

Hybrid Working Scheme Review 2022

Scope of the review

There were two main guiding principles of the review. Firstly, that it was an opportunity to review the process so that it is as light touch as possible. Secondly, that the review should ensure the scheme achieves a balance between providing as much flexibility as possible for staff whilst maintaining essential on-campus services and having consideration to the fact that we are a campus-based university.

Information for the review has been gathered via:

- A survey of directors/heads of department
- 1-2-1 feedback meetings with a cross-section of line managers from throughout the University. These were primarily line managers involved in the consultation process when setting up the scheme. The majority of these managers gathered feedback from their own team members and a couple also gathered feedback from other colleagues within their directorate; therefore a total of 14 teams were represented.
- Email feedback provided by other key stakeholders – Occupational Health (OH), Information Services (IS), Assistant Director of Estate Planning, Staff EDI networks
- Analysis of data on applications and responses, including equality data
- Information on practice at peer universities gathered from the Employee Relations network

Findings

- The HWS has proved to be **popular amongst professional services staff**.

Applications were received from 46.7% of the overall professional services staff population. Excluding staff in frontline services (who make up approx. 23% of total professional services staff), the **proportion of applications is approximately 61%**.

- The HWS has been **widely accommodated by managers**, in line with the over-arching principle that managers should seek to facilitate hybrid working where operationally possible.

Overall **86.3% of applications were approved** and 13.7% declined.

- The **role classification of applications using the 'RAG' status** can be broken down as follows:



- Approximately three quarters of managers consulted felt that the 60:40 office to home split was **about the right balance for roles within their teams**. However, there were some calls from line managers, heads of service and directors **for greater flexibility to adjust the balance where necessary, especially to respond to market forces**.

- **There was a call for simplification of the approval process** in line with the guiding principle of making the process as light touch as possible. Feedback indicated that managers felt the process was appropriate when the scheme was initially launched, but now that the principles are clear and experience has grown, there is room for relaxation of the process.
- There are **significant gaps in data (affecting about a third of applications)** which are primarily due to errors that occurred through the original two-stage approval process (involving director-level approval) coupled with the limitations of the Staff Connect system. **The data needs to be improved to provide a sound base for future monitoring.**
- Feedback gathered by managers from their team members indicates that staff generally view the scheme positively due to the **individual benefits of improved work-life balance, financial savings and an enhanced sense of trust.**
- The most significant **challenges relate to achieving team cohesion** and, for managers, **ensuring cover to maintain service delivery (in some areas)** and achieving the **right balance in managing workload/performance** remotely without micro-managing.
- Work is ongoing to **improve the infrastructure and working environment that support hybrid working.** This includes the launch of the “Tech Shop” scheme by IS in July 2022, funding to equip 20 more meeting rooms with the technology required for hybrid meetings and future plans to look at driving efficiencies in the use of space over the next year.

The future of hybrid working

The HWS Review Panel made a number of recommendations to enhance the scheme, which have now been approved by JSNCC and EG. In doing so they carefully balanced the wishes of individual staff members regarding work-life balance, the views of line managers regarding what works on the ground from an operational/service delivery perspective and the views of directors/heads of service from a broader strategic perspective. The latter include, for example, considerations regarding the University’s offering to staff in comparison to external competition and the extent to which the University wishes to retain its key selling point as a campus university in the region.

With effect from September 2022, the following actions will be taken to enhance the scheme:

- There will be **Director discretion regarding the maximum permitted number of remote working days.** The **standard maximum will remain as two days per week** – meaning a 60:40 office to home ratio – but Directors will have discretion to specify parameters within their area that exceed the standard maximum, subject to guidelines. This allows working practices to be more agile in view of business needs, particularly to take into account market forces in different areas.
- We will **keep the standard policy under review**, taking into consideration the impact on the student experience and changes to service needs over time. The 2022-23 academic year will see students return to campus fully for the first time since the

pandemic and so it would have been premature to make a more radical change to arrangements ahead of this.

- In order to make the process more 'light touch', we have **simplified the application approval process so that Directors are no longer required to sign off on individual applications**. Managers and staff fed back that the additional level of authorisation in Staff Connect proved cumbersome and time consuming. It also led to a number of errors, which may have slowed things down.
- There will be **no annual application window**. Both new starters and existing staff who are not already in the scheme can apply at any time.
- **Additional support** has been arranged to support managers with the challenges in leading hybrid teams – see here: [Leading Hybrid Teams](#). This will be in addition to the modules already available in the [Future of Work](#) suite of e-learning on Staff Moodle.