

Fact Sheet 5: Is flexible work good for young workers?

Flexible working hours are good for both employees and employers. There are also particular benefits for young people.

Many young workers are in transition jobs, trying to upskill themselves through studying and needing to work at the same time. Other young workers have family responsibilities and or are committed to sporting and other activities.

The ability to request flexible working hours will benefit young workers by helping them to balance employment with study, sports and other commitments. This would enable young workers to fulfil their obligations in family life, education, health and fitness, and make a contribution to their communities.

Why do young people need flexible working hours?

- Many young workers are employed in the private sector in low paid and casualised jobs. 37% of young workers work in service and sales roles¹, which are at the lower end of the labour market in terms of pay and conditions.
- The concept of 'flexibility' is already commonplace in these jobs, but this is not flexibility by choice. Young workers often have shifting rosters and insecure work hours.
- Many young people have other demands, such as studying for qualifications to help them get better jobs in the future or sporting or family commitments.
- Flexible Work Hours legislation would provide young workers with the opportunity to have some say over these rosters and shift patterns and seek for more formal working arrangements where these rosters take into consideration factors in their life such as study and sport.

Good for students

- Research shows a strong correlation between education outcomes and future labour market participation and better pay rates.
- People who complete bachelor's degrees earn 31% more than those that do not have this qualification².
- However work pressures can make completion of tertiary education more difficult. The 2001 Census showed an increase in students combining study and work. The proportion of young people in full-time employment has dropped while those participating in education and part-time employment has increased³.

¹ 12 to 24: Young People in New Zealand, Ministry of Youth Development, 2003

² Education and the Labour Market, Ministry of Education, March 2007

³ 12 to 24: Young People in New Zealand, Ministry of Youth Development, 2003

- Many young workers need to balance their study with anti-social working hours such as night shifts at supermarkets and bars, or weekend retail and hospitality work.
- Many would like the opportunity to request flexibility particularly around exam time or when there are pressing obligations in other spheres of their lives to ensure that there is a better balance between work and study.
- Flexible working hours is important for them to be able to do justice to their education, and ensure a highly skilled workforce for the future of Aotearoa/New Zealand.

Flexible work and student debt

- Student debt is currently around \$9 billion.
- Many students need to work to cover weekly expenditure, in addition to borrowing from the government, because of lack of access to allowances and living costs. Only about one third of students actually receive any form of allowance.⁴

The 2004 NZUSA/TNS survey of 10,000 students nationwide showed:

- 67% of all respondents were employed in regular work during term time. This had increased from 41% since a 2001 survey.
- In addition to study, many students, particularly women, juggle study with family responsibilities.
- The average age of tertiary students is currently 28 years old, which means they are more likely to have children or other dependents than in the past.
- The NZUSA/TNS survey found 18.6% of female students and 9% of male students had dependent children.

“Vulnerable young workers who request time off or exercise their rights can find themselves getting less and less hours of work every week - forcing them to find alternative work, or submit to losing income.

Without the support of flexible working hours legislation, many young workers face being told they cannot take time off for university examinations, or being made to work until 3am or 4am on the eve of a deadline, exam or competitive sport event. Many young workers are not comfortable seeking flexibility and the backing if the law would assist with this.”

Youth Union Movement

“Students with dependent children are struggling to find time to study and care for their children, without the added concern of fitting work around these activities. If flexible work hours were available, fitting work around these activities would not be so problematic, and student parents would be less worried about their household bills.”

Tertiary Women’s Focus Group

⁴ Tertiary Women’s Focus Group, submission to Department of Labour on quality flexible work, December 2006