 am to 5 pm, with an hour for lunch, they may now start work any time between 8 and 9.30 am and finish between 4 and 6.00 pm.

“I think that flexibility helps everyone to do their job well and also organise their lives” said Kate. “And where people want to move to part time working we will always consider that. These opportunities have to be available to everyone, across the board. And at the same time it’s important to be open and flexible about how you apply the rules to individuals and take their current circumstances into account.

“Culture is the key– if everyone feels that they are trusted to do a good job without having to account for every minute of the day, then they don’t take unfair advantage of the flexibility. It does come from the top – from the Head of School downwards. And I know that by trusting my staff and being flexible with them they are encouraged to do the same with the people they manage.”
Kate readily admits that although the School has moved a long way in this direction, there is still work to be done. “We are now making good progress on staff development, supporting staff who wish to develop their skills in areas outside their current roles” she explained.