



<b>Guidance name</b>	<b>Flexible Working Guidance for Employees</b>
<b>Responsible team</b>	Human Resources
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### ***Purpose***

This guidance is an associated document of the Flexible Working Code of Practice and intends to offer clear guidance to employees who are looking to navigate the process of submitting a flexible working request. The aim is this guidance will help empower employees to feel informed when considering possible flexible working opportunities. Additionally, by providing practical advice on how to facilitate a transparent dialogue between employees and managers, this guidance intends to assist in promoting a workplace culture that values flexibility and supports the diverse needs of its workforce.

This guidance document should be read in conjunction with the Flexible Working Code of Practice.

### ***Introduction***

Flexible working arrangements can provide mutually beneficial results for both employers and employees. The University believes that flexible working enhances employee motivation and accommodates the diverse needs and preferences of employees by promoting better work-life balance and increasing job satisfaction. Enriching employee wellbeing also improves organisational performance and productivity.

### ***Examples of flexible working***

Flexible working refers to any working schedule that is outside of a typical working pattern. Making a request for flexible working can mean making a change to the hours, times, or days worked, allowing employees to work in a more flexible way, and cater to any personal commitments outside of work.

It is important to remember flexible working refers specifically to an individual contractual agreement which differs from an agile working approach which refers to other arrangements to work flexibly which are more typically applied week-by-week, based on operational needs. Formalising a flexible working arrangement provides consistency for both the employee and employer by having an ongoing definitive arrangement.

Examples of types of flexible working arrangements, which could be submitted as a formal request and the potential benefits, implications and practical considerations can be viewed in the table shown below.

Type of flexibility	Description	Examples of potential benefits	How could this work?
<b>Job share</b>	A variation of part-time working where two people jointly share the responsibilities of one full-time post	Skills and capabilities of two employees rather than one  Minimise disruption of holidays/absences	Effective communication channels should be established between job share partners to ensure a robust handover process. Examples include having a shared inbox, or a crossover of hours to handover work  Whilst it is not mandatory to cover the vacant hours of work due to a job share partner's absence, there is scope for this to be mutually agreed in exchange for additional pay during this time
<b>Reduction/change in hours</b>	Reducing working hours to less than full time	Potential to offer hours to other part-time employees  Retention of employees who might otherwise leave  Increased engagement	Adjustments could be made to work deadlines to ensure important tasks are prioritised and workload is managed effectively
<b>Staggered working (having a formal agreement to work at different times on different days)</b>	Coming to work at different times on different days, ensuring the contracted hours are still worked	Improved employee morale and ability to focus on work when at work  More availability through the week than conventional part-time (full or half days)	Important team activities, discussions and meetings can be scheduled in advance (where possible) to help facilitate attendance and teamwork  Team members can be made aware of individual working hours to maintain team collaboration; for example, this could be done by using shared calendars
<b>Compressed working weeks (work arrangements where it has been agreed a standard working week is reduced to fewer than five days and employees make up the full number of hours per-week by working longer hours on working days)</b>	Alternative work arrangements where a standard working week is reduced to fewer than five days and employees make up the full number of hours per week by working longer hours on working days	Improved staff morale and ability to focus on work when at work  Retention of staff who might otherwise leave  Promotes better work-life balance so employees could pursue an individual interest during this time	Employees should ensure adequate breaks are taken when working a longer working day  Employees on non-standard working patterns should be mindful of emailing colleagues outside of their normal working hours  Requirement to set expectations to ensure employees do not work over their hours; for example, line managers should monitor employee well-being, considering the potential impact of longer working days on work-life balance  Where working hours per day exceed the standard amount, ensure time for <a href="#">sufficient</a> rest breaks

Type of flexibility	Description	Examples of potential benefits	How could this work?
<b>Fractional contracts</b>	Working 36, 40 or 44 weeks a year  Pay is equated and spread over 12 equal payments in the year	Positive impact on work-life balance for other commitments outside of work; for example, helping to facilitate longer time off during school holidays	Thorough understanding of implications on pay  Careful planning and consideration of both University needs and employee preferences. Clear communication and transparent agreements are essential to facilitate this.
<b>Working at home (having your normal place of work in the office/on campus but working from home on a set day of the week due to individual circumstances)</b>	Having the normal place of work in the office/on campus, but working on occasion from home	Increased productivity through improved focus and time on task  Retention of staff who might otherwise leave  Increased engagement	Ensure compliance with <a href="#">Display Screen Equipment (DSE)</a> use at home including DSE Workstation Assessment and DSE <a href="#">self-assessment checklist</a>  Considerations should be given over home-working spaces eg availability of a private office, especially when dealing with sensitive or confidential data  Communication with colleagues and management should be maintained via channels such as Microsoft Teams

This list is not exhaustive; examples of employee flexible working scenarios can be found in Appendix A.

### **Short-term changes**

There may be occasions where employees require short-term changes (3 months or less) to their working pattern. In these instances, a local decision can be made.

Although these arrangements do not require a formal consultation meeting, it is crucial to still consider the following guidance as it helps to ensure that all interactions regarding flexible working are approached thoughtfully and consistently, promoting transparency and fairness.

Any locally agreed short-term arrangements should have a clearly defined start and end date, after which time, employees are expected to revert back to the standard working pattern or raise a formal flexible working request to make this a permanent arrangement. Employees will receive confirmation of any informal agreements in writing.

### **Before making a formal request**

It is recommended that employees initiate an informal conversation with their line manager before making a formal flexible working request. This initial discussion provides an opportunity to discuss the proposed changes and explore how arrangements might be accommodated, including whether there are any other options to consider if the exact modification is not possible.

This informal exchange enables employees to clearly communicate their needs and employees are urged to be as open as possible about what outcome they are seeking. This will help enable line managers to engage in a constructive dialogue regarding feasibility and potential solutions.

### ***Preparing for the consultation meeting***

Employees should consider the following points before attending their consultation meeting to help facilitate a productive conversation.

- Reflect on the benefits and overall impact of the flexible working request - This includes thinking about the potential benefits as well as the potential challenges of the proposed working arrangement to the wider team, School or Department. For example, where employees requesting flexible working also have managerial responsibilities, consideration should be given to the possible impact on team dynamics so solutions can be presented to the line manager considering the request.
- Explore any alternatives - In order to pre-empt potential manager concerns regarding a new flexible working pattern, proactively brainstorm possible solutions which address possible hesitations. For instance, if a manager is worried about maintaining team collaboration with a proposed work schedule, suggest team meetings only occur during core hours. By offering solutions to potential concerns, this can demonstrate a commitment to finding mutually beneficial arrangements.
- Be prepared to discuss trial periods - Being receptive to discussing the possibility of implementing a trial period, expresses a commitment to finding effective resolutions for both parties. It is important to communicate a willingness for open and honest conversations both before, and during any trial periods as this will help assess the benefits and challenges. Employees may discover that the proposed working arrangement causes unforeseen difficulties and does not work in practice, or it may be apparent a slight tweak to the original request would be favoured.

### ***During the consultation meeting***

Employees may find it helpful to follow these steps to ensure a productive and transparent discussion takes place during the consultation meeting.

- Practice active listening - Listen to the manager's outlook and any concerns regarding the flexible working request. Employees should ensure they understand the perspective before responding.
- Establish clear expectations - Performance goals and targets, communication methods, and availability during core working hours should be agreed. Ensure both parties have a shared understanding of what is expected.
- Address any concerns - If managers express reservations or concerns, address them openly and constructively. Offer suggestions or compromises to address any challenges that arise.

### ***Trial periods***

Utilising a trial period could be an essential step toward ensuring the success and sustainability of a flexible working arrangement. Trial periods allow employees to experience first-hand how a proposed working pattern would align with productivity, personal life, and overall well-being.

Trial periods can reveal unforeseen unintended consequences that might not have been apparent initially, providing a chance to address and mitigate any issues before committing to a permanent arrangement.

The statutory 2-month time limit for providing a final decision to the employee may need to be extended when implementing a trial period, particularly where the trial period is agreed up to the maximum period of 3 months. Both parties must agree to any extensions and all responses must be confirmed in writing.

### ***Navigating change***

Where flexible working arrangements are agreed and implemented, adapting to new patterns can be challenging as it impacts aspects of an employee's professional and personal life.

It is vital line managers and employees maintain open conversations throughout the course of a flexible working arrangement. This way, managers can be made aware of any challenges which may arise and be given early opportunities to proactively address these.

Employees must be aware that formal flexible working patterns are typically considered permanent changes (except where a short-term agreement has been communicated). However, it is important to acknowledge that circumstances and needs may evolve over time and there may be instances where reverting or amending the arrangement is possible, but this must be mutually agreed. Flexible working arrangements cannot be reversed without employee agreement.

This highlights the importance of informal, regular catch-ups with line managers, as they provide opportunities to discuss and assess the effectiveness of the current arrangement, and explore potential adjustments to help employee well-being.

### ***Support for employees when an application is refused***

The University understands that requesting a change to a working arrangement is an important decision which requires careful thought and consideration. It can, therefore, be disappointing when a decision is made to reject the request, whether this is because the request cannot be facilitated by the University due to one of the permitted refusal reasons, or whether the rejection has been made following the completion of a trial period.

It is important to know that line managers must assess all options, before rejecting a flexible working request. Managers understand the significance of these requests and should aim to find mutually beneficial solutions whenever possible.

The following steps may be helpful when navigating the final outcome:

- Individuals are encouraged to reach out to their line managers if support or further clarification on the decision is required. This can be helpful when intending to make future requests.
- Employees may wish to appeal a decision, in this instance the request will be overseen by another manager. Please refer to the appeals process in the Code of Practice for further information.
- Evaluate the timing of the request. If there were specific factors influencing the decision such as current team workloads causing an inability to re-organise work among existing staff, consider whether raising this request in future, will result in a different outcome. Employees are permitted to raise two flexible working requests in a 12-month period.

Further support facilities are also available at the University and it may be beneficial to consider the following:

- The University's Employee Assistance programme which provides free confidential support via telephone 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- University Counselling Service
- Occupational Health referrals
- University Chaplaincy and Faith Service

### Examples of flexible working requests

Flexible working can mean a wide range of arrangements to suit different situations. The following situations are examples of where flexible working arrangements have been utilised.

#### *Example 1*

I recently returned to work following a period of Shared Parental Leave taking care of my child. My partner and I wanted to share caring responsibilities so that we would have an equal opportunity to develop our careers. I made a flexible working request to reduce my working hours to work 4 days per week, and I am now able to spend one day a week at home caring for our child.

#### *Example 2*

My colleague and I work in a job share arrangement, and we both currently work 2.5 days each week. We were both working full-time previously, however, both had interests outside work which we were pursuing, and which meant a lot to us because it helped us maintain our work-life balance, but we were finding the time commitment very demanding.

The work we do is very customer focused, therefore, it was important to us both that we could facilitate a job share arrangement without affecting the level of service that we offer. Good communication is key. We share a mailbox and an extension number, and our email signatures specify when we're going to be in the office so that people know when they can contact us. We also have half a day's handover every Wednesday so that we're always aware of any outstanding issues – not only does this mean that there are no gaps in service, it can also mean that we actually offer a more complete service because we bring different perspectives to our work. This is just one of the ways in which our flexible working arrangements complement each other.

This kind of commitment and a degree of flexibility can make a job share possible in all kinds of roles. It might not be for everyone, but in the right circumstances it works really well.

#### *Example 3*

My elderly parent has a weekly medical appointment every Tuesday, and it was becoming increasingly challenging for me to manage this on the days I was required to come into the office for team meetings. Often, I would have to make alternative arrangements to support my parent, or it meant a considerable amount of time spent travelling between locations. I felt having a formal agreement to work from home on a Tuesday each week, would allow me to attend the appointments, without the need to make alternative care arrangements, or compromise on my work commitments. Following conversations with my line manager, it was agreed we could trial this arrangement for three months to fully assess the practicality of this and whether there was an impact on the wider team. We will revisit this towards the end of the three-month period to assess if any adjustments are needed.