



New Ways of Working: Frequently Asked Questions

Contents

FAQs for team leaders	2
General principles of the New Ways of Working scheme	2
Making decisions about New Ways of Working applications	2
Reviewing and managing New Ways of Working	4
FAQs for employees	5
The New Ways of Working scheme	5
The application and decision-making process	7
Ongoing arrangements	8



FAQs for team leaders

General principles of the New Ways of Working scheme

Why does the framework not include an option for working remotely all the time?

The NWW Framework draws on the experience of the University's staff during the Covid-19 pandemic and seeks to facilitate informal arrangements for staff to continue to benefit from new working patterns that are effective and benefit their work-life balance. While many of us found ways to work effectively during the pandemic, once most staff return to working on site for at least some of the time, our way of working will change again. More activities will happen face-to-face, and there are few roles that would not benefit from some time on site, interacting with colleagues in person and attending meetings and events. This is good for relationships and teamworking, even where hybrid meetings are possible. It is not anticipated that many roles will be suitable for fully, or even majority, remote-working arrangements. However, staff wishing to request to work 100% remotely can do so through the formal flexible working process, which lead to a contractual change (NWW arrangements will remain non-contractual changes).

How do New Ways of Working discussions link to PDR discussions?

In short, they don't. New Ways of Working discussions should be completely separate to PDR discussions, although in future years PDR discussions may be one of the methods you use to check in with your team member on how well any changed working arrangements are working for them.

Who should pay for any 'office' equipment that an employee may need to work from home?

Once all pandemic measures are lifted those who work from home will be doing so from choice and therefore, if they don't already have the necessary furniture they should provide it for themselves. However, if the equipment is needed because of a disability, or for a Health and Safety reason, the department should buy it (follow normal purchasing arrangements). If the equipment is to be used more than occasionally for domestic use the department should seek advice from the tax team to make sure there are no tax implications.

There may be other exceptional circumstances in which a department considers it is appropriate to purchase home-working equipment. In such circumstances it is important that any local policy is applied consistently. As above, if the equipment is to be used more than occasionally for domestic use the advice of the tax team should be sought.

In the very rare circumstances where the value of the equipment purchased by the individual would be sufficient to bring the overall monthly income below the National Minimum Wage, please seek advice from the Reward Team before agreeing to the purchase.

Making decisions about New Ways of Working applications

If I have more applications for remote working from my team than I can accommodate how should I decide which applications to agree and which to reject?

Detailed [guidance for team-leaders on decision-making](#) has been provided, to make sure that key issues including equality and fairness are considered. Where team-leaders require further advice local HR teams can provide support.



[Should we agree to requests to work from home if staff have caring responsibilities for children or adults with care needs?](#)

During the pandemic, whilst schools and other care facilities were closed, many staff did an extraordinary job balancing care responsibilities with working from home. To allow the University to operate in exceptional circumstances, some staff were permitted to flex their normal contracted hours to accommodate caring responsibilities. Small children and other family members 'zoom-bombing' meetings was understood to be unavoidable. The University also de-prioritised some activities to enable staff to have workloads that were manageable.

As we return to 'business as usual', pre-pandemic expectations will resume. Anyone who is working remotely should ensure that they can work, attend virtual meetings, take phone calls, etc throughout their agreed working hours, without unplanned interruptions. This will not be compatible with caring for dependants with intensive and unpredictable care needs (such as very young or primary age children) during working hours, and staff will be expected to make alternative care arrangements for dependants of this sort who would be at home with them. As circumstances vary, it is not possible to give hard and fast rules but, for example, where children will be at home after school or during holidays, but are able to look after themselves completely during the employee's working hours, or where other dependants need occasional support at planned break times, this should not be a bar to the individual working from home.

[Some members of my team have small children; is it OK for me to require them to work standard office hours and ask them to confirm they have suitable childcare in place for their working hours?](#)

During the Covid-19 pandemic some staff with caring responsibilities were given special dispensation to work for less than their contracted hours, or to work to a very flexible pattern to enable them to keep working. Under Business as Usual arrangements staff will be expected to work their full contracted hours. There may be valid operational reasons that the team need to work standard office hours to meet its aims, or to work together effectively; equally, there may be scope for hours to be worked more flexibly by some or all team members, and this should be discussed. If this can be accommodated without impacting the team's ability to meet its objectives, you should aim to support the work / life balance of team members in this way.

It is reasonable to ask staff with small children wishing to work from home to confirm that they have suitable childcare in place for working hours. The scheme guidance explicitly states that no one should supervise small children while working.

[Can I refuse a request for remote working on the basis that it has been clear during the pandemic that the person is less efficient than they were when working on-site?](#)

Yes, as long as the reasons that they were less efficient are likely to continue. For example, if they were less efficient as they were trying to balance work and home-schooling, or had other caring or health issues, then it would be fairer to consider a trial period so that the employee has a chance to demonstrate whether they can work efficiently once the pandemic-related issues are resolved. You should consider whether any form of new equipment or training might address the issues identified before declining the request.



I feel strongly that being part of a team and learning from / guiding others in that team, and the shared understanding that comes from spending time together as a team, are important and a valid reason for working in the office. May I reject a request for extensive remote working on this basis?

Supporting effective team-working is a key responsibility for team-leaders and an important consideration in reviewing applications for remote working. It is recommended that you hold a discussion with all the team together about how you want to communicate and work together, to set the context for your consideration of individual requests. You should not reject a request unless you have a clear, objective rationale for believing that majority on-site team working is necessary for effective teamworking and communication, and why such interactions can't be facilitated through remote means. It may be possible to find a way to ensure that all the team is present on site for part of the week to conduct joint activities, with some remote working also built in at times when they are focusing on individual tasks.

Reviewing and managing New Ways of Working

When can a new working arrangement start?

You can start a new working arrangement as soon as all parties have agreed to it and the template agreement has been signed. No contractual change is needed.

How, and how often, should I review a new working arrangement?

During a trial period the arrangement should be reviewed very regularly (eg monthly). This can be done in normal 1:1 meetings. Team leaders should give honest feedback and discuss any issues arising as early as possible, to give their team members the opportunity to address any problems with their support. It would not be reasonable to tell an employee that the arrangement is not working at the end of the trial period if issues have not been raised, and opportunity to address them in good time.

Once the trial period is over, and the arrangement confirmed, you should continue to review the arrangement regularly, perhaps every three to six months, or whenever you review work objectives. You should keep a note of these reviews, and of any actions agreed to address issues that have arisen or are anticipated. If you decide that the arrangement needs to be adjusted, you should discuss that with the employee and seek to reach agreement. If this is not possible, consult your local HR contact.

If I agree to a remote working arrangement on a trial basis and I think it's not working, can I end it and require the employee to return to full-time on-site working?

Yes, as long as there has been open and clear discussion during the trial period about how things are going, and the employee has had the opportunity to address any issues raised with them. Team-leaders should keep notes of discussions, and arrange regular review meetings to help the employee to make the arrangement work. Operational needs are paramount so if the arrangement is still not working, despite these efforts, and there are clear, objective reasons to require the employee to return to full-time on-site working, or reduce the amount of time they spend working remotely, you can do this. You should arrange a meeting and explain the reasons for revoking the agreement, and give the employee reasonable notice of the change, being mindful of any arrangements they may need to put in place, for example for childcare, season tickets for travel, etc.

The employee may make a new request in due course, or make a formal flexible working request, if they do not agree with your reasons.



How can I manage my team if people are all working different hours in different places in terms of being able to arrange meetings etc? Can I require them to come into the office for meetings? How far do I need to arrange these around their availability or a regular timetable?

Before agreeing to remote working arrangements, you should think through any requirements for staff to come into the workplace and set these expectations out clearly at the outset. Where there are facilities for hybrid meetings, you can make use of them. Where that is not possible, or will not meet the team's needs, events and group meetings should be held as far as possible when all staff are available in the office. On occasion, and with reasonable notice, you may need to ask members of the team to flex their usual arrangements to enable events or meetings to take place. It should be understood from the start that this is a possibility, but it should be avoided whenever possible.

FAQs for employees

The New Ways of Working scheme

[Why does the NWW Framework not include an option for remote working all the time?](#)

The NWW Framework draws on the experience of the University's staff during the Covid-19 pandemic and seeks to facilitate informal arrangements for staff to continue to benefit from new working patterns that are effective and benefit their work-life balance. While many of us found ways to work effectively during the pandemic, once most staff return to working on site for at least some of the time, our way of working will change again. More activities will happen face-to-face, and there are few roles that would not benefit from some time on site, interacting with colleagues in person and attending meetings and events. This is good for relationships and teamworking, even where hybrid meetings are possible. It is not anticipated that many roles will be suitable for fully, or even majority, remote-working arrangements. However, staff wishing to request to work 100% remotely can do so through the formal flexible working process, which lead to a contractual change (NWW arrangements will remain non-contractual changes).

[What working patterns are available?](#)

The NWW Framework outlines four different patterns as follows:

- On site: You will conduct all your work on site
- Occasional remote: You will work mostly on site and attend all relevant team meetings and events in person
- Regular remote: You will work remotely on a regular pattern. This would normally be anywhere between 20% to 80% of your time. You will attend all relevant team meetings and events in person
- Primarily remote: You will attend site on a pattern agreed with your manager e.g. one day per week or fortnight, and for any in-person meetings or events, with notice

[I prefer to work on site all of the time, as I did before the pandemic. Will that be possible even if my job could be done remotely?](#)

If you wish to return to pre-pandemic contracted working pattern, this should be facilitated wherever possible.



Can I have my children at home at times I am remote working?

This will depend on personal circumstances. Once the University moves back to BAU activities, no-one should be supervising small children whilst working, and your arrangements with respect to older children should enable you to focus on your work activities during your working hours.

Is the University planning to introduce hot-desking across the organisation?

No, but it may be introduced in some areas, where many staff will be working some of their time remotely.

With more people working remotely, will the University still provide the same catering facilities for those working on-site?

There are no current plans to change catering arrangements. This will be reviewed over time when it becomes clearer how many staff will work some of their time remotely in the long term.

Does working remotely have to mean working from home, will there be other options – out of town offices/shared space etc.

There are no current plans to provide out of town offices or shared spaces, but working remotely need not necessarily mean working from home, if there are other suitable, private spaces in which you wish to work. The University will not bear any costs for rented spaces.

I would like to work remotely from outside the UK/another part of the UK – is this possible under the NWW scheme?

The NWW Framework is not intended to encompass arrangements for staff to work from a non-commutable distance from Oxford. Even the 'Primarily remote' working pattern will still require staff to attend site 'on a pattern agreed with your manager e.g. one day per week or fortnight and for any in-person meeting and events'. The University will not bear the costs associated with this occasional on-site working.

Staff who are prepared to commute long distances to suit their other arrangements are welcome to do so, but there are a number of other factors to be considered before someone may commence work outside the UK – an application under the [Overseas Working policy](#) will be required.

If I need special equipment in order to work from home, who should pay for it?

Once all pandemic measures are lifted those who work from home will be doing so from choice and therefore, if they don't already have the necessary furniture they should provide it for themselves. However, if the equipment is needed because of a disability, or for a Health and Safety reason, the department should buy it (follow normal purchasing arrangements). If the equipment is to be used more than occasionally for domestic use the department should see advice from the tax team to make sure there are no tax implications.

There may be other exceptional circumstances in which a department considers it is appropriate to purchase home-working equipment. In such circumstances it is important that any local policy is applied consistently. As above, if the equipment is to be used more than occasionally for domestic use the advice of the tax team should be sought.



In the very rare circumstances where the value of the equipment purchased by the individual would be sufficient to bring the overall monthly income below the National Minimum Wage, please seek advice from the Reward Team before agreeing to the purchase.

The application and decision-making process

How is the University ensuring that the Framework is applied fairly to all staff so that similar roles don't have different access to flexible working arrangements depending on their managers' personal preferences?

Team leaders will need to take local, operational needs into account in decision-making, so similar roles in different teams may not be similarly suitable for a remote-working arrangement. However, a detailed step-by-step guide has been developed, together with guidance for managers to help them to make reasoned decisions in a consistent way.

I would like to request to work at home for the majority of my time and to work non-standard office hours (for example, working very early or very late in the day, or both). Can I do this?

A few roles will be able to accommodate primarily remote working, provided a means can be found to ensure that teamworking and communication is maintained. You can ask both to work remotely for a proportion of your working hours and to flex those hours. However, it is likely that working hours will need to overlap with those of your service-users, colleagues and/or line manager, as appropriate. There may also be parameters set locally, such as core hours, but you should discuss the opportunity for flexibility with your line manager, who will consider what room there is to adjust working hours without impacting the team's objectives.

If my team is only able to accommodate a limited number of people working flexibly, how will this be decided?

There will be a number of options in these circumstances, but it is likely that everyone will need to compromise. You can read the [guidance to help team-leaders to make fair decisions](#) about applications.

If my request to change my working arrangement is accepted when will my new working arrangements start?

A new arrangement can be started as soon as the agreement is signed by both parties and any necessary arrangements are in place. Notice may be required to set some processes or arrangements in place.

What can I do if my manager and I can't reach agreement on my working arrangements?

The NWW scheme is an informal scheme which tries to balance operational requirements with individual preferences. It is the responsibility of team leaders to ensure that all members of the team are treated fairly and that the team can still achieve its objectives to a high standard. If agreement can't be reached between an employee and their manager, there is no entitlement to an appeal. You may wish to consider whether there are any other arrangements that would meet your needs and those of your team. However, if you wish, you may make a formal flexible working application through the normal [flexible working procedure](#). This will be considered by someone in a more senior role.



My manager says they need me working in the office more than I would like and my colleague who has the same role is allowed to work remotely most of the time. This is unfair – what can I do?

In the first instance you should raise this with your manager. Be aware that there may be personal circumstances which have led to the decisions that have been made, and your manager may not be able to share the details of this with you. Equally there may be operational requirements you are unaware of. If informal discussion does not resolve the issue any employee who is unhappy with their working arrangements may use the formal flexible working application process.

Will my contract change to reflect my new working arrangements?

No, the NWW is an informal scheme and agreements reached through this scheme do not require contractual changes. They will be reviewed regularly and may be amended by your line manager. You may also request changes to the agreement on an informal basis, on the basis of experience or when your circumstances change.

Ongoing arrangements

Will we be able to come back to the office if there are still some social distancing measures in place?

The University has detailed return to on-site working plans which ensure that workplaces will be safe before staff are expected to return to them. The NWW scheme looks to the post-Covid BAU working environment.

What happens if my agreed arrangements don't work out and I want to change them?

If you are unhappy with the arrangement you have requested, either on the basis of your experience of working it, or because your circumstances change, you should speak to your line manager. These are informal requirements which can be amended where it is operationally possible to accommodate the change.

If it's agreed that I can regularly work remotely for some / most of my working hours, is this a permanent arrangement? Under what circumstances could the University change this?

If circumstances in your team change, e.g. changes of staffing or work requirements, new technology, etc, your line manager may need to review your working pattern. The NWW agreements are informal and non-contractual, but your line manager will be reasonable, and take your circumstances into account. They will discuss any proposed changes with you, explain the reasons for them, and seek to reach agreement with you. You will be given notice of any changes that are needed.

What compensation will be available to me as I have to work on site and commute whilst others stay at home?

Inevitably some roles will lend themselves to remote working better than others. The University does not intend to pay any expenses for those who choose to work remotely, other than necessary equipment. It will not support utilities costs, or travel costs when staff do come on-site. Similarly, it does not intend to cover any commuting costs for those who travel to work on-site, just as it did not before lockdown. It is hoped that a reduced number of commuters coming in and out of Oxford each day will make commuting easier for those who continue to work on-site.



Will those who work remotely have somewhere to work when they come into the office?

Each team will have to think through the implications of remote working, including having fewer staff on site, and the need for secure storage and workplaces for remote workers when they do come on site. Some staff will retain an office or desk, and this is more likely for those who continue to work the majority of their hours on site. Others may be asked to share a desk or use a hot-desk on the days they work on site. This will be discussed at a local level.