

# UNIVERSITY OF ABERDEEN

## HOMWORKING POLICY

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 The University recognises the importance of facilitating working from home. There may be benefits in terms of helping staff to balance their work and personal life, reduced commuting and impact on the environment. As part of its commitment to expand the flexibility of working arrangements for staff, the University will agree to a member of staff working partly or wholly from home, provided that such an arrangement is mutually beneficial and facilitates effective and efficient working to meet individual, team and University objectives. This links to our 2040 Strategy and in particular the Inclusive strand where the first Commitment is that 'we will care for the wellbeing, health and safety of our diverse community' and the Sustainable strand where we make the commitment that 'we will encourage everyone within our community to work and live sustainably, recognising the importance of our time, energy and resilience'.
- 1.2 It is recognised that traditionally, some members of staff already have significant flexibility in how, when and where they work, including from home. For example this in particular has been the case with academic staff who traditionally have had the freedom to determine where they work based on the nature of activities they are undertaking (and, for example, whether this is required to be undertaken on campus or not). This policy is not intended to restrict this type of flexible working and such traditional arrangements take precedence over requirements introduced in this Policy.
- 1.3 The University has a duty of care and wishes to ensure the health, safety, and wellbeing of all staff, as well as ensuring appropriate security of University property and data. This policy is, therefore, intended to be enabling and to facilitate homeworking where this is requested as a regular and ongoing arrangement, whilst ensuring it is done in a safe and appropriate manner.
- 1.4 This policy defines the types of home working arrangement to perform University work (either occasional, regular or permanent as defined in Section 3), and sets out entitlements, eligibility criteria and other conditions that apply, determined by the type of homeworking arrangement.
- 1.5 The policy is not intended to address the ad hoc one-off arrangements for homeworking for short periods to complete specific agreed pieces of work, nor intended to impinge on existing arrangements or working practices as outlined in 1.2.
- 1.6 Appendix 1 sets out guidance material applying to all homeworking as well as arrangements applying to regular and permanent homeworking specifically.
- 1.7 Subject to normal line manager approval processes, homeworking may be combined with other forms of flexible working (e.g. 9-day fortnight arrangements - which currently apply to Professional Services Staff only, part time working or Purchase of Annual Leave).
- 1.8 It is recognised that hybrid working arrangements within teams (e.g. a mix within a team of staff homeworking and others working on campus) presents challenges in terms of team cohesion and dynamics. Associated guidance has been developed which aims to facilitate such arrangements.

### 2. Scope

- 2.1 This policy applies to all University staff, regardless of contract type or duration, with the exception of those employed on a casual basis (ie those employed on temporary services contracts).
- 2.2 It is recognised, however, that because of the nature of some roles, homeworking will not be practical. Positions with at least one of the following requirements will not normally be considered suitable for Regular or Permanent homeworking:
  - direct face to face contact on a frequent basis (for example reception duties for internal and external visitors);
  - being a member of a team who needs to have face to face contact with other team members such as checking off or signing documents, providing cover during breaks;

- servicing and serving other University facilities or assets (e.g. security, grounds worker, catering).

2.3 In addition, it is recognised that the following will impact on the suitability for homeworking on an occasional, regular or permanent basis (as defined in Section 3).

- The suitability of the job and whether the work is capable of being undertaken equally effectively from home;
- The impact on the level of service, student experience, efficiency and/or effectiveness which ultimately take precedence, albeit staff preferences will be accommodated as far as reasonably possible;
- Whether any costs incurred are reasonable;
- The needs of the staff member for more flexible working arrangements;
- The suitability of the home environment and its technical accessibility/connectivity;
- Any potential negative impact on the staff member of working from home;
- Any potential negative impact on the staff member's colleagues/team;
- The potential for maintaining good communication with the staff member;
- The staff member's risk assessment and data protection assessment which can be found [here](#).

2.4 Where any application for regular or permanent homeworking is declined, staff will have the opportunity to appeal the decision in line with the Flexible Working Policy.

### 3 Types of Homeworking

There are different types of homeworking which individuals may seek to adopt to support their own specific work circumstances. In this section we will set out the different types and relevant considerations to be given in relation to each scenario.

#### 3.1 Occasional Homeworking

3.1.1 Occasional Homeworking is working from home on an informal and occasional basis with the prior approval of the line manager other than as specified below. Staff may work from home occasionally, normally in specific one-off circumstances or to complete specific tasks. This is a non-contractual arrangement.

3.1.2 As noted above, it is recognised that academic staff already have existing arrangements in place that may include working from places other than on campus. Thus, it is not expected that academic members of staff will have to seek approval of their line manager for occasional homeworking. The requirement to seek approval of line managers will, therefore, apply to Professional Services, Support and Technical members of staff.

3.1.3 Any occasional homeworking will not form part of any contractual agreement, and the main place of work will remain as stated in the contract of employment.

3.1.4 Staff may wish to request line manager approval for occasional homeworking such as in the following type of situation (this list is not exhaustive):

- to provide a solution to temporary difficulties with travelling to University premises e.g. public transport disruption, exceptional weather conditions, a domestic emergency, or an injury or physical condition which does not preclude working but affects travel to work. Such temporary difficulties may include the unforeseeable unavailability of care for children or other dependents, provided the staff member is able to devote a significant proportion of their time to work; however, this may continue only for a short period until other arrangements can be made;
- to provide a short-term solution to care for children or dependents);
- where working from home for part of the day is an operationally efficient response to other job requirements e.g. when attending a meeting, which is closer to home than the University premises;

- to allow the opportunity to work without interruptions on a particular task where prolonged concentration is important.

3.1.5 Other than where existing flexibility applies to academic staff or where there is already an understanding between line managers and staff regarding occasional homeworking, staff should discuss and agree requests with their line manager. Whilst there is no automatic right to work from home, approval from line managers will not be unreasonably withheld and requests should generally only be turned down for operational or practical reasons.

## **3.2 Regular Homeworking**

3.2.1 Regular Homeworking is where full-time or part-time staff have a formal agreement to work from home on a regular basis for the whole or a part of their working week or day, e.g. 2 days at University premises and 3 at home, working from home every third week, working from home regularly for part of the day or otherwise working from home for a proportion of working time.

3.2.2 This recognises that an approach to working from home can be supported where there is flexibility in the time spent both at home and in the workplace, determined by activities that need to be undertaken, some of which are required to be undertaken in the workplace. Further considerations which should be taken account of in this scenario are detail in section 3.4.

3.2.3 Staff regularly working from home, including academic staff who, above and beyond the arrangements discussed in 1.2 above wish to enter into a formal homeworking arrangement, will be asked to sign a Homeworking Agreement. This agreement will outline the duration for which the agreement will be in place, the specific arrangements in place and any additional specifications made in relation to the agreement. In line with statements provided above, the purpose of this agreement is to manage regular homeworking appropriately, ensure the health safety and wellbeing of staff and ensure that University security and GDPR responsibilities are followed, rather than to restrict the ability of staff to work flexibly.

## **3.3 Permanent Homeworking**

3.3.1 Permanent Homeworking is where a member of staff has their home as their work base and travels to University premises infrequently. They may be required to use a hot desk when working from University premises.

3.3.2 Further considerations which should be taken account of in this scenario are detail in section 3.4.

## **3.4 Considerations for Regular and Permanent Homeworking**

3.4.1 The full terms which will apply when a member of staff is working from home are outlined in appendix 1.

3.4.2 Staff who work from home on a regular or permanent basis must ensure that they have a suitable environment in which to work and follow the University guidance and legislation supporting this. Refer to appendix 1.

3.4.3 Staff must ensure that they can work free from disruption for the core period of their working time. In addition, staff should ensure that they are contactable (via phone or Teams) and can engage in virtual meetings and activities during homeworking.

3.4.4 Generally, there is an expectation that staff have appropriate care arrangements in place for dependents and homeworking on a regular or permanent basis cannot be used as a substitute for appropriate care arrangements for dependents on an ongoing and full-time basis. It is accepted, however, that home working may be suitable to provide flexibility for staff to work around care arrangements. For example, a member of staff may work from home after a nursery or school pick up period or during school holidays as long as they are still able

to undertake their work appropriately. Consideration of the appropriateness for home working in such circumstances will be based on the specific detail on an individual case basis with a focus on flexibility and accommodation of requests as far as reasonable but bearing in mind the need to maintain the level of service, student experience, efficiency and/or effectiveness;.

3.4.5 It is the responsibility of staff to inform their line manager if any of the agreed homeworking arrangements change.

3.4.6 Under no circumstances are arrangements to be made for students or external stakeholders to meet with a staff member at their home to conduct University business. All such meetings should be held at the University, virtually, or in a similar professional setting, in order to maintain the necessary levels of professionalism and safety. Whilst the normal expectation is for staff to meet other members of University staff in a similar professional setting, meetings may take place in homes where mutually agreed.

#### **4 Regular or Permanent Homeworking outside the UK**

4.1 Homeworking outside the UK will not be permitted on a long-term or ongoing basis other than in exceptional and pre-agreed circumstances. This is owing to tax, social security, pension and immigration considerations. Homeworking may be permitted on a shorter-term basis depending on the circumstances. Staff should ensure that they discuss with their line manager any plans to work from home outwith the UK even on a shorter-term basis. This is to ensure that the potential implications both for the staff member and the University are fully explored and understood. Line managers will seek advice from Human Resources before approving any requests, but approval is not guaranteed.

4.2 Full details of the University's position on this and guidance in relation to this issue can be found in the Mobile Workforce Framework/Global Mobility policy (which is being developed).

#### **5 Approval process for Regular or Permanent Homeworking Requests**

5.1 Individual requests for regular or permanent homeworking will be reviewed on their own merits. Agreement to a specific request will depend on an objective assessment of whether the staff member's work can be done from home without any detriment to productivity or operational needs. Consideration will also be given to whether it suits individual working circumstances. While the University is generally supportive of homeworking it cannot be guaranteed that every request can be approved.

5.2 Staff who request regular or permanent homeworking should consider that while working from home it is anticipated that they will:

- agree with their line manager how work will be set, and progress monitored;
- manage their workload effectively and complete work in accordance with deadlines;
- identify and attempt to resolve any new pressures created by working from home and, as appropriate, raise them with their manager;
- work independently, motivate themselves and use their initiative;
- make use of support and resources available from the University to support physical and mental wellbeing;
- adapt to new working practices including maintaining contact with their line manager and colleagues at work;
- be subject to the same performance expectations processes and objectives that would apply if physically working in the University.

5.3 Staff should, in the first instance, discuss their request for regular or permanent homeworking with their line manager and then apply using the appropriate form. The line manager will arrange a meeting with the staff member to discuss the feasibility of the request to work from home. It is the University's policy that any requests for homeworking will be viewed in a positive light and requests will, whenever it is possible and practicable, be approved, and will only be declined where there is a clear operational justification to do so. The criteria for making these decisions are outlined below.

- 5.4 Approved applications will be subject to the signing of a Homeworking Agreement and the successful completion of a trial period of 3 months. The aim of the trial period is for both the staff member and the University to evaluate whether the new working arrangements set out in the Homeworking Agreement work as expected. At the end of the trial period, the line manager will meet with the staff member to evaluate the success of the trial. The line manager will determine whether the trial has been successful and if so will confirm that the Homeworking Agreement may continue. The University reserves the right to end the Homeworking Agreement if the trial has been unsuccessful and if proposed amendments are unreasonable or unworkable, no amendments can be implemented, or the staff member's work output, quality, oversight, or similar, suffered to the detriment of the University or the staff member.
- 5.5 The arrangements which shall apply once a Homeworking Agreement is reached are outlined in Appendix 1.
- 5.6 A Homeworking Agreement can be terminated, by either the staff member or the University by giving three months' notice. This may be varied in exceptional circumstances or by mutual agreement. The University will not terminate a Homeworking Agreement without reasonable cause.
- 5.7 Where the agreement relates to regular homeworking, the staff member will return to work at University premises on termination of the agreement.
- 5.8 Where the agreement relates to permanent homeworking, the staff member will be expected to work from University premises or as detailed in their homeworking agreement.

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