

# work-life balance solution: what good policy looks like

## Introduction

The **organisation of working time** can have a direct impact on equality and health in the workplace. It is important that workers are able to attain a balance between their working life and family and home life.

UK workers do the longest hours in Europe and long working hours will often mean that **men** are unable to enjoy a full role in family life. **Women** tend to be the main carers of children and adults dependants and it is important that they have the opportunity to combine these responsibilities with equal rights in the workplace.

Many organisations have still not introduced work-life balance policies, despite encouragement and positive reports from organisations that have and the evidence highlighting the many advantages. Others have a mismatch between *policy* and *practice*.

This briefing examines some of the **alternative working patterns** available which contribute to good work-life balance policies, including good practice checklists and examples of where these policies work well. Reps and negotiators should use these to:

- keep work-life balance on the bargaining agenda
- monitor the types of flexibility requested of and granted by the employer.

## The business case for work-life balance policies

Many organisations, including the TUC, employers' organisations and voluntary sector organisations such as Working Families have demonstrated the benefits for employers in promoting flexible working practices. These include:

- organisational reputation
- aiding staff retention
- reducing recruitment & training costs
- enhancing morale & performance
- improving commitment
- helping long-term career planning
- encouraging women to return after maternity leave
- reducing sickness absence and
- reducing stress.

There is a comprehensive package of flexible working and caring policies at **Centrica**, called the Work:Wise programme. The programme has been actively promoted by the company which has been enthusiastically taken up by the workforce, the majority of whom are men. Therefore, men comprise the majority of those working flexibly, those working from home or taking career breaks and using the childcare voucher scheme.

The work-life balance policy is also comprehensive at **BAE Systems** and includes a flexible approach to retirement, including pre-retirement leave and the opportunity to attend pre-retirement courses. The company offers a wide range of flexible working arrangements which can be agreed with individual businesses and sites.

## **Alternative or flexible working patterns**

There are many examples of working patterns which could be introduced to enable a balance between work and home life, including:

- Part-time working
- Job sharing
- Flexitime
- Term-time working
- Homeworking/home-based working
- Compressed working weeks (eg nine-day fortnight)

It is important to ensure that members with flexible working arrangements have equal access to training, career development and promotion opportunities. In addition to the negotiators' checklists below, some general issues to bear in mind for members working less than full-time hours:

- ensure that those working less than full-time hours are paid for their breaks;
- ensure that part-time workers, job sharers or those working reduced hours are not blocked from moving back to full-time jobs when there are vacancies;
- Pension Accrual: ensure that in final salary schemes pension remains linked to full-time equivalent salary, rather than actual salary so that people moving to part-time hours do not suffer a reduction in pension built up when they were full-time.

People's family or home responsibilities change over time, so a package of flexible options should be available. Most of the organisations where are Prospect has members do offer more than one flexible working option.

**The right to request flexible working** is being extended to all employees from June 2014 and a Code of Practice is currently being developed by ACAS. Agreement has been reached across many Prospect membership organisations already for the right to request flexible working to be available for all employees.

## **Part-time working**

There has been a significant increase in the number of people working part-time, although sometimes part-time working has not always been a voluntary option for individuals. However, where it is voluntary, it is one of the most popular ways to enable people to combine work and families/home responsibilities, training requirements or leisure pursuits. Part-time workers have protection under the law to ensure that they have equal rights to full-time workers. Further advice and guidance on this can be found in [Members' Guide No 16](#) on part-time and flexible working

### **Rep checklist: part-time working.**

Seek to agree:

- pro-rata terms and conditions
- the same benefits for part-time workers as full-time workers
- guaranteed minimum hours which cannot be varied without agreement
- the flexibility for employees to change their hours
- the opportunity for part-time workers to revert to full-time
- eligibility for allowances such as shift/disturbance payments for work outside 'normal' working hours
- equal opportunities for training, development and promotion and that the opportunities fit with their hours and location
- pro-rata entitlement to statutory holidays
- that redundancy selection criteria do not discriminate against part-time workers

Part-time working is common across Prospect's membership areas. Some organisations, for example the **Big Lottery Fund**, also has a policy of allowing part-time work for a temporary period for staff returning to work after a period of long-term sickness absence or maternity leave in order to ease them back into the routine of working.

### **Job Sharing**

Job sharing is where two people voluntarily share one full-time post: hours, pay and benefits. Job sharing schemes have the advantage that posts at high levels can be covered where there is resistance to part-time working at higher levels. There is a continual staff presence and a clear continuity of responsibility between the job sharers, bringing additional knowledge, skills, ideas and experience to a post.

### **Rep checklist: job sharing.**

Seek to agree:

- A clear definition of job sharing and its benefits
- a commitment to management posts being open to job sharing
- procedures and criteria for any posts to be exempted from job sharing
- a commitment to different patterns of job sharing, agreed between the job sharers and the line manager
- job sharers to agree their division of duties
- arrangements for liaison between the partners to be included in set hours, not additional hours
- equal access to training
- individual appraisal and promotion procedures to apply
- specific arrangements and rates of pay for covering short and long-term absences. It should not be assumed that one job sharer will cover for the other's absence
- arrangements for statutory holidays
- employers to set up and keep up-to-date a job share register
- management commitment to promoting the scheme
- procedures for filling vacancies when one sharer resigns (see below)
- reference to posts being open to job sharing being included in advertisements
- equal terms and conditions for job sharers with full-time staff on a pro rata basis

When a sharer resigns:

- the status of the post should remain full-time, and the remaining sharer should be offered the opportunity to revert to full-time
- if the post continues to be shared, the remaining post holder should be involved in the recruitment process
- if another person cannot be found for the job share, consideration should be given to finding the remaining job sharer a part-time post

The **Big Lottery Fund** has a flexible policy for job sharing where the job sharers agree between themselves and their line manager the particular pattern of work, e.g. to work split days, split weeks or alternate weeks.

## **Flexible hours and flexitime**

There are many ways that working hours can be organised flexibly to allow employees to strike a balance between work and home life. Some employers allow staff the flexibility to vary their starting and finishing times so they can collect or leave children at schools, nurseries or child-minders, or to arrange care for elderly dependants.

**We cover these in detail at the WorkTime YourTime website.**

Variable start and finish times can enable employees to avoid rush-hour traffic, and reduce congestion on the roads and on public transport, which is also beneficial to the environment. Additionally, employees have a less stressful journey to work.

### **Rep checklist: flexitime.**

Seek to agree:

- Any introduction of a change to flexible working hours scheme to be a matter for negotiation between management and unions
- an initial trial and joint discussion on any problem
- joint agreement on exceptions to the coverage of flexible working hours
- joint agreement on whether participation will be voluntary or compulsory, the degree of flexibility and the method of time recording
- the right for individuals to choose their own starting and finishing times within the bandwidth
- flexitime to be carefully organised with arrangements made for flexi leave and other conditions
- flexibility to relax core time in special circumstances
- limitation on the number of credit/debit hours in a settlement period. A good guide would be 15 hours a month or five hours a week
- rules governing overtime when the scheme is set up. They should not be used to restrict freedom of choice for individual starting and finishing times
- flexible working hours to be available to all staff, including part-time staff.

At **Historic Scotland** the scheme has a bandwidth of 07.00 to 19.00 with no core time and credits are given for public and privilege holidays.

At the **Countryside Council for Wales** there is the flexibility to increase or decrease the amount of time/leave that can be carried forward. For example, staff are permitted to carry forward Flexi leave beyond a 12 week period to enable them to build up their Flexi leave for a particular purpose, which would be beneficial to staff who wish to take extended leave to visit family abroad.

There is an informal flexitime arrangement at the **Forestry Commission** which allows staff to finish early one day a week and make up the time on other days, for example, which enables some staff to take part in voluntary community activities.

### **Term-time working**

Term-time, or part year working, is another form of flexible pattern, designed to assist employees with children. There are two types of term-time working scheme:

- where the employee's salary is paid continuously throughout the year, and a certain amount of leave is unpaid
- where employees are paid solely for the time spent at work.

Term-time working can help to overcome staff shortages for short term projects, and cope with increased customer demand.

#### **Rep checklist: term-time working.**

Seek to agree that:

- Term-time working is voluntary and accessible to all staff, regardless of grade or hours worked
- workers receive the same pro-rata benefits as full-time employees in the same grade
- salaries are calculated on the basis of the total yearly salary divided into 12 equal monthly payments
- all members of staff have an opportunity to take leave during school holidays, not just term-time workers
- workers should not be treated any differently to their full-time colleagues in the event of redundancy
- workers have the option to work in the school holidays
- term-time workers receive holidays in lieu of bank holidays which fall in the school holidays
- term-time workers have access to training and promotion
- continuity of service is maintained.

The work-life balance policy at the **Wales Audit Office** contains provision for term-time working. At the **Environment Agency** their term-time working arrangement ensures that staff receive an average monthly salary over the year.

### **Homeworking/home-based working**

There are two types of homeworking arrangement: *occasional* to deal with a problem (eg carers with particular difficulties and disabled people to minimise regular travel to an office); and more permanent where the employee does most of their work from home, with only infrequent attendance at the office.

Although homeworking can offer the employee a greater degree of flexibility, there are several associated problems which need to be overcome. These include isolation, health and safety in the home, and issues concerning training and career progression. Although working from home can give greater flexibility in organising work around caring responsibilities, it is important to ensure that caring responsibilities and work tasks do not conflict. See [Prospect's Members' Guide No 20 to Homeworking](#).

**BT** has a comprehensive agreement for home-based working which covers matters such as London weighting, additional home expenses, equipment and furniture, health and safety, insurance and taxation. Further details of the agreement can be found on Prospect's website.

### **Compressed working weeks**

This is where staff work longer but few days - e.g. a four-day week or a nine-day fortnight. This type of working arrangement is fairly commonly available across public sector employers.

### **Other types of flexible working arrangement**

**V time:** this is voluntary reduced working time, where less money is paid, pro rata to hours worked. Such arrangements are usually for a specified period of time, with no loss of benefits on the right to return to full-time hours.

**Time banking:** there are various forms of time banking. In some organisations employees can bank time in order to take extended leave or reduce their working hours for a set period. Time bank credits can be built up from additional hours worked and in its simplest form, it is a way of taking time off in lieu (TOIL). Such schemes can involve a limit to the additional hours which may be accumulated and the period in which they may be taken. In the **WorkTime YourTime website we provide a spreadsheet** which members can use to record and monitor their working hours.

### **Other "family-friendly" measures**

A good work-life balance policy should also include:

- Maternity leave and pay
- Paternity/partner leave and pay
- Adoptive leave and pay
- Parental leave and pay
- Paid dependency care leave
- Paid fertility leave
- Career breaks
- Assistance with childcare
- Paid leave for urgent domestic distress

### **Conclusion**

When work-life balance concerns are raised, many people think about family-friendly working arrangements, but this is not the only consideration - finding the time for learning, or taking part in community life, are equally powerful motivators for balancing life at work with life outside.

## Resources and Links

[Prospect Members' Guides](#) contain detailed information on specific interests.

[Working Families](#) Changing the way we live and work: this is the UK's leading work-life balance organisation. The charity helps working parents and carers and their employers find a better balance between responsibilities at home and work.

Copies of the agreements mentioned in this Briefing are available and if you would like to see any of them, please contact Sandie Maile. We are working towards publishing the agreements on the library so that they are available for you electronically. Additionally, please send Sandie examples of work-life balance policies, so that we can keep a library of them as a resource for you.

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