

CONTENTS

Section 1 - Work Life Balance

- 1 Why Work Life Balance?
Work Life Balance in the UK
- 2 Flexible Working
- 3 Employers' Implementation List
- 4 Employees' Implementation List

Section 2 - Work Life Balance Support and Signposting

- 5 Work Life Balance Legislation
- 6 Childcare and Financial issues
- 7 Places for Guidance and Support
- 8 Frequently Asked Questions

Section 3 - Work Life Balance Case Studies

- Patchwork Foods - Self Rostering
- Jobcentre Plus - Reverse Termtime Working

I Why Work Life Balance?

The world of work is changing rapidly as a result of new technologies, an increasingly competitive global market, more employment legislation and changing demographics. But so, too, is our world outside of work: changing family structures, reduced leisure times and opportunities, increased internet usage, 24-hour shopping, shifting social interactions, and so on.

Although our lives at work and outside of work can be closely linked they can also become mismatched, with work intruding on non work activities and enjoyment and vice versa. This can lead to feelings of loss of control and abilities, and the sense that there is never enough time to do things. Stress, strain, anxiety and tension, with all of the impacts they can have on our lives, often result.

Work Life Balance is about striking the right balance between what we can achieve at work and when not at work.

Work Life Balance has been driven forward by the need to change the way we work and live as a society. Flexibility is required for employees to access jobs that meet their expectations and potential as well as improving productivity. Businesses are more market driven and customers are more demanding about when they can access services and products. The labour market is more diverse with increasing numbers of women and older workers. Employment legislation and regulatory standards impact on the way businesses and organisations work. Developments in technology make it possible for employees not to be 'tied to' their desks. Expectations of employees have changed as the boundaries between work and life have narrowed and the importance of flexibility is recognised.

Effective Work Life Balance policies and practices can benefit both employers and employees by changing traditional views of work. They can benefit individuals, families, employers and society,

supporting the combination of working, family and private lives.

For both employers and employees effective Work Life Balance can lead to:

- improved recruitment and retention
- increased motivation and loyalty
- improved opportunities for childcare
- more positive interactions with colleagues, family members and friends
- increased work flexibility
- better productivity
- reduced absenteeism and stress
- increased opportunities for training and upskilling
- improved image of both the company and its staff
- improved quality of applicants
- being better equipped to deal with fluctuations in the economic climate

Many employers now offer flexible working and can demonstrate innovative approaches to managing people and time both on a formal basis and informally.

This information pack aims to provide information, signposting and the tools required by employers and employees to implement and manage Work Life Balance policies and practices.

The pack contains information on the legislative framework around Work Life Balance and Parental Leave as well as flexible working options, examples of good practice, case studies and implementation lists to support employers and employees with the successful introduction and management of WLB policies and practices.

Work Life Balance in the UK

The Work Life Balance Campaign was launched in the UK in March 2000. A consultation document 'Changing Patterns in a Changing World' was launched by the UK Government and the Welsh Assembly Government in 2000. This set out changes in the world of work as a result of new technology, new opportunities, an increasingly competitive global market, more women working, fewer younger people and more older people.

The purpose of the campaign was to convince employers of the economic benefits of Work Life Balance (WLB) by presenting case studies and to convince employers of the need for change.

Since the launch of the campaign WLB initiatives have been promoted and supported by the UK and Welsh Assembly Governments through a legislative framework, including parental leave rights, organisations supporting WLB initiatives, the Childcare Strategy and funding for childcare through tax credits and childcare vouchers. Most major UK companies have recognised the importance of Work Life Balance to their business; they have gone further than required by legislation and made WLB available to all employees. Many SMEs, though, are still experiencing barriers to the introduction of flexible working/WLB policies and practices.

2 Flexible Working

Flexible working can be about the place of work as well as the hours of work.

Flexible working allows employees time to develop other aspects of their lives, deal with caring responsibilities, make time for special events and to handle emergencies.

Flexible working enables employers to extend the working day, improve customer service and increase output. It can also ensure the organisation can meet variable and seasonal fluctuations, whilst reducing absenteeism and sickness rates and improving punctuality. By using flexible working options, employers can preserve their skill base and maintain their workforce, whilst employees have greater job security.

The benefits of flexible working practices cannot be ignored. Flexibility impacts positively on individual performance. Employees who work flexibly are more committed to the organisation as a result.

a. Part-time working

Part-time working is when employees are contracted to work for anything less than the basic full-time hours. This could involve a later start and earlier finish time, working morning or afternoons only, or fewer working days in a week. Part-time working also means an equivalent reduction in pay.

Part-time working enables employers to:

- Increase efficiency through reviewing existing processes and procedures
- Use the skills of trained and qualified staff who are unable to work full-time
- Better meet peaks and troughs of work demand

But:

- Employing a number of part-time staff can be more difficult to manage
- Providing a continuous level of service may be difficult
- Employing part-time staff may lead to higher training, administrative and recruitment costs

Part-time working enables employees to:

- Meet personal and work commitments
- Feel more valued in the workplace

But:

- A cut in wages can impact on pension contributions
- It can be difficult to return to full-time work

b. Job Sharing

Two people share the responsibilities, pay and all the other benefits of a full-time job. It is important to note that the work is shared and not split.

Job sharing enables employers to:

- Be provided with plenty of scope for new ideas and the right skills, knowledge and experience to get a full time job done
- Provide continuity of cover if one partner is absent
- Experience higher productivity, lower absenteeism and a reduction in staff turnover

But:

- It can lead to higher induction, training and administration costs
- It may be difficult to find a replacement if one partner leaves
- It places added responsibility on managers who must allocate work fairly and ensure that the job sharers communicate effectively

Job sharing enables employees to:

- Meet personal and work commitments, whether it be for studying for a qualification or to care for a child or relative
- Feel more valued in the workplace as their skills and experience may well be lost otherwise

But:

- As it is part-time work, there will a reduction in pay and other benefits, including pension contributions
- There may be a personality clash with the other partner, which can result in communication breakdown

c. Flexi-time

Flexi-time allows employees to vary their working hours within specified limits from day to day and week to week. A certain number of hours can be carried forward from one period to another with the option of flexi-leave for time accrued.

Flexi-time enables employers to:

- Tailor working patterns to cover the peaks and troughs of the workload
- Recruit and retain staff, as flexibility is seen positively by future employees

But:

- Flexi-time can result in increased administration costs to maintain records, as well as increased heating and lighting costs
- Providing supervision for employees may be difficult

- A different management style may be needed to manage this level of flexibility and management training may be required
- It may be difficult in smaller organisations to provide cover during non-core hours

Flexi-time enables employees to:

- Have greater freedom in organising their working lives to suit their personal needs
- Save money if they are able to travel out of peak time
- Reduce their carbon footprint by travelling outside of peak times
- Retain their full-time pay and pension contributions

But:

- The employee needs to ensure that the correct number of working hours are actually worked

d. Compressed working hours

Employees work their total number of working hours over fewer working days. For example, the employee could work a five day working week in four days.

Compressed working hours enables employers to:

- Improve recruitment into the organisation
- Reduce overtime, labour turnover and absenteeism

But:

- Employers need to ensure that any proposed compressed hours arrangements meet the Working Time Directive
- It may be difficult to schedule work and provide sufficient cover within the compressed working period and time off must be on a strict rota basis

Compressed working hours enables employees to:

- Have a longer weekend and increase leisure opportunities

But:

- Longer daily work periods of compressed working weeks can increase fatigue
- Some employees may find the increased length of daily work periods difficult to adjust to

e. Term-time working

Term-time working gives employees the opportunity to reduce their hours or take time off during school holidays and remain on a permanent contract.

Term-time working enables employers to:

- Retain the valued skills and experience of parents
- To attract parents back to work who might otherwise take a complete break from employment or go to work for another employer

But:

- The long absences in peak holiday time may make it difficult to arrange cover, particularly in specialist roles
- Term-time working may also put pressure on other colleagues who feel they cannot take holidays during school holiday periods

Term-time working enables employees to:

- Save on childcare costs
- Spend time with their children when they are off school

But:

- A reduction in hours will cause a corresponding reduction in salary and will impact on pension contributions
- May cause resentment amongst other employees who don't have children

f. Shift Swapping

Employees negotiate their working times by re-arranging shifts amongst themselves with the understanding that the required shifts must be covered.

Shift swapping enables employers to:

- Save time rostering shifts

But:

- The system needs to be monitored closely to ensure fairness amongst all employees as there is a chance that less confident employees may end up with shifts that nobody else wants to do

Shift swapping enables employees to:

- Fit personal commitments around work on an ad hoc basis
- Take control of their working pattern

But:

- If lacking in confidence, the employee may end up with the shifts that nobody else will do

g. Self Rostering

Self-rostering is similar to shift swapping in that employees have a degree of choice about what shifts they would like to work. However, it is then the employer who compiles the shift patterns based on individual preferences and required staffing levels.

Self-rostering enables employers to:

- Involve the workforce in the rostering system, showing they are valued in the decision making process
- Have employees who want to be at work on a given shift
- Ensure all employees are treated in the same way

But:

- It can be difficult to maintain staffing levels based on individual preferences and it may not always be possible to meet the employees' requirements
- It will require more administration to self-roster as each employee's request will need to be worked into the schedule

Self-rostering enables employees to:

- Fit personal commitments around work requirements
- Have a say in their working pattern and feel more valued

But:

- There is no guarantee the employee will be able to work the shifts requested as staffing levels still have to be met

h. Annualised Hours Scheme

Employees work a total number of hours in a year and these hours are varied to meet both organisational demands and the employee's personal needs. The employee's salary is usually paid in equal installments regardless of the amount of time the employee has worked in that period.

An annualised hours scheme enables employers to:

- Reduce or eliminate overtime payments and this removes the need to employ agency or temporary staff

But:

- When moving to an annualised hours scheme employers should consider that they may need to compensate their employees financially initially
- Ensure that the scheme complies with Working Time Regulations and Directive

An annualised hours scheme enables employees to:

- Receive a constant salary throughout the year
- Use the variations in employment to meet other commitments or aspirations

But:

- An intense period of working may cause unnecessary stress

i. Working from home /tele working

Employees carry out their job from home, either occasionally or as a permanent working arrangement. It requires a working relationship that is based upon trust and encourages employees to manage their own work.

Working from home enables employers to:

- Reduce costs by providing savings on office space and other facilities
- See an increase in productivity from their employees
- Show a degree of trust in their employees
- Continue to function in extreme weather conditions

But:

- Need to ensure there are systems in place to monitor performance
- Need to ensure there are robust communication channels open with the employee
- Ensure robust health and safety checks are in place

Working from home enables employees to:

- Cope better with caring responsibilities
- Reduce their carbon footprint by cutting out the travel to work
- Manage their own workload
- Continue to work in extreme weather conditions

But:

- Working from home can leave some employees feeling socially isolated
- Some employees who work from home put in more hours without lunch breaks and find it hard to switch off at the end of the day

j. Career Break

A career break is an extended period of unpaid leave. Employees are required to resign but are given a commitment by employers that they will be allowed to return.

A career break enables employers to:

- Retain a valued employee who may otherwise leave the employment market
- Enhance the skill base and experience of their employees

But:

- It may be difficult to re-employ returners if business is poor
- There may be some problems in keeping skills up-to-date

A career break enables employees to:

- Look after a dependent, who may have long-term needs, or to pursue family or individual travel plans or an ambition for longer-term study

But:

- It may be difficult to return to work at the end of the career break
- The leave will be unpaid and there will be no contributions to the company pension during this period and may count as a break in service

k. Sabbatical

This is a form of career break but is paid, as some companies use it to reward employees for long service.

A sabbatical enables employers to:

- Develop other members of the team to consider secondment opportunities for employees from other areas of the organisation
- Retain a valued employee

But:

- Clarity needs to be sought regarding the right to return and on what conditions
- Employers are advised to take legal advice before agreeing to any form of sabbatical

A sabbatical enables employees to:

- Feel valued
- Experience things they would not otherwise have the opportunity to be exposed to and return with new ideas

But:

- The employee needs to be clear on the right to return and that their understanding matches that of the employer

I. Voluntary reduced work time ('V' time)

The numbers of hours worked by an employee are reduced for an agreed period on a voluntary basis. There is a guarantee that full-time employment will be available again at the end of this period.

'V' time enables employers to:

- Use this option during an economic downturn
- Develop the skills of other members of the team

But:

- It needs to be managed carefully to ensure that when the employee returns to their normal working hours, they are able to settle back in
- The employer needs to be clear about when the 'V' time comes to an end and the conditions of returning to the previous working hours

'V' time enables employees to:

- Care for elderly or infirm dependents or a sick or disabled child and still continue working

But:

- It may be difficult to return to previous working hours after any period of reduced hours
- The employee needs to be clear about when the 'V' time comes to an end and the conditions of returning to the previous working hours
- It will result in a reduction in pay and will also have an impact on pension contributions

3 Employers' implementation checklist

Employers considering the implementation of Work Life Balance policies can do so for many business reasons such as reducing costs, retaining key staff or responding to customer need.

A summary of issues to consider is contained in the following implementation checklist:

- Consult with employees and employee representatives
- Ensure commitment from senior management
- Appoint a WLB Champion
- Consider business needs and objectives
- Plan any changes well in advance
- Check the legislative framework
- Consider how flexible working will impact on production, staffing, supervision, contracts delivery
- Pilot, monitor and improve any new WLB practices before implementation
- Ensure all systems are in place for new practices to work e.g. monitoring outcomes, recording hours worked
- Integrate WLB issues into the management development programme

4 Employees' implementation checklist

Employees can request to work flexibly for many reasons, such as care responsibilities at home, study commitments, leisure interests or to avoid rush hour traffic. In all cases it is important to:

- Check any legal rights you may have to request flexible working
- Consider whether to work existing hours flexibly or to reduce hours
- Consider implications of changes on travel, childcare and other arrangements
- Consider the impact on the team and workload
- Consult colleagues and team members
- Consider any financial implications
- Prepare a business case focusing on the feasibility of the proposed change
- Present the business benefits.
- Suggest a trial period
- Maintain channels of communication throughout

5 Work Life Balance legislation

When considering WLB policies and practices, employers and employees are supported and protected by a legislative framework. The lists below consist of legislation applying to all employees and legislation applying to employees with (child) care responsibilities. Please note that these are not exhaustive lists as legislation is continually being developed

Legislation - All Employees

Employment Equality (Religion or Belief) Regulations 2003

The Regulations protect against discrimination on the grounds of religion, religious belief or other philosophical belief in employment and vocational training including flexible working/leave and religious observance.

Employment Equality (Age) Regulations 2006

The Regulations protect employees against discrimination on the grounds of age in employment and vocational training, including flexible working/leave.

Race Relations Act 1976

The provision protects against discrimination on the grounds of nationality and colour, or ethnic, racial or national group. Individuals are protected from discrimination, victimisation and harassment.

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1995

The DDA protects against discrimination on the grounds of disability. Employers have a duty to make 'reasonable adjustments' to ensure the employee is not disadvantaged by employment arrangements or any physical feature of the workplace. This includes:

- Allocating work to someone else
- Being flexible about working hours - allowing different core hours and to be away from the office for assessment, treatment or rehabilitation

According to recent case law, the DDA can also apply to carers of disabled people as well as the disabled person themselves.

Gender Equality Duty 2007

This Duty protects against discrimination on the grounds of gender including:

- Promoting and managing flexible working
- Ensuring high level part-time work and supporting part-time workers
- Managing leave for parents and carers
- Managing pregnancy and return from maternity leave

Employment Rights Act (Sunday Working) 1996

Shop workers in England and Wales (unless they only work Sundays) are provided with the right to choose not to work on Sundays. The Act also provides protection for employees who refuse to work on Sundays.

Part-time Workers (Prevention of less favourable treatment) Regulations 2000

The Regulations ensure that part-time workers are not treated less favourably in their terms and conditions of employment than their comparable full-time colleagues.

- Part-time employees are entitled to the same hourly rate of pay for normal working hours as comparable full-time employees, have the same access to annual leave, maternity and parental leave and sick leave entitlements on a pro-rata basis.

Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of less favourable treatment) Regulations 2002

This provision ensures that fixed term employees are treated no less favourably in their terms and conditions of employment than those on a permanent contract.

Working Time Regulations 1998

The Working Time Regulations protect employees from working excessive hours (more than 48 hours a week on average).

Employees can choose to opt out by signing an agreement and are protected from dismissal or detriment if they refuse to opt out or withdraw their opt-out. Some professions are exempt from the Regulations.

Right to Request Time Off for Training

From April 2010, employees will have a new right to request 'time to train'. Employee requests can be to undertake:

- Accredited programmes leading to a qualification; or
- Unaccredited training to help them develop specific skills relevant to their job, workplace or business.

Time off for Dependents

Employees have the right to take a reasonable amount of time off work to deal with an emergency involving a dependant. A dependant is:

- The partner, child or parent of the employee, or someone who lives with the employee as part of their family. It can also mean a person who relies on the employee as their primary carer or the only person available to help in an emergency.

This leave may be paid or unpaid depending on the employer. The employee must inform the employer as soon as possible why they are taking time off.

Legislation - Parents and Carers

Right to Request Flexible Working

The Right to Request Flexible Working enables parents to have more choice and support to balance childcare and work in ways that benefit everyone. Parents with children under 17 years old or under 18 years old if the child is receiving Disability Living Allowance can make a request for flexible working.

This Right was extended in the Work and Families Act 2006 to include the carer of an adult who:

- Is married to, or is the partner or civil partner of the employee; or
- Is a near relative of the employee; or
- Falls into neither category but lives at the same address as the employee.

Under the Right to Request Framework, employees can request changes to their:

- Hours of work
- Times of work
- Place of work

Any changes to the employee's work patterns are permanent.

Employers can refuse the request but only if one of the following business reasons apply:

- Burden of additional costs
- Detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand
- Inability to reorganise work among existing staff
- Inability to recruit additional staff
- Detrimental impact on quality
- Detrimental impact on performance
- Insufficiency of work during the periods the employee proposes to work
- Planned structural changes

Parental Leave

The right to parental leave entitles employees with parental responsibility (mothers, fathers and those who have obtained formal parental responsibility for a child under the Children Act) to take leave to care for each child born.

Parental leave is taken to care for a child, which can include making arrangements for the good of a child. This may be to allow a parent to spend more time with a young child, or to look at new schools, to spend time with a child who has been hospitalised or to settle a child into new childcare arrangements.

- Employees are entitled to 13 weeks unpaid parental leave for a child, to be taken in blocks or multiples of one week and no more than 4 weeks can be taken in any one year up until the child's fifth birthday.
- Employees of children with a registered disability are entitled to 18 weeks unpaid leave up the child's 18th birthday. Leave does not have to be taken in blocks of weeks.

In the Future

Work and Families Act (Paternity Leave Regulations)

It is expected that these Regulations will be introduced in 2010 and will come into force in April 2011. These Regulations will allow mothers to transfer up to 26 weeks' maternity leave to the child's father (or co-adopter) with provision for additional statutory paternity pay at the same rate as maternity pay.

Temporary Workers Directive 2008/104/EC

This European Commission Directive will be implemented in UK law by 2011. It ensures that temporary agency workers are protected and treated the same as all other employees. The aim of the Directive is to improve the quality of agency work, help to create jobs and assist in developing flexible working arrangements.

Equality Act

The Equality Act will come into force during 2010/11 combining parts of existing equalities legislation. New rights in the Act will enable employees to claim direct discrimination as result of two of the protected characteristics (i.e. age, sex, religion or belief, race, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, and sexual orientation) instead of just one. This is called dual discrimination.

The Act will also protect carers of a disabled child or older relative from discrimination in the same way as disabled people are currently protected.

6 Childcare and Financial Issues

All day care services providing care for children under 8 for more than 2 hours a day must be registered and inspected by the Care and Social Services Inspectorate Wales (CSSIW) in Wales, OFSTED in England and the Scottish Commission for the Regulation of Care in Scotland.

1) Childminders

Childminders are day care providers who work in their own homes caring for children. They are based in the community, which means that children can go to local playgroups, parent & toddler groups, clubs or visit friends. Childminders are self-employed and set their own fees. They can offer flexible childcare, year round, full-time or part-time and outside school hours. They can look after up to 6 children of varying ages at the same time.

2) Day nurseries

Day nurseries provide early education and childcare for young children from birth to age 5. They usually open from early morning to early evening, Monday to Friday, all year round. They offer a caring, safe, stimulating environment either as full day care or part-time care for babies and pre-school children. Some may also provide care before and after school and in the holidays for children aged 4 to 7 and sometimes older children too.

3) Playgroups cater for children age 2 to 5, usually for 2 to 3 hours in the morning or afternoon and mainly during term-time. They offer a safe and stimulating environment where children play, learn and socialise with each other.

4) Playgroup Plus / Nursery Plus

Playgroup Plus / Nursery Plus is sometimes offered as an extension to a playgroup or Local Authority Nursery Education Class. It offers more day care than a traditional playgroup and may have longer sessions. Groups operate for up to 4 hours a day, with a maximum of 20 hours a week.

5) Part-time education for children aged 3 & 4

All children have the right to a free, part-time, good quality early education place in an approved setting from the term after their third birthday. Part-time means a minimum of 10 hours a week, for around the same number of weeks as the normal school year.

6) Out of school childcare clubs

Out of school childcare clubs help parents or carers who work or attend training. They provide before school/breakfast clubs, after school clubs, and holiday clubs.

Help with Childcare Costs

Working Tax Credit

This is a payment to top up the earnings of working people on low incomes. Parents can apply for help with the costs of qualifying childcare through the Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit.

You can only get the childcare element if:

- You are working at least 16 hours a week, or,
- You are part of a couple, both you and your partner must each work at least 16 hours unless one of you is unable to work due to incapacity.

If you are entitled to the childcare element of Working Tax Credit, it will be paid directly to the person who is mainly responsible for caring for the children in the family, alongside any payments for Child Tax Credit. The Childcare Element of the Working Tax Credit can pay up to 80% of registered or approved childcare costs.

Childcare vouchers

Childcare Vouchers are one of the ways in which employers can assist their employees with the costs of childcare. Childcare vouchers are exempt from Class 1 National Insurance Contributions (NIC) for both employers and employees - employers therefore reduce some of their business costs and employees make savings on their childcare costs.

For further information on childcare in your area or help with the costs of childcare contact your local Family Information Service. Details can be found on www.nafis.org.uk.

In Wales you can also ring 0300 123 7777 for details of your nearest FIS.

7 Places for guidance and support

Organisations/groups that can be contacted to help with WLB development/implementation.

ACAS

Detailed information on employment rights, as well as help and support for employees and employers.

Tel: 08457 474747 Website: www.acas.org.uk

Business Link

Support for businesses in England

Website: www.businesslink.gov.uk

Business Support Wales

Support for businesses in Wales

Tel: 03000 603000 Website: www.business-support-wales.gov.uk

Carers UK

Information, guidance and support for carers across the UK

Tel: 0808 808 7777 Email: advice@carersuk.org

Website: www.carersuk.org

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD)

CIPD can provide advice and guidance to those involved in the management and development of people.

Tel: 020 8612 6200 Website: www.cipd.co.uk

Chwarae Teg

Information and support on WLB in Wales

Tel: 029 2047 8900

Email: post@chwaraeteg.com Website: www.chwaraeteg.com

Contact a Family

Provides support and guidance to families with disabled children.

Tel: 0808 808 3555

Email: helpline@cafamily.org.uk Website: www.cafamily.org.uk

Daycare Trust

Promotes quality childcare which is affordable and accessible and as a way of ensuring parents are able to access training and employment.

Tel: 020 7840 3350 Email: info@daycaretrust.org.uk

Website: www.daycaretrust.org.uk

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (BIS)

Government department that can provide information and advice to businesses.

Tel No: 020 7215 5000

Email: enquiries@bis.gsi.gov.uk Website: www.bis.gov.uk

Department for Work and Pensions (DWP)

DWP is able to provide information and advice on welfare and pension issues. For local information contact your local Jobcentre Plus. Website: www.dwp.gov.uk

Direct.gov

Government website with information to support employees with flexible working.

Website: www.direct.gov.uk

Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)

The EHRC ensures equality across age, disability, gender, race, religion and belief, sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

Tel No: 0845 604 6610 (England); 0845 604 8810 (Wales);

0845 604 5510 (Scotland)

Email: info@equalityhumanrights.com

Website: www.equalityhumanrights.com

Family Information Services (FIS)

FIS can provide support to employees and employers on work-life balance, as well as information and guidance on childcare and support with childcare costs. For details of local FIS, please contact the National Association of Family Information Services (NAFIS).

UK: 0207 953 4085

Website: www.nafis.org.uk

Wales: 0300 123 7777

Flexibility.co.uk

An online resource for new ways of thinking about work.

Website: www.flexibility.co.uk

GMB

The GMB is a Trade Union that supports employees of all sectors with useful information about employment rights.

Tel: 020 8947 3131

Email: info@gmb.org.uk

Website: www.gmb.org.uk

Health & Safety Executive (HSE)

Information around health and safety in work.

Tel: 0845 345 0055

Email: hse.infoline@connaught.plc.uk

Website: www.hse.gov.uk

HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

HMRC provides information and advice on Tax Credits, Taxation and National Insurance Contributions.

Website: www.hmrc.gov.uk

Scope

Information and guidance on issues affecting disabled people, including employment information.

Tel: 0808 800 3333

Email: response@scope.org.uk Website: www.scope.org.uk

The Work Foundation

The Work Foundation aims to improve the quality of working life and the effectiveness of organisations by equipping leaders with evidence, advice and new ways of thinking.

Website: www.theworkfoundation.com

TUC

The TUC brings together all Trade Unions and works together to improve working conditions for all employees. The TUC provides useful information about employment rights.

Tel No: 020 7636 4030

Website: www.tuc.org.uk

Unison

Unison is a trade union and provides useful information about employment rights.

Tel: 0845 3550845

Website: www.unison.org.uk

Unite

Unite is a trade union and provides useful information about employment rights.

Tel: 020 7420 8900

Website: www.unitetheunion.com

Working Families

Support and guidance for working families.

Tel: 0800 013 0313

Email: advice@workingfamilies.org.uk

Website: www.workingfamilies.org.uk

Financial support for businesses

Finance Wales

Finance Wales provides funding for Welsh companies to enable the business to grow, or to introduce new technology. The funding could be used through these streams to support Work-Life Balance. For further information see www.financewales.co.uk

Health Work and Well-Being Challenge Fund

The Health Work and Well-Being Challenge Fund provides grants to small and medium enterprises to improve the health and welfare of employees. There are two funding rounds every year. For further information, see www.workingforhealth.gov.uk/ChallengeFund

8 FAQs

Flexible working – it's for parents, isn't it?

A - Although flexible working benefits many parents and families it can also benefit other employees in order to develop other aspects of their lives, such as learning and leisure activities.

Do I have to consider a request to work flexibly from an employee who wants to care for a relative?

A - Employees can apply to work flexibly to look after a relative but need to meet certain criteria. Template forms are available on www.direct.gov.uk. Any variation in the pattern of work will be permanent unless requested for a specified time only.

Can any job be suitable for job sharing?

A- Most jobs can be shared as job sharing can take many forms. Job sharers can effectively manage the arrangements by taking responsibility to divide tasks and to provide handover updates. The increased flexibility introduced by a job share benefits both employers and employees.

How can I trust my employees working from home?

A - It is important to be clear about the targets and outputs expected from the home workers and to provide prompt feedback. You must ensure to keep in touch with home workers on a regular basis to update them on new developments and training opportunities and to prevent them from feeling isolated.

How can small businesses afford to introduce flexible working?

A- In many cases introducing flexibility does not have any cost implications and may actually increase productivity. Business needs will influence what arrangements would suit different places of work. Consulting the workforce on possible solutions is a good first step to take.

Would working more flexibly affect my future career prospects?

A - Working flexibly can improve your career prospects as your motivation will increase and you will be able to prioritise and handle your workload better. If you reduce your hours you must ensure to communicate to your employer that you can take on additional responsibilities proportional to your hours worked.

Will other staff members resent me for changing my working hours?

A - Any WLB policies must be consistent and fair across the whole organisation. You and your employer need to ensure that any additional workload doesn't fall unfairly on others. It is important that any barriers to your colleagues working flexibly are addressed by your employer.

Work Life Balance Case Studies

Patchwork Foods - Self Rostering

Summary

■ Description of the organisation/personnel:

The Patchwork Traditional Food Company produces pate and was set up about 30 years ago by a single mother originally working from home. See www.patchwork-pate.co.uk

■ Nature of the WLB practice introduced:

Patchwork staff originally worked as a self directed team. More structured self rostering/ term time working / flexible working policies were piloted when new quality systems were introduced.

■ Initiated by:

After consultation WLB was introduced by employer and employees as a result of the British Retail Consortium quality systems requirements for a more structured supervisory process in order to achieve a grade A.

Background

Work Life Balance was practised from the time of the start up of the company due to the vision of the owner of the company that in order to have employees who perform effectively it needs to be recognised that they have responsibilities and a life outside work. Patchwork now has a workforce of 30 employees in a factory with limited titles where everyone is able to have their say and can openly voice their opinion. Original management systems have been maintained as far as possible and the team decides its own production schedules and work patterns, is able to recruit collectively and is involved in everything from the design of new packaging to product development.

Patchwork is located in a very rural part of Wales where there are many gaps in the provision of quality registered childcare and parents often need to rely on the family network for childcare. Childcare provision in the UK has improved slowly over the last decade or so but is still costly and there is not always sufficient financial support for parents to enable them to use quality childcare.

Across the UK Patchwork has been recognised as an example of good practice from the onset and a good example of an employer where informal WLB practices, developed in consultation with employees, have proved effective and profitable.

Introduction of Work Life Balance

Employees were consulted initially and the employer worked in partnership with the employees to identify solutions reflecting the changing needs of the company and its employees.

Self rostering worked well from the start but some staff indicated that they would welcome more involvement from the management to avoid less assertive employees ending up with the least favourite shifts.

Parents with school age children ensure that school holidays shifts are covered equally and it is not assumed that employees who do not have young children cannot take time off during school holidays. Flexitime is working well for the Administrative and Finance and IT staff as some of them welcome the opportunity to come in very early in the morning or late evening to complete tasks requiring concentration.

Regular staff meetings ensure that WLB policies and practices are reviewed and evaluated continuously and appropriate changes are implemented to reflect the demands of the company as well as the employees.

Experiences

The experience of the company is that there is a low turnover of staff, saving on training and recruitment costs.

Demand for the company's products is subject to seasonal fluctuations and employees are prepared to be flexible and meet deadlines. Flexitime allows employees to take long weekends occasionally and sickness absence records are low. Staff members are happy to have personal details on the company website showing recognition of the importance of life 'outside work'.

Employees who are parents can spend more quality time with their children which also saves them paying for formal childcare.

Outcomes and impacts

WLB has been sustained for over 30 years as the company reviews and evaluates the effectiveness of the practices on an ongoing basis and employees are encouraged to help find solutions to issues that crop up.

The company has been happy to share their experiences with other employers and employees locally and nationally.

Jobcentre Plus - Reverse Term Time Working

Jobcentre Plus (JCP) is a UK government agency administering unemployment, incapacity and other benefits as well as supporting job seekers back into employment and helping employers fill their vacancies. Jobcentre Plus staff are able to access a variety of working patterns to help them balance their work and home commitments, including part time working, part year working and compressed hours.

At the local Jobcentre Plus Benefit Delivery Centre in Wrexham, employees who are parents experienced difficulties working during school holidays due to lack of suitable childcare and/or costs of childcare. The centre employs over 400 people, many of whom are parents. Term-time contracts have been available for some time, and have been used by many parents to help meet their childcare commitments. However, the number of staff on term-time contracts resulted in some difficulties in managing workloads during peak leave periods.

UK legislation gives parents the 'Right to Request' flexible working but employers can decline this request. Across the UK childcare provision during school holidays is patchy and can be expensive. There is a particular lack of provision for children with disabilities.

Reverse Term Time working was introduced in response to requests by JCP employees. JCP recruited and trained students to cover activities during school holidays normally delivered by JCP staff, some of whom work Term Time only.

Jobcentre Plus have introduced several WLB initiatives across the organisation and its teams but 'reverse term time working' is a recent development

New employees were recruited to work during school holidays to help cover absences of existing employees with childcare responsibilities who were working term time only. Before this, there were no contingencies to cover the part year contracts. In effect there was a two tier customer service in some parts of the business because we could not deal with all of the work; we had to prioritise.

New employees working 'reverse term time' were mainly students and due to the complex nature of the work, undertook a limited range of duties. However, they did receive training for the work they delivered, which helped them gain valuable work experience.

The use of reverse term-time workers relieved the pressure on the full-time staff and helped maintain output and services to customers, during peak leave periods. Managers were at first reluctant to accept the value that these staff would add. Resources were needed to train and mentor the new staff, and they were not able to cover the full range of work. However, it quickly became obvious that this was a worthwhile investment and proved a complete success.

Reverse Term Time working has worked well. However, contracts will not be extended currently due to budget constraints and the need to reduce the workforce. The use of reverse term time working would be considered again by JCP in the future if budgets allow.