WORK LIFE BALANCE

AIM
The University of Essex is fully committed to helping staff balance work and personal commitments whilst ensuring compatibility with the interests of the University and the delivery of the goals set out in the University’s Strategic Plan. This new policy document recognises that addressing work-life balance must take place in a context in which we are clear about work/personal life boundaries in order to avoid continual working rather than flexible working. Our hours of duty remain unchanged, acknowledging that the nature of some jobs has always required flexibility in the hours we work. Our revised policies recognise that staff may wish to work flexibly and acknowledges that a work-life balance has social, personal and workplace benefits for members of staff, the University and the community. Furthermore, the University recognises that in some cases a career break benefits both the member of staff and the University, improving motivation, performance and retention.

SUMMARY
Flexible working
Staff have a right to request to work flexibly provided they have been employed for the University for 26 weeks continuously at the date an application is made. Although employees with less than 26 weeks service do not have a statutory right to request flexible working, we allow all staff to make such a request. The university will consider requests in a reasonable manner and will only refuse them if there is a business reasons for doing so.

Flexible working could include:
- part-time working,
- compressed hours,
- term-time working,
- annualised hours,
- job sharing, and
- homeworking.

Teaching related flexible working requests should also be made in reference to this policy.

TIME OFF IN LIEU
Where staff work hours in excess of those in their contract, they can take time off in lieu with prior agreement of their line manager. For Support Staff (Grades 1-6) in exceptional circumstances overtime will be paid.

CAREER BREAK
This scheme is intended to provide a facility for employees, with at least two years continuous service, to request an unpaid extended period away from employment to meet their personal needs. This scheme is not intended to replace the University policy on Research Leave (for academic staff).

You may also be interested in the following:
- Family Leave
- Special Leave
- Childcare Vouchers
- Equality and Diversity
- Flexible benefits scheme
- Parents’ Support Network
- Parent Mentoring Scheme
- Research Leave (for Academic Staff only)
- Retirement
- Wivenhoe Park Day Nursery
- Religious observance

FLEXIBLE WORKING
(INCLUDING CAREER BREAK GUIDELINES)

APPLICATION FORMS
FLEXIBLE WORKING APPLICATION FORM
CAREER BREAK APPLICATION FORM
CAREER BREAK EXTENSION FORM

APPENDICES
APPENDIX A: FAQS FOR TEACHING RELATED FLEXIBLE WORKING REQUESTS
APPENDIX B: HOMEWORKING GUIDELINES
APPENDIX C: CAREER BREAK GUIDELINES
-APPENDIX D: HOMEWORKING RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

FLOWCHARTS
FLEXIBLE WORKING AND CAREER BREAK FLOWCHART
The University recognises the importance of maintaining a healthy balance between work and other aspects of life. Flexibility and 'flexible work' are terms used to describe a wide range of work styles and employment practices. Broadly speaking, they include all kinds of employment which differ from the traditional nine to five full-time job.

There are a number of reasons why managers will consider expanding on the traditional patterns of work, and offering flexibility in work patterns, these include:

- To support retention and attract of a diverse range of experienced and valued staff;
- To increase employment opportunities for staff with family commitments and people with disabilities who are not able to work full-time;
- May better suit the changing academic needs, though in some roles, for example in service jobs is achieving the objectives set by the University.

Outputs and outcomes matter more than precisely how the job gets done (e.g. a minor, temporary change in working hours to cope with a sick off event, or occasional home working). They should be agreed by your Head of Department and reference to the Executive Dean or the Registrar and Secretary is not required. A decision does not need to be recorded in writing using the procedure outlined below at 2.4.

Flexible working is not about preferential treatment; it is about working together to find workable solutions that meet individuals’ and the organisational needs.

Due to immigration regulations, it may, however, not be feasible to consider requests from individuals who do not have a permanent right to work in the UK. Please speak to your link HR Manager/Officer in this case.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

1. The University has a commitment to increase the use of flexible working across the University
2. Across the UK, 54% of employees work flexibly in some way. (CIPD employee outlook, April 2016)
3. The top three benefits reported by employees are: a better work-life balance, a reduction in stress / pressure, and a desire to stay with their current employer. (CIPD employee outlook, April 2016)

SECTION 2: FLEXIBLE WORKING

2.1 ELIGIBILITY

Under provisions set out in the Employment Regulations, 1996 and the Children and Families Act, 2014 and regulations made under them, all employees have a statutory right to ask the University for a change to their contractual terms and conditions of employment to work flexibly provided they have worked for the University for 26 weeks continuously at the date the application is made. Staff who have been employed for less than 26 weeks, agency workers and office holders do not have a statutory right to request flexible working. An employee can only make one statutory request in any 12 month period. Employees who do not meet the eligibility requirements to make a statutory request may still make a formal request to their manager who will consider the request taking into account business and operational needs.

Staff requesting a career break must have at least 2 years continuous service before the date of commencement of the career break and hold a permanent contract.

Staff who teach

In addition to the statutory right to request flexible working under the Flexible Working Regulations, this policy also covers the University’s Teaching Constraints process with which staff must comply on an annual basis. This process is in place to ensure that all the required teaching activities are scheduled into the available time and spaces and that timetables for students enable them to maximise the optionality within their curriculum and to meet their full potential, whilst managing individual staff needs. For further information please see Appendix A.

Informal arrangements are occasional arrangements or those that do not involve significant alterations in current practices or total hours worked (e.g. a minor, temporary change in working hours to cope with a sick off event, or occasional home working). They should be agreed by your Head of Department and reference to the Executive Dean or the Registrar and Secretary is not required. A decision does not need to be recorded in writing using the procedure outlined below at 2.4.

Formal arrangements for a defined period (normally up to 1 year) are those that will have an impact on hours and/or regular times worked over a sustained period. Staff must apply for these in writing using the flexible working application form. If agreed, a right to work in this way is created for the agreed period (normally more than 1 year) and will be subject to regular review. Most flexible working arrangements will be for a defined period. This option may be suitable for staff wishing to reduce hours for a short-time following Family Leave or to care for an elderly relative who wish to return to their original working arrangements after the defined period. Most flexible working would use this option and would not involve a change to the contract. This needs approval from the Faculty Executive Dean for academic staff within Faculties and for professional services staff, including those within Faculties, approval from the Registrar and Secretary.

Changes to contractual terms on a permanent basis are those which will continue indefinitely (e.g. a member of staff switching permanently from full time to part time working). Staff are required to apply for these in writing using the flexible working application form. If agreed, changes will be made to the contract and will be irreversible, unless there is a renegotiation of the contract.

2.2 MAKING ARRANGEMENTS

Three levels of arrangement are possible.

- Informal arrangements that confer no rights.
- Formal arrangements that confer rights for a defined period of 12 months or less.
- Changes to contractual terms that are permanent.

1 For the purposes of these procedures, Department shall mean Departments/Schools, the Centre for Psychoanalytical Studies (CPS) and Sections; Head of Department shall mean Head of Department/School of an academic department of the University.
at a later date. Managers should be aware that their staff’s contractual terms cannot be altered without agreement of individuals and the University. This needs approval from the Faculty Executive Dean for academic staff within Faculties and for professional services staff, including those within Faculties, approval from the Registrar and Secretary.

Before any formal arrangements or permanent changes are confirmed a trial period normally of 3 months should be agreed to help test out the working arrangements and iron out any problems and overcome fears or anxieties about how the new arrangement will work. A review of the trial period will help to confirm whether the arrangement is sustainable for both parties.

By using a standardised process for formal arrangements and permanent changes all requests will be considered in the same way but the process cannot promise the same outcome for everyone. Flexible working may be easier to accommodate in some departments and for some jobs than others.

2.3 EXAMPLES OF FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

The following are examples of arrangements that the University will consider, on a case by case basis, where they are compatible with the needs of the work. Whilst some flexible working requests will be agreed on a permanent basis (and will result in a contractual change) other requests will be for a specific period (up to a year) and to be subject to review. The table below shows which arrangements are available for each flexible working option.

Part-time working

Part-time working is working fewer hours per day, working fewer days per week or working a shorter period – examples could include working 1 day per week, month or year where your hours sum to less than a full-time load. At the University, if you are contracted to work full-time or 26 hours per week in every week of the year, excluding lunch breaks, you are classified as working part-time and are paid proportionately to your relevant full-time salary. Any requests from staff to move to part-time must be seriously considered and any effects upon operational requirements considered carefully.

Term-time working

Term-time contracts are likely to be extremely attractive to those with responsibilities for caring for school age children. It may also be appropriate to offer this option where the needs of the service fit around the academic cycle.

The member of staff is engaged to undertake the required number of hours per week, over either the University or school term time. Salary and other terms and conditions of employment are pro rata to the relevant full-time arrangements. It is important that members of staff engaged on a term time basis are clear about their work pattern (i.e. whether half terms are included, etc.).

Compressed hours

Compressed working hours is an arrangement whereby staff work their contracted hours within days which are longer than the standard 22 hours per day in exchange for a reduction in working days. Compressed hours are usually arranged over a weekly or fortnightly period. Given that employees will be contracted to work consistently longer than the standard working day, it is important that managers monitor staff in order to ensure that there are no detrimental effects of longer than normal working hours on their health and well-being. Lunch breaks must be at least 30 minutes and preferably one hour in duration.

Job sharing

Allows for two people sharing the duties of one full-time position. Managers and staff should be aware that where one employee leaves a job-sharing arrangement, the post will first be offered to the remaining employees on a pro rata full-time basis. If the remaining employee does not wish to accept, the University will advertise for a replacement partner. If this is not successful other options will be considered such as redeploying the remaining member of staff or reorganising work within the team, but staff need to be clear that failure of all of these options may leave the University with no choice but to terminate the contract of the remaining job-sharing partner.

Working from home

The majority of jobs within the University need to be undertaken within the workplace for most or all of the time, although it is recognised that members of academic staff do already work from home. However, there are occasions where flexibility may be agreed which allows you to work from home. Whilst some occasional homeworking can be informally agreed between you and your Head of Department, e.g. when a report needs to be written which could be undertaken more easily in a quieter home environment, there may be certain circumstances within departments and for some staff, arrangements for working from home on a more regular basis. In certain circumstances, a formal arrangement may be appropriate to offer this option where the needs of the service fit around the academic cycle.

The following list of considerations is intended to assist Heads of Department when considering requests.

- needs of the service both generally and specifically on days in question;
- nature of role for which employed;
- practicalities of undertaking specific elements of work or tasks at home (i.e. availability of appropriate workstations, IT, resources, etc.);
- impact on colleagues and service users;
- degree to which this is a regular or formalised element of work pattern;
- any local arrangements for requirement of regular face to face meetings;
- health and safety advice can be obtained from Occupational Health and Safety department and risk assessment;
- information security and data protection (see the University’s policy on Data Protection);
- arrangements for notification of sickness absence;
- insurance for University equipment and information;
- supervision of work.

Homeworkers ideally need to be:

- happy to spend long periods on their own;
- self-disciplined and self-motivated;
- a resilient personality who doesn’t let setbacks get them down;
- confident working without supervision;
- able to separate work from home life.

‘Home’ is regarded as a UK-based address, unless otherwise agreed by the Head of Department after consultation with Human Resources.

Homeworking is not a substitute for suitable care arrangements and dependents should always be looked after by someone other than yourself during working hours. You should make every effort to participate in staff training, networking days/events and be available to attend the University for meetings as and when required.

Working from home is not a sufficient reason to be unavailable to attend meetings as you may be able to attend meetings online or you may need to come in. Before any homeworking is undertaken a homeworking risk assessment must be undertaken by you and sent to your Head of Department with your flexible working request.

If you are a member of academic staff it is recognised that you already work at home on a regular basis and you do not normally need to fill in a flexible working application form in order to work in this way. However, you should still inform your Head of School/HF & Resources of any change in arrangements and provide further details in accordance with the Appendix B, Homeworking Guidelines.

Annualised hours working

Annualised hours contracts can average full- or part-time employment across the period of a calendar year. Annualised hours contracts specify the number of hours to be worked during the course of the year and, while this equates to less than full time, terms and conditions of employment are pro rata to those of full time staff. This flexible method of employment ensures that the individual works at those times most suited to the workload requirements. While the increased flexibility can be beneficial to the University and the employee, it should be recognised that too great a degree of uncertainty in relation to work pattern can be stressful and even impractical to potential employees, so patterns should be specified as far as possible.

Time off in lieu

Time off in lieu is usually available to staff at grades 1 – 5 where they are asked to work longer hours than in their contract. Time off in lieu needs to be agreed in advance with line managers and should be taken within 3 months. Staff at grades 7 – 11 are typically on notional hours contracts and are therefore required to work the hours reasonably required to perform the duties of the role, which is usually 36 hours per week but may be more. In some circumstances, for example where staff are asked to come into work on the weekend, time off in lieu may be given with prior agreement with your line manager.

Career break

A career break is intended to provide a facility for you to request an unpaid extended period away from employment to meet your personal needs. This arrangement is not intended to replace the University policy on paid Research Leave for Academic staff. To request a career break you must have been employed for at least 2 years before the date of commencement of the career break and have a permanent contract of employment (either full-time or part-time). In exceptional circumstances, an application may be considered if you have less than 2 years’ service. The minimum duration for a career break is 3 months; the maximum is usually 1 year, but may be extended to 2 years in exceptional circumstances. You will not normally be allowed more than 1 career break in any 7 year period. However, there may be the facility for a second career break to be agreed where exceptional, compassionate circumstances exist. You must submit your career break request at least 6 months before you intend to start your leave.
Once a time period for the career break has been agreed, any alteration must be by mutual agreement. Replacement of an employee on a career break will normally be by an appropriate appointment e.g. fixed term appointment. Requests for replacement will be subject to the usual University procedures for vacancy approval. The career break can be terminated by the University if you fail to work on specified dates or fail to fulfil other requirements of the scheme. You must inform the University of any change of address within 2 weeks of moving. If you wish to apply for an extension to a career break, you should do so using the extension to career break form, at least three months in advance of the agreed return to work date. It is recognised that there may be circumstances beyond your control which prevents you from adhering to this timescale and Heads of Department should consider requests accordingly. For further information please refer to Appendix C, Career Break Guidelines.

2.4 PROCEDURE FOR MAKING AND CONSIDERING FLEXIBLE WORKING AND CAREER BREAK REQUESTS

Application
It is advisable that you contact your link HR Manager/Officer in advance of making an application to discuss your request and to understand how any permanent, contractual changes or any unpaid leave may affect your pay, annual leave and pension contributions.

You should complete one of the following forms (as appropriate):
- Flexible working application form
- Career break application form

You should submit your application form to your Head of Department, with a copy to your link HR Manager/Officer. The initial onus is on you to prepare a carefully thought-out application well in advance of when you would like the desired working pattern/time off to take effect confirming the pattern you wish to work and how it could be accommodated within your Department. You should give considerable thought to your application taking into account business needs.

Where an application is incomplete and you have not supplied all the required information, the University is not able to consider your application and your Head of Department will inform you about what has been omitted and ask you to re-submit the application. You can, at any time, withdraw your request for flexible working. However, it is important to note that if it is withdrawn, another application cannot be made for 12 months from the date of withdrawal (unless otherwise agreed).

Meeting
Your Head of Department will arrange a meeting with you to discuss your request normally within 28 days of the application being received. You may be accompanied at this discussion by a work colleague or a trade union representative (if you are a member of a trade union). Your Head of Department may wish to discuss the request with the link HR Manager/Officer before the meeting. If you fail to turn up to the meeting on two occasions, without reasonable excuse, the University will treat your application as withdrawn. Your Head of Department will not give you any indication of their opinion or their view of the likely outcome of your application until the Executive Dean or Registrar and Secretary has considered it and a decision can be made.

The decision
Your request will be handled in a reasonable manner. Your Head of Department should consider your formal request for flexible working /career break carefully looking at the benefits of the requested changes in working conditions for you, the Department and the University, weighing these against any adverse business impact.

Your Head of the Department should then make a recommendation to the Executive Dean or Registrar and Secretary on the original application form. S/he will assess each case on its individual merits against operational requirements to ensure that it does not hinder the achievement of the goals set out in the University’s strategic plan. The link HR Manager/Officer will be informed of the decision in order to confirm this to you in writing.

If your request is accepted, or accepted with modifications, it will be discussed with you how and when the changes might best be implemented.

If the request is rejected it must be for one of the following business reasons as set out in the legislation (detailed reasons should be given under one or more of these headings):
- the burden of additional costs;
- an inability to reorganise work amongst existing staff;
- an inability to recruit additional staff;
- a detrimental impact on quality;
- a detrimental impact on performance;
- detrimental effect on their ability to meet customer demands;
- insufficient work for the periods the employee proposes to work;
- a planned structural change to the business.

2.5 CONTRACTUAL ARRANGEMENTS

Flexible working arrangements may be agreed informally with no changes to contracts e.g. homeworking. Flexible working arrangements will usually be for a defined period (up to 1 year) and subject to a trial period and regular review unless otherwise stated. Human Resources will write to you with the agreed changes and the start date of the arrangement. Permanent changes will be contractual and you will not be able to revert back to your original contract unless otherwise agreed.

Appeal procedure
Where a request has been refused, or where you feel your request has been dealt with unfairly, you have 14 days from the date of the notification of the decision to lodge an appeal. This will be outlined in the letter explaining the reasons for the refusal. The appeal should be in writing and addressed to the Director of Human Resources, outlining your reasons. The Deputy Vice-Chancellor, together with the Director of Human Resources, will consider appeals and make a final decision.
APPENDIX A: FAQS FOR TEACHING RELATED FLEXIBLE WORKING REQUESTS

REQUESTS

You may also wish to refer to the timetabling policy.

It is understandable that teaching related roles are less adaptable to some of the flexible working options outlined in Section 2 of this document. For example term-time only roles may not be suitable for the delivery of some programmes and even with remote networking capability working from home is not an option for delivering lectures.

For this reason, we have drafted FAQs to assist staff (with teaching duties) considering making a request and to assist managers in evaluating these requests.

Why do teaching related flexible working requests need to be reviewed annually?

All teaching related flexible working requests need to be reviewed annually by the Head of Department with the Faculty Executive Dean and the link HR Manager/Officer in the interests of achieving fairness and consistency in relation to both the changing requirements of individual staff members and also those of our learning and teaching environment. Staff may therefore need to amend their flexible working requests annually in response to the teaching timetable.

How can I accommodate my work, life and family responsibilities around teaching hours which may fall any time between 9am-6pm?

As a University, we seek to respect the needs of staff members with significant caring responsibilities/health requirements. Staff are asked to complete a Flexible Working Application Form where they are able to propose solutions to support any timetabling adjustments. Any requests will be considered formally in accordance with the University’s Work Life Balance policy.

CHILD CARE:

Can I request family-friendly teaching hours within the context of a full FTE?

For example, can I say that I can’t teach between 9 – 10 am and 4 – 6pm in order to collect my children from School on a daily basis?

We will be as flexible as possible with regards to agreeing to family-friendly teaching hours; however, there will need to be a balance between these arrangements and the teaching needs of your Department. It may not be possible to agree to constraints relating to both nursery/school drop offs and collections for a full 5 days of the week, (i.e. 10 drop off and collections) within a full FTE.

If for family reasons you did need to accommodate both nursery/school drop offs and collections every day of the week you would need to consider whether this arrangement would meet the operational needs of your Department. The option to be employed at reduced FTE is already used by many staff including increasing numbers of academic staff as the family-friendly option.

Would I have to consider reducing my full-time FTE if I wanted to do school drop-offs in the mornings only, and it meant that I couldn’t teach till 10am?

If, for example, you were to propose that you would be able to be available for teaching daily from 10am till 6pm (due to school drop-offs), you would still need to complete a Flexible Working Application Form to request formal approval of this arrangement. The approvals process would need to consider whether this arrangement would be able to meet the operational needs of the business.

Can I appeal against the outcome of my application?

Can I appeal against the outcome of my application once it has been submitted?

You will need to submit your form prior to the agreed deadline to your Head of Department. The Head of Department will then make a recommendation to the Faculty Executive Dean for him/her to consider in conjunction with the link Faculty HR Manager/Officer. You will then be advised of the outcome and may be asked to complete the non-availability for teaching information needed by the timetabling office to complete the student timetables. In all of these decisions we seek to recognise the benefits of a diverse community and to ensure that we can fully harness the talents, creativity and skills that our people bring.

Can I request family-friendly teaching hours within the context of a full FTE?

For example, can I say that I can’t teach between 9 – 10 am and 4 – 6pm in order to collect my children from School on a daily basis?

We will be as flexible as possible with regards to agreeing to family-friendly teaching hours; however, there will need to be a balance between these arrangements and the teaching needs of your Department. It may not be possible to agree to constraints relating to both nursery/school drop offs and collections for a full 5 days of the week, (i.e. 10 drop off and collections) within a full FTE.

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Would I have to consider reducing my full-time FTE if I wanted to do school drop-offs in the mornings only, and it meant that I couldn’t teach till 10am?

If, for example, you were to propose that you would be able to be available for teaching daily from 10am till 6pm (due to school drop-offs), you would still need to complete a Flexible Working Application Form to request formal approval of this arrangement. The approvals process would need to consider whether this arrangement would be able to meet the operational needs of the business.

Can I say that I can’t teach till 10am and not after 4pm in order to do the nursery drop-off and collection from our campus nursery/childminder/private nursery?

The University nursery (as do many private nurseries) opens at 8am and closes at 6pm (Monday to Friday) so childcare for nursery age children would not typically require a case for flexible working. In the case where full-time staff elect to use a nursery for part of the week as a matter of individual choice (and do not wish to attend the workplace on the remaining days in order to provide childcare in the home), this should be a case for requesting a reduced FTE. Once again this would be considered as to whether this meets the needs of the business.

TRAVEL TO WORK:

Can I request a late start if I have a difficult journey into work?

Unfortunately, this will not be considered as an acceptable constraint. If you have a medical reason which would impact on a 9am start, this may offer grounds for consideration of a revised timetable as a reasonable adjustment.

Can I request compressed/condensed hours as I live at distance - as I would prefer to come to campus only three days per week?

In order to meet our operational requirements, this arrangement will not normally be accommodated within the context of a full FTE. However, staff with teaching responsibilities may wish to request this flexibility through a reduced FTE.

RESEARCH:

Can I specify my own research day?

No. We seek to provide academic staff with an entitlement to research time one complete day (or pro-rata for part-time staff) for research per week during teaching periods, along with longer periods outside of term. In order to protect research time and to attract and retain the best academic talent (male and female) to the University of Essex, one complete day (or pro-rata for part-time staff) per week free of teaching will be determined by autoscheduling (although it should be noted that there may be specific circumstances when this cannot be accommodated). To clarify, staff will not be able to pick a specific day unless there are clear operational grounds for this agreed by the Head of Department, Faculty Executive Dean and the link HR Manager.

What do I need to do to apply under this process?

If you wish to have your circumstances considered, you should complete the Flexible Working Application Form and submit it to your Head of Department by the deadline noting that the deadline for timetabling auto-scheduling may be different to the HR deadline for requests. In line with the flexible working policy, you can request a meeting to discuss your application with your link HR Manager/Officer. Please do however ensure that this is held prior to the application submission deadline.
WORK LIFE BALANCE POLICY

APPENDIX B: HOME WORKING GUIDELINES – GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STAFF

HOME WORKING GUIDELINES – GUIDANCE NOTE FOR STAFF

INTRODUCTION

The majority of jobs within the University need to be undertaken within the workplace for most or all of the time, although it is recognised that members of academic staff already work from home on a regular basis. However, for those staff based on campus, there are occasions where flexibility may be agreed which allows you to work from home even though your main base will still be a University building. This may be a short term arrangement (e.g. to enable you to complete a piece of work) and in this instance informal approval should be sought from your line manager in advance. However, there may be occasions where a more regular, longer term (up to 1 year) home working arrangement is more appropriate. In these situations home working requests should be made using the flexible working application form and be subject to formal approval. Home working cannot be agreed on a permanent basis and will always be subject to review.

In considering any home working arrangement you must take into consideration the needs of the service and the nature of the work to be undertaken. It is accepted that home working is not practical for all roles (e.g. those with direct customer face to face contact on a frequent basis, those that require a high level of supervision or those servicing and serving university faculties). Anyone working at home must be available to come into the University if required.

SCOPE

This guidance note is applicable to staff who wish to work at home on a longer term basis (up to 1 year) although it is recognised that the practical issues outlined below may also be relevant for short term arrangements.

PRACTICAL ISSUES

In the University the work environment, equipment and work demands can be assessed and controlled, however this is not always the case when working from home. It is therefore important that you and your line manager complete the risk assessment form below so that you may identify any risks and take steps to control them. A risk assessment must be carried out before any formal request for homeworking is made and attached to your flexible working application form for your Head of Department to consider. For informal homeworking (or for academic staff) you should still take time to read the advice below and ensure that your environment is safe.

RISK ASSESSMENT FORM

Work environment: Whilst it is not necessary to have a separate work area within the home, it is important to ensure that work can be carried out in a safe manner and separate to home life. The room will need adequate space, lighting, temperature and ventilation. General health and safety hazards also need to be considered. There should be suitable access to the work room and you should ensure good standards of housekeeping e.g. removing trailing leads and not using the floor or high shelves for storage. Also be aware of whether your workspace could create risks to other family members, such as children.

Work equipment: If you are using a computer at home, you should ensure that you undertake a DSE assessment of your work station to make sure it is set up for your comfort and safety. You should pay attention to your desk, chair, screen, keyboard, lighting and space to work to minimise the risk of muscle-skeletal damage and visual fatigue. If you need advice on your DSE assessment contact your DSE Facilitator. Should you have a computer problem please contact the University IT Helpdesk.

Work equipment (costs): As home working is not a requirement for the job and arrangements are made at your request it is expected that any costs associated with equipment, telephone/broadband usage and virus checking arrangements should be met by yourself. In exceptional circumstances and on agreement with the Head of Department and the link HR Manager/Officer, reasonable expenses may be paid.

Mental Wellbeing: You need to be aware of issues of time management and social isolation when working at home and some people can find this stressful. It is important to maintain good communication systems with your line manager and colleagues to minimise feelings of isolation. You should also ensure that you take regular breaks from your work station.

Working alone: You need to be aware of the possible risks of working alone with no close or direct supervision. Please see:


Should you have an accident or illness whilst working alone you should record the incident by completing the Health and Safety Incident Report Form.

Insurance

There is an element of cover for University equipment e.g. laptops when used off University premises. It is important that you contact the University’s Insurance and Risk Manager to check cover arrangements in advance of any planned home working where University equipment may be required. Further information and contact details for the Insurance and Risk team are available at:

http://www.essex.ac.uk/finance/for_staff/risk_information_management.aspx

Equipment being used that is personal property must be covered by personal or home insurance. If you are working at home on a regular basis you should seek advice from your home insurance provider as you will need to declare this as your place of work to ensure that appropriate cover arrangements are in place. Failure to notify your home insurance provider of this could invalidate your insurance.

Data Protection

You must assess any risks to confidentiality of data under the Data Protection Act 1998 and the University’s policies on data security and copyright regulations. All the University data protection and data management requirements must be adhered to including preventing access by unauthorised persons to computer or paper materials and any storage devices e.g. USB sticks. You should be aware that the University IT Guidelines apply when working from home. Please contact the University’s Information Manager if you require any advice or guidance.

Maintaining contact

Good communication is an essential part of any successful home-based work arrangement. Provision must be made to allow effective communication with work colleagues and external clients during the working day. You must be contactable at home throughout normal working hours by your line manager or head of department and other University employees. The arrangements for contact should be agreed prior to working from home. You should make every effort to participate in staff training, networking days/events and be available to attend the University for meetings as and when required. Working ‘from home’ is not a sufficient reason to be unavailable to attend meetings as you may be able to attend meetings online or in person.

You should not arrange for meetings with staff, students or other clients or representatives at your home, although it is recognised that informal meetings between academic staff may take place. Meetings regarding University business should usually be carried out at a University campus or a similar professional setting in order to maintain the necessary level of professionalism and safety.

Supervision and monitoring

You and your line manager or Head of Department should have a shared understanding of what work is being undertaken at home and how this fits into overall work objectives. You should review the arrangement regularly to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of both parties and that you are following recommended practices. Risk assessments should be reviewed regularly.

Other Costs/expenses

No contribution will be made by the University towards normal household expenses attached to homeworking, such as heating, lighting, or council tax costs. When you are working at home, journeys made to your normal office base will not be reimbursed.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Information on working with computers and maintaining good posture is provided in the Health and Safety Executive’s guidance Working with VDUs (PDF).

Information on fire safety in the home is provided in the Fire safety in the Home (PDF) leaflet.

More fire safety information is available on the home fire safety website.

For information on pregnant workers please see the guidance and DSE and pregnancy guidance and complete a pregnant workers risk assessment.

Further advice and support can also be obtained from your DSE Facilitator, or the Health and Safety Advisory Service.
APPENDIX C: CAREER BREAK GUIDELINES

For what reasons can I take a career break?
Possible reasons for you to seek a career break could be as follows:
- To extend the standard maternity or paternity leave period to have more time with your child as they grow up;
- To care for an elderly relative;
- To undertake long term, full-time study;
- To travel or work on a voluntary basis (e.g. to accompany a partner working abroad);
- To undertake long term, full-time study;
- To care for an elderly relative;
- To visit relatives abroad.

Examples of the type of activity for which career break would not be allowed include:
- To take up any other employment (either permanent or fixed term) or to start your own business (without written agreement from the University. Such consent will not be unreasonably withheld).

What if I want to resign from my post during a career break?
If you decide to resign from your post during a career break, you must submit a written statement of resignation to your Head of Department, with a copy to your link HR Manager/Officer, in advance of the agreed return to work date in accordance with your contractual notice period.

Do I need to give notice to return?
Before returning from a career break, you should give your Head of Department three months' written confirmation of your intention to return to work. A copy should also be sent to your link HR Manager/Officer.

What happens if I am sick during a career break?
If you cannot return to work on the agreed date due to sickness, you must submit a written statement of resignation to your Head of Department, with a copy to your link HR Manager/Officer.

Will I still receive my annual increment on my pay scale during my career break?
No, you will not receive your annual increment on your pay scale during the time you are on a career break. You will also need to have at least six months' satisfactory service in your grade, upon return to work, before receiving an increment. This delay to the increment date is imposed because annual increments are awarded to reflect the development of skills, knowledge and experience within the role for which an individual is employed.

Will I be entitled to maternity pay, paternity pay, shared parental pay whilst on a career break?
You will not be eligible for Occupational Maternity pay, occupational paternity pay or occupational shared parental pay whilst on a career break. You should be aware that entitlement to statutory maternity pay (SMP) may also be affected since SMP is calculated on the basis of your salary 15 weeks before the expected week of childbirth. Please contact your link HR Manager/Officer for further information about how the rules apply to your particular situation.

Can I return before the agreed return date?
Once a career break has been agreed, you will not normally be allowed to return before the agreed date. However, where it is known that circumstances may result in you wishing to return earlier than planned (e.g. the career break is to care for a seriously ill relative) account will be taken of such factors at the outset in order to allow as much flexibility as possible to meet your needs and the operational requirements of the University.

Will I accrue annual leave whilst on a career break?
You will not accrue annual leave whilst on a career break. Any annual leave owing must be taken before commencement of the career break. There will be no payment in lieu for any leave outstanding.

Can I return to my previous post?
The University will endeavour to facilitate your return to the post which you occupied prior to the career break. However, there can be no guarantee that a return to the previously occupied post will take place. In the event of your original job no longer being available the provisions of the University's Redeployment Policy and Procedure will be applied.

I cannot return to work due to sickness.
If you cannot return to work on the agreed date due to illness a medical note must be produced.
You are eligible to make a flexible working if you are:

- An employee of the University and;
- Have been employed continuously with the University for at least 26 weeks before the date the application is made and;
- Have not made another flexible working request in the last 12 months.

**Note:** Employees who do not meet the eligibility requirements above (to make a statutory request) may still make a formal request to their manager who will consider the request taking into account business and operational needs.

You are eligible to make a request for a career break if you:

- Have been employed for 2 years before the date the application is made and
- Have a permanent contract of employment and
- Have not taken a career break in the last 7 years before the date the application is made.

(please note you must submit your request at least 6 months before the date you intend to start your career break)

Before you submit your formal flexible working application you may wish to have a meeting with your link HR Manager/Officer to discuss the request and understand how any permanent, contractual changes or any unpaid leave may affect your pay, annual leave and pension contributions.

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**APPLICATION**

If you meet all of the criteria above you may submit one of the following applications (as appropriate) to your Head of Department with a copy to your link HR Manager/Officer:

- Flexible working application form
- Career break application form

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**THE MEETING**

I Within 28 days of your application being received your Head of Department will arrange a meeting with you to discuss your request.

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**THE DECISION**

Your Head of Department will make a request to the Faculty Executive Dean/Registrar & Secretary and he/she will make the final decision. The Faculty Executive Dean/Registrar & Secretary should inform the link HR Manager/Officer as soon as possible so that HR can write to the individual with the decision. A copy of the letter from HR should be sent to the Head of Department.

- Request approved. Revised working arrangement begins. Trial period of 3 months is recommended
- Request rejected. Reasons given
- Appeal
  You may submit an appeal to the Deputy Director of HR within 14 days of your rejection letter