



Work Life Balance Policy

1. Scope and Purpose

- 1.1 UCL acknowledges that its staff are most productive when they have achieved a work-life balance that enables them to meet their responsibilities outside work. This policy provides a framework within which departments¹ can consider how best to enable staff to achieve an effective balance between work and life outside the workplace. This framework incorporates UCL's statutory responsibility to consider requests for flexible working for any reason. This document should be read in conjunction with existing policies which facilitate flexible working and time off from work and are listed under the related Policies and Guidance.
- 1.2 This policy relates to all categories of UCL staff.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 UCL aims to recruit and retain staff of the highest calibre. Remuneration and other benefits, regular appraisal and development opportunities, good job-design and effective management practices are all important factors in enabling departments to achieve this objective. Research suggests, however, that increasingly the opportunity to achieve a work-life balance can be as important a factor as pay and benefits in attracting and retaining staff and therefore this policy has the aim of benefiting both staff and UCL as an employer.

1. ¹ The term department will be used throughout this document to include administrative divisions, Schools and the Post Graduate Institutes

- 2.2 Some departments already have arrangements in place whereby staff operate flexible working patterns and some groups of staff enjoy flexibility in their working arrangements that enables them to work from locations other than UCL and/or at times other than the standard working week. The purpose of this policy is to set a framework within which more staff can benefit from a greater degree of flexibility, but it is acknowledged that the options available to an individual or group of staff will depend largely on the nature of their work, the location of the workplace and the size of the team with which they work.
- 2.3 To facilitate different flexible working options faculty and departments are strongly encouraged to operate a 'core business in core hours' model for key meetings. Core hours are between 10.00 - 16.00. This will ensure the maximum number of people can attend these key meetings, ensuring widespread dissemination of critical information and avoiding unintended exclusion of some staff.
- 2.4 Under this policy, staff who request (or agree to) revised working arrangements must do so voluntarily and should consider the potential financial implications of their choice on their salary, pension benefits etc. It is not intended that these proposals be operated in a way that undermines existing contractual entitlements. Any approved request for revised working arrangements will mean a permanent change to the individual's terms and conditions of employment on completion of a trial period and there will be no right to revert back to the former hours of work once the trial period is satisfactorily completed, unless a temporary change has been explicitly agreed. Any changes in working arrangements must be confirmed in writing to the individual by the line manager/Head of department and copied to the Human Resources Division for the HR record. Where posts are externally funded, a request for flexible working might also have to be discussed and agreed with the funding body.
- 2.5 The options outlined below can be utilised in two ways. Firstly, Heads of Departments should consider whether one or more of these options could effectively offer greater flexibility to a group of staff for whom they are responsible, in view of the work they do and the hours during which certain duties need to be undertaken. Heads are responsible for ensuring that opportunities for flexible

working are offered consistently across their department, where they are appropriate. Where the Head of Department proposes that flexible working arrangements are made available to a group of staff within a department, the details should be communicated in writing to all staff to whom they apply. Where alternative working arrangements are agreed for a group or an individual, a copy of the letters confirming the new arrangements should be forwarded to the HR Division for the HR record.

2.6 Secondly, one of the options outlined below may be requested by a member of staff by writing to their line manager/Head of Department. Individuals making a request for a change to their working arrangements should set out

- the reason for their request
- the change in working pattern requested
- the required start date
- any effect which the individual considers the change will have on the work of the department/team in which s/he works and suggestions for addressing these.

The framework within which managers must respond to such requests is outlined in [Appendix 2](#) of this document.

2.8 Line managers seeking advice on the working arrangements that could suit particular circumstances or who would like advice on evaluating the appropriateness of a flexible working request, should contact the HR Advisory Team. Departments might wish to consider making options available that are not included in this policy and if that is the case, these should be discussed with the relevant contact in the HR Advisory Team before implementation, to ensure that any implications for matters such as annual leave are identified and that there is no unwitting detriment in the proposed arrangement, for either employees or for the department.

3. Criteria for dealing with a request for flexible or revised working arrangements:

3.1 Managers must take the following into account in considering requests for alternative working arrangements:

- The potential benefits of the proposal which may include improved productivity, morale and commitment, retention of key staff and/or salary or other cost savings. Work must be as productive (or more so) following the implementation of any changes.
- The change must be feasible and have no adverse impact on the work of colleagues, the department, students, research sponsors, service users or any other relevant third party.
- The arrangements must have no adverse impact on the workload or health, safety and security of the individual concerned or their colleagues: managers must be aware of the hazards of working outside the 'normal' day and should consult their departmental safety policy in the first instance if they have any queries.
- Any additional administration required to implement the proposed arrangement must be practicable and cost effective.
- The change must be able to be managed effectively and may generate efficiency gains in terms of use of office space.
- The proposal must not hinder the achievement of individual, team or departmental objectives.
- If a proposal will affect an individual's pay they should be advised to consult the pensions department in order to ensure they understand how their pension might be affected.
- Where the arrangement proposed cannot be accepted for operational reasons, possible alternatives should be considered and discussed with the individual before a final decision is reached.

3.2 Providing that there are no adverse operational or financial implications, requests should be considered favourably with a view to agreement, wherever practicable. When moving to a new or more flexible working arrangement, all parties should be

aware of the need to monitor performance levels to ensure that they are effectively maintained.

4 Flexible working options:

- 4.1 Flexible working arrangements must conform to the Working Time Regulations and minimum rest periods must be adhered to (see [Working Time Regulations Policy](#))
- 4.2 **Flexitime** schemes usually involve individuals working a set of "core hours" in which they are obliged to attend work, with periods either side of the core, within which they can choose their arrival and departure times. Arrangements for cover of the office/lab etc. outside core hours must be written into any agreed scheme, as must arrangements for dealing effectively with regular peaks in workload across the week, month or year. An outline model scheme is detailed in [Appendix 3](#), which allows flexibility in starting and leaving times within the month but does not facilitate staff taking additional days leave. Academic, Research and Professional Services Staff on Grades 7 and above are eligible for time off in lieu of additional hours worked and it is not expected that they will be included within formal flexitime schemes or annualised hours schemes.

For employees some of the benefits are:

- the opportunity to avoid commuting in the rush-hour
 - control over their start and finish time from day to day within certain parameters, to allow for changing domestic or other commitments
 - being able to take a child to or from school, to accompany a friend or dependent to a day centre or similar, to await the arrival of a carer prior to leaving for work or flexibility to pursue interests/hobbies outside work.
 - the ability to schedule work which does not involve contacting others, for quieter times outside normal office hours
- 4.3 For UCL the benefits are being able to recruit and retain staff whose domestic commitments or interests outside work mean they need flexibility to allow them to cope with the fluctuating demands of home life or who wish to commute outside the rush hour. Research indicates that having more control over starting

and finishing times can increase job satisfaction significantly. Any newly implemented flexitime scheme should be closely monitored and reviewed by the Head of Department after an agreed trial period.

- 4.4 **Annualised Hours** - under this option, working time is organised on the basis of the number of hours worked over a year rather than a week. This can help to resource predictable peaks and troughs of work during the year and could, for example, involve staff working shorter hours outside term time or longer hours over a very specific period such as during degree ceremonies or preparation of year-end financial returns, with the compensation of shorter hours at other times of the year/term.
- 4.5 Annual hours are based on the working week multiplied to an annual total, less annual leave, closure periods and public holidays. Scheduling annualised hours may be an average monthly total to be worked, or may take the form of planned periods of more intense work followed by periods of rest. Such arrangements can in principle meet the needs of employees who are comfortable with variation in employment intensity to dovetail with other aspirations in life. Annualised hours arrangements must conform to the Working Time Regulations and therefore an average 48-hour week must not be exceeded and minimum rest periods must be adhered to (see [related policies and procedures](#)). The prescribed working hours must be set out on an annual basis in writing to staff involved in annualised hours working and there must be a robust system for ensuring that hours worked, are recorded.
- 4.6 **Term-time working** - this is a variation on annualised hours in that the hours worked coincide with school or UCL terms only. Such working arrangements are usually only suited to those activities where the activity of the post is only during the academic term. It can be of mutual benefit to employees and departments in these circumstances and allows staff to be at home during school holidays. Salary in these circumstances is usually paid over twelve months of the year and annual leave is taken outside term time. There are clear

advantages for some staff in this arrangement but there may be problems for departments in terms of continuity and cover, especially if the individual has scarce skills or expertise.

- 4.7 **Shift Working** - Shift working operates in some parts of UCL such as in the Security service where 24 hour cover is needed. Where shift working is in operation, a formal structure within which staff can swap occasional shifts with colleagues can enable staff to address individual domestic commitments.
- 4.8 **Rota working/staggered hours** - This option enables the agreement of a fixed pattern of starting and finishing times for each individual and enables members of a team to cover the work required in an office or lab for a longer working day than might otherwise be the case if everyone followed the same working pattern. It therefore has the benefit of enabling the extension of office/lab/building opening hours and enables individuals to travel outside rush hour and work to a fixed routine around which they can plan their leisure time.
- 4.9 **Job share** - is a particular form of part-time working, where all aspects of a job are shared between two people. A job share could in principle involve more than two people but the coherence of the job tends to disintegrate when more than two people involved. There may be certain roles for which job share is not a viable option and if there is any doubt, HR should be consulted.
- 4.10 Models for job share vary. A 50:50 split is most common, but other variations are possible. Job share works best when both workers have a few hours a week overlap, to enable the effective handover of information and to allow them both to attend team meetings etc. When looking at this option it is crucial to consider whether an overlap period can be physically accommodated but often, other than when they are meeting to hand over, job sharers share a workstation. Job share has the advantage that there are two members of staff who are familiar with the responsibilities of a role and if annual leave is staggered, it is possible

to cover the duties with shorter gaps throughout the year, which may result in a better service provision for customer facing roles.

4.11 **Job splitting** is also a form of job share in which the range of tasks within a role are split between two or more staff. This option is less satisfactory than job share as the post holders do not gain the career development opportunity of undertaking the breadth of duties and there is the danger that one partner will undertake more of the routine aspects of the role than the other. Managers wishing to implement job splitting must seek advice from the HR Advisory team as the arrangements may have implications for the grade of one or both aspects of the post.

4.12 **Part-time working** - this option allows employees to reduce their working hours to enable them to meet temporary or permanently increased responsibilities outside work. Staff should seek information regarding the impact on salary, pension and other benefits when deciding to follow this option. Once again careful consideration must be given to ensuring the needs of the department are covered when looking at agreeing a reduction in hours. Decisions will have to be made as to whether the remainder of the post needs to be filled and if this is the case, any agreement to part-time working may be contingent on the department being able to recruit to the remainder of the post. Part-time staff are entitled to the same rates of pay and holiday (pro rata) as full-time workers doing the same kind of job, and the same entitlement to pension, maternity leave, sick pay, access to training and promotion etc.

A reduction in hours may be permanent or temporary. If an employee wishes to return to working full time, there is no automatic financial barrier to prevent them from doing so. Such requests should be considered on a case-by-case basis and refused only where there is an objective business reason. The option of reverting to full time working should be discussed ahead of the extended leave being taken. Where an individual has returned to work on a part time basis and subsequently requests to revert to full-time working, any variations in hours must be agreed between an employee and her/his line manager formally

with individuals, in terms of a change of contract issued by the HR Employment Contract Administration Team. For further information about UCL's commitment and approach to balancing family and work commitments see the Parental Leave Policy.

4.13 Flexible retirement and part-time working – members of the USS Pension Scheme may apply for flexible retirement (subject to eligibility) and take part of their pension benefits if they reduce their working hours (see 4.12). Staff are encouraged to engage in early discussions with their line manager about reducing their working hours if they are considering flexible retirement. Formal applications for reduced part-time working and flexible retirement should be made on this form. Requests will be considered by managers in accordance with this procedure. The Pension Services website contains further information on the USS Flexible Retirement scheme and application process for flexible retirement.

4.14 Planned remote working - The majority of jobs within UCL need to be undertaken within the workplace; however flexibility may be agreed for occasional working at alternative locations (either home or elsewhere). As with other options there will be many roles for which this is not practical and an assessment of the role needs to be made before considering whether this option is viable for a particular post holder. Circumstances where home working can be considered will vary; however, any such arrangement will need to clearly benefit the department. Any such arrangement must be formalised and the expectations detailed. Practical issues such as availability of equipment, additional costs, insurance and health and safety issues must be considered before agreeing changes:

- Insurance : UCL's insurance covers university property used off site but UCL has an excess of £2,000 which means that most portable equipment would not be covered. Any loss of equipment of less than £2,000 in value falls on the department. A number of departments have taken out their own cover for

laptops, PCs etc. valued at below £2,000 which is arranged and paid for by the department. UCL's insurance does not cover personal equipment belonging to staff and they are advised to take out their own cover. Employees working away from UCL are still covered by UCL's Liability policies, in regards to accident or injury if it is established that UCL is liable for any damages.

- Risk Assessment : employees using VDU equipment at home must be advised of the display screen regulations and instructed to operate within these guidelines as if at work (DSE guidance) Managers must also assess any risks to the confidentiality of data under the Data Protection Act, depending on the nature of the work.
- Contact : arrangements must be agreed for availability regarding telephone and e-mail contact from colleagues if staff are working from home. Where necessary UCL e-mail accounts can be made accessible from the remote working location.
- Providing equipment and paying expenses: Where regular and frequent home working is a requirement of a job it is reasonable that the department provides equipment and pays for work calls. Reimbursement of the cost of a home telephone line is potentially a taxable benefit and is not appropriate unless it is a line dedicated to work use. The Finance department must be informed of any reimbursement of the cost of home telephone lines in order that the payment can be processed as a taxable benefit. If major costs were to be incurred in infrequent home working, the costs may negate the benefits of the arrangement to the department. Departments should not make home working arrangements with employees as a requirement of the job without advice from the HR Advisory Team. Where home working is infrequent and arrangements are made at the employee's request s/he will be expected to meet costs of purchase and maintenance of equipment and telephone usage and to be responsible for virus checking arrangements etc.
- Supervision/management - work objectives need to be agreed at the outset of any home working arrangement. It should be remembered that not everyone is

experienced at motivating themselves when working in isolation all day, in their home environment.

- 4.15 **Compressed hours** - This arrangement means that staff agree to work longer hours on some days in order to work shorter hours on another day. For example longer working hours on four days of the week can mean that an individual contracted to work 36.5 hours a week can work those hours over four and a half days. While such arrangements can offer welcome flexibility for staff, managers must bear in mind the times and days at which post holders need to be available to respond to queries from others. Due to the need for many post holders to be available Monday to Friday, compressed hours are not feasible in many cases. It is also important that any agreement which meets the needs of a few individuals does not inconvenience a larger number of other staff who are required to interact with them in order to do their job or who will have to cover for them in their absence.
- 4.16 **A move to staggered or compressed hours should be accompanied by the stipulation that the manager may need to request work outside the agreed pattern, in exceptional circumstances, and in such instances time off in lieu will be offered. As much notice as possible must be given in such circumstances.**
- 4.17 **Career Breaks** - Within the existing Policy on Leave for Domestic and Personal Reasons, staff with caring responsibilities can request unpaid leave for a period of up to 6 months to care for someone who is seriously ill. In addition to this, staff with two year's service may request an unpaid career break from their post for a period of up to 12 months to care for a family member or to undertake career or personal development. Such a career break would be unpaid and UCL would not contribute to pension contributions during this period. The employment contract would remain in place and the individual would not normally be at liberty to work for another employer during their period of unpaid leave. Each case will be considered on its merits and a decision on whether to agree such a request would depend on UCL's ability to recruit someone with sufficient skills and experience to cover the post temporarily and the time judged necessary for such an individual to be fully

effective in the role. Where a post can be covered satisfactorily during the individual's absence s/he will be offered return to the same post but where such a role cannot be filled on a temporary basis or where an individual is leaving one of many similar posts at the same level, an individual may be offered a guaranteed return to a similar post at the same level, on completion of a career break. Career breaks can be an effective means of retaining a skilled and experienced member of staff whose domestic commitments mean that if they do not take a career break they must resign from their post. All career break arrangements must be discussed with the HR Division before agreement is reached with an individual and HR will confirm the arrangements in writing.

- **Employee Assistance programme** - UCL recognises that unexpected problems can arise that threaten to disrupt work-life balance. At these times, immediate confidential access to sources of information and support can help staff to deal with problems before they get out of hand. UCL provides an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to give practical advice, and where appropriate, emotional support to help staff manage problems effectively. The service is accessed through a free and confidential telephone helpline. Staff and their immediate families can call the helpline 24 hours a day. Examples of issues that staff may wish to seek help with are family-care, domestic, legal (excluding employment issues), financial, emotional, or relationship problems. More details can be found on the UCL [Occupational Health and Wellbeing web pages](#).

5. Review of arrangements

- 5.1 Where there is a trial period in relation to revised working arrangements, it is important that at the review stage a full discussion of the benefits and any disadvantages of the working arrangements are discussed. If at the end of the trial period, either party considers that the arrangements have not been successful it should not continue. If at the end of the trial period the arrangements are deemed by both parties to be successful, the changes will be confirmed as permanent or where further temporary changes to the arrangements have been agreed, timescales will be set for their review.

6 Monitoring of the policy

The HR Division will monitor the operation of the policy and its implementation will be reviewed in consultation with UCL's recognised trade unions.

HR Strategy and Planning

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Related policies and procedures

- [Maternity Leave](#)
- [Leave for domestic and personal reasons](#)
Including:
 - Paternity Leave
 - Parental Leave
 - Compassionate leave - bereavement
 - Adoption leave
 - Carer's leave
 - Religious and cultural observances
 - Visiting relatives abroad
 - Medical appointments
 - Leave for domestic crises
- [Sabbatical leave policy](#) including study leave
- [Working Time Regulations](#)

Appendix Two: Flexible working procedure for Managers

Procedure to be followed by a manager receiving a written request for flexible working or a change to working arrangements.

1. Within 28 days of receipt of the application, the manager must arrange a meeting with the employee to discuss the request. The employee is entitled to be accompanied at the meeting by a work colleague or UCL trade union representative. If their companion is unable to attend the meeting, the employee can postpone the meeting to a more convenient date and where the postponed date is reasonable and is within five working days, the manager will agree to the postponement.
2. The meeting will provide the manager and the employee with the opportunity to discuss the desired work pattern in depth and consider how it might be accommodated within the department. In considering flexible working hours, managers must bear in mind that staff working for a continuous period of 6 hours must take a minimum of a 30 minute break in that period.
3. Managers should, in consultation with their Head of Department/Division consider the issues outlined in section 3.1 of the policy document, prior to the meeting.
4. At the meeting, the employee may be asked to expand on any aspects of their proposal and the manager may ask the employee if there are any other working patterns they could consider. Both parties should be prepared to be flexible.
5. The Human Resources Advisory team can provide advice and assistance to managers in considering requests, particularly in providing advice on practice adopted elsewhere in UCL. Line managers should consult with HR when they are unsure as to how to respond to a request.
6. The time limits for the meeting to take place can be extended if the manager is absent from work or through agreement between the manager and the employee.

7. There may be exceptional occasions where the procedure cannot be followed within the specified time limits. For example, a manager may need extra time to speak to another employee who is on holiday, about whether they could work the hours left uncovered by the employee's requested work pattern, or the employee may be about to commence a period of leave. Extensions of time limits must be in agreement with both the manager and the employee and the manager must make a written record of the agreement. The written record must specify the period the extension relates to, the date on which the extension is to end, be dated and sent to the employee.
8. Where an application is sent to the manager and the manager is absent from work due to leave or illness the matter shall either be referred upwards within the Department or Division, or an automatic extension will apply. The period that the manager has to arrange the meeting will commence either on the day of the manager's return or 28 days after the application is made, whichever is sooner. On the manager's return, the employee's application must be acknowledged in order to make the employee aware of the extension that has been applied and the date on which they can expect the meeting to take place.

Decision

9. Once the manager and the employee have discussed the request, the manager must notify the employee of the decision and confirm this in writing within two weeks following the date of the meeting.
10. Managers shall only refuse an application for one or more of the following reasons:
 - The department cannot afford the burden of additional costs (this may include accommodation or equipment or additional administration costs) There will be a detrimental effect on the department's ability to meet the demands upon it
 - It is not possible to re-organise work amongst existing staff
 - The department will not be able to recruit additional staff
 - There will be a detrimental impact on quality
 - There will be a detrimental impact on performance
 - There will be insufficient work during the periods the employee proposes to work

- There are planned organisational changes that militate against agreeing to the flexibility requested

Request Accepted

11 If a request is accepted, the notification must include a description of the new working pattern, state the date from which the new working pattern is to take effect and be dated. The manager or staff member may propose a trial period in which to assess the new working arrangements and in this case, the length of the trial period and the method of evaluating its success, should be included in the notification. The manager must keep a copy of confirmation of agreeing the request and the Human Resources Division must be informed as the HR record must be updated.

Request Rejected

12 If a request is rejected, the notification must state the ground/s for refusing the application, provide a sufficient explanation as to why the ground/s for refusal applies in these circumstances, provide details of the employee's right to appeal and be dated. The manager must keep a copy of the notification that the request is rejected and forward a copy to the Human Resources Division. The decision should be consistent with the discussion that has taken place during the meeting.

Appeal

13 Where an employee believes that their request has not been properly considered, they may appeal against the decision.

14 An appeal must be lodged within 14 days of receipt of the decision to reject the application. The employee must set out the grounds for their appeal in a dated letter to the Director of Human Resources.

15 Within 14 days of the Director of Human Resources receiving the notification of appeal from the employee, a meeting to hear the appeal will be held. The Appeal Panel will be appointed by the Director of Human Resources and will comprise three members of staff who have not previously been involved in the case, one of

whom will be a trade union representative³. A member of the HR Advisory Team will act as secretary to the panel.

16 The employee is entitled to be accompanied at the meeting by a work colleague or UCL trade union representative. If his/her companion is unable to attend, the employee can postpone the meeting to a more convenient date. Where the suggested time is reasonable, the senior manager must postpone the meeting.

17 The HR Division will advise the employee of the decision of the appeal in writing, within 14 days of the appeal meeting.

Appeal Upheld

18 If the appeal is upheld the written decision must include a description of the new working pattern, state the date from which the new working pattern is to take effect, and be dated. A copy of the notification will be held on the individual's HR file.

Appeal Refused

19 If the appeal is refused, the written decision must set out the reason for refusal in this case and provide a sufficient explanation of the grounds for the decision. A copy of the notification will be held on the individual's HR file. The Appeal Panel's decision shall be final.

Appendix 3: A Model Flexi-time Scheme

A Model Flexi-time Scheme:

This flexible working hours scheme may be withdrawn, amended or suspended at any time with one month's notice, if they are considered to impact on the effectiveness of service provision.

- Core hours **10.00 - 16.00**
Hours may be worked **08.00 - 18.00**
Telephones to be answered **09.00 - 17.30**
- Minimum 30 minutes lunch break.
- Minimum 1 person covering the office/lab between 12.00 and 14.00. Staff will be responsible for arranging cover between 9am and 10 a.m., 12 noon and 2pm, 4pm and 5.30pm (Lunch can be taken between 12.00 - 14.00).

- Times of arrival at work, lunch breaks and leaving work must be logged daily by the individual and will be countersigned by the manager/supervisor at the end of each week.
- The monthly cycles will commence from
- A maximum of 5 hours surplus or deficit may be carried over from week to week, subject to work demands. No hours may be carried over from one monthly cycle to the next.
- Overtime will not usually be paid. Exceptionally, where approved in advance by the Head of department/Manager/Supervisor, the first five surplus hours will be paid at plain time and overtime rates will be paid for additional hours.
- Periods of sickness or annual leave will be treated as a normal working day - 7 hours and 18 minutes for those working a 36.5 hour working week.
- Medical appointments should be arranged in accordance with Policy on Leave for Domestic and Personal Reasons.
- Time lost through transport delays will be made up by the individuals with few approved exceptions (such as transport strike days and exceptional weather conditions etc).
- For health safety purposes staff should ensure that a colleague is aware when they leave the office for the day.