

EMPLOYERS

1. What is Work-Life Balance?

A good work-life balance culture creates employees who want to work. Work-life balance reflects the continuing evolution of our modern working environment and recognises the respective needs and commitments of employers, employees and customers as a social norm.

2. What is Flexible Working?

Flexible working takes many different forms, looking at **How, Where** and **When** we work, and is part of the options available to employers and employees when reviewing Work-life Balance.

3. What kind of policies are there?

There are many different options. Some you may already have in place as formal policy documents or they may occur on an ad hoc basis within your organisation. Arrangements could include:

- Flexi time
- Job Sharing
- Part time work
- Term time working
- Annualised hours
- Employment / career break
- Parental leave
- Sabbaticals

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4. How would I request to work flexibly?

Talk to Personnel, Human Resources or your Line Manager – the process will vary according to your organisation's structure, and how it views flexible working.

The April 2003 legislation surrounding flexible working states that parents of children aged under 6, or disabled children aged under 18, have the right to apply to work flexibly and their employers will have a duty to consider their request seriously. This legislation was extended in April 2007 to include carers.

5. I do not have any children – can I still expect to work flexibly?

Yes, Work-Life Balance and Flexible Working is for everyone. With the shift in the age of our population many people may now be carers for elderly relatives instead of/as well as children. The encouragement of lifelong learning means that many more people now

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return to or continue to study once in employment and we all have activities and responsibilities outside of work. Flexible working may be beneficial in all of these situations and more.

6. Do I have to justify why I want to work flexibly?

No, flexible working should be 'reason neutral', that is, your request for flexible working should be judged primarily on its viability in a business sense, not on your reason for requesting it.

7. What happens if I decide I do not like the new arrangement?

It is best practice to offer flexible working on a trial basis. This allows both the employee and employer to assess whether the arrangement is working and make adjustments accordingly.

8. What if my circumstances change and I no longer need to work using the same flexible policy?

Working arrangements should remain open to future negotiation or amendments. Your terms and conditions of employment may have been altered so you will probably need to consult with your manager but organisations should be flexible to your requests.

9. My child is unwell and needs to go to hospital regularly, is it just the mother that is entitled to time off?

No, Employees - both mothers and fathers – who have completed one year's service with their employers', are entitled to 13 weeks (unpaid) parental leave to care for their child. Parental leave can usually be taken up to five years from the date of birth, or date of placement in the case of adoption. Parents are also entitled to a reasonable amount of (unpaid) time off work to deal with an unexpected situation involving a dependent.

Flexible working arrangements such as Flexi-Time or Time off in Lieu may also be of use in this situation.

10. We have an adopted child – are we entitled to parental leave?

Yes, as well as the unpaid leave mentioned above, Parliament introduced new rights to paid leave in 2003.

[Access the DTI web site for more information](#) (*link to external website*)

10. Will I have to pay overheads if I work from home?

Many organisations will offer packages to help employees with the costs of working at home, such as electricity and telephone. There's a balance to be struck. Even if you are not offered compensation, you might be saving on travel costs and time.

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11. Does it mean more work for managers?

Setting up Work-life Balance and Flexible Working schemes will require management time but there are many examples and case-studies now available to draw on to help the

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process. Once the initial period of change has occurred, most people find that Work-life Balance schemes operate smoothly.

12. Will it cost more?

At the beginning there could be some additional costs in relation to publicising available schemes, training and purchase of equipment. Again, these should be weighed against the potential benefits and savings and will depend on what scheme is implemented. The evidence is overwhelming that the introduction of flexible working reduces absenteeism, improves recruitment and retention, increases efficiency and saves money. Chances are that this will occur in your organisation too.

13. What about communication?

Good communication is vital. It is important that all employees know what is available and that they know who to talk to if they have any queries. Additional communication may be necessary to ensure the smooth operation of new working arrangements. In a job share situation, for example, it may be important to arrange specific meeting or overlap times for the partners to facilitate idea sharing and ensure they are working co-operatively.

14. I manage front line staff so there needs to be cover at all times. Surely if they worked flexibly my business would suffer?

Flexible working should be balanced with business need. Often, by looking at things afresh, solutions can be achieved that suit everybody. But where that is not possible, organisations are entitled to refuse a request if it would be detrimental to the business or the colleagues of the individual.

In the case of front line staff a compressed working week, term time working, part time working, job share and flexi time are potential arrangements

15. Who will cover times when an employee isn't at work?

This depends very much on the arrangements you have in place. For example, Flexi Time could operate on a commitment-to-cover basis, where employees arrange time off amongst themselves' to ensure there is continual cover. Arrangements such as compressed working are fixed in advance so you will be aware when an employee will not be at work. Other eventualities such as an illness would apply, as with any other employee and in these situations flexible working may be particularly beneficial. If one job share partner is sick, for example, at least half the job is still done. Employees who are able to work flexibly are also more likely to help out with cover in such situations.

16. If one employee asks to work flexibly, will it cause a problem within my team?

All benefits should be offered on an equal basis. Provided requests are dealt with fairly and colleagues are not disadvantaged in any way, then conflict within a team should be minimal. Involve the whole team in determining what would work best.

17. What if one job share leaves?

Many employers offer the post full time to the remaining employee. If this isn't practicable, the job share vacancy should be advertised in the same way as any other. This eventuality should be discussed with employees at the outset of the job share arrangements.

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18. How do you supervise employees working at home?

The emphasis should be on the completion of tasks. Where a significant amount of home working is undertaken then performance measures should be agreed and then monitored.

19. Don't home workers suffer from social isolation?

Where an employee is working at home special consideration should be given to communication. It is important that a worker does not feel isolated. Regular meetings, support groups and socials can all be useful. Make sure, though, that their private time remains private. It's a good idea to agree lines of communication from the outset, so that everyone knows what times an employee can be contacted.

20. Are there too many distractions at home?

Some people may indeed find that they are unable to concentrate when they are working at home. For this reason it is advisable that home working is optional and not enforced. It is also recommended that a trial period is offered before an employee commits to home working. Time management training should be considered, to ensure that people are able to work at home effectively.