# JOINT NEGOTIATING COMMITTEE (JNC) FOR YOUTH AND COMMUNITY WORKERS

## GUIDANCE ON WORK LIFE BALANCE

### Introduction

1. The JNC believes that local authorities' employers, not for profit and voluntary sector employers of youth and community staff should be committed to developing and implementing purposeful work life balance policies and to support this has developed the following national guidance. A lack of work life balance can have an adverse impact on all staff and reduce their chances of good health and their ability to balance workload and other activities. In 2023/24, stress, depression or anxiety accounted for 46% of all work-related ill health and 55% of all working days lost due to work-related ill health. Work related stress was also found to be more prevalent in the public service sector, such as education; health and social care; and public administration.[1] Therefore any measures that can be taken to reduce such risks should be considered. Having a clear shared understanding and commitment to maintaining a healthy work life balance, can be an important part of creating good work, for jobs that people feel are manageable and want to stay in.

### Work Life Balance

2. Work life balance is about helping staff combine work with their personal commitments and interests. Positive work life balance is an essential factor in developing workforce planning, staff effectiveness and satisfaction, which in turn supports young people. Employers should adopt policies that enable staff to balance their working lives with their personal needs, interests and caring responsibilities.

3. In ensuring effective work life balance policies it is important to note that youth services do not operate standard working hours and employees work flexibly in various environments and across multidisciplinary teams. It is important therefore to pay attention to work life balance as that can take a bit more consideration in a service that does not work what we might think of as "office hours" and a traditional 9 – 5 model.

4. A proactive approach to work life balance issues can yield significant benefits, including reducing stress, reducing sick leave, boosting morale, increasing job satisfaction and improving recruitment and retention. If an employer helps their employees balance their work and home life, this can be rewarded with loyalty and commitment allowing an employee to focus on their work and develop their career.[2]

### Shift Planning

5. The JNC's position is that shifts and rotas should be properly scheduled with sufficient notice of shifts so that staff are able to plan their lives, while recognising the need to provide a flexible and effective service. As local services evolve this should be left to the discretion of local management arrangements involving consultation and ideally consent with employees. There may be the occasional requirement to change working arrangements at short notice, but again this should be managed in consultation and where possible with the consent of employees.

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[1] Work related Stress, Anxiety and Depression Statistics in Great Britain 2024, Health & Safety Executive, https://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/assets/docs/stress.pdf

[2] http://www.acas.org.uk/media/pdf/j/m/Flexible-working-and-work-life-balance.pdf

6. There is a need to ensure appropriate rest periods between shifts and that the provisions of the Working Time Directive (WTD) (11 consecutive hours' rest, in a 24-hour period) are applied correctly. While this is the legal framework, managers in multidisciplinary teams should be aware of different working patterns that may be related to the professional role when planning cross team interaction and there should be effective communication between employers and employees. An example of effective planning is that where an employee works late into the evening then an early morning meeting the following day for that individual should be discouraged.

**Workload and Time off in lieu (TOIL)**

7. TOIL forms a core part of work life balance because it is a clear way of supporting employees to be flexible with work, but to ensure they are able to take that time back. It is about flexibility on all sides. TOIL is included in the JNC's National Agreement ('The Pink Book'). Flexibility is required to allow staff to be able to take leave within time limits and employers should have effective local planning and management arrangements which take account of the particular out of hours needs of youth services.

8. Local authorities as large employers will generally have an over-arching framework on TOIL that covers all council services. The nature of the work often means that youth and community staff provide services in the evenings, weekends and bank holidays. Paragraphs 9 to 15 of the National Agreement provides policy on the management of staff which covers flexible working, work planning and TOIL. Where possible each working week (that does not include a residential) could contain two consecutive days that are designated as non-working days. Any TOIL accrued for residential work would be separate from these designated non-working days. Time should be planned over a rolling four-week period with normally up to ten sessions each week. These arrangements do require local negotiation and agreement.

**Working Patterns**

9. The JNC also recommends the following as good practice with regard to working patterns for staff:

- That work should be allocated fairly and reasonably according to the needs of the service locally and this should not normally exceed ten sessions (totalling no more than 37 hours) a week;

- There should be no more than eight evening sessions per fortnight. This should be the maximum rather than the pattern. The National Agreement does not define what an evening session is or when this should commence, so this is a matter for local determination. However, in terms of guidance, we recommend that opportunities should be created for workers to reduce the number of nights with twilight sessions (on a regular basis to improve work life balance.

- Session lengths should be clearly defined in each employing organisation;

- Staff should be appropriately rested when they come on duty and therefore alert enough at all times to ensure that those under their supervision are properly cared for;

- It is recognised that irregular working hours and concentrated work periods can be part of the job. In most cases, good time management and planning will take account of this. To be effective plans will need to predict more than a week ahead;

- The JNC believes that following this guidance will support the delivery of high-quality youth and community services which will respond to local community needs and will contribute to the work life balance for youth and community workers.

**Practicable Support for Flexible Working**

10. There are a variety of approaches that can be taken to flexible working, which is now a legal right to request[i], that would include part-time working, job share flexitime, annualised hours, compressed working, term-time working and time accounts). As well as these structural approaches, both Sides of the JNC encourage the use of practical steps to support more effective working practices and a better work-life balance. Examples of this would be:

- Telephone or video conference facilities for staff where meetings are hard to attend in person;
- Managers of multidisciplinary teams should be aware that many youth workers work non office hours and different working patterns and it is helpful to be flexible in terms of the timing of team meetings;
- Purchase of equipment, for example phones, laptops, tablets etc., to help staff work more flexibly and reduce the need to come into an office to deal with administrative tasks.

**Training**

11. Good practice entails working with all staff, including those who work part-time, to provide appropriate training to enable them to do their jobs effectively within standard hours. Training, including CPD, should ideally take place during the working day but may be required to take place out of hours given the nature of the service. An evening session of training is included as one of the maximum eight sessions per fortnight for staff.

[i] Employment Relations (Flexible Working) Act 2023