

Flexible Working

The purpose of these notes is to provide guidance to members of staff on making formal requests for flexible working.

Flexible working arrangements can be beneficial to both employees and the University. Finding the right work-life balance is important for all of us in terms of motivation and commitment to our work.

General advice on flexible working

You have a legal right to request flexible working, and have that request fully considered. The decision to accept any request for flexible working is at the discretion of your manager, taking into account all of the relevant factors, such as the impact on service provision or impact on colleagues. Your manager is obliged to consider each case on its own merits at the time it is received.

When you make a flexible working request, you are requesting a permanent change to your terms and conditions of employment. This means that you cannot automatically revert to your previous hours in the future, although this will always be considered. To do so would require another formal request.

If you only require a change to your working arrangements on a temporary basis, perhaps to deal with a short term or urgent situation, discuss this with your manager in the first instance. It may be possible to accommodate such a request on an informal basis.

If you are working here on a visa, please contact HR Services prior to making a request as any change to your contract may affect your visa.

Before making a request, consider the impact your requested arrangements will have on the work that you do, the service and the rest of your team. For example:

- could the job be done differently but equally effectively?
- would replacement cover be required?
- are there any potential cost implications or savings?
- how can the work be re-organised?
- does the proposed change present any development opportunities for others in the team?
- how can any potential negative impacts of the new arrangements be mitigated?
- if you are academic staff, what will the implications be on teaching allocations or students?

It will help your application if you have thought this through and completed the relevant section on the application form.

You do not have to explain the reasons for your request, but it may help your manager to understand your needs in order to explore the best ways to meet them.

The process

Once a request is made, your manager should arrange to meet with you as soon as practicably possible. The aim of the discussion is to explore the request in detail, the potential benefits of the request, the impact it may have on the service or the rest of the team, and how it might be accommodated.

The meeting should also provide the opportunity to ensure that the proposal put forward is the best solution – and explore options. Your manager may discuss other alternative working arrangements with you. If there is any doubt whether a particular arrangement will work in practice, your manager may also suggest a trial period, normally for between one and three months. You are also free to request a trial period.

Before making a decision, your manager will need to consider:

- the impact of the potential changes on the University, students or staff
- your needs and requirements
- if applicable, how the work will be covered or managed

- whether a trial period is appropriate
- any budget implications.

Having considered the changes requested and weighing up the advantages, possible costs and potential logistical implications of granting the request, your manager will confirm their decision to you.. They may:

- accept the request and agree with you a start date / any other actions
- propose a trial period of the new arrangements in order for a decision to be made in due course
- reject your request, setting out clear business reasons and the appeals process.

If the request is accepted, you can agree a mutually acceptable start date for the new arrangements. Once accepted the new arrangement becomes a contractual change to terms and conditions of employment.

If you agree a trial, the length of this will be agreed with you, and a formal date will be set for review. Normally, trials last between one month and three, but this may vary according to the type of work that you do. For example, if your role is typically quiet during the summer, it would be sensible to review the impact over a longer period.

If a request is agreed, your manager will notify HR Services.

Managing flexible working

Where flexible working is agreed, the key to making it a success is effective communication. The most important factor is that the work is completed to the necessary standards. If your request is accepted, you may wish to consider:

- how you would like to communicate your new working arrangements to colleagues

- agreeing with your manager how you would like to be kept up to date in any periods when you are not working (for example, during term time only arrangements)
- mutually reviewing objectives and workloads to identify if any changes are required.

Frequently Asked Questions

One of my team works flexibly. I would like the same working pattern. Will that be allowed?

This very much depends on the circumstances. Agreeing to flexible working for one member of staff does not set a precedent that similar requests can be accepted. If there are a number of other colleagues already working flexibly in your area, your manager may be unable to approve any further requests based on the impact on the University.

I made a request for flexible working six months ago. My circumstances have changed and I would like to make another request. Is this possible?

Normally, only one request is permitted in a 12 month period. However, we recognise that people's personal circumstances can change suddenly. Your manager may at their discretion allow you to make another request. Please talk to them about your circumstances.

I want to request flexible working but I have not yet worked for the University for 26 weeks. Is this possible?

Normally, you are required to work for the University for 26 weeks before you can make a request. However, we recognise that can be a long wait, especially for employees with childcare or caring responsibilities. Your manager may at their discretion allow you to make an earlier request. Please talk to them about your circumstances. If you are still in your probation period and the changes that you request are significant, there may be an impact on the length of your probation period.

What will happen if the flexible working arrangements don't work in practice?

Ideally, this should not happen. Where there is any doubt, a trial period should be used to check the mutual suitability of the new arrangements. In the event that problems do arise, discuss them with your manager at the earliest opportunity.

I would like to work from home. Does this need to be considered as a flexible working request?

Not necessarily. If you simply want to work from home on an occasional basis for any reason, this can be an informal agreement between you and your manager. If this is a permanent request to work from home on a regular basis it would be sensible to make this a formal request.

I am due to go on maternity leave / adoption leave / shared parental leave. I want to work flexibly on my return. When should I make an application?

It is a good idea to talk to your manager informally prior to your leave commencing so that you can both begin making plans. You can choose to make your formal request before you leave, or a few months before your return.

I currently have a flexible working arrangement. I want to apply for an internal post. Will my arrangement automatically transfer?

Normally, when you apply for a new role it will be for the hours and working arrangements advertised. If you would like to work flexibly, please state this in your application.

I want flexible working while my children are young, but I may not always want or need to do this. How would this work in practice?

When you apply for flexible working it is a permanent arrangement. There is no automatic right to change in the future. However, you can make another request and it will be fully and reasonably considered with reference to the situation at the time. Whether the request can be agreed may depend on a range of factors, including for example whether someone else was recruited in the event of part time or job share working.

Related Documents

Flexible Working Policy and Procedure