

Topic 1: Work and careers

About Topic 1

The **Work and careers** topic includes issues of opportunities and problems at work, ways of motivating and rewarding workers, the work/life balance, changes in patterns of jobs and work (for example, the growth in working from home), career choices and training, and occasionally the relationship between government and businesses or industries.

You are not expected to know any vocabulary connected to specialised areas of finance, marketing and so on.

Topic 1 Example Task

Some employers offer their employees subsidised membership of gyms and sports clubs, believing that this will make their staff healthier and thus more effective at work. Other employers see no benefit in doing so.

Consider the arguments from both aspects of this possible debate, and reach a conclusion.

Explanation of the Task

This is an Opinion>Discussion type Task. You should introduce the topic, present two or three ideas on each side of the discussion, and then give your opinion in the conclusion.

If you are not already familiar with the different types of IELTS Academic Task 2 essay, please see the 'Overview' at the end of this book. It is essential to be familiar with these different essay types before you take the exam.

The following model essay shows you key words and phrases which you can use to increase your band score when discussing this topic, in both writing and speaking. The key words are **highlighted in bold**.

Band 9 model essay

Employers are always seeking ways to enhance their employees' **productivity**, and **subsidising** healthy pursuits may be one way of achieving this. There are arguments on both sides, however, which we will discuss here.

On the one hand, it might be said that if workers are fitter and less stressed, their working time will be more efficient, leading to higher levels of **output** and service. Furthermore, the **work/life balance** of the staff will hopefully be improved, because their leisure time will be more fulfilling. This may even be more **motivating** than **pay increments**, **perks**, or **financial rewards** such as **bonuses** or **incentives** which may be hard to attain. Finally, feeling healthier may lead to better **job satisfaction** which is in itself a motivating factor.

Conversely, the problem with such leisure-based subsidies is that their efficacy is virtually

impossible to quantify. For example, with **target-related** payments, employers can at least see whether the objectives are reached or not. It might also be said that, if this budget was spent on (for instance) **on the job training** or **day release programmes**, the employees would achieve better **career progression** and have better **job prospects**. These matters are all easier to **measure**, especially in **performance reviews** and **appraisals**, and may even help to reduce the risk of **redundancy** if the company **restructures**, **downsizes** or **outsources** its **workforce**.

Overall, it seems that, while health-related subsidies are **superficially** attractive, the lack of **measurability** is a substantial drawback. Spending funds on **ongoing training** would appear to be a better use of company or **Human Resources** budgets.

(259 words)

Explanation of the topic vocabulary and examples in Speaking

These words and phrases are listed in the order that they appear in the essay

productivity = the ability of people to produce useful results at work.

Example of using this vocabulary item in the IELTS Speaking Test:

‘My country is not as advanced as some other countries in our industrial sector. Productivity and quality are still quite low.’

Important: Please remember that these extra example sentences are designed to show you ways of using this vocabulary in IELTS Speaking, and so the examples may include contractions (‘*don’t*’ etc) and personal stories about the speaker and their family or friends. This is fine in the Speaking test, but not in Task 2 writing, which should never have contractions or personal stories.

These Speaking examples also sometimes include less formal words such as ‘really’ or ‘good.’ Again, these words are acceptable in Speaking, but try to use more formal words in Writing, such as ‘substantially’ or ‘positive.’

to subsidise = to pay part of the cost of something, usually in order to help people.

Example of using this vocabulary item in the IELTS Speaking Test:

‘The government could encourage children to be healthier by subsidising swimming lessons and sports coaching at weekends.’

output = the amount of work or goods produced.

In Europe, industrial output has decreased, maybe because of competition from producers in other continents.

work/life balance = the ability to work hard but also enjoy a good quality family and social life

People are working long hours these days, and so their work/life balance is affected, leading to stress.

to motivate people = to give them positive reasons for working hard

If employees are given regular feedback, they will probably be well motivated and committed.

pay increments = pay rises/increases

In my country, pay increments have been very low because of the financial crisis.

perks = reward from an employer which are not financial (eg free lunches, a car etc)

Personally, I'd like to work for a company that gives lots of perks, because I would find this very enjoyable.

financial rewards = any form of money payment (salary, commission, pension etc)

Being a primary teacher may be satisfying, but the financial rewards are not high

bonuses = money given in addition to salary, usually in return for achieving targets

Apparently some investment bankers can earn millions of dollars in bonuses.

incentives = any reward that makes people work harder

Some employers offer vacations or parties as incentives if the team hits its sales targets.

job satisfaction = enjoyment of a job for non-financial reasons

I get a lot of job satisfaction from my work at the wildlife centre, although the financial rewards are quite low.

target-related = dependent on hitting a target

My boss once offered me a target-related bonus, but it was almost impossible to achieve!

on the job training = training while working, not by leaving work to go to college etc

My sister has found that the on the job training she gets at her bank is very useful, and she has progressed well because of this.

ongoing training = training throughout your time in a job, not just at the start

I enjoyed my work at the airline at first, but I soon found that there was no ongoing training and my skills weren't really developed.

day release programmes = programmes of training or education when employees can spend entire days out of work

I feel that employers should be much more flexible regarding training, for example by subsidising day release programmes or job exchanges with other companies.

career progression = the ability to advance your career

The problem with being a freelance photographer is that there's no real career progression, unless you become very famous.

job prospects = the possibility of promotion or higher level work in future

I remember an interview when the employer told me there were excellent job prospects in their firm for young people. In reality, this was not really true.

to measure = to assess the dimensions of something

Job satisfaction may be important, but can we really measure it?

superficial = not addressing deep or important issues

I'm not a big fan of traditional music. I find the lyrics rather old-fashioned and superficial for modern listeners.

performance reviews/appraisals = meeting at which an employer gives feedback to a worker on their work over a fixed period.

I remember being worried about my job at first, but at my six month appraisal my manager told me she was pleased with my efforts.

redundancy = a situation where a worker loses their job because of changes in the company (not because of personal mistakes) (verb = to make someone redundant)

In my home town, the textile factories have closed and many people have been made redundant.

to restructure = to change the organisation of a company, usually in order to make it more

effective or to save money.

We used to have a large training department in my office, but in our recent restructure it was eliminated and the staff were made redundant.

to downsize = to make an organisation smaller and employ fewer people

My father's college used to employ almost one thousand people, but then it downsized and now has less than five hundred.

to outsource = to stop doing work inside the company and send it to other companies or other countries, usually to save money

Many American companies have outsourced their IT operations to Asian countries, where productivity is similar and salaries are lower.

the workforce = the total number of people working in an organisation, company or country

The workforce in Northern Europe is skilled, but it's also inflexible and much older than in other parts of the world.

Human Resources (or HR) = the department in a company which manages recruitment, employment and training

When I graduate, I plan to work in the Human Resources area of the oil industry, possibly in the Middle East.

Summary of Topic 1

This completes our Module for Topic 1.

Remember, please don't try to learn or memorise *all* of these words immediately. Go through the whole book from Module 1 to 10, and try to practise using a small group of words from all of the Modules, then go back and expand on each group.
