



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

PUBLICATION

Workforce Partnership Council agreement: partnership and managing change

How employers and trade unions can work in partnership and manage change.

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CYNGOR PARTNERIAETH Y GWEITHLU WORKFORCE PARTNERSHIP COUNCIL

The status of the Workforce Partnership Council

The Workforce Partnership Council (WPC) is recognised by each of the 3 partners as the key forum for cross-public services workforce matters in Wales.

The WPC is a tripartite social partnership covering the devolved public services in Wales. It is an equal partnership between Welsh Government, employers and trade unions – respecting the sovereignty and decision making structure of each partner.

The WPC has significant influence and legitimacy arising from the commitment of the 3 partners to working on an effective tripartite basis.

Employers, trade unions and Welsh Government each have in place their own governance arrangements to ensure that WPC members have the necessary authority to take decisions and make commitments on behalf of those whom they represent.

The status of this agreement

The WPC seeks to reach agreement on matters which are cross-public service or relevant to the whole public service. Agreement in the context of social partnership means the agreement of all three parties.

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'Partnership and Managing Change' is a formal agreement of the Workforce Partnership Council. This means each partner has agreed that it will be fully and universally implemented in all the sectors covered by the WPC.

It will be delivered through the established collective bargaining arrangements and does not substitute for them.

Principles of managing change

1. All social partners will use best endeavours to ensure employment continuity. Change can be very unsettling for staff. Social Partners agree that employment continuity is an important element of the change process. However, change need not be seen to be a barrier to employment continuity and can generate opportunities for the achievement of potential through rewarding, renewed and refreshed careers.

2. The social partners will support the use of the best standards of employment practice, such as systematic workforce planning, to manage deficits and surpluses in a planned way as we shape the future delivery of services.

3. Public service organisations embarking on change, which impacts on the workforce, will consult trade unions at the earliest appropriate opportunity and before any irreversible decisions are made.

4. Any change should be properly planned and delivered through partnership. It is accepted that external factors may on occasion dictate the speed of the process but it is crucial that full consultation and negotiation amongst the social partners is followed in an open and timely manner with the aim of reaching mutual agreement. Equally it is crucial that this process is not constrained by either partner.

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Our way of working

The WPC vision is:

“ For Wales to have a public services workforce which enjoys life enhancing work and terms of employment. A workforce which, through social partnership and trade union collective voice, is empowered to deliver improvements to the economic, social, environmental and cultural well-being of Wales. ”

1. Workforce engagement

The social partners are committed to supporting the Welsh Government’s ambition that public services in Wales should be provided by exemplar employers.

In delivering their commitment the social partners will jointly:

- consult, negotiate and, in good faith, commit every effort to achieving agreement over proposed changes
- subsequently communicate any agreed change process to all stakeholders including the workforce.

2. Workforce learning

Lifelong learning is central to securing the progressive improvement in public services which we seek. It is recognised that initiatives such as the “Wales Union Learning Fund” and social partnership training continue to make a significant contribution to workplace change. It is essential that employers and

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trade unions at all levels fully engage in the partnership process.

3. Career development

The development of careers that add value to the outcomes they achieve for Welsh communities and the Welsh economy is a key part of the public service policy agenda. The work undertaken by Welsh Government and others on secondments, management and leadership training is critical to this.

4. Equality and well-being

The social partners support the implementation of equality-proofed pay and grading systems within the public service. The need for ongoing work to track and reflect legislative policy changes is recognised. There is commitment to develop good practice in partnership with the equality community. The need to develop social justice in work, including equal pay, health and well-being issues, an ageing workforce, work life balance, and flexibility is recognised.

The implementation process

The following will need to be fully met in order to implement this agreement:

1. Employers and trade unions to agree a policy statement at the outset regarding managing change. The statement should include a clear vision supported by both parties which emphasises a corporate approach to managing change. It is the aim of the social partners that a culture of shared objectives and joint ownership of problem solving will become commonplace throughout.

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2. Social partners to adopt early planning of change with clear and realistic timescales. It is essential that due process is followed which allows for all parties to properly consider and shape any proposals which may be under consideration.

3. Meaningful consultation and negotiation with trade unions to be mainstreamed into the change process. Cross sector and cross organisational working may lead to complex lines of accountability and particular attention should be paid to operating in a collaborative context. Employers and trade unions should seek to ensure the process is integrated and seamless.

4. Communication with all stakeholders, including the workforce, to be a key component of any change process. Social partners should agree a communication plan in advance of any change process. In a properly functioning partnership joint employer and union communication with the workforce will play a significant part.

5. Social partners to facilitate and encourage training both in partnership working and change management to underpin the process. The training should include knowledge and application of this Agreement and any locally agreed arrangements.

6. Employers to commit to a full and lasting obligation to trades union recognition. In this setting, social partners will advocate the benefits of trade union membership, not least in assisting to help reduce labour turnover, increase staff morale and commitment, and improve productivity. This will involve local arrangements to facilitate and encourage trades union membership throughout the workforce.

Disputes

Any disputes relating to the terms of this agreement or its implementation should be taken through the appropriate collective disputes resolution procedure in place in each sector.

In case of failure to resolve matters at sector level, disputes may then be taken to the tripartite Joint Executive Committee of the Workforce Partnership Council.

Managing the transition to a digital workplace

Purpose

1. This annex to the Partnership and Managing Change agreement outlines a set of principles for managing and supporting the workforce as a result of increasing digitalisation. The principles specifically promote a social partnership approach to the involvement, participation and consultation of staff and trade unions.

Introduction

2. In the modern workplace digitalisation takes a variety of forms from the use of automated machinery, to the application of sophisticated data analysis or the use of complex and intelligent computer systems. These features have the potential to offer significant benefits to both organisations and employees but they also raise a number of fundamental questions about the future of work.

3. The true impact of digitalisation remains an area of contention but there is a general acceptance that new technologies offer a variety of challenges for the

future, both to how public services are delivered and their resulting impact on the workforce. Research also consistently highlights that digitalisation is likely to affect disproportionately some sectors and workers over others. Whatever the extent of potential impacts, there is little doubt that advances in digitalisation will continue at pace, changing public expectations on how services are provided and how the workplace is both viewed and operated in the future.

4. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic greatly exacerbated a number of drivers that were already in place increasing the demand for digitalised technologies. These included the effects of budget constraints on public services, departure from the European Union, public demand for digitalised services and developments in the world of technology itself, all exerting pressure for more innovative solutions to service delivery. The pandemic itself has redefined how the work environment looks, creating greater need for hybrid models of working based around digitalisation that provide greater flexibility to both employers and the workforce.

5. It is important that the full extent of the challenges that lay ahead are considered within the context of social partnership so that an equitable and balanced approach can be adopted to managing digitalisation in the workplace. For this reason a series of dedicated principles have been constructed as a discrete annex to Partnership and Managing Change. These offer a way of approaching the introduction of new technologies that respect each side of the employment relationship. As such, they provide a useful framework for understanding the introduction and implementation of digitalisation in the workplace which can complement or update an organisation's existing policy statement on partnership and managing change.

Policy context

6. The policy context is set within the understanding that change is inevitable and that planning for the impact of digitalisation through social partnership is

essential.

7. The Partnership and Managing Change agreement is central to introducing new ways of working into public services across Wales. In particular the specific section which outlines the principles of managing change offers the opportunity to provide both consistency and context to the principles set out here for digitalisation. For example, they emphasise the importance of employment continuity, workforce planning, consultation with trade unions and working in social partnership. As such, the principles for managing digitalisation are perfectly suited to be included as an addendum to the Partnership and Managing Change agreement.

8. Social partnership as a policy area in Welsh Government is central to the ambition to make Wales a fair work nation. The need to strengthen social partnership arrangements in Wales was also one of the key recommendations of the Fair Work Commission. To develop consistency in approach, the principles for digitalisation are underpinned by a number of the Commission's key characteristics for fair work as follows:

- Employee voice and collective representation
- Security and flexibility
- Opportunity for access, growth and progression
- Safe, healthy and inclusive working environment
- Legal rights respected and given substantive effect

9. In developing the principles for digitalisation by using the characteristics of fair work there is also alignment with the Welsh Government's Programme for Government. Taken together, the Partnership and Managing Change agreement, the Fair Work Commission's recommendations and the Welsh Government's Programme for Government (including the commitment to social partnership and fair work) offer a powerful policy context for developing and promoting the principles for digitalisation set out in this document.

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10. The Welsh Government's Digital Strategy also sets out a vision and ambition for a coordinated digital approach across Wales. It recognises that digitalisation is not simply about technology but new ways of thinking, designing public services around users whilst ensuring the workforce is provided with the opportunity to develop digital skills on a continuous basis. The strategy commits to reviewing how public services deliver digital, promoting standards through the development of training and knowledge sharing.

Principles for digitalisation

These principles are designed to support the significant introduction of digitalisation into the workplace, recognising both the benefits and the impact this can have on the workforce. They develop the broader principles of Partnership and Managing Change setting out ways of working, expectations and guidance regarding the implementation of digitalisation in the devolved public service work place.

Principle 1: Employee voice and participation

Interpretation

It is important that staff are consulted at an early stage over the introduction of digitalisation in the workplace so they are involved in the changes being proposed.

Ask

That employers consult trade unions at an early stage over any proposed

introduction of digitalisation into the work place explaining the rationale for change. This should allow trade unions sufficient time to discuss any concerns with their members and explore the potential impact of the measures being proposed as part of the implementation process.

Evidence

That regular structured meetings are held with workers through their trade unions, e.g. through joint consultative committees or similar structures to involve them in the introduction of new digital technologies in the workplace.

Principle 2: Flexible and secure job change

Interpretation

That there is clear and consistent communication to the workforce over any proposals relating to job redesign or job redeployment as a result of digitalisation.

Ask

That staff and trade unions are given early notice of any intentions to restructure existing jobs or redeploy staff due to the introduction of new digital technologies.

This should include access to proposed workforce planning arrangements as well as the criteria and assessment methods being used to redeploy staff, or restructure jobs, so that employees and trade unions understand the processes involved. Staff and trade unions should be kept informed of developments through regular communication with employers including details of relevant

timescales.

Evidence

That clear guidance is produced supported by regular engagement, outlining workforce planning arrangements and the process being adopted for any job restructure or redeployment of staff including key criteria and timelines.

Principle 3: Opportunity for progression and growth

Interpretation

That the introduction of digitalisation into the workplace provides important opportunities for staff and it is essential that these are matched by suitable levels of training and development.

Ask

That the level of training being provided to staff fully supports the use of new digital technologies and does not compromise the ability of a person to perform their job.

That organisational training recognises the need to monitor the pace of technological change so it can evolve accordingly to ensure training remains relevant and of a sufficient quality to support continuous learning and skills development. For both staff and trade unions to be informed at an early stage of the types of training being developed so they can better understand and access what is being provided.

Evidence

That the importance of developing digital skills is recognised in corporate training and development plans and actively promoted within an organisation to ensure full transparency of the opportunities available.

Principle 4: Health safety and well-being

Interpretation

That staff are fully supported through the personal impact potentially created by the introduction of new digital technology.

Ask

That the introduction of digitalisation into the workplace is managed in consultation with trade unions so it does not impact negatively on the health and well-being of staff. This should take account of appropriate legislation and include a full analysis of the risks presented to staff by different forms of digitalisation, including those with protected characteristics, to ensure technology is introduced safely and inclusively.

Evidence

That comprehensive risk and equality impact assessments are developed and regularly reviewed in consultation with trade unions to ensure staff are fully supported regarding the introduction of new digital technology.

Principle 5: Respecting workers' rights

Interpretation

That the employment rights of workers are substantively acknowledged through the introduction of new digital technology.

Ask

That the introduction of digital technology does not adversely affect compliance with statutory employment rights and standards. That employers are proactive in ensuring workers' rights are safeguarded in the design and implementation of new technology. That workers and their trade union representatives are engaged at an early stage in order to understand how the implementation of new technology relates to statutory employments rights and standards.

Evidence

That employers, in consultation with trade unions, conduct a review of the impact of new technology on employment rights and standards and ensure workers are kept informed.

Contact

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