

Study-work/Work-life Balance

Developed by Western Balkans Institute Team

Findings suggest that the small sample of students investigated have few tools in place to manage their **study-work balance**. In order to manage the juggling act of work and study students are normally focused on one factor at a time, either study or work. The few balancing tools may be attributed to the lack of general work-life balance knowledge among students. More recently, authors (McPherson & Reed, 2007) have extended the definition of 'life' to reflect the contemporary society and extend the concept to address issues of work-life balance discourse (Harris & Pringle, 2007). For example, the term 'life' can refer to non-paid activities such as recreation, travel, voluntary work, personal development people aspire to include in their daily life. This extension of the term 'life' has broadened the focus from typical activities outside of work such as family responsibilities to incorporating a wider range of people such as students combining study and paid work, and young people wanting time away from work to travel (McPherson & Reed, 2007).

Social and economic conditions of student life in higher education have a significant role to play in students' success and attainment and the overall wellbeing. Students well-being is often correlated with their ability to manage stress levels, maintaining both mental and physical health, and creating personal time, having financial and emotional support from various individuals and student services, etc.

In their recent study on the impact of COVID19, Matijević, S., Schmidt, Š., & Farnell. (2021, March 17) show that as many as 41.1 % of students who worked during their studies lost their jobs (28.9 % temporarily, 12.2 % permanently). As a result, these students become significantly less capable of covering their study and living costs, compared to all other groups of students (p.35).

Many international students rely on part-time work to help finance their studies, which the COVID-19 pandemic severely affected due to large-scale job losses. Some countries reported that they increased the working time for international students to engage in paid employment to better address the impacts of the pandemic (e.g. in Belgium, France, Ireland and the UK).

In 2018 the EUROSTUDENT VI project research combining Studies and Paid Jobs¹ states that in 28 European countries examined on average, slightly more than half of all students are combining studies and a paid job – either during the whole lecture period or from time to time during term-time. The share of students who work regularly throughout the whole lecture period ranges from less than 15% in IT, AL and RS to over 50% in DE and EE. The average number of hours per week students with a regular paid job

¹ https://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/TR_paid_jobs.pdf

spend working ranges from less than 20 hours in DK, NL, DE and CH to more than 35 hours in TR, GE, RO and PL (p.9). According to this study, students' motives for engaging in a paid job position while studying vary from covering living expenses, and cost of study (financial factors), to gaining experience in the labor market (60% of responding students across the examined 28 countries). As expected, master level students tend to have more study-related jobs than their colleagues pursuing bachelor degree. Most of these students are coming from ICT and medicine work sectors/educational backgrounds. In 16 European countries out of 28 examined, of students the share of working students in the positions that are closely related to their field of study is 45% and above (p.10).

In performing study and work-related tasks in parallel, key stressors for students appear to be: time loss (e.g. spent on travelling from home to work and study place); at risk students' dependency of financial support available for their participation on professional events (payment of contributions, costs of travel and stay); lack of understanding and skills needed to balance study-work tasks and roles performed.

When it comes to **work-life balance**, it is normally depicted as ability to manage time in order to enable successful enjoyment and work-related aspects of one's life with the contributing factors (Illustration 1).

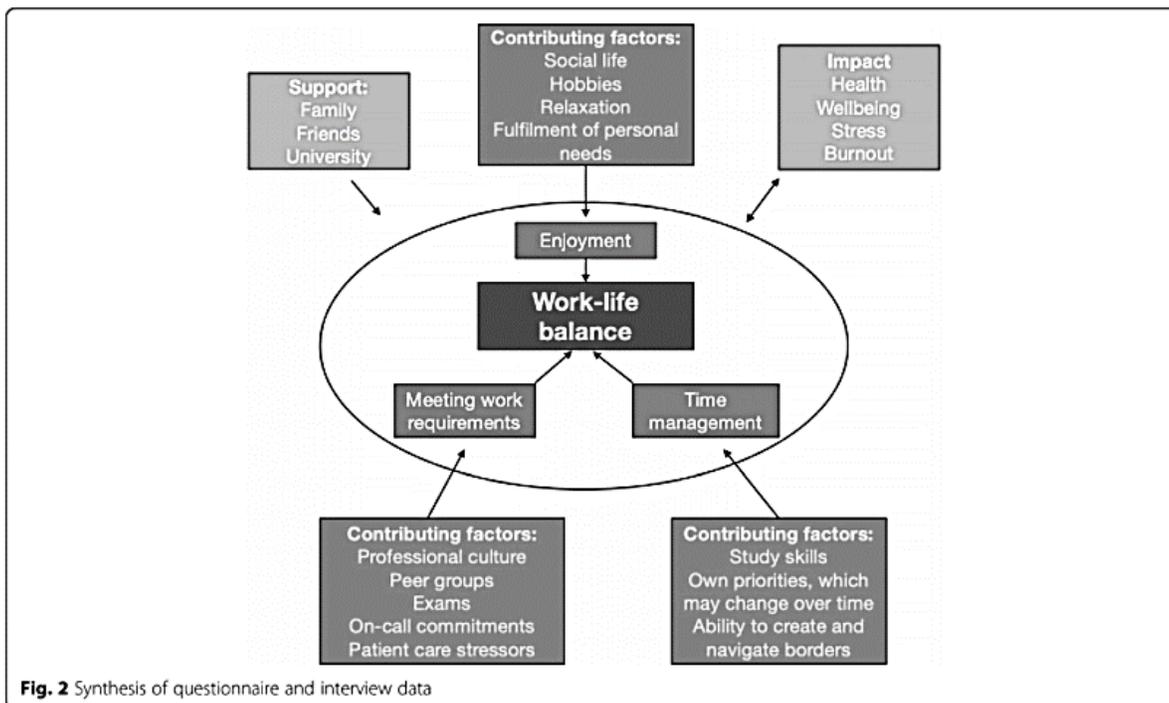


Illustration 1: Work-life balance contributing factors

It can well be argued that work-life balance is important to all working individuals, but higher education institutions house a special tradition where teaching and in particular research is regarded as a 'mission' that allows for no or little outside life, be it family, political engagement or hobbies.

The concept of academic work as a mission is double-edged: on the one hand it raises the status of the academic profession as it marks those in it as gifted and special, chosen by their career rather than the reverse. On the other, it is a hindrance for achieving work-life balance as it requires the individual to put work before every other demand on their time and on their mind. This concept is so internalized that few dare voice skepticisms or indeed even perceive their own lives in this light. However, research indicates that university teachers as any other professionals could do a better job as teachers and researchers if they lead a full life.

'Life' refers to the time we spend beyond the specialized, narrow field of work in the company of people who, in turn, are linked to other combinations of life and work. For instance, social engagement in daily activities at home, but also contacts in nongovernmental organizations or while practicing hobbies provide insights into the world that cannot be gained by only sitting at a desk or being in a laboratory. Such experiences are of great importance to any academic in order to develop socially relevant questions, to be able to assess technological impacts, to judge the social acceptance of procedures, and so on.

The generation referred to as Millennials or Generation Y, includes those born between 1980 and 1995. Members of this generation also place a high priority on work-life balance and flexibility in the workplace. Work-life balance has been described as one of the most important factors in the retention of faculty among this generation and a factor in choice of career track (PricewaterhouseCoopers LLP, 2013). Although the commitment of Generation X (born between 1965 and 1979) and Generation Y to a more balanced work-life tension bodes well for efforts to improve work-life balance of faculty in the future, nursing faculty members from earlier generations or approaching retirement age may have different views about what is acceptable work-life balance.

The results of a 2011 study of a national sample of 3,120 full-time nursing faculty revealed that 76.2% of nursing faculty were satisfied or very satisfied with the flexibility in their academic position, enabling them to achieve acceptable work-life balance. However, the level of satisfaction dropped to 65.1% among those who taught in doctoral programs (National Survey of Nurse Faculty, 2011). Brady (2010) posited that with faculty shortages, frozen faculty lines, and increasing student enrollments to address the nursing shortage, faculty workloads may be increasing and flexibility within the faculty role declining. These changes conflict with the desire for flexibility in work roles and greater work-life balance, which is a reason that some people prefer academic roles over nonacademic roles.

The American Council on Education (2013) has launched a national challenge for higher education to promote faculty work-life balance and has pointed out that upcoming generations of faculty members will expect greater career and personal flexibility in order to achieve greater work-life balance.

Vast body of literature points out that students lack skills needed to maintain a healthy study-work-life balance. These often refer to the ability to conscious decision-making based on identification, observation and understanding of individual relevance of particular material and non-material QoL (Quality of Life) determinants that would help them choose between alternative life patterns. An early elaboration of individual hierarchy of QoL determinants, including work-life balance, can enhance the ability of young persons to make conscious choices about their future professional careers and personal development and thus make valuable contribution to higher efficiency of their professional activities.

Research completed with Norwegian students on QoL determinants (Gawlik, R., & Jacobsen, G., 2016) pointed at the need of Norwegian Youth to be approached individually, leaving space for particular combinations of work-life balance determinants as a strong motivation mechanism at work. Conducted research has also shown that preferred levels of above factors are individual specific, therefore managers, including HR specialists, should adopt a more individual-focused approach to their actual employees, as well as to the candidates for work posts. It definitely is more resource consuming that a standardized approach to human resource management, but allows to expect a higher efficiency in solving unconventional tasks. Future research could determine to which extent this general remark stands for various working environments and for different positions.

Martinez, E., Ordu, C., R. Della Sala, M., & McFarlane, A. in their small-scale study (2013) indicated that good management of time, roles, responsibilities and priorities and reduced 'procrastination' were skills needed to maintain a healthy balance as well as making trade-offs (Illustration 2). Nevertheless, students suggested the use of questionnaires for lecturers to gain information on term-time employment, encouraging students to obtain employment in their field of study, and advertising jobs within the university itself may assist with balancing work and life. With tertiary enrolments beginning to fall in the last two years, universities may wish to consider work-life balance among students as a mechanism to counterbalance this falling trend and to assist in retaining tertiary enrolments.

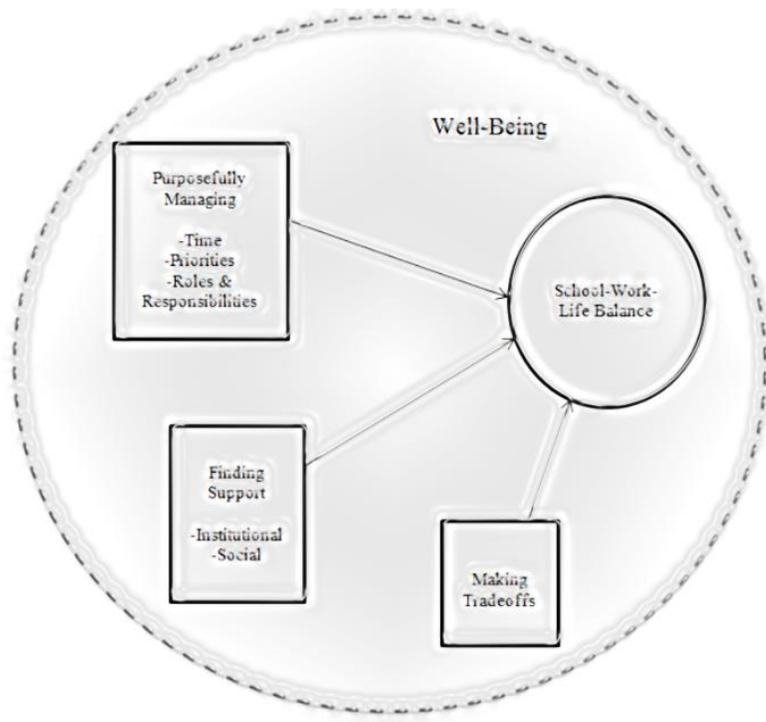


Figure 2. *Students school-work-life balance key components*

Practices that work

Even though study-work-life balance is hard to reach, and is ever more compelling, some and/or HE institutions seem to have been doing a better job than others. Some examples of national/institutional policy measures related to the question of students balancing work and studies in higher education are presented below.

Increase in state funding

Canada Emergency Student Benefit and National Student Grant are programmes providing financial support to post-secondary students and recent high school graduates who were unable to find work due to the COVID-19 pandemic over the summer of 2020. The government also announced plans to double student grants and broaden the eligibility for financial assistance, as well as additional support in the form of scholarship funding extensions for students and postdoctoral researchers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Offering additional opportunities in order to establish students reflection on work/life balance

Institutions like John Hopkins and Imperial College of London University offer supporting tools on conflicting demands of school, work and family, so students can reflect through managing time,

emphasizing importance of relaxation and healthy study practice, investing in standards of excellence regarding university supporting systems, and also offering part-time jobs with flexible working hours so students can study and work at the same time.

Introducing credit-based higher school curriculum

Colleges in Scotland already have a unitized and credit-based higher education curriculum that is available to students in a variety of modes of study, from a defined full-time or part-time course to a personalized programme of individual units

Peer support in socio-economic wellbeing of incoming students

The Division of psychology and language science of University College London (UCL) runs a buddy system pairing first year students with a second- or third-year student who acts as an advisor for socio-economic wellbeing of incoming students.

Critique on campus strategies and structures addressing gender equality

Strategies on the college campus from St. Cloud State University bring insights about inconsistency of work-life policies and practices on campuses across the nation stating that these policies and practices are virtually ineffective in creating equity for female advancement and promotion (DeMinck, Debra K., 2017).

From merit-based to needs-based student support system

Extent of work alongside studies closely related to eligibility for student support Estonia switched from merit-based student support to a needs-based student support system. In 2013, Estonia started implementing higher education funding reform, which changed the way students pay for their studies and the basis for receiving student support. Previously, all students could apply for student support regardless of their employment situation (if they performed with sufficient grades). Since this reform, support is now eligible for students who study full-time and do not have any income (from family or work) or those with an extremely low income. Also, with the reform in 2013, all students can now study for free if: 1) they study full-time, 2) they study within the regular study period, 3) their study programme uses Estonian as language of instruction. One of the underpinning ideas behind the reform was that students would focus more on their studies and earn more credits each semester, therefore completing their studies on time to avoid paying tuition fees.

Recommendations

1. HEI should introduce a module on material and non-material determinants of quality of life into the university programme; decision-making workshops focused on assisting young people in conscious planning for their future careers, with a focus on sustainable work-life balance should become part

of their academic formation delivered by trained educators with intercultural sensitivity, and understanding of the particularities of socio-economic development

2. Gender perspectives should be promoted through campus policies and practices both for students and staff members on study-work-life balance including through flexible part-time option that can be used for limited periods (up to 5 years) as life-course needs arise; a guarantee to make high-quality childcare slots available, particularly for new hires; discounting of family-related resume gaps in the hiring process; establishment of school-break childcare and summer camps; emergency backup childcare programs; adoption benefits; introduction and promotion of the family-friendly package as a major recruitment tool.
3. Reducing time stressors for students (e.g. travelling time to get to class) through schedule improvements, e.g. offering one three-hour class instead of three one-hour class per week.
4. Ensuring accessible and user-friendly counselling and guidance for students and staff to find appropriate solutions for academic, health, and career challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.
5. Social dimension principles of higher education should be further promoted through development and implementation of programs devoted to keeping at-risk students engaged (training for both students and teaching and administrative staff including on digital competencies which enhance social dimension of teaching and learning by enabling studying and working in an online environment).
6. Teaching and research placements and contracts should recommendations by the European Commission published in the European Charter for Researchers and the Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers that encompasses good and best practice in gender equality and work-life balance for both staff and students. At minimum Gender-Directive 2006/54/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 5 July 2006 on the implementation of the principle of equal opportunities and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation should be considered.
7. Evidence based policies and good practices on *study-work-life balance for all* on institutional and national level should be promoted and scaled up.
8. Employment, including social security, should be offered to all doctoral candidates and post-doctoral positions; if junior researchers are given a grant or stipend, the funding must include social security arrangements.

9. Ways to lighten academic workload should be looked into, e.g. by improving the student/ teacher ratio and appointing non-academic staff to undertake administrative tasks. Each higher education institution should have an Equality officer or office to promote and implement various policies to improve work-life balance.
10. Increase of financial support both in terms of students' assistantships and travel grants – better monitoring internal funds for travel to support all graduate students' attendance and presentations at professional meetings (in particular assisting at risk students).
11. More efforts should be made to build in flexibility in the work of faculty members and assistantships and school schedules of students, even allowing them to work from home if the assigned tasks and responsibilities can be completed in those confines.

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