

# Employee health and well-being policy

## Introduction

The University recognises the important contribution that our people make to the achievement of the University's aims. As such the HR Strategy sets a positive agenda for working at the University. The University aims to be not just an employer and to deliver a staff experience that encourages commitment, loyalty and success. This is not simply determined by a competitive suite of terms and conditions of service, but by fostering a working environment that protects the physical and mental well-being of our staff.

This policy document provides a framework within which the University will encourage and facilitate working practices and services that support employee well-being. It aims to draw upon good practice, recognising existing informal arrangements around campus, and to be flexible rather than prescriptive.

It is vital of course that each employee, regardless of their role or status, makes a full contribution to the University, but it is recognised that flexibility and diversity of working practice derives mutual benefits. There is abundant evidence that a flexible approach to working patterns may have significant organisational benefits, including reduced absenteeism, improved morale and greater productivity.

This policy is applicable to all staff but recognises the diversity of contractual and other working arrangements that exist. The policy is complementary to the University values and established policies including:

- Working Together: A strategy for success
- Values for Working Together and Professional Behaviours
- Capability
- Disciplinary
- Equality & Diversity
- Family Leave
- Flexible retirement
- Harassment
- Mediation
- Review and Restructuring
- Sickness Absence Policy.

# Values for Working Together

The University is a place of learning and endeavour, a community of staff and students. Some of us contribute to that community by engaging directly with teaching, learning and research, others support and enable those core activities.

Our collective commitment is to excellence, in all our activities, and this is underpinned by certain essential values that both employees and the University should encourage and develop.

- **Freedom** within the law to question, put forward new ideas and challenge one another intellectually to contribute to the advancement of knowledge.
- **Respect** for the rights, differences and dignity of all those who study, work and lead within our community.
- Members of our community **work together** to demonstrate ethical professional behaviours at all times.
- **Communication** is honest and open, ideas and opinions are sought and given due consideration, and resulting decisions are acted upon.
- The need for **responsible stewardship** of our environment, facilities and resources is understood and respected.
- We are all **accountable** for our actions and act with professionalism so that our positive contributions are recognised and valued.
- We strive to continuously improve our work and to be **aspirational** for our own and the University's future.

These values are essential to the success and well-being of our University, and will inform and guide all our practice, policy and activity.

# Promoting health & well-being

The University is committed to creating a workplace that embraces flexibility and gives its staff the best opportunities to manage their time and commitments. It is vital therefore that this message is communicated to staff, to breed confidence that requests for flexibility will be given appropriate consideration. The University must also provide line managers with adequate support and guidance to enable them to respond positively to such requests.

The University will make the best use of all internal communication tools to:

1. Promote its commitment to offering a range of flexible working arrangements, and;
2. Provide advice and guidance, to staff and managers, in recognising and addressing work-related stress, and;
3. Provide broad information to allow staff to make informed choices about improving lifestyles and well-being, and;
4. Promoting the related facilities and services available to staff.

The University is committed to providing a safe and healthy working environment for its staff and recognises the importance of fostering psychological as well as physical well-being. Stress is a complex subject and the University has to deal with its effects irrespective of its source.

The University aims to reduce the levels of stress so far as its reasonable practicable. This is achieved in practice through appropriate job design, creating a supportive work environment, training and supporting managers and employees to assist them in preventing and coping with workplace stress, and supporting employees if and when they are experiencing stress.

There are a number of courses, workshops and training sessions for managers and employees on how to prevent and manage work-related stress, run by CSTD in conjunction with Human Resources, Health and Safety Services and Counselling and Wellbeing. The University also run a number of different Supporting You event days across the year that all staff are encouraged to participate in.

Other health and well-being course offered via CSTD include:

- Absence management;
- Time management;
- Supporting You: Dealing with change & uncertainty;
- Supporting You: Relaxation techniques;
- Supporting You: MBTI & working under pressure;
- Supporting You: Avoiding Burnout;
- Effective communication to manage conflict
- Assertive communication skills
- Having difficult conversations
- Managing flexible working
- Supporting you: effectively managing stress
- Tame your emails
- Supporting you: how to be fabulously happy (most of the time).

The above is by no means an exhaustive list and all members of staff are encouraged to look at the CSTD intranet pages on a regular basis for an up to date list of current courses. Bespoke training sessions can be arranged to meet the specific issues of an area. Please speak with your HR Partner/Advisor.

The University acknowledges that for some staff, managing a high volume of emails can be a source of stress. Most posts at the University require staff to send and receive emails as part of their working day during normal working hours. This should always be done ensuring that messages do not give offence, either in tone or content. A specific email guidance document has been developed to provide support and advice on best practice when sending and receiving emails. This document is available at: [http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/humanresources/humres-E-mail\\_guidance.pdf](http://www.reading.ac.uk/web/FILES/humanresources/humres-E-mail_guidance.pdf)

The University has excellent sporting and recreational facilities and staff should be reminded regularly of the range of activity available to them. The Sports Park management will be consulted with a view to developing a programme to promote its facilities to staff and to encourage regular use.

# Work-life balance

Work-Life balance is very prominent in the public mind and is closely associated with the prevention of unhealthy work-related stress. By taking steps to improve the working environment through effective, flexible and sensitive management the University will hope to enable individuals to cope successfully with the demands and pressures of work.

It is generally accepted that a flexible approach to working arrangements reaps benefits for both employer and employee. There are many different ways of structuring working patterns including, but not limited to, the following:

- Part-time working;
- Term-time only working;
- Flexible working hours;
- Compressed working hours;
- Annualised hours;
- Job sharing;
- Working at or from home.

Annex 1 describes how some of these flexible working arrangements might operate.

Certain employees already have a legal right to request flexible working in recognition of particular circumstances, e.g. caring responsibilities for young children, disabled children and adult dependants; however the University will give due consideration to any reasonable request for flexibility. Managers are encouraged to be open to such suggestions, but employees must appreciate the constraints that might demand a refusal or modification of the request, such as:

- The burden of additional costs;
- A detrimental effect on ability to meet customer demand;
- The inability to reorganise work amongst existing staff;
- The inability to recruit additional staff;
- A detrimental impact on quality or performance;
- An inability to match the hours requested with sufficient work;
- Planned structural changes.

Requests to work flexibly should be made formally, following a procedure in Annex 2.

# Staff support and counselling

As part of its commitment to improving health and well-being, the University has introduced a free, confidential, 24 hour Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) with FirstAssist. The EAP will help employees who are experiencing stress or anxiety caused by issues in their personal or work life, and give them the practical and emotional support they need. The service is fully accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), ISO 9001:2008, and the Employee Assistance Professionals Association (EAPA).

The EAP provides:

- 24/7 Telephone counselling - covering a wide range of work-related and personal issues including, but not limited to, finance, stress, bereavement, bullying, relationship difficulties, managing work life balance.
- Face-to-face counselling - employees can have a number of face-to-face counselling sessions. With a comprehensive network of counsellors, employees can choose to meet a counsellor at a convenient location and should not have to travel far.
- 24/7 Legal and financial information - many issues including relationship breakdowns, debt worries, neighbour disputes can lead to feelings of anxiety and stress. Fully qualified legal professionals provide practical and easily understood information.
- 24/7 Health & Well-being advice - employees can have instant and confidential access to health and lifestyle information from a team of doctors, nurses and specialists. Issues covered include: diet, nutrition, medical issues and vaccinations.
- Online Health & Well-being Portal - employees have access to a dedicated portal for information and factsheets on a wide range of topics. The portal also provides further information on the services available and how to access them. Employees can also test themselves using the online Health Risk Assessment.
- Manager support - a series of online factsheets and guides for managers on dealing with sensitive issues and difficult conversations

The helpline number is: 0800 716 017.

Managers can refer employees with difficult and sensitive issues to the EAP for confidential help and advice.

The University also has an arrangement with Recourse; [www.recourse.org.uk](http://www.recourse.org.uk), to provide telephone and online support and guidance on a range of issues.

The University's Counselling Service may also be accessed where appropriate and subject to availability. A charge of £50 per session applies, but this may be waived in certain circumstances. Please contact your HR Partner/Advisor for further information.

## Managing sickness absence

While the general thrust of this policy is toward creating a healthy working environment, staff will continue to be absent from work on grounds of ill-health, to varying degrees and it is vital that the University improves upon its arrangements for recording, monitoring and managing sickness absence.

A number of benefits accrue from a more robust approach to the management of sickness absence, including reduced absenteeism and the earlier identification of problems and trends. This can be particularly significant when sickness absence records and patterns point to serious health concerns.

Detailed procedures for the reporting and management of sickness absence are contained with the University's sickness absence policy.

Structural changes within the Human Resources Office will allow more time for HR Professional services team to take a more proactive approach to sickness absence management, calling on support and advice from the University's occupational health providers as appropriate.

## Services & contacts

The key services relevant to this policy are shown below, with contact details.

Name	Location
<b>Human Resources Office</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor, Whiteknights House. Extension 8751
<b>University Counselling Service</b>	1 <sup>st</sup> Floor, The Health Centre, 9 Northcourt Avenue, Reading RG2 7HE. 0118 975 1823
<b>Health and Safety Services</b>	Room 110, Physics Building. Extension 8888
<b>Centre for Staff Training and Development</b>	2 <sup>nd</sup> Floor, Whiteknights House. Extension 7097
<b>SportsPark</b>	Extension 8799

The University's recognised trade unions (UCU, UNITE and UNISON) are also useful sources of support and guidance for staff.



## Examples of flexible working arrangements

### Flexible working hours scheme (grades 1-5)

It is essential for the successful operation of any flexible working hours scheme that appropriate levels of cover are maintained; operation of the scheme is conditional upon this and it is the responsibility of the relevant line manager to ensure compliance.

It should also be noted that the scheme is best-suited to staff who work regular hours and may not be suitable in areas where working hours are dictated by service provision.

1. Core hours are 9.30 a.m. to 12.00 noon and 2.00 p.m. to 4.30 p.m. All staff will normally be in the workplace during these hours.
2. Your working hours will not normally start earlier than 8.00 a.m. or finish any later than 6.00 p.m.
3. At least 30 minutes must be taken for a lunch break between 12.00 noon and 2.00 p.m.
4. It is permissible to carry a balance of up to +/- 7 hours from one calendar month to another. It is not permissible to carry a deficit forward for two consecutive calendar months.
5. Doctors, dentists and other appointments should, as far as possible, be made outside of core hours. Your line manager must authorise absences which, exceptionally, fall within core time.
6. Flexi-time sheets must be completed daily (in hours and minutes, rounded down to the nearest fifteen minutes) and approved weekly by your line manager, who will maintain appropriate records.
7. Any abuse of the scheme or fraudulent entries on the flexi-time sheet will be subject to disciplinary procedures.

### Compressed hours

This is where an employee works their total agreed hours over fewer working days. For example, a five-day working week is compressed into four days or the employee works nine days out of ten in a fortnight.

### Annualised hours

This is a system that calculates the hours an employee works over the whole year. The annual hours are usually split into 'set shifts,' which cover the majority of the year and 'reserve shifts,' which the employee can be asked to work at short notice as demand dictates. In practice the system is often used by shift workers.

The typical formula would be:

No of weeks per year, less contractual annual leave, bank/public holidays and closure days, multiplied by the number of working hours per week.

## Requesting Flexible Working

The procedure for requesting flexible working will be as follows:

1. A member of staff wishing to request flexible working should submit a written request to the relevant Head of School (or equivalent) outlining the reason for the request. The request should state the proposed effective date, the changes required, the effect these changes may have on the University and how this might be dealt with. A standard form, available from the Human Resources Office, should be completed.
2. Within 28 days of receiving the written request the Head of School will arrange to meet with the member of staff to discuss the request and how best it might be accommodated. The meeting will provide an opportunity to consider alternative working patterns should this be necessary.
3. The member of staff will have the right to be accompanied to the meeting by a work colleague or a trade union representative.
4. The Head of School will advise the member of staff of his/her decision within 14 days of the meeting, providing detailed reasons for any variation to the request or refusal. (Where a member of staff is exercising their legal right to request flexible working, the request can only be refused on specific grounds, as listed on page 2).
5. The decision must be reported to the relevant HR Partner/Advisor who will advise as to the need for a Staffing Request Form to be completed, and will action any necessary variation of contract.
6. A variation to a work pattern may be made on a permanent or time-limited basis. It may be advisable to include a trial period in any agreement.
7. In circumstances where a member of staff is exercising a legal right to request flexible working, and the application is refused or amended, the member of staff will be informed of their right of appeal. An appeal should be made in writing to the Director of Human Resources, stating the grounds of appeal, within 14 days of being informed of the decision.
8. An appeal meeting will then be arranged to hear the appeal within 14 days of receipt of the appeal letter. The member of staff will have the right to be accompanied to the appeal meeting by a colleague or a trade union representative.
9. The outcome of the appeal will then be communicated to the member of staff within 14 days of the appeal meeting.
10. No further request for flexible working can be made until a period of 12 months has elapsed following the last request.