

FLEXIBLE WORKING REQUESTS - GUIDANCE NOTES FOR MANAGERS

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Flexible Working Policy

1. Flexible working arrangements can be beneficial to both employees and the University. Try to keep an open mind and view requests positively and objectively as they may open up new possibilities in the way the service is provided. Finding the right work-life balance is important for all of us in terms of motivation and commitment to our work.
2. As the nature of the discussion is confidential and potentially sensitive, you should always arrange to meet with the employee in private, at a mutually convenient time to discuss their request. Allow sufficient time for the employee to arrange to bring a union representative or workplace colleague with them, should they wish to do so.
3. Meeting with the employee provides the opportunity to ensure that the proposal put forward is the best solution.
4. The aim of the discussion is to explore the potential benefits of their request, the impact it may have on the service and the rest of the team, and how it might be accommodated. Encourage the employee to put forward his or her ideas about how the working pattern sought could be made to work, as s/he may have some sound ideas about how the job might be done differently, but equally effectively.
5. Remember that if the working hours reduce, the workload will need to be reduced proportionately. Would you need to find a replacement/cover or could the work be done at a different time or in a different way? Are there any potential costs or savings? Does this present development opportunities for others in the team? For academic staff you should consider the effect on teaching allocations. Explore whether the research grant could be extended if necessary. Consider whether the probation period will be affected or need to be extended.
6. The employee does not have to tell you the reasons for their request but you should explain that by knowing this it might help you to explore the best way to meet both their needs and those of the service.
7. You are free to explore alternative suggestions in order to try to find a compromise solution. (4.4 in the policy provides examples of various flexible arrangements you may consider) You may agree a temporary or trial period if you have justifiable reservations, or agree a different start date (e.g.) if

other measures need to be put in place in order to make their request workable, such as training up a colleague to cover when they are not there.

8. Be careful not to discriminate inadvertently, For example, by being more sympathetic to requests from one particular sex. If you receive requests from more than one employee do not make value judgments about which is the most deserving case. Look at each case individually based on the impact on the service. Ensure your decisions are based on justifiable business grounds.
9. If two or more requests are made very close together it may be helpful to hold separate discussions with each of the employees and explain the situation. Through discussion you might find a compromise which enables you to accommodate all or more of the requests.
10. If you find you are unable to approve any further requests due to the impact on the service, where you already have a number of other employees working flexibly, you may call for volunteers from the existing flexible working employees to change their hours (some may be happy to do so if their situation has changed) thereby creating capacity to approve new requests.
11. Having weighed up the situation, you are under no legal obligation to grant the request if it cannot be accommodated. You can turn down a request as long as the reason for turning it down is one of the business reasons set out in the policy (6.2).
12. Once you have reached a decision and have received School/Directorate approval to proceed:
 - i. Complete the managers section of the application form.
 - ii. If you are agreeing to some form of flexible working arrangements, inform the employee verbally and send the form to HR Services who will write officially to the employee to confirm the contractual changes.
 - iii. If you are rejecting the request you may wish to meet with the employee to explain your reasons but you do not have to.
You must confirm your decision in writing to the employee and retain the form on file locally.
The written confirmation should specify which of the statutory grounds for refusing a request applies (6.2 in policy) and should also explain why that reason applies in the individual case.
13. Informal short-term temporary arrangements to deal with personal issues, such as reduced hours for a couple of months to care for a sick relative, may be dealt with outside of this policy where appropriate.