

WORK LIFE BALANCE AN OVERVIEW



Government of South Australia
SafeWork SA

Work Life Balance

INFORMATION SHEET

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#1

This information sheet gives an overview of work life balance as a workplace strategy through which employers can enhance employee attraction, retention and productivity, while also improving the quality of life of employees.

WHAT IS WORK LIFE BALANCE?

Work life balance is about individual choices that enable employers and employees to manage the interaction between work and the demands of life that affect health, families and communities.

There are increasingly more employees who care for children or elderly family members, manage work and study, seek graduated retirement or balance demanding work and life commitments. This necessitates a new approach to working arrangements.

The key to a healthy work life balance is flexible work and leave arrangements. Work life balance is for every business and everyone.

KEY DRIVERS FOR WORK LIFE BALANCE IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

There are a number of key drivers for work life balance in South Australia, based around the following current and future workforce requirements in the state:

• ageing population

South Australia's population is ageing more rapidly than any other state in Australia, with a major depletion of the workforce predicted as baby boomers retire. Many older workers would choose to remain employed in a more flexible workplace.

• untapped labour resources

The South Australian workforce continues to lose skilled people because:

- they have taken on the role of a carer for children, elderly, sick or disabled relatives
- they are women who are unable to return to work after having children because of inflexible work arrangements and a lack of affordable quality child care
- workplaces are not adapted to the needs of people with disabilities, chronic illness or injuries.

• skills and labour shortage

The skills shortage in South Australia continues as talent is lost overseas and interstate to job opportunities offering more flexible work conditions and attractive remuneration packages.

Employers who take into consideration individual needs for flexibility, time for study, volunteering or personal interests and time for family, position themselves to attract and retain skilled workers whose loyalty is assured.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS?

In a competitive labour market, employers are exploring flexible work arrangements that assist employees to balance work and life commitments in order to recruit and retain the best talent.

Flexible work and leave arrangements can help people keep their jobs by working reduced hours or with longer breaks, avoiding redundancies and retraining.

Work life balance initiatives increase loyalty and dedication, and decrease employee absenteeism, improving client service and enhancing business reputation overall.

Flexible work arrangements are now a feature of enterprise bargaining: unions and industrial regulators include work life balance indicators in the formulation and negotiation of employment arrangements.

Employees who can benefit include:

- working parents responsible for children
- employees responsible for elderly relatives, partners or family members with illness or disabilities
- employees with disabilities
- employees wishing to undertake further studies
- employees who commute long distances to work
- employees who volunteer their time for community projects.

Managing the competing demands of work, family and social life is an issue that affects many South Australians. By promoting a work life balance culture and environment in the workplace, employers can improve their ability to attract and retain employees, in turn enriching our health and wellbeing and building stronger communities.

The South Australian Government is committed to work life balance through South Australia's Strategic Plan Target 2.12 *'Improve the quality of life for all South Australians through the maintenance of a healthy work-life balance.'*

SafeWork SA is the lead agency for the target through the Work Life Balance Strategy.

www.safework.sa.gov.au/worklifebalance



IMPLEMENTING WORK LIFE BALANCE STRATEGIES

When implementing a work life balance strategy, consultation between management and employees is essential in establishing flexible arrangements that meet the needs of both parties. There is no one set of arrangements that will work for every business.

Some arrangements that may be looked at to improve work life balance include:

- flexible start and finish times
- part-time and job-share arrangements
- flexible working hours (where core hours are prescribed but other times can be worked flexibly)
- home-based work or telecommuting (where employees work from home on a regular basis subject to compliance with occupational health and safety, workers compensation and other relevant laws)
- rostered days off, nine-day fortnight or compressed full-time work (where the employee works a slightly longer day to take fixed days off)
- purchased leave (where the employee self funds extra leave by having a smaller take home pay each week)
- ability to take unpaid leave.

Arrangements can be inexpensive and remarkably simple – from providing access to a telephone for emergencies to providing on-site child care.

When you are considering flexible work arrangements for your business, also make sure you meet your legal obligations (see next section).

LEGAL OBLIGATIONS OF EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

Federal and State industrial relations legislation prescribes minimum standards for all workers. Both employers and employees have a legal obligation to comply with these standards.

Arrangements can be negotiated directly between an employer and employee, or with the assistance of the relevant union, but all working arrangements need to consider the relevant award, agreement and legislation as well as other related legislation.

The National Employment Standards in the Commonwealth *Fair Work Act 2009* provide core entitlements for all Australian workers, while the new federal industry awards will provide further entitlements.

In addition, the provisions of the *Long Service Leave Act 1987* can be used to support work life balance arrangements. Under the Act, an employee who has completed 10 or more years service is entitled to 13 weeks long service leave (LSL). A further 1.3 weeks is granted for each completed year after 10 years service. Accrued LSL may be used to support part time arrangements.

Australia's Paid Parental Leave (PPL) scheme will also assist work life balance by providing 18 weeks of PPL to new parents with a guarantee they can return to their job. The scheme came into effect on 1 January 2011.

NOTES:

- Any changes to employment arrangements must comply with conditions set out in the National Employment Standards, the relevant award and/or enterprise agreement.
- The Commonwealth *Fair Work Act 2009* applies generally to employers and their employees in South Australia from 1 January 2010.

Visit www.safework.sa.gov.au (look under 'Industrial Relations') for detailed information regarding the new national industrial relations legislation or visit the website for the Fair Work Ombudsman at www.fairwork.gov.au.

DISCLAIMER

This publication contains information regarding occupational health and safety. It includes some of your obligations under the occupational health and safety legislation that SafeWork SA administers. To ensure you comply with your legal obligations you must refer to the appropriate Acts and Regulations. This publication may refer to legislation that has been amended or repealed. When reading this publication always refer to the latest laws.

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www.safework.sa.gov.au

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