

Flexible Working Policy and Procedures

Introduction

George Watson's College ("the School") believes that where flexible working can be accommodated, this is helpful in increasing staff motivation, promoting work-life balance, reducing stress and improving performance and productivity. The policy is part of the School's commitment to family friendly working and is aligned to the core principle of the School, *ex corde caritas* – love from the heart. This policy sets out the School's approach to flexible working arrangements which is in accordance with the [ACAS code of practice](#) on handling requests to work flexibly in a reasonable manner.

Requests for flexible working may be made for any reason and are not restricted to members of staff with family care commitments, using the procedure at Appendix 1.

This policy provides guidance to members of staff in relation to their legal right to request flexible working. Whilst the School is not obliged to grant flexible working requests, it does have a legal duty to consider such requests seriously. The School will only refuse a request when there are sound and objective reasons for doing so.

Policy Aims

The aims of this Policy and associated procedures are as follows:

- To ensure that the School complies with its legal requirements and in relation to the ACAS code of practice on flexible working requests
- To provide a clear framework and comprehensive guidance for flexible working requests and the associated decision making processes
- To help support our employees in striking a good work-life balance, wherever possible.

Scope

This Policy and associated procedures applies to all staff (i.e. employees) directly employed by George Watson's College who meet all of the eligibility criteria.

Eligibility

In order to make a request under this policy a member of staff must:

- Be employed by the School, i.e. this does not apply to agency workers
- Have worked at the School for a minimum of 26 weeks' continuous service at the date of the request being made, and
- Have not made a request to work flexibly in the preceding 12 month period.

The process could take up to 3 months to complete, from receipt of the request to decision making and appeals.

Please be aware that depending on the time of year that the request is made, it may not always be possible to give a decision in the timescales listed. This may be to do with timetabling or class allocation. Any such reason will always be made clear to the applicant as soon as possible after the application has been submitted.

General Principles

The policy is underpinned by the following principles:

- Requests will be considered promptly, fairly and with sensitivity

- Each request will be considered in line with the needs of the department/business area, including any possible impact on other staff and service/teaching provision. In some cases, this may mean that it will not be possible to agree to a request.

Types of Flexible Working

Flexible working describes any working arrangement where the number of hours, time or place where work is undertaken is varied from standard practice. This includes, but is not limited to the following:

- Change to number of hours
- Change to times required to work
- Working from home
- Reduction in working week
- Working pattern changes, e.g. term time only
- Career/study breaks
- Job sharing arrangements
- Winding down or phased retirement plans, in accordance with pension scheme rules

Job sharing is an arrangement where two part time members of staff share a role. These arrangements can be complicated and flexibility by job sharing partners is needed in order for this arrangement to work effectively. However, an appreciation that job sharing partners will have other commitments outside the workplace is also important to make this arrangement work.

Phased retirement is for support staff wishing to reduce their hours prior to retirement.

Relevant Legislation

The following legislation is relevant in relation to the School's Flexible Working Policy:

The Children and Families Act 2014 (and subsequent amendments)

Employment Rights Act 1996 (and subsequent amendments)

Equality Act 2010

Other Relevant Policies

[Grievance Policy and Procedures](#)

Questions or Complaints

If an employee feels they have been treated unfavourably, or the policy has not been applied appropriately, they should first consider raising the issue informally with their line manager, PLT member or Human Resources. If the matter cannot be addressed or resolved informally, the School's Grievance Policy and Procedure should be used.

Effective Date

The Flexible Working Policy and associated procedures are effective from February 2023. This policy supersedes any previous policies or procedures relating to working time.

Approval and Review

The owner of this policy is the Head of Human Resources.

The Flexible Working Policy has been approved by the Staff Committee of the Governing Council, following endorsement by the Principal's Leadership Team and ICE Committee.

In line with the agreed schedule, the School will review the Flexible Working Policy at least every two years, or as soon as practicable after any change of relevant legislation, to ensure that the policy and associated procedures continue to comply with current employment legislation and to meet the School's operational needs.

Date of next review: Spring 2025

Appendices

- Appendix 1 Flexible Working Procedure
- Appendix 2 Flexible Working Application Form (parts 1 and 2)
- Appendix 3 Guidance Notes for Staff
- Appendix 4 Explanatory Flow Charts for Employees and Decision Makers

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Appendix 1

Flexible Working Procedure

Before commencing the formal process of applying for flexible working, members of staff who are considering their options are encouraged to explore possible options and/or impact on their salaries, leave and pension arrangements in an informal manner with Human Resources, Payroll or their direct line manager, without prejudice to any formal application.

Once a member of staff has made a decision to apply for flexible working a formal procedure is needed, in order to comply with the legislation that supports this process. The procedure is outlined below.

Making a Request for Flexible Working

All requests should be made formally in writing through the completion of the School's Flexible Working Application Form (Annex 2) and be submitted to the Human Resources Department.

As it can take up to 3 months from receipt of the original request to the process ending it is recommended members of staff submit their request for flexible working as soon as possible.

It may not always be possible to agree to a request made at particular times of the year. For example, a request for a change to working pattern from the start of a school session could not be confirmed until the timetabling process is underway.

Only one application can be made within any 12 month period.

Guidance notes for members of staff considering making a request are available at Appendix 3.

Meeting

Within 28 days (4 weeks) of receipt of the request the member of staff will be invited to attend a meeting.

For teaching staff this will usually be with the Head of School, Head of Department and Head of HR. Other relevant managers could be invited as appropriate, for example Deputy Heads.

For support staff this will usually be with the Head of the Department/Director. The Head of Human Resources will be present at all meetings.

The aim of the meeting is to find out more about the proposed working arrangements and how they could be of benefit to the members of staff and the School. Where a meeting is held, the member of staff has the right to be accompanied by a work colleague, if they wish.

Where a request can be met without further discussion a meeting may not be necessary.

Decisions on whether or not a request can be granted will be based upon the School's ability to deliver high quality and efficient services. Other considerations taken into account include,

- Impact of changing hours and pay on departmental costs
- Health and safety requirements, e.g. home working
- Impact on others, redistribution of work elsewhere
- Long term problems caused by the proposal
- Potential indirect or direct discrimination
- Consistency of approach; equal opportunities

Not all working patterns or flexible working options will be suitable for all departments. It may also be difficult to accommodate flexible working requests from a number of employees in the same area.

Outcome

The request will be considered weighing up the potential benefits to the member of staff and to the School against any adverse impact of implementing the proposal. Previous requests may be reviewed for consistency purposes but each request must be considered on a case by case basis, having due regard to equal opportunities for all. Agreeing to one employee's request will not set a precedent or create a right for another employee to be granted a similar change to their working pattern.

The member of staff will be informed in writing of the decision within 14 days (2 weeks) of the meeting.

The request may be granted in full or in part: for example, the School may propose a modified version of the request, the request may be granted on a temporary basis, or the member of staff may be asked to try the flexible working arrangement for a trial period.

All decisions will be documented and recorded in Human Resources in a central register.

Temporary/Trial Periods

Where a trial is offered, the member of staff may be asked to relax deadlines for processing and implementing a request.

Trial periods may be suggested to ensure the effectiveness and suitability of the arrangement for both the member of staff and the School. Trials will be implemented on the basis that:

- They are short term, normally no longer than 3 months
- All parties agree to the trial
- Agreed measures of success are agreed at the outset
- Any extension of the trial is agreed by all
- At the end of the trial a formal review is undertaken which includes discussion with any member of staff who is potentially affected.

Upon successful completion of the trial, any change agreed will be a permanent change to the employee's terms and conditions of employment unless a further trial or temporary period is agreed.

Granted Requests

Where a request is granted the member of staff and the manager/s involved will discuss how and when the changes will take effect. Providing that agreement is not given on a temporary or on a trial period basis, a permanent change will be made to the employee's terms and conditions. This may include pro rata adjustments to salary and leave entitlements.

Any changes to terms and conditions will be put in writing, by Human Resources, and sent to the member of staff as an amendment to his/her terms and conditions of employment as soon as is reasonably practicable.

Job Share arrangements are a possibility subject to operational requirements. Terms will be agreed for each case and confirmed in the letter.

Refused Requests

Reasons for the refusal of any request will be provided in writing and must be a reason set out by the legislation i.e.

- the burden of additional costs is unacceptable;
- an inability to reorganise work among existing staff;
- an inability to recruit additional staff;
- the School considers the change will have a detrimental impact on quality;
- the School considers the change will have a detrimental impact on performance;
- the School considers the change will have a detrimental effect on ability to meet pupil, customer or service demand;
- there is insufficient work for the periods the member of staff proposes to work; and
- where the request does not fit into planned structural changes

No refusal will be made until the Human Resources Department has been consulted. All decisions to refuse a request must be justified and fully documented.

Timescale Adjustments

Where any timescales cannot be met, for example due to staff absence, School holidays or peak periods, the member of staff will be asked if they are prepared to relax the timescale for consideration of their request.

Review and Monitoring

All decisions will be documented and a central register held in Human Resources. This register may be used in making future decisions and/or for monitoring and analysis of patterns that may emerge.

All flexible working arrangements must have a formal review with the member of staff and their line manager. The review must be documented and should consider whether the arrangement is providing the original outcomes discussed at the initial meeting. Both parties should be prepared to make minor adjustments to the arrangement if circumstances change or the review highlights the need.

Documentation of the review must be sent into the Human Resources Department.

Support, Complaints and Appeals

If any member of staff is unclear at any stage throughout the process he/she should contact the Human Resources department for assistance.

If a member of staff is dissatisfied with the way in which his/her request has been handled he/she should raise a grievance under the School's Grievance Procedure (this is separate to the appeal procedure outlined below).

If an employee wishes to appeal against the outcome, they must do so in writing to the Principal, within 10 working days of receipt of the outcome of their flexible working request. Any appeal must:

- confirm the grounds of appeal
- confirm what outcome the employee is seeking
- include any additional evidence, where relevant to the appeal

The Principal will acknowledge receipt of the appeal and will appoint a Chair of the appeal hearing, who will be a member of PLT not involved in the original decision.

In some circumstances, employees can complain to an Employment Tribunal or to the ACAS arbitration scheme. Details are available on the [ACAS website](#), along with information about how mediation may help the employee and the School reach an agreement.

Appendix 2

Flexible working Application (part 1)

Please give the completed form to the Human Resources Department.

| | |
|---|--------|
| Employee Name: | |
| Employee Number: | |
| Job Title and Department: | |
| I have worked continuously as an employee of the School or the last 26 weeks | (tick) |
| I have not made a previous flexible working request in the last 12 months | (tick) |
| Describe your current working pattern (days/hours/times worked): | |
| Describe the working pattern you would like to work in future (days/hours/times worked): | |
| I would like this working pattern to commence from: | |
| What impact do you think the proposed change would have on the School, on the service to pupils and staff and your colleagues? How do you feel this impact might be dealt with? Please read the Flexible Working Requests - Guidance Notes for Staff | |
| Is this application a request for reasonable adjustment in response to a disability, as defined by the Equality Act 2010? Yes/No | |
| Signature: Date: | |

Flexible Working Application Form (part 2)

To be completed by the Head of Department/Line Manager and returned to HR

| | | |
|---|-------------|-------------|
| Employee Name: | | |
| Employee Number: | | |
| Job Title: | | |
| Department: | | |
| Flexible working arrangements agreed (provide full details of new arrangements): | | |
| Permanent change to contractual terms | (tick) | Start date: |
| Temporary change to contractual terms (incl trial) | Start date: | End date: |
| If temporary/trial provide explanation: | | |
| Manager name (print): | | |
| Manager signature: | Date: | |
| <p>Manager to send this form to the Human Resources Department HR will confirm contractual changes in writing to the member of staff and make necessary changes to payroll and employee record</p> | | |

| | | |
|---|-------|--|
| Flexible working arrangements rejected | | |
| Reason for rejection (refer to policy for valid reasons) | | |
| Explain reasoning: | | |
| Further comments: | | |
| Manager name (print): | | |
| Manager signature: | Date: | |
| HR informs the member of staff giving a full explanation. HR record decision and retains form | | |

Appendix 3

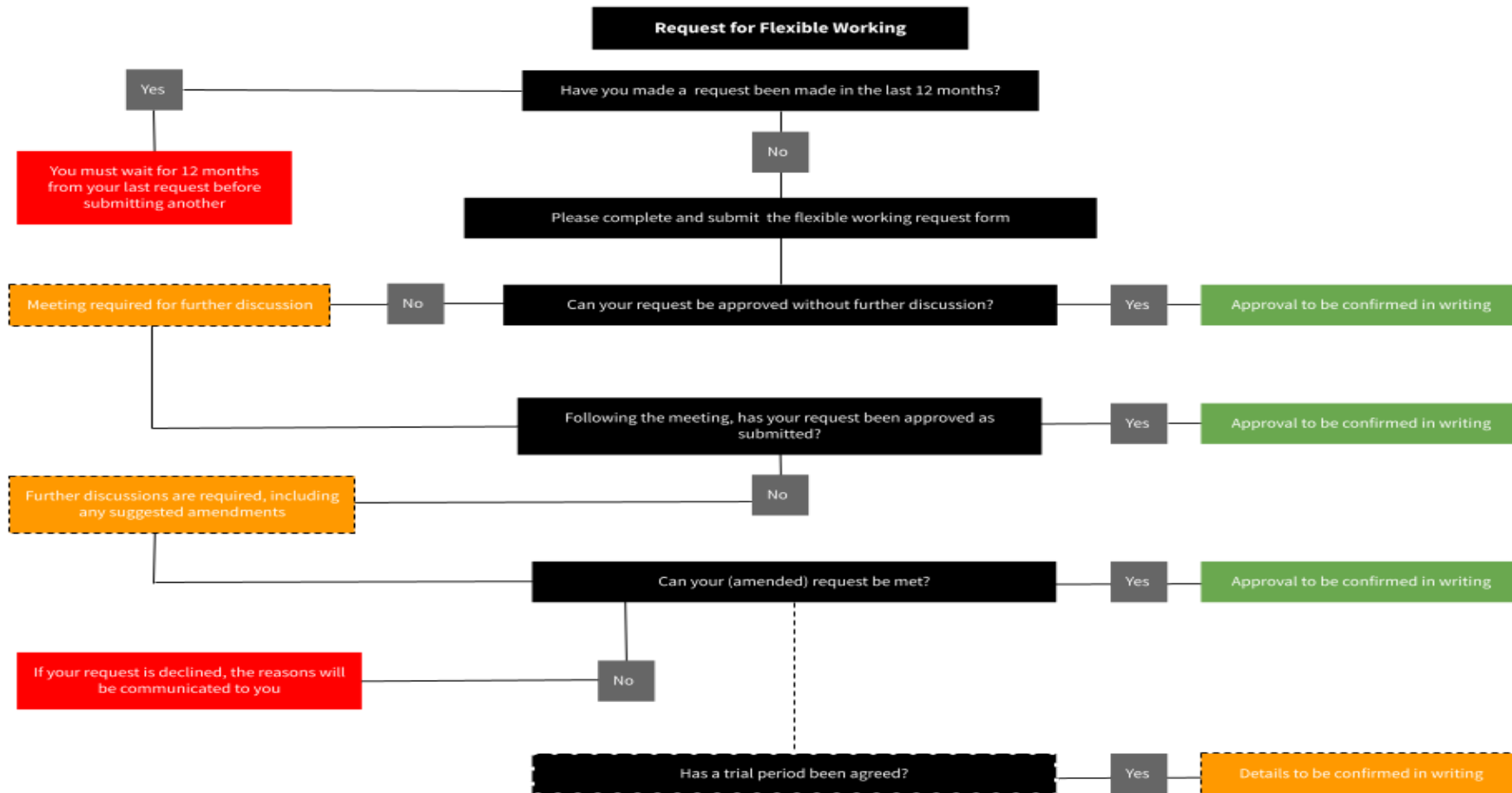
Guidance Notes for Staff

This guidance should be read in conjunction with the Flexible Working Policy and Procedures.

Finding the right work-life balance is important for all of us in terms of motivation and commitment to our work. Flexible working arrangements can be beneficial for both employees and the School. However, please bear in mind the following as you make your application.

1. The arrangements need to suit the School as well as yourself. You have a right to request flexible working, not a right for this to be approved.
2. You are requesting a permanent change to your terms and conditions of employment, so you cannot expect to automatically revert to your original hours at a future date. Any future changes would be through the same application process and will depend on the School needs and budget at that time. If you are only requesting an informal short-term temporary arrangement to deal with personal issues, such as reduced hours for a couple of months to care for a sick relative, discuss this with your manager as it may not be appropriate/ necessary to use this procedure.
3. Consider what impact your requested arrangements would have on the work you do, the service we provide to pupils, parents, colleagues, and the rest of your team. How would these needs be met, for example:
 - Could the job be done differently, but equally effectively?
 - Would a replacement/cover be required or could the work be done at a different time or in a different way?
 - Are there any potential costs or savings?
 - Does this present any development opportunities for others in the team?
 - For academic staff you should consider the effect on timetables and pupils
 - If you are on probation will this be affected or need to be extended?
4. Your manager will arrange to meet with you to discuss your request. This provides the opportunity to explore the potential benefits of your request and how it might be accommodated. It will help your application if you have thought this through as described in Section 3 and completed the appropriate section on the application form. You do not have to explain the reasons for your request but it might help your manager to understand your needs in order to explore the best way to meet both these and those of the School.
5. Your manager is free to explore alternative suggestions with you in order to try to find a compromise solution. S/he may suggest a temporary or trial period if they have justifiable reservations, or suggest a different start date e.g. if other measures need to be put in place in order to make your request workable.
6. Agreeing to a request from a colleague does not set a precedent. Your manager must consider each case individually based on the impact on the School. If there are already a number of other members of staff working flexibly in your area your manager may be unable to approve any further requests due to the impact on the pupils and/or School.
7. It may be that the type of flexible arrangements you would like are not suitable for the type of role for which you are employed. In which case you may need to consider alternative roles if you wish to pursue this.
8. Having weighed up the situation, there is no legal obligation to grant the request if it cannot be accommodated. Your manager may turn down a request as long as the reason for turning it down is one of the reasons set out in the policy.
9. If you are working here on a visa please consult HR before making a request as any changes to your contract may affect your visa.
10. Once a decision has been reached this will be confirmed in writing to you.

Appendix 4 Explanatory Flow Chart of Process for Employees



Explanatory Flow Chart of Process for Decision Makers

