

Contemporary work patterns

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The UK economy is characterised by a relatively high level of flexibility in work patterns when compared with our continental neighbours. The work force is roughly split between male and female employment, although women are more concentrated in part-time rather than full-time employment. The numbers of males working part-time is increasing each year.

The development of family friendly employment practices has encouraged the increasing feminisation of the workplace e.g. job sharing, home working, and the development of creche facilities in the workplace. While some employers emphasise the importance of developing a good work/life balance, others demand extremely long hours from full-time employees.

Core workforce

A major change in working patterns has been the reduction of the core workforce. The core workforce consists of full-time, high paid employees.

In contrast we have seen the growth in numbers of employees working part-time and on temporary contracts. Many large companies have shrunk back their core workforces in order to cut costs and to become more competitive.

The shrinking core is in many cases replaced by outsourced labour. For example, a number of organisations that previously operated their own call centres in this country, now outsource this type of work to overseas contractors who must keep up a certain standard of performance.

There are all sorts of non-core activities that companies have contracted out.

Work/life balance

Many large companies today lease the buildings they operate in. They therefore contract out a range of activities associated with building maintenance and security. Specialist companies such as Land Securities provide tailor made maintenance services for companies like banks situated in Central London.

Oil companies may not directly employ the workers on oil rigs in the North Sea. Instead they will employ the services of a contractor who provides the labour force for them.

Work/life balance involves creating an appropriate balance between work and family and leisure commitments.