

Future of Work: Managers Guidance

1. Background

Whilst it is expected that the vast majority of employees will be working back on Campus at the beginning of the next academic year, the pandemic has had a significant impact on the way people work, live and study. What is clear is that the way that many people work will be permanently affected. There has been widespread commentary both in the UK and internationally on the benefits and challenges of working from home, more flexible patterns of work being normalised and having the opportunity to now reshape and redesign the way in which organisations operate and our physical working spaces.

Flexible working allows employees to vary their working arrangements. Employees may request a change in the hours they work, a change in the times they work or the location at which they work. Further examples of different types of flexible working arrangements can be found in the Flexible Working Policy ([here](#)) and Guidance ([here](#)).

The Flexible Working Policy is unchanged by recent developments, as the policy encompasses statutory rights and allows an individual to bring forward a request for flexible working based on personal circumstances which is then considered relative to the needs of the University in delivering its services to students. It is typically a permanent variation to an individual's terms and conditions of employment, and there is a process to follow which needs to meet specified legal requirements - as set out in the Flexible Working Policy.

Employees do not have an automatic right to have their request granted. Consideration of any request must consider the need for the University to achieve its objectives efficiently.

2. Permanent Campus Based Contract of Employment (existing contractual arrangements for most staff)

Our most recent student feedback tells us that students prefer face to face teaching and being able to access staff in person, which is why those working in student or staff facing roles will be required to return fully to campus, via a phased and safely controlled approach. These colleagues may wish to request to work flexibly and can make an application to do so through the existing Flexible Working Policy ([here](#)).

All those permanently based at campus, on a full-time contract will have a dedicated desk, which may be role dependent, and all appropriate technology and equipment,

subject to the requirements of the role. Those working less than four or five days per week on a permanent basis may be required to share a desk.

3. Permanent Remote Working

Those with no face to face student or limited staff contact may request to work permanently at home. Applications can be made through the Flexible Working Policy ([here](#)) and, if agreed, all appropriate home office equipment will be provided and a risk assessment undertaken by a qualified member of staff will take place to ensure it is a suitable and safe working environment.

Those working permanently from home will be issued with a variation to their existing contract of employment and will not be provided with any working space or equipment at campus. If they are required or wish to attend campus a hot desk will be made available within team space.

4. Hybrid Working

It is clear that if a member of staff is able to work part of the time from home and part of the time from campus two dedicated workplaces cannot be provided and there has to be a primary place of work.

Therefore, the following guidance applies:

- Where it is considered a member of staff is able to work 100% from home there would be no entitlement to a desk on campus as per the definition of Permanent Remote Working above.
- Where staff work up to 60% (three days) of their time in the office they would be entitled to a desk share or use of a hot desk in team space.
- Where staff work in excess of 80% (four to five days) of their time on Campus, dependent on their role, a dedicated desk will be made available.
- The management of the desk environment would be through the Line Manager/ Head of Department.

Those who are hybrid working will only be guaranteed a dedicated desk if they work at campus for at least 80% of their working week (4/5 days). This change in space policy will enable the University to utilise its space better for the benefit of staff and students.

Hot desks and desk sharing within team spaces will be made available for those at campus up to 3 days a week and a degree of flexibility will be required with regards to hot desk location from time to time.

Hot desking is being made increasingly available and means that desks are used by different staff at different times, on an ad-hoc basis. There will be a centralised list of hot desks made available for those that require this facility, with easy identification in team spaces. Hot desking helps maximise the use of office space and encourages staff to move around the office and interact with other members of the team. Those working flexibly will be provided with appropriate technology, subject to the

requirements of the role, however will not have a duplicate set of equipment for home use. In addition, those who are hybrid working and do not have a dedicated desk will be provided with a locker or other suitable storage facilities. Our Housekeeping team work extremely hard in maintaining a clean and safe working environment and additional cleaning products will be made available in hot desk/desk sharing areas for staff to use.

If a staff member requires reasonable adjustments to their work station on campus the line manager should seek guidance, if necessary, from the Health and Safety Officer ([here](#)).

Regardless of the way in which staff work they must be easily contactable during normal hours of work and ensure their contact details can be found in the internal telephone directory.

Those who have caring responsibilities must make adequate provision while working from home and if flexibility is required to manage these responsibilities then an application can be made through the Flexible Working Policy ([here](#)).

5. Flexible working application process

If an employee would like to make a request for flexible working it is recommended that in the first instance they have an informal discussion with their line manager, prior to a formal application being made. The line manager can seek additional support from Human Resources.

Formal applications should be made to the employees line manager, by completing the flexible working request form ([here](#)). Further details are contained in the Flexible Working Policy. Once a formal request is received the line manager will arrange to meet with the employee.

The aim of the meeting is to explore the suggested working arrangement and to discuss how it might be accommodated. Alternative work patterns can also be discussed, should there be a problem accommodating the working arrangement requested.

Notification of the outcome of the meeting will normally be sent to the employee within 10 working days of the meeting taking place.

Accepting or declining the request

No application will be approved or rejected without consultation with Human Resources and the appropriate senior manager. If the request is successful the employee will receive a contract variation, confirming a trial period, reflecting the change in working arrangement and the date the change will be effective from.

All agreed requests will be subject to a 3-month trial period. This will provide the opportunity to test the new working arrangement and determine if it works for the employee, the line manager and the business area.

The manager will meet with the employee at the end of the trial period to discuss and review the arrangement. If it is deemed that the new pattern is not suitable by either party, the employee will revert to their original working pattern. If it is deemed that the new pattern is successful, the original contract variation will remain in place and the arrangement will continue on a permanent basis.

Remote working employees, maintain their existing terms and conditions of employment apart from their designated place of work which changes from the University to the remote worker's defined remote site.

If the request is unsuccessful, the employee will be notified in writing. The line manager should provide a clear and accurate explanation for the refusal, including the business reason, with sufficient reason to allow the employee to understand the decision.

An employee has the right of appeal against a declined flexible working request. The appeal should be made in writing using the Flexible Working Appeal Form ([here](#)) and sent to the Director of Human Resources within 10 working days of receipt of the outcome/decision.

6. Meetings and working in a hybrid environment

It is expected with the majority of staff returning to campus there will still be a small number of staff either working flexibly or permanently at home and therefore meeting management and ensuring inclusivity will be hugely important. Although the University has become used to meeting online there are both advantages and areas of challenge, set out below:

Advantages

- No travelling involved.
- Firmer Agendas and structured discussion as meeting technology limitations prevent background discussions and members speaking over one another.
- No requirement for a physical space.

Challenges

- Meetings perhaps being less inspirational as discussions is limited.
- Lack of necessary social contact.
- Less ability to 'read the room' and ancillary serendipitous discussions to take place.
- Strong chairing of meetings to ensure they stay on track and to time.

Although it is expected that the majority of meetings will return to being face to face from 1 September 2021, subject to government guidance, meeting organisers may wish to consider the following guidelines:

- Large structured meetings, where being remote will add additional value, should continue to be held via Zoom.
- The meeting organiser should ensure that meetings are fully inclusive and ensure that if they are to be held via zoom all participants are able to contribute equally.

Technology

The use of technology and systems is important to the successful adoption of Hybrid working and further advice and guidance is available on IT pages [\(here\)](#)

Meeting support

Meeting rooms to accommodate confidential Zoom meetings are currently limited however we are working hard to create more quiet areas and spaces to facilitate virtual meetings.

7. Boundaries

Although technology has huge benefits and has enabled the University to continue to operate, it has also impacted the physical and mental health of staff, who are often using it for prolonged periods without a break. Email traffic has significantly increased due to the non-use of landlines and staff are often using their own devices. Therefore, it is vital we now create some boundaries to ensure staff are not tied to their computers/laptops for long periods of time, or feel they should be 'on call' into the evening. The following boundaries are recommended although line managers and individual teams can set what will work for them:

- To enable staff to have proper breaks between meetings it is recommended meetings should last no longer than 30 minutes, with 50 minutes being the exception for longer meetings.
- If meetings are required to be in excess of 50 minutes then regular breaks must be put in place.
- Evening meetings should be avoided as much as possible to further support the wellbeing of staff.
- Staff should not be expected to send or respond to emails after 6pm or before 8am or at weekends. In an emergency then the staff member should be contacted by phone. There will be occasions when this is not possible however emails outside of these times should be by exception.
- All staff must have a reasonable lunch break away from their workstation and 'working lunches' should be avoided.

8. Communication

Hybrid teams require a special focus on communication as balancing campus and remote working can be challenging for all involved.

It is important for colleagues to work together to support and enable hybrid team communication and special focus will be required to ensure that everyone within the team has the information they need to perform, as well as open lines for feedback, troubleshooting, celebrating success and discussing challenges.

9. Health, Safety and Wellbeing

When an employee is working a hybrid arrangement the employee should also follow the guidance currently being provided on Home Working [\(here\)](#)

Where the employee is remote, spending four days a week or more from home, the University becomes the 'Responsible Person' with regards to the employee's office environment.

This extends to:

- Assessing their workplace for Display Screen use and equipment used.
- The Fire protection provisions in their home and risk assessing the environment in which they work for hazards

The University also has a greater responsibility for the member of staff's mental health from a health and safety perspective therefore a home visit will be necessary for permanent remote workers to establish suitability of the working environment and enable any risk to be identified and mitigated against. This home visit will be conducted by a suitably qualified member of staff who will ensure the working environment is health and safety compliant and that the workstation is appropriate.

To ensure the wellbeing of all our staff, it is strongly recommended that when employees are feeling unwell they should arrange a Covid as soon as possible and work from home, if their job allows them to, and follow the latest government guidance.

For further advice and guidance on any of the above please contact the HR Helpdesk. hrhelpdesk@stmarys.ac.uk.

10. Supporting documents

[Flexible Working Policy](#)

[Flexible Working Request Form](#)

[Flexible Working Appeal Form](#)

[Home Working Principles and Guidance](#)