

All-New  
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TV

Girl boss: Felicity Ward as Hannah Howard

# Return to THE OFFICE

Get ready for the launch of a third incarnation of Ricky Gervais' hit sitcom

**F**or many fans of *The Office*, news that the cult sitcom was being remade in 2024 prompted a sense of trepidation. After all, Ricky Gervais and Stephen Merchant's masterpiece has already been perfectly remade in the US, with Steve Carell as the lead.

But this latest incarnation looks a little different – made in Australia, the doofus boss is a woman this time round, with comedian Felicity Ward playing the role of Hannah Howard. It arrives on Prime Video this month and from what

we've seen, here at *heat*, we have high hopes.

Of course, taking a much-loved show and gender flipping the lead character comes with a lot of pressure – even with Ricky's blessing. Asked in a recent interview how she was feeling about the show's launch, Felicity joked sarcastically, 'Pretty chill, actually. English people and people who love *The Office*, they're like, "Hey, whatever you do with it is fine."'

But she needn't worry. Rather than a scene-by-scene recreation of the UK series, as the more stilted earlier episodes of the US

remake were, *The Office Australia* has taken the original show as a jumping-off point for writers Julie De Fina and Jackie van Beek to create their own world.

The pair saw the success the US series found when it moved away from Stephen and Ricky's original and leant into the unique strangeness of the American workplace, and decided to embrace that for the Aussie version.

As with the UK and US

shows, which first aired in 2001 and 2005 respectively, the new version takes place at a suburban stationery company. This time, it's Sydney box company Flinley Craddick, with its corny slogan, 'Think inside the box.'

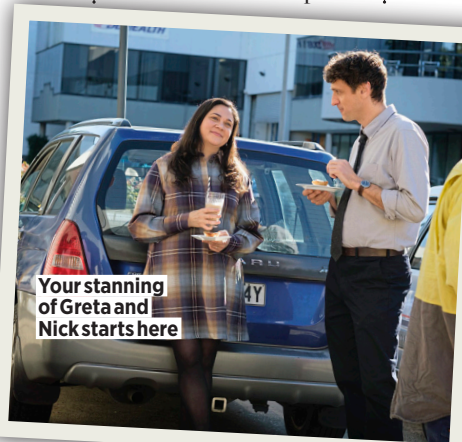
Felicity, who has had a successful stand-up

comedy career here in the UK and at home in Australia, plays Hannah, an employer who's every bit as excruciatingly cringey as David Brent and just as desperate to be liked as Steve Carell's Michael Scott of Dunder Mifflin.

Yes, she might be a woman, but Hannah

has an ability to make her employees – and the viewers – wish the ground would swallow them up just like the boys did.

She's not the only character



Your stanning of Greta and Nick starts here



Great Scott: Steve Carell reps the US version

RG is the OG, David Brent

Threat level: midnight

People say I'm the best boss

eagle-eyed fans will recognise. Greta and Nick are the new Dawn and Tim/Pam and Jim, the will-they-won't-they love birds (who, we suspect, will). They're played by Shari Sebbens and Steen Raskopoulos (husband of Sara Pascoe). The Gareth Keenan/Dwight Schrute role has also switched gender, this time with Edith Poor playing front desk executive and productivity manager Lizzie.

Bringing *The Office* back for 2024 might seem like a risky move, but you can understand the desire. After all, nearly 20 years

after it first aired, the US show is one of the biggest shows on streaming services. In 2018, the programme was the most-watched show on Netflix, with a new army of Gen Z super-fans adopting it as their own.

Among the show's young

fans is Billie Eilish, who has watched the show 30 times – despite being just three years old when it first aired.

But it's not just *The Office*

itself people keep going back to. In 2024, viewers of all stripes are still drawn to workplace comedies, from widely streamed classics such *Scrubs*, *Parks And Recreation* and *Brooklyn Nine-Nine* to new kid on the block *Abbott Elementary*.

**'It could be a classic in the making'**

The genre particularly appeals to the younger generation like Billie, who – and it's hard to believe – dream of a time when they could go to the office five

days a week. After all, this is a generation who entered the workforce post-lockdown, when remote working was always a given.

Lucky them, right? But Gen Z seem to crave and romanticise office life, with some even dressing like 'office sirens' (read: pencil skirts, tight shirts, rectangular glasses) after being denied this by the pandemic and its more relaxed dress codes.

*The Office Australia* references this world. The show sees Hannah trying to convince her employees to come back to the office full time, which they're not

thrilled about, obviously.

There will be people who think *The Office* should be left alone, and that bringing it into the age of Zoom calls is unnecessary. But we've seen once before that this genius central premise – a show about a very normal workplace – can spawn a mega-hit.

With Felicity centre stage – and her Hannah having the potential to be just as iconic as David Brent and Michael Scott – we wouldn't be surprised if *The Office Australia* is a classic in the making. Whatever you do, don't ask Hannah to dance... ■