

Work/life balance



What is work/life balance?

Work/life balance is an important issue for staff employed in the tertiary education sector. It's about balancing your life and needs with the needs of your employer and how best to ensure appropriate working conditions for performance and job satisfaction in your career. This is an important balance to get right – both for you and your college or university.

Work/life balance is a concept that is often used to refer to parents who are juggling family life with their job – but it applies equally to anyone who works and seeks to find a balance with their other responsibilities and aspirations.

Set yourself finite periods of time for a specific piece of work and remember to take proper breaks

Achieving a healthy work/life balance

DON'T SUFFER IN SILENCE

If you are finding your workload or the demands on your time too great, make sure your manager knows about this. If they aren't aware of the problem, they won't be able to help.

PRIORITISE

It's important to 'work smart, not long'. Set yourself finite periods of time for a specific piece of work and remember to take proper breaks.

SEPARATE WORK AND HOME LIFE

If you have to take work home then ensure you have a designated area where you work. Don't let friends and family relationships suffer because of long hours and leave yourself time for exercise and other leisure activities. Keep at least one day of the weekend free and try to avoid taking work home on a least one evening.

GET ADVICE

Talk to colleagues about work/life balance issues and find out how they assess their needs.

MONITOR YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Look after yourself and look out for symptoms of stress such as anxiety, exhaustion or feeling constantly demotivated. Visit your doctor if things aren't improving.

USEFUL LINKS

- 1 JNCHES guidance on work-life balance:
www.ucea.ac.uk/download.cfm/docid/3C809907-65B6-A811-3757B5D4D111F634
- 2 UCU commentary on JNCHES guidance: <http://bit.ly/c1WGMf>

Working long hours – managing your time

Teachers on average work the longest unpaid hours out of all professions (TUC survey 2005). In most careers in education there will be times when you feel swamped with a heavy workload and it often seems like the only way to reduce your inbox is to work longer than your contracted hours. However this can often be at the expense of your home life and health. Under the Working Time Regulations 1999 you are not expected by law to work longer than 48 hours a week unless you sign a contract that says you are willing to do so. Here are some more tips on time management:

- Make lists – write down the things you need to do. This will clear your mind and help avoid stress.
- Break down the things you have listed into more manageable tasks.
- Prioritise your work bearing in mind your long term objectives.
- Make an estimate as to how long tasks will take.
- Delegate or drop unimportant tasks.
- Be assertive and learn to say ‘no’.
- Avoid procrastination. If you often find yourself putting off certain tasks ask yourself what the reason for this could be.
- Develop a routine that best suits you – for example if you are most creative in the mornings then try to plan your work around that time.
- Reassess and analyse your time management strategy every now and then. If it’s not working for you then change it.

USEFUL LINKS

- 1 Worklife Support – an organisation that helps schools and other public and not-for-profit organisations achieve their full potential by focusing on the wellbeing and motivation of their staff. Go to: www.worklifesupport.com
- 2 workSMART – a TUC website that helps people get the most out of the world of work. Go to: www.worksmart.org.uk
- 3 UCU’s campaign on workload protection – go to: <http://bit.ly/brlaEe>



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