University of
Reading

SCHOOL OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

Values for working together in the School of the Built Environment.

Contents

1.0 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this document is to establish a common understanding of working practices within the School of the Built Environment. It is informed by the University's <u>Values for Working Together and Professional Behaviours</u> document which provides a framework within which the University community can work together effectively.

In the context of broader University guidance, the School recognises the importance of adopting supportive working practices as a means of ensuring diversity and inclusion in the workplace. We would seek to go beyond what is normally accepted as 'good practice' across the University. This is seen to be important not only in terms of equality, but also in terms of our ability to attract and retain the best quality staff. It is further important to recognise that staff have responsibilities and interests beyond work which need to be balanced with the demands of working in a high-performing academic environment.

We are committed to the provision of an environment which promotes effective working with a necessary focus on performance. But crucially we see performance as inseparable from an environment which supports staff holistically in the promotion of health and wellbeing. We are especially committed to enabling a positive work-life balance. The School has in recent years increased in size and complexity such that it is important that this commitment is set out in the form of a formal policy. The aim is to ensure that all colleagues have a common understanding of working practices within the Schools, and a shared set of expectations.

Hence this document sets out to re-affirm the School's strong commitment to wellbeing, diversity and inclusion, while at the same time setting out a common set of expectations regarding practices and responsibilities. It is important to emphasise that the School's Leadership Team is committed to leading by example in all respects. This extends to considerations of diversity when constituting committees, forming interview panels, setting up School events and inviting keynote speakers.

2.0 THE SCHOOL OF THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT

2.1 Vision statement

Our vision is to build on established strengths to become a recognised interdisciplinary centre of excellence in education and research for the built environment. Our traditional primary focus of expertise has been construction management, but we also have longstanding and developing interests in renewable energy and environmental engineering. More recently, our strategy has been to extend our activity 'across the scales' in recognition of the role of the built environment in contributing to a range of societal challenges, e.g. prosperity, health & wellbeing and resilience. We further recognise the urban fabric of our cities as a manifestation of cultural heritage, and the means through which communities connect to the past, the present and the future. The recent advent of Architecture brings an enhanced spatial dimension to our work, together with a stronger focus on design as a means of shaping 21st Century lives.

2.2 Organisation and branding

The School of the Built Environment (SBE) comprises two departments of equal status: (i) Architecture and (ii) Construction Management and Engineering. It is recognised that we need to present different identities to different audiences, and hence the way we describe ourselves externally will not always align with how we organise ourselves internally. Architecture is presented externally as a 'School'

primarily for the purposes of student recruitment. In research contexts, we tend to put more emphasis on Architecture as an integrated part of the interdisciplinary School of the Built Environment.

We also retain the identity of the School of Construction Management and Engineering (SCME), primarily for the purposes of PGT student recruitment in international markets. More generally, we refer to Architecture and Construction Management and Engineering (CME) without the need for any organisational prefix. We are also striving to strengthen the identity of 'Energy and Environmental Engineering' within the broader interdisciplinary context of the School.

We have further chosen to maintain the brand of the Technologies for Sustainable Built Environments (TSBE) Centre beyond the duration of its EPSRC funding as an Industrial Doctoral Training Centre. The future vision for the TSBE sees it a focus for applied research in energy and environmental engineering. It is intended to provide an 'industry-friendly' portal into the School for the purposes of developing of external research collaborations.

It is recognised that it may in future be necessary to rationalise the nomenclature whereby we have 'schools within a school'. In the short term, there is seen to be no advantage in relabelling Architecture and CME as 'departments'. Also of relevance is the re-organisation of the University, such that faculties no longer exist. This may in the long-term enable new opportunities in terms of the nomenclature of academic business units.

For the sake of clarity, the expression 'Head of School' is used throughout this document to refer to the head of the School of the Built Environment. The heads of Architecture and Construction Management and engineering (CME) are correspondingly referred to as 'Heads of Department'.

2.3 Working culture

In the School of the Built Environment (SBE) we aspire to a culture of equality of opportunity for all staff and students. The University emphasises the importance of respect, responsibility and accountability in working together. There is a clear expectation that colleagues should demonstrate ethical behaviour at all times. Discrimination and unsupportive language of behaviour of any kind will not be tolerated. Within SBE we are especially focused on encouraging diversity and inclusion. We are proud to have been awarded the Athena Swan Silver Award on two consecutive occasions. At the same time, we are also conscious that there is much that we could do better. Ultimately the reality of how we operate is more important than external validation.

We share the University's strong commitment to diversity and inclusion which extends beyond issues of gender:

> *Here at the University of Reading we are committed to ensuring that all staff and students are treated with respect at all times and are given equality of opportunity in all activities.*
>
> *Through the support of senior management, robust policies and procedures, strong support structures and the provision of training opportunities we aim to promote best practice in ensuring that equal opportunities and diversity considerations are mainstreamed into our institutional functioning and inform everything we do.*
>
> *In valuing principles of equality we will create a culture which is based on principles of fairness, respect and of valuing difference. In turn, by creating and maintaining a positive environment whereby all staff and students are free from discrimination and harassment we will ensure that everyone is given the opportunity to reach their full potential in both employment and education.*

The University Strategy for 2026 further seeks to foster 'a culture of strategic thinking and continuous challenge and renewal'. In a working environment of continuous change, it is important for staff to understand the expectations placed on them and to be accountable to colleagues and students. We also strive to support a good work-life balance by accommodating flexible working where possible and

by scheduling meetings to take account of core working hours (10.00-16.00). Where ever possible, scheduling of meetings during lunchtime should be avoided. The School is also supportive of part-time working and job-share working arrangements.

3.0 WORKING PRACTICES

3.1 Independence and personal responsibility

All staff in the School of the Built Environment are expected to work independently (as appropriate for their role) and show initiative to organise their own workloads to meet agreed objectives. They are also expected to make effective use of resources and to communicate clearly and respectfully. To meet the aspirations of our working culture it is important that:

- We each share personal responsibility to prioritise workloads effectively and seek assistance from supervisors/peers as necessary.
- We engage with opportunities for continuous professional and personal development.
- We understand the overall goals of the University and the School and how we play a part in achieving these.
- We are open to change including new practices and approaches.

3.2 Professional delivery of teaching

Student expectations of academic staff are set out in the Reading Student Charter:

- Teach in an engaging and varied manner that inspires learning.
- Give timely and constructive feedback on work.
- Provide effective pastoral and learning support when needed.
- Respond, communicate and consult in a timely and effective manner.
- Recognise the student body to be a diverse collection of adults who are partners with an equally important voice in their learning.

High quality contact time with staff has always been important to students, and we remain committed to building a learning partnership with our students. At the same time students should be realistic in their expectations of staff.

3.3 Availability for students

We aspire to ensure the consistency and quality of student experience by:

- providing sufficient opportunities for UG students to book meetings on a weekly basis during term time;
- making every effort to arrange meetings with all Personal Tutees at least once a term and replying promptly to requests by Tutees for meetings or advice in addition to the regular termly meeting;
- delivering all assigned teaching as specified on the module description form (MDF), including agreed contact hours, assessment type and content;
- maintaining up-to-date module information on Blackboard. This should normally include a module guide (containing a description of all assessments including deadlines and a reading list), and a link to the MDF;
- responding promptly to emails from students within 2 working days;
- returning all summative and formative assessment to students within 15 working days, via the Student Support Centre (dissertations are exempt from the 15 day turnaround deadline);

- ensuring reasonable availability for PGT dissertation students within and beyond term time. PGT students are especially appreciate of supervisory meetings during the summer recess prior to the September submission deadline (subject to annual leave).

3.4 Teaching and learning administration and enhancement

It is further expected that all staff should contribute to the administration and enhancement of teaching and learning. This includes:

- attending Teaching Enhancement Group meetings regularly;
- representing our teaching programme at open days, visit days, summer schools and outreach events, which will include occasional weekend and/or evening working;
- participating in site visits/field classes, which may include occasional weekend working and/or working away;
- attending at least one Graduation Ceremony per year;
- Attending all relevant examination boards;
- engaging in CPD, for example though training events organised by the Higher Education Authority (HEA) or Centre for Quality Support and Development (CSTD);
- updating module description forms on an annual basis;
- activity in support of student placements;
- participating in quality assurance procedures for teaching and learning, including peer review of teaching, student module feedback and responding to comments from external examiners.

3.5 Postgraduate research students

- All academic colleagues on teaching & research (T&R) are expected to participate actively in the supervision of PGR students;
- Supervisory responsibilities frequently extend beyond the normal structure of academic terms;
- Responsibilities include participation in independent assessment processes (i.e. annual reviews, confirmation reports etc);
- Given the School's aspirations to increase PGR density there is an expectation that T&R colleagues should supervise students in their broad area of expertise;
- PGR supervisors should expect to support their graduating students by attending the relevant ceremony.

4.0 AVAILABILITY AND NOTIFICATION OF ABSENCE

4.1 Working away from campus

Academics are accorded a significant degree of autonomy in organising their work; academic contracts notably do not usually specify fixed working hours. This has real advantages in enabling academic colleagues to maximise productivity whilst balancing out-of-work responsibilities. But too often this supposed 'flexibility' translates into a 'long-hours' culture with a potentially detrimental impact on health & wellbeing.

Notwithstanding the above, academic staff are expected to be present on campus to meet basic obligations relating to teaching commitments, meetings, tutorials and administrative roles. Participation in PGR supervisory meetings is of particular importance. Colleagues are further expected to be substantively present for the purposes of engaging with the School's research ethos and working

collaborative with colleagues. Such engagement is seen to be of central importance to good academic citizenship and the desired culture of collegiality.

Failure by academic staff to meet the above expectations inevitably results in an increased burden for those members of staff who are present, often with a potential impact on wellbeing and career progression. In light of this it is important to be clear in the expectations for availability and notification of absence:

- The baseline expectation during term time is that full-time colleagues should be present at their place of work for a minimum of four days per week during term time. Working from home one-day-a-week for research purposes, or for the purpose of catching up on marking, requires no special permission. If you are working away from the University it is important that we know how to contact you and that you respond to appropriate requests in a timely fashion.
- Requests to reduce the attendance requirement to three days per week should be made in writing to the Head of School with the clear support of your Head of Department. Several such arrangements currently exist within the School in cases where there are justifying circumstances. However, it should be emphasised that the reduced attendance requirement is dependent upon operational needs. There are parts of the School where it is important for colleagues to be present for four days a week during term time due to the pattern of teaching commitments.
- Academic staff should obtain the permission of the Head of School if they are due to be away from the University for a period of more than 3 days during term time. The only exception to this requirement relates to colleagues for whom a proportion of their time is accounted for by externally-funded research contracts. In these cases the attendance requirement should be adjusted on a pro rota basis. Similar arrangements would apply to externally-funded Teaching & learning (T&L) contracts. In both cases funding must normally be on the basis of full economic costing (fEC).
- It is further recognised that enterprise and outreach activities often take place beyond campus. These are seen to be important activities which should be actively encouraged. Such activities can greatly enhance the prestige of the University and contribute to the collective benefit of the School. Colleagues are encouraged to actively celebrate such activities through the School's website and social media accounts. It is in the collective interest for these activities to be promoted as widely as possible.
- The default expectation outside of term time is that the requirement to be present at the place of work is commensurate with the operational needs of the School. It is recognised that research, enterprise and outreach activities invariably continue irrespective of academic term dates. The same is also true T&L administration/enhancement activities and PGR supervision. Even teaching commitments are increasingly likely to occur outside term time.
- Unless specifically away on approved on annual leave, there is therefore an expectation that colleagues should be on campus to attend all operational commitments irrespective of the structure of academic terms. If working from home they should also make themselves available via e-mail and/or telephone. They are further expected to respond to requests promptly.
- If you are travelling overseas you must complete an 'Overseas Travel Form' in advance of your travel date and if required the relevant risk assessment must be approved. The only exception to this is if the trip comprises a holiday as part of your requested annual leave. Please note that the submission of the 'Overseas Travel Form' does not replace the requirement to obtain permission from the Head of School if you are to be away from the University for more than three days.

In contrast, support staff are expected to work regular hours; their contracts of employment tend to specify fixed hours in recognition of the nature of administrative work and the need to be available to support others. Nevertheless, support staff are entitled to receive to an appropriate degree of flexibility provided that it doesn't conflict with operational requirements. On those occasions when support staff

are required to work out-of-hours there is an expectation that they will be awarded time-off-in-lieu. Support staff will not normally be permitted to work from home without the specific approval of the Head of School.

4.2 Annual leave

It is important that all relevant parties are aware when a colleague is away on annual leave. It is therefore incumbent upon all of us to adhere to the University's guidelines for booking annual leave. The leave year runs from 1 October each year, to the 30 September the following year.

- Full-time academic staff are entitled to 26 days Annual Leave on top of Public Holidays and University Closure days.
- Full-time support staff (those employed in Professional & Managerial or Academic & research roles at Grade 6 and above) are entitled to 26 days annual leave.
- Full-time support staff (those employed in Professional & Managerial or Academic & research roles at Grades 1-5) are entitled to 21 days annual leave during their first four years of continuous service. This increases to 25 days annual leave from their fifth year of continuous service onwards.
- Part-time employees receive pro-rota leave entitlement based on their working pattern. Spreadsheets are available on the Human Resources website for staff to calculate their current leave entitlement.
- Support staff are entitled to annual leave based on their length of service and FTE of employment. The basic leave is 21 days for 1.0FTE plus University closure days and Bank Holidays; information in relation to leave entitlement can be found on the HR webpage.

All colleagues are strongly encouraged to take their full entitlement of annual leave. Working long hours can be a contributor to workplace stress, which undoubtedly undermines productivity as well as having an adverse effect on wellbeing. There is no expectation that staff will reply to emails while on annual leave or beyond normal working hours. Sending emails outside working hours is similarly discouraged. If not on annual leave, staff are expected to be contactable irrespective of whether they are on campus or working elsewhere.

Periods of leave should normally be requested via the Employee Self Service portal at least three weeks in advance so that plans can be put in place to cover periods of absence. All requests for annual leave must be approved in advance by the Head of Department (or relevant line manager), who should not unreasonably withhold consent. A clear reason must be given in writing if consent is not given. However, leave will not normally be granted during term time or welcome week unless there are mitigating circumstances.

Annual leave can only be carried forward into the next leave year in exceptional circumstances. Requests should be made in writing to the Head of School and should be limited to five working days only.

4.3 Sickness absence

When reporting sick, all staff should follow the Sickness reporting procedure so that your line manager is aware of your absence and can maintain regular contact with you whilst you are absent from work, can ensure support in put in place where required (e.g. referral to the Occupational Health Advisor or the Employee Assistance Programme) and so that the School can ensure that appropriate operational plans are in place.

Where you may be out the office for a prolonged period such that you are unable to respond to e-mails, you should activate an out-of-office message which includes the following: 'Please note if your email is a request under the Environmental Information Regulations or the Freedom of Information Act then

please resend your mail to imps@reading.ac.uk'. The message should also direct the person enquiring to an alternative point of contact in your absence (if relevant). For advice on setting up out-of-office email messages please contact Tracey Wigmore, Executive Support Manager.

4.4 Family leave

University guidelines on family leave (including maternity, shared parental and adoption leave) are available at:

http://www.reading.ac.uk/internal/humanresources/policiesandprocedures/AbsenceandLeave/humres-familyleave.aspx

4.5 Other leave

It is further recognised that staff may occasionally need to take leave from work at short notice as a result of unforeseen circumstances or personal emergencies. If this occurs, please advise your Head of Department / line manager as soon as possible so they can agree the type of leave which would be appropriate to use under the particular circumstances in accordance with University policies and procedures.

Chris Harty
Head of School

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To be re-visited and appropriately updated in July 2020.