

## **STEP TWO: FIND OUT ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING NOW, AND WHAT THE ISSUES ARE FOR YOUR ORGANISATION AND WORKFORCE**

*One organisation used focus groups to find out more about work-life balance practices in the organisation. The groups were established to look at the issues raised in the survey.*

### **Template Letter and Questionnaire for Focus Groups**

Dear

Thank you for agreeing to help us by participating in one of the work-life balance focus groups. Work-life balance is about people feeling satisfied with the way they divide their time and energy between paid work and all the other things they need and want to do.

We need your help to explore some of the issues raised in the survey that was carried out at the end of last year, and to help us think about possible solutions. The groups will be run by (name and title).

The discussion will be confidential. We will only report the common themes and suggestions back to the work-life balance working group.

The arrangements for your Focus Group are:

Date:

Time:

Venue:

I have attached a copy of some of the questions that we would like to ask you. You will also be able to raise anything else you think is important.

If you have any questions or concerns, please talk to your work-life balance team representative or call me on ext XXX.

Thank you.

## **Work-Life Balance Focus Group Questions - Operational staff**

### ***General***

- What things do you think that (name of company) does well in assisting staff get a satisfactory work-life balance? Which are most important to you?
- What things do you think that (name of company) does that makes it harder for staff to get a satisfactory work-life balance? Which have the most impact on you?

### ***Knowing what to expect***

- When you started your job, did you know what to expect about working rosters and shifts?
- If so, how did you know?
- If not, would it have been useful to know? What would have been the best way for (name of company) to do that?

### ***Leave***

- What difficulties, if any, do you have in taking annual leave?
- Given the nature of the work, do you think (name of company) could do anything different in this area?
- Have you ever needed to take time off during your shift? If so, how hard was it to do this?

### ***Rosters***

- What roster patterns do you work?
- What things about (name of company) rosters help with your work-life balance?
- What things about (name of company) rosters make your work-life balance harder?
- If there are difficulties, what practical things do you think would make a difference?

### ***Support from your manager***

- Does your manager help or hinder you in getting a satisfactory work-life balance?
  - What do they do?
  - Is there anything you think would be useful for them to do differently?
- How comfortable are you talking to your manager about work-life issues?
  - What helps?
  - What makes it harder?

### ***Other issues***

- Is there anything else to do with work-life balance we should be aware of or thinking about?

## **Template Letter and Questionnaire for Managers of Operational Staff**

*Managers of operational staff were also asked to complete a questionnaire*

Dear

Thank you for making the time to meet with (name/title) to discuss work-life balance issues for (name of company). Work-life balance is about people feeling satisfied with the way they divide their time and energy between paid work and all the other things they need and want to do.

The survey we undertook at the end of last year on work-life balance gathered information on the issue from an employee's perspective. We also need to understand what the issues are from the perspective of managing staff. Hence why we think it is important to get your views.

Your conversation with (name) will be confidential. He/she will only be reporting back the common issues, concerns and suggestions to the work-life balance working group. This information will be used to help them come up with practical solutions that will work in our organisation.

(Name) will meet with you in your office on (date) at (time).

Thank you for your help.

## **Work-Life Balance – Having to Manage the Issue (managers of operational employees)**

1. What kinds of work-life balance issues do your employees raise with you?
2. Which, if any, of these issues do you find most difficult to deal with?
3. What currently helps you deal with these issues? E.g. policies, advice from HR, advice from other managers
4. What else would make it easier to respond to these issues?
5. One of the issues raised in the survey was rosters. What works well with your current roster system?
6. Do you think that any changes are needed to rosters to make it easier for you and your employees to get a satisfactory work-life balance? If so, what changes do you think would be useful and practical?
7. Another issue raised in the survey was flexibility in taking leave. Is this an issue in your area?
8. Do you think that any changes are needed to the way that leave is organised? If so, what changes do you think would be useful and practical?
9. What benefits, if any, do you hope to get by addressing work-life balance issues?
10. Are there any other aspects of managing work-life balance within (name of company) that we should be thinking about?

### ***Specific issues raised in work-life balance survey***

11. One of the issues raised in the survey was (insert issue). Is this an issue in your area?
12. Do you think that any changes are needed to (insert issue) to make it easier for you and your employees to get a satisfactory work-life balance? If so, what changes do you think would be useful and practical?
13. Another issue raised in the survey was (insert issue). Is this an issue in your area?
14. Do you think that any changes are needed to (insert issue)? If so, what changes do you think would be useful and practical?

## **Work-Life Balance: possible discussion prompts**

*Following on from a survey and focus group meetings one organisation established a set of 'prompts' to further stimulate discussion about work-life balance. Once a month for three months various teams were sent a discussion question based on issues identified by the survey and focus groups.*

*The following document was used to advise the teams of the discussion prompts and the reasons for the follow-up.*

The work-life balance survey and the focus group discussions identified communication about work-life balance options as one of the key issues. It illustrated the need for maintaining general awareness, and for ensuring that people knew where to go when they needed specific information. This strategy is intended to assist particularly with general awareness.

### ***Purpose***

The intention of this strategy is to provide teams with prompt questions to stimulate debate and discussion at meetings around work-life balance issues.

A prompt question, or series of related questions, will be sent out to each team at regular intervals.

### ***Scheduling the topics (at your meetings)***

The scheduling and order of the topics should be related to:

- topical issues
- preparing for known work pressures or demands e.g. times when sick leave is typically high
- release of other information tools that are related to the topic.

### ***Pilot***

This strategy will be piloted for three months just within the areas involved in this project, with a question going out once a month. If the strategy is found to be useful, consideration will be given to using it more widely through the organisation.

(Note: in this organisation the strategy was managed by the human resources department and where relevant and possible they found it useful to provide written information and/or related policies, along with the prompt question.)

### ***What are we expecting of the teams***

It is expected that each team will put it on the agenda for one of their staff meetings. There will be genuine opportunity for people to discuss the issue. It is expected that this will take up to 15 minutes. For some, it will be much shorter than that. After the discussion, the manager or a delegated team member will be asked to send a brief message back to HR outlining:

- anything the team will do differently as a result of the discussion
- anything that they would like HR to be thinking about related to the topic
- anything that they would like the work-life balance committee to be aware of or thinking about related to the topic.

### ***Possible discussion prompts***

*(Note: questions 2, 5 and 7 were identified as the most important to include in the trial followed by questions 3 and 4)*

1. Sick leave typically increases during the next few months. Is there anything we can do to minimise the disruption that this may cause?
2. Part-time work is an employment option that people are often interested in:
  - a. where would it work in our area?
  - b. where would it not work?
  - c. what do we already do as a team to make it possible for people to work effectively on a part-time basis?
  - d. is there anything we could do better?

3. Many people are trying to balance full-time work with their rest of their lives
  - a. what do we already do to make this easier?
  - b. is there anything we could do better?
4. Flexibility around start and finish times is important to many people to help them with work-life balance
  - a. how much flexibility is possible in our area? What is not possible?
  - b. could we make it work better?
5. Flexibility to attend events during the workday or shift, such as a child's school play, a medical appointment of an elderly relative or a key sports event is important to many people to help them with work-life balance
  - a. how much flexibility is possible in our area? What is not possible?
  - b. could we make it work better?
6. People often request temporary or one-off changes to shifts or working hours
  - a. what is reasonable to ask for?
  - b. what is not reasonable to ask for?
7. Getting away on time at the end of the shift or working day is important to many people.
  - a. are there things that happen here that make this harder?
  - b. could we do things differently so that this is less likely to happen?
8. People sometimes need to take extended leave from the workplace, whether it is for parental leave, their own health, or the illness of a family member
  - a. what can we do to minimise the disruption to our work?
  - b. what can we do to make it easier for the person who is on leave? e.g. leading up to them going, while they are away and on their return.

### ***Draft communication to teams***

One of the keys to people being able to maintain a satisfactory work-life balance is good communication. People need to know that the issue is seen as important by the organisation, they need to know what their options are, and with their colleagues they need to know how to make things work. To raise general awareness of work-life balance issues and an understanding of specific options, we are asking teams in the work-life balance pilot to discuss a series of key work-life balance issues.

### ***What will happen with your feedback?***

It will be used to:

- Identify any areas where HR needs to provide more information, clarify issues or develop initiatives.
- Identify if there are common problems across the organisation.
- Help the work-life balance committee refine the strategies they are recommending and piloting.

If the discussions prove to be useful, we will look at potentially spreading the idea across the organisation.