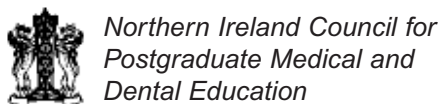


Work-life balance

This guide has been jointly produced by the following.



What is work-life balance?

People have to juggle more and more activities, interests and relationships outside work while trying to meet the increasing demands of the workplace.

Work-life balance is about employers identifying with their workforce how both the organisation and its employees can benefit from a different and more imaginative approach to working practices – an approach that allows employees to achieve and maintain a better balance between their work and other aspects of their lives. Naturally, this will involve the organisation considering the limits of its own business.

What is the right balance?

Creating the right balance between work and home life will vary between different people and also at different stages of our lives.

- For some people, the problem is not having enough work, whether because they are unemployed, because they are working part time but want to work full time, or because they would like opportunities to work overtime.
- Other people need more time for their life outside work, whether to raise children, to care for a sick, elderly or disabled person, to improve their skills

and knowledge, to volunteer for community projects or to pursue other interests.

- For others, the issue may not be how much time they spend at work but when and where to do their work.

It is about adopting working arrangements so that everyone, no matter what their religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation, gender, disability, having dependants (the nine groups defined in Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998), can find a balance that allows them to combine work with other responsibilities or wishes.

Personal choice

Individuals should decide, in consultation with their employer, what balance they want to strike between work and other aspects of their life. The needs of the business will have to be taken on board in any decision made. Considering an employee's work life balance could involve:

- how long people work – flexibility in the number of hours worked;
- when people work – flexibility in the arrangement of hours;
- where people work – flexibility in the place of work;

- developing people through training so they can manage the balance better;
- providing back-up support to employees; and
- breaks from work.

Benefits of work-life balance

Striking a balance between work and home life creates benefits for both employers and employees. Work-life balance also benefits families and the wider community.

Employees

- Better relations between management and staff
- Improved self-esteem, health, concentration and confidence
- Loyalty and commitment
- A reduction in bringing home problems to work, and vice versa
- Time to strike a better balance with life outside work
- Greater control of working lives.

Employers

- Better recruiting and keeping staff
- Better staff relations and motivation
- Reduced stress and absences
- Increased loyalty and commitment
- Increased productivity, service, delivery and profit
- Attract a wider range of candidates
- Build up a reputation as an employer of choice.

Families

- The family can manage the balance between income and time spent at home.
- Children benefit from time spent with their parents.
- Mothers can return to work on agreed conditions.
- The commitment to caring for dependants is recognised.
- Flexibility allows the family and the employer to agree a working pattern in a period of changing circumstances.

Community

- Fewer people are unemployed.
- More families have take-home pay.
- Sickness absences and demand on health services are reduced.

- Lost production, disruption, reduced effectiveness and compromised quality are reduced.
- The community is less stressed for any reason.
- More leisure time encourages other economic activity.
- Minority groups feel involved in society because they have more work choices.

Policies which promote a work-life balance

Most organisations have the following policies in place.

- Flexi-time scheme
- Career break scheme
- Part-time working
- Job-sharing scheme
- Carer's leave
- Parental leave
- Paternity leave
- Maternity leave
- Adoption leave
- Compassionate leave
- Bereavement leave
- Special leave (in exceptional cases).

Other work-life balance policies, which some organisations have in place, are:

- term-time leave;
- annualised hours;
- personalised hours;
- compressed hours;
- study leave (post-entry training); and
- exam leave.

Conclusion

There is no one perfect solution and choices will often still have to be made. The aim of work-life balance is to offer a wider range of options so that people can have more control and have the freedom to choose what they believe is best for them.

At the same time, the needs of the business will create certain limits and will have to be considered.

Gaining more control over their own work-life balance also means that staff members have to be willing to grant the same to their colleagues. Often, this demands greater flexibility from everyone.

More Information

You can get more information from your human resources department.