



**DEVELOPING GOOD
MANAGEMENT PRACTICE**

A HEFCE Initiative

Flexible Employment in Higher Education

Flexitime A report

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Foreword

The Flexible Employment Options (FEO) Project has over the last few years been investigating the impact of introducing flexible working arrangements in the Higher Education sector. This was achieved through piloting different ways of working at four higher education institutions (HEIs) - the University of Birmingham, Canterbury Christ Church University College, De Montfort University and Staffordshire University. Employees across a variety of departments were offered a range of flexible working options during 2002/3, and the effects were monitored and evaluated. A summary project report was distributed to all HEIs in England in December 2003, and the results were disseminated at a series of national events. Feedback from these events indicated that HR and other staff would like more information on how specific flexible options can be implemented effectively.

This report has been written to provide background information for managers within the HE sector who are considering introducing flexitime, formalizing informal flexible hours arrangements, or extending existing traditional formal schemes. Accompanying this report is a guide to good practice.

Other reports available are:

Job share

Homeworking

Our website will provide background information on the project, and materials and information for organisations wishing to introduce or extend the use of flexible working.

For more information visit www.staffs.ac.uk/feo

Section 1: Introduction

Often termed flexible working hours, flexitime is one of the most widely used alternatives to the 9-5 office pattern, and gives individual employees control over when to start and end their working day. It is popular with employers as well as employees as it can combine set or “core” times of common agreement when all employees should be at work, with parts that can be individually adapted. Flexitime is a long standing and well used scheme, but there is a need to look at it afresh, and reassess its relevance for the higher education sector. This is in the light of changing organisational culture, and within the context of achieving greater work/life balance for employees.

Good work/life practices, of which flexitime is one, offer a win-win situation for employees and employers in the higher education sector. Generally, there is a lack of data on the extent of flexible working in the sector, but flexitime is believed to be widespread, with informal flexibility in daily hours more the norm than formal schemes. In some institutions however, formal flexitime policies have been in use for many years, and the time may now be right for reviewing these within the context of considering the work/life balance of all employees.

Although flexitime is the most popular way of varying daily hours it has its limitations, and is not suitable for all job roles and workplaces, and other flexible options may provide better solutions. Flexitime works best, as with all alternative working patterns, as part of a package of options available to help employees balance their work and personal lives and the organisation meet its business objectives.

Sometimes the terminology in use can be confusing as the word “flexitime” is often used in the media to describe general flexible working options offered by organisations, not a fully defined flexitime scheme. Conversely, policies entitled “flexible working hours” will often only refer to flexitime and set out the rules for its use. However there are other arrangements which do not involve altering the number of hours worked or the terms and conditions of employment that can come under the heading of flexible working hours, such as compressed hours, annualised hours and staggered hours. This report only covers flexitime.

Section 2: History and background

Flexitime has been described by Personnel Today (13.11.01) as one of the earliest quintessential introductions of employee led flexibility, and it has its origins in Germany with the aerospace company Messerschmitt-Bolkow-Blom. The scheme first appeared in 1967 for 3,000 white collar workers in administration and also those in Research and Development at the main head-quarters near Munich as a means to reduce queues for clocking on and off, and the resultant traffic congestion of everyone being required to start and finish at the same time. People were inevitably leaving 15 minutes early to beat the queues, and morale and productivity were suffering. The then personnel manager, Herr Hillert, recognising the freedom of variable hours found a compromise between this and rigid hours. It was termed "Gleitzeit" – gliding/ sliding time, or Flexible Working Time (FWT). By 1972 6,000 of the 20,000 workers were using flexitime, and the company reported an estimated saving of around 40,000 dollars a month in increased productivity and lower absenteeism. They also reported fewer recruiting difficulties and fewer travel problems. Flexible Working Time was not extended to production line employees who had their own shift system which brought its own benefits. (Hill)

The idea spread quickly and by 1973 was in use by 6% of the labour force in Germany, and by thousands of companies across Europe. (Wade, 1973) In Germany its use had been fuelled by labour shortages, and it was found that the scheme enabled women to return to work and also care for families. This added to the pool of available labour. A study of Paris traffic congestion in 1968 (Hill) had suggested that altering work starting times by 15 to 30 minutes would reduce pressure on the metro at peak times by 10%, and this original reason of easing traffic congestion still holds true today. Hill also cites another company's use of flexitime. At Vickers-Zimmer AG lateness was reduced by 93%; time off for private business fell by 87%; traffic eased and employees saved travelling time. Also included in the report was information about a French pilot scheme where it was found that employees were proud of their department; other departments were slightly jealous and wanted the same regulations; employees appeared more relaxed; absenteeism reduced by 60-70%; and employees appeared more co-operative over workloads and bottlenecks. The cost of installing the mechanical recording systems was not considered great. In the late 1980's at the Salvation Army Headquarters in London it was discovered that employees with transport or domestic difficulties would miss work rather than come in late, and here the introduction of flexitime reduced absenteeism from 8% to 4%. (New Ways to Work) Today flexitime is still introduced to help reduce short term absence. Allensprach writing in 1975 highlights another more insubstantial but very real benefit - *"Flexible Working Hours can also contribute not only to an improvement of the general*

atmosphere and human relations in the undertaking but also to an ultimate enhancement of pleasure of work.” (Allensprach, 1975)

Most of the first texts on the subject of flexible working hours date from the early 1970's, and agree that most of the take-up was in monthly-paid, white collar departments with little or no overtime. By the late 1970's the use of flexitime had spread all over Europe. In the UK too it was prevalent in insurance, local government, public service and white collar groups in industry. (Maric, 1977) An IRS survey in 1996 suggested that overall 10% of all employees in the UK had access to some form of flexitime. The IDS study suggests this figure is relatively unchanged today with roughly 1 in 10 employees in the UK having access to flexitime, and is still most widely used in the public sector. Most of the recent surveys have reiterated the strong difference between the sectors in the take-up of flexitime, confirming that it is more suited to some roles and workplaces than others. The Labour Force Survey of 1995 found that although 61% of organisations offered flexitime, this went up to 85% for public sector local authorities. In a survey done by the CIPD in 2002, 26% of private sector companies' surveyed offered flexitime, while the figure for the public sector was 79%.

There is also evidence that despite the slow down in the adoption of flexible hours, it is still desired by employees who currently have no access to this kind of flexible working pattern, and is still being newly introduced into organisations where there has been no previous experience of flexitime. A TUC work-life balance study (2001) found that in 62% of work places at least some staff were allowed to vary their usual hours, and that 47% of employees not currently using flexitime would like to do so. This survey also found that the proportion of men wanting flexitime, along with compressed hours and annualised hours exceeded the proportion of women wanting such types of flexibility. Another survey by Cranet (2003) found that 50% of organisations responding to the survey offered some form of flexitime, usually covering a greater proportion of the workforce. The survey also found that the use of other types of flexible working had been growing since 1995; balancing out the fact that take-up of flexitime seemed to have slowed.

Across Europe, the UK has had the lowest increase in new organisations taking up flexitime along with Denmark and Greece. In the Netherlands, 73% of organisations have widened their use of flexitime, and there has been growth in its use in Austria, Belgium and Germany - all countries with already high use. In other EU countries working time is more strictly regulated by statute and collective workplace agreements than in the UK, although that is now changing. Traditionally, UK employees have been able to obtain flexibility in working times in ways other than by formal agreement, but this informality is less likely in Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands and Sweden. The UK has more freedom in working patterns but less curb on long hours, therefore there is less pressure to come up with

solutions that allow a healthy work-life balance (Personnel Today, 13.11.01). A more recent survey by the delivery firm UPS suggests that the UK despite the take-up in public services of flexitime still lags behind Europe. In the poll around 48% of staff were allowed flexible hours, this contrasts to 98% of German companies and 81% of firms in Belgium. However the poll also suggests that a further 28% of UK directors expect to provide it in the future (Personnel Today, 6.2.04). Also Government backing for work-life balance and flexibility initiatives has meant that organisations are still taking up such options as flexitime for the first time, including local authorities. Wellingborough Council used the Investors in People (IIP) Work Life Balance model to introduce flexibility in February 2003. This included a flexitime scheme and resulted in higher retention, higher productivity with reduced absenteeism and sick leave (Personnel Today, 8.7.03).

So in the last few years flexitime has again been advocated as a means of combating short term absence, as well as a means of attracting and retaining a wide and diverse staff group. It is also seen as a way of extending office cover and meeting customer demands. In the public sector, some organisations are taking flexitime a stage further. Twenty years ago, this sector was at the forefront of the flexible working revolution with then radical initiatives such as flexitime and part-time working (Personnel Today, 1.3.03). Even today there are some areas where this is still the case. For instance in financial accounting and auditing the private sector has higher pay but expects hours up to 60 a week, while the public sector, although paying less, respects work/life balance and offers such benefits as flexitime (The Independent, 5.8.04). As other organisations have followed suit by offering flexible working, the public sector has found that they no longer always have this edge in offering flexibility instead of the highest salaries, especially if compared to the best practice in the private sector in the area of work/life balance. To combat this some are looking at expanding flexibility, and have recently begun to move away from traditional core hours. Merton Council introduced 7am to 7pm flexitime along with home-working in June 2000, and sickness absence in three departments dropped by nearly 50% and absence due to medical appointments dropped by 75% (Personnel Today, 4.12.01). After consultation with staff, South Tyneside Council's flexitime scheme now has no requirement to work core hours, and employees feel more engaged with the whole scheme because they helped design it. In another example, recently Newcastle City Council has expanded its flexitime scheme by removing core hours and staff can come and go anytime between 7am and 7pm (Personnel Today, 9.3.04).

Recent emphasis on encouraging diversity in the workplace has highlighted another potential use of flexitime in allowing employees to follow requirements of their faith such as praying at certain times of the day or week. The Department of Health's guide to Religious and Cultural Awareness encourages managers to

consider requests for flexible working from individual's wishing to observe religious festivals and holy days. While the Burnley Borough Council suggests managers and employees agree "suitable adjustment within the provisions of the flexitime scheme", but that "any adjustment should not unreasonably disrupt effective delivery of service." The London Borough of Waltham Forest, among others, has developed a form of flexitime to help Muslim employees break their fast at appropriate times during Ramadan. (Centre for Research in Ethnic Relations, 2003)

To conclude, while there has been a proliferation of other types of flexible working, flexitime has proved durable, with clear advantages when well managed. The TUC suggested that when employees are surveyed the ability to vary their hours on a daily basis is the option most say they would like, or would be most reluctant to lose, where it is already available.

Section 3: Current use made of flexitime in HE

The report so far has covered general issues of the background and use of flexitime, however what about the central concern of this report, that of the use of flexitime in higher education? Is it used? Is it relevant given the diversity of size and the nature of the roles staff have to undertake? Outside opinion seems to think so. The graduate careers website Prospects in the section on working in higher education states that - *"initiatives to improve retention often focus on making the work environment more positive and family-friendly"*, and includes flexitime as being *"widely available"*. Is this really the case? If flexitime is so useful how much use is the higher education sector making of this form of flexibility?

A look through the open access information on higher education institution websites suggests that some more openly promote the existence of such flexible working schemes as flexitime than others; some have a few flexible options available to staff but not flexitime; some use flexitime as a tool in recruitment, using the fact that they operate such schemes as part of their overall attractiveness to potential employees; some do not promote their scheme in their documentation although there may be one in wide use by employees; some institutions may have a flexible working policy just to comply with legal requirements in respect of the new right of parents of children under 6 to request flexible working arrangements; some just list such schemes as flexitime under a family friendly label rather than as a help to all staff; some mention their flexible working under sections on equal opportunities or diversity; and some promote the overall integration of flexible working within the organisation's culture of supporting work/life balance. The internet of course only gives a rough idea of the scope of flexitime use within higher education institutions and how it is promoted. Some websites will be incomplete or being revised and not all information is on open access. Is there any quantitative information?

In 2003 the Joint Negotiating Committee for the Higher Education Sector (JNCHES) published guidelines for higher education in the area of flexible working and work/life balance, including flexitime. Here, the University of Brighton is given as an example of good practice for flexitime. (For details see page 16)

In August 2004, Incomes Data Services reported on pay, recruitment and retention in London's higher education institutions for the London HE Pay Consortium. The survey looked into the problems faced in the areas of retention and recruitment, and the ways in which these were being addressed, including offering flexible working options. They found that 13 of the 27 responding organisations had formal policies on flexible working. Policies offered on a formal basis included flexible start

and finish times. In addition many institutions had general policies or were looking to introduce them and stated that all requests for flexible working were considered. 12 organisations had informal arrangements and typically included some form of flexitime. Only 2 organisations did not offer any kind of flexible working. A few institutions said their flexible working policies were specifically designed to support recruitment and retention, and in general it was felt that the nature of academic work offered considerable informal flexibility.

In general it is difficult to find statistics on how much formal flexitime is being used by employees in higher education institutions, and also which staff groups have access to it and how much informal practice there is.

3.1 FEO Project Audit of HEIs, 2000

One of the first tasks for the FEO Project when it started in the autumn of 2000 was to find out how much flexible working was going on in the sector already, and flexitime was one of the options asked about in the subsequent questionnaire. The resulting audit was based on the 50 responses (42%) received out of 120 questionnaires sent out. The results for flexitime were as follows –

- 19 with formal flexitime
- Of those 19 with formal policies
 - 4 were for all staff
 - 10 were just for clerical and administrative staff
 - 5 were for different combinations of staff but usually including clerical staff
- 20 with informal flexitime
- 3 had a local scheme but were considering a formal one
- 2 more were considering formal policies
- 3 had considered and rejected a formal policy
- 3 had no policy

The types of staff groups offered flexitime varied from institution to institution, but generally academic staff were not included, nor were senior management, or shift and contract workers in facilities management areas. Flexitime was usually offered to administrative, clerical, professional and technical staff, and also some academic related staff. The audit concluded that academic staff and senior managers usually have the control, and therefore flexibility, of start and finish times and are required to work the hours necessary to complete the objectives of their role.

From the survey it appeared that a large majority of the responding institutions had some type of flexibility in hours for some groups of staff. The conclusion of the audit itself suggested the widespread existence of formal and informal arrangements generally for flexible working. Reasons for not submitting the survey centred on pressure of work, and as formal policies particularly take time to set up this may be the reason why there are so few. Departments instead may be responding to ad hoc requests for flexible working and flexitime from departments and individuals, as this is quicker and easier in the short term.

3.2 FEO Project Pilot Scheme, 2001-2003

The FEO project followed up the audit with pilot schemes based at four higher education institutions where employees were given the chance to try out some flexible working options. These took place between October 2001 and April 2003 at the University of Birmingham, Canterbury Christ Church University College, De Montfort University and Staffordshire University.

At the beginning of the pilot, of the four HE institutions taking part, only one institution had a formal flexitime policy while the other three were operating informal schemes in some services and departments. In the institution with a formal policy the departments taking part in the pilot scheme chose to offer extended schemes to staff – one with an increased bandwidth (See Appendix One for definitions) and slightly shorter core times, the other with an increased bandwidth and no core hours. In the other three institutions the departments taking part chose to trial a standard flexitime scheme, in one case formalizing and extending the informal scheme already in place. The details of these are covered in the section on case studies including comments from participants and line managers, but generally all the schemes were very successful, with flexitime proving to be the easiest of the options to manage.

Part of the questionnaire filled in by employees taking part in the pilot schemes looked at value placed on particular ways of working flexibly. The one relating to flexitime stated - *"I would value the opportunity to vary my hours on a daily basis according to my own preference."* Here 73% of respondents "strongly agreed" or "agreed" with the statement. This was followed by a statement relating to daily flexibility of hours for childcare, and here only 30% "strongly agreed" or "agreed" (38% of the respondents said they had caring responsibilities for children). The FEO report concluded that the desire to vary your own hours is not related to caring issues, but is generally desired by a large percentage of the workforce.

3.3 Mapping Equality and Diversity Initiatives, 2004

Last year, Coventry University as part of Equality and Diversity Initiatives in Higher Education (EDIHE) also sent a questionnaire out to all institutions in the UK. Flexible working was one of the areas covered. The Coventry team had 87 responses and of these 66% indicated that they offered flexitime. However it is not known how many of these are formal policies. The questionnaire also had space to comment on other flexible options available, where one institution indicated that flexitime was being piloted.

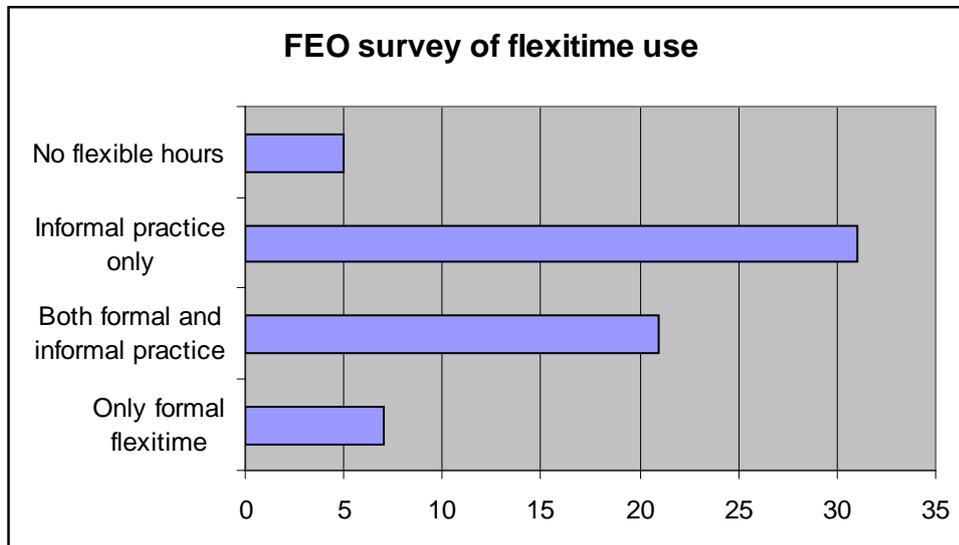
3.4 FEO Project Research, 2004

Recently, for this particular research, the FEO project has again surveyed institutions to try to gauge the use of the following options – job share, home-working and flexitime. The questions this time were more detailed to try to get a view of the use of formal and informal schemes, how many employees are using the schemes, and which groups of staff have access to them. Of the 132 institutions in England funded by HEFCE, 64 institutions responded to the questionnaire - 48%. (The questionnaire is included in Appendix 2) The results are as follows –

- **Do you have a formal policy for flexitime? Yes -** 28 (44% of total)
- **If so, how many years has it been in place?**
 - <2yrs 5
 - 2-4yrs 5
 - >5yrs 18
- **Which staff groups does the policy apply to?**
 - Administrative staff only 12 (46% of 28)
 - Administrative & manual staff 2
 - Administrative, manual & management staff 2
 - Administrative & management 4
 - Administrative & research 1
 - All, including academic, research & clinical staff 6 (21% of 28)
- **Do you have any staff who use any of the following on an informal basis?**
 - Flexitime/TOIL (Time off in lieu) 51 (80% of total)

Of the 64 higher education institutions who responded, 22 have employees working informal schemes as well as having a formal policy, and in fact only 5 institutions offered nothing in the way of daily flexible hours. These were small colleges with correspondingly small numbers of employees, and the other is Anglia Polytechnic University which does not offer flexitime but does offer a full range of other flexible working options. This leaves 94% of higher education institutions

responding to the questionnaire offering access to some form of daily flexible working hours to a varying proportion of employees. However It is unknown how much of the informal practice is operated under a system of TOIL (time off in lieu) and is therefore not under the control of the individual. The table below shows the number of institutions in each category.



The institutions which have *only* formal policies are in the main those with schemes which have been in place more than 5 years. They tend to be for administrative and support staff only, although at Oxford Brookes University the scheme is open to all staff groups. The Southampton Institute has a slightly newer scheme which is also open to all staff groups.

The existence of a policy does not of course give any indication of use, so the survey also asked how many employees actually used flexitime under a formal policy. The four institutions taking part in the FEO pilot scheme had on average around 40% APT&C staff, giving a rough comparison for the number of employees who might be expected to be using a formal flexitime scheme if it was just offered to traditional groups such as APT&C staff and had been in place for a few years.

However the difference in the numbers of employees using formal flexitime returned in survey was very wide, ranging from 7% to 60% of employees, while the mean was 31%. (The data has been converted into percentage of total number of employees for ease of comparison.) The percentage of employees using flexitime varied widely even in institutions that had policies available to all staff groups, and even where flexitime schemes had been in place for many years.

Also, there generally seemed to be no correlation between the number of staff employed by the institution and the number using formal flexitime. 10 institutions out of the 28 who had formal policies in place did not know how many employees

used the flexitime scheme, and many institutions were also unclear how many were flexing their hours informally. This may reflect the fact that often flexible working has been approached on a department basis, and no central records are held.

3.5 Summary

In conclusion, it can be tentatively estimated that while around 40-45% of institutions currently offer some form of formal flexitime, the majority may be offering flexibility of hours, particularly if TOIL is included in this definition. However as many as half may be localised schemes and restricted to small groups of staff. In the case of TOIL, often subject to the discretion of the line manager and be more concerned with overtime and workload rather than freedom for the individual to manage their own time. A handful of institutions offer flexitime to all staff, including academic staff. It is difficult to be accurate with around a 50% return rate on surveys and the lack of collection of data and of monitoring procedures.

There has been some move over the last few years towards integrated approaches and reassessing provision, suggesting a move from a re-active approach by HR and institutions towards a more planned pro-active approach. Some have introduced flexitime as part of the Right to Request flexible working legislation often listing it under "family friendly" in websites, rather than seeing the scheme as generally popular and useful for everyone. Others are at the stage of re-examining long standing schemes that have been just for administrative staff. Patchy informal practice and use of TOIL may be indicative of staff and managers locally trying to close the gap between the freedom allowed to academic and senior staff with respect to hours, and a much more rigid and formal approach for support staff.

Section 4: Case studies

4.1 A selection of the flexitime schemes found in HE

The case studies that follow will illustrate some of the variety found from standard schemes through to a more open and individual approach to flexible hours. They are all from the higher education sector as examples from other sectors are well documented in the research literature. Use within the FEO project is covered separately in the next section.

The following case studies are included –

1. **Typical, traditional scheme** –University of Brighton
2. **Typical, traditional scheme** – Staffordshire University
3. **Choice of schemes** – Aston University
4. **Long accounting period** – University of York
5. **Broad bandwidth** - Loughborough University
6. **University laboratory** – unknown institution
7. **Other useful examples** - University of Southampton; University College Winchester; University of Teesside

NB Unless otherwise stated, in all the case studies employees are expected to take a minimum of 30 minutes at lunch time if they are working longer than 6 hours as per the Working Time regulations. Most have contractual hours of around 37 per week.

Case study 1: Typical, traditional scheme – University of Brighton

This flexitime scheme was used as an example of good practice by the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff, and the following details come from their report entitled “Work Life Balance Guidance for higher Education Institutions”. It was also included in the IDS Study.

Who is the scheme for?	APT&C staff
When was it introduced?	Mid 1980's for all grades except senior management and departments with particular needs.
When amended?	-
Basic structure Bandwidth	8am-6pm
Core times	9.30am-12pm; 2pm-4pm
Flexible times	8am-9.30am; 12pm-2pm; 4pm-6pm
Accounting time	4 weeks
Debit	4 hours
Credit	8 hours
Flexi-leave	Whole day or two half days in an accounting period.
Other features	-

Although the flexitime scheme is aimed at the traditional ATP&C staff groups, the university gives consideration to the working hours of academic staff too and suggests that they monitor them as per the European Working Time Directive. The university also offers a range of other flexible working options.

Case study 2: Typical, traditional scheme - Staffordshire University

Who is the scheme for?	APT&C staff including receptionists unless specifically excluded by HOD; currently in use by about 30% of employees
When was it introduced?	1989
When amended?	Currently being reviewed with a view to removing core hours (see under use in FEO project)
Basic structure	8am-6.30pm
Bandwidth	
Core times	9.30am-12pm; 2pm-4pm
Flexible times	8am-9.30am; 12pm-2pm; 4pm-6.30pm
Accounting time	8 weeks
Debit	4 hours
Credit	10 hours
Flexi-leave	One whole day plus one half day, or three half days in any accounting period.
Other features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Specifies standard day and half day. • Contingency for carry over up to 20 hours where sickness or service requirements prevent balance in accounting period – authorized by HOD. • Standard office day when offices to be staffed: 8.30/8.45 – 5pm (Mon to Thurs); 4.30pm (Fri)

- Provision made for managers to ask staff to work after end of core hours if needed to complete urgent work, giving “reasonable” advance notice.
- Overtime working not encouraged, but if authorized starts at end of standard office hours. Claims submitted at end of accounting period and are subject to deduction of any debit hours.

Case study 3: Choice of schemes – Aston University

Who is the scheme for?	APT&C staff
When was it introduced?	Mid 1980's for all grades except senior management and departments with particular needs.
When amended?	Currently under review
Option One - Bandwidth	7.30am-6.30pm
Core times	9.30am-12pm; 2pm-3.30pm
Flexible times	7.30am-9.30am; 12pm-2pm; 3.30pm-6.30pm
Accounting time	4 weeks
Debit	5hours
Credit	11 hours
Flexi-leave	Up to 1.5 days (11 hours)
Other features	Earlier finish to afternoon core time
Option Two - Bandwidth	7.30am-6.30pm
Core times	9.30am-12pm; 2.30pm-4pm
Flexible times	8am-9.30am; 12pm-2.30pm; 4pm-6.30pm
Accounting time	4 weeks
Debit	4 hours
Credit	8 hours
Flexi-leave	Up to 1.5 days (11 hours)
Other features	2 and a half hours for lunch flexible period

- Normal office coverage is 8.45am – 5 /5.15pm.
- The university currently uses a computerised clocking on system with cards, but is considering using electronic timesheets.
- Currently managers check hours worked, including debits and credits on a weekly basis, and at the end of the accounting period.
- There is provision for overtime to be authorized where hours fall outside the bandwidth. Staff clock off at 6.30pm and then manually record overtime.
- A 6 month trial is recommended for new departments joining the scheme.
- Part-time staff are not formally covered but have the option to clock in and out at the beginning and end of their normal working day.

Case study 4: Long Accounting period - University of York

Who is the scheme for?	All Administrative and Related Staff and technical staff*; Part time staff are fully covered by the scheme where it operates. About 600 staff use the scheme (out of 3000); another 150 have informal "flexitime"
When was it introduced?	Guidelines on flexible working hours adopted university wide in April 1996; some schemes had been in existence before.
When amended?	Further emphasis in last few years on flexible practices has led to new pilots, including the library
Basic structure - Bandwidth	8am-6pm
Core times	10am-12pm; 2pm-4pm
Flexible times	8am-10am; 12pm-2pm; 4pm-6pm.
Accounting time	3 months (unusually long)
Debit	32 hours
Credit	32 hours; Excess lost at end of period.
Flexi-leave	3 days as full or half days in any period.
Recording	Departments use a combination of paper based systems and spreadsheets; 2 departments have an electronic recording system.
Other features	Guidelines suggest departments should first pilot the scheme for between 3 and 6 months before implementing on a permanent basis.

* Some departments have professional or academic related grades working flexitime.

Useful quotes from guidelines document -

- *"Flexitime is a concession not a right, but it is anticipated that staff and Departments will obtain mutual benefits from the scheme."*
- *"These guidelines are designed to allow staff greater freedom to organise their working hours . . . Flexitime will have no adverse effect on working arrangements and indeed it is expected that there will be efficiency gains."*
- *". . . at certain times of the year flexitime may be suspended to meet peak operational demands."*

The general ethos of the university means that flexibility is accepted and supported whenever possible, and the range of options used by departments is broadening to include term time working, school friendly hours, and job share.

Case study 5: Broad bandwidth - Loughborough University

Who is the scheme for?	Secretarial, clerical, technical and academic-related staff who are expected to work normal office hours.
When was it introduced?	Pilot scheme run Sept. to Dec. 2002 with 196 participants from 10 departments; others now keen to try flexitime too.
When amended?	n/a
Basic structure - Bandwidth	7am-7pm
Core times	10am-12pm; 2pm-4pm
Flexible times	7am-10am; 12pm-2pm; 4pm-7pm
Accounting time	4 weeks
Debit	3 hours
Credit	8 hours; maximum 8 hour surplus carried over to next period
Flexi-leave	1 day taken as full or half days
Recording	Either electronic spreadsheet or paper
Other features	Provision for part time staff made; Personnel recommended keeping copies of time sheets for 12 months.

- Pilot evaluation report by Personnel recommends that the scheme be introduced university wide to all ALC, secretarial, clerical and ancillary staff *"with immediate effect"*.
- The report also recommends investigating and piloting further work-life balance schemes in the same way. Flexitime has been piloted in the library.
- Other finding from the evaluation questionnaires:
 - 67% stated their time management at work had improved
 - 39% stated they felt their department had become more efficient
 - 65% stated they felt communication and morale had improved
 - 43% stated manager "keen"; 30% stated manager "very enthusiastic"
 - 80% would be disappointed if scheme not implemented university wide
 - 80% of managers/supervisors took part themselves
 - All managers stated they could trust their team in relation to time keeping
- The Loughborough pilot had responses broadly in line with those of the FEO pilot groups with very little negative effect, and a percentage who saw improvement in the areas of customer service, office cover, morale, productivity, team working, communication and arrangement of meetings.

Case study 6: University Laboratory – institution unknown

(This case study is taken from Croner's Flexible Working Practices.)

Who is the scheme for?	Full time technical staff; part-time not included
Basic structure - Bandwidth	7.45am-6.15pm
Core times	10am-12pm;2pm-4pm
Flexible times	7.45am-10am; 12pm-2pm;4pm-6.15pm
Accounting time	4 weeks
Debit	7.5 hours
Credit	10 hours
Flexi-leave	Taken as full or half days but number not specified
Other features	Recording by swipe cards; Medical appointments outside core hours; Overtime is that outside of the bandwidth and at weekends.

"The overriding consideration in the operation of a flexitime scheme is that it should improve the efficiency of the department ... Flexitime should not be seen as a way of acquiring extra days off, but as a way of making the working day best fit the demands of work and personal circumstances."

Provision is made for suspension if required by the department, but it also states that staff will not be asked to work hours that deviate from the standard day on a regular basis.

Case study 7: Other useful examples

University of Southampton – here the policy on flexible working hours states the advantages of offering flexible hours. It then goes on to give good general guidance and suggestions on a traditional flexitime scheme, but the detail of operational hours, core time and so on are left for individual departments to determine. It suggests recording is done on paper. In addition there are guidelines on flexible working for line managers stressing the importance of work/life balance.

University College Winchester – currently there is an informal TOIL policy to be used by all support staff (about 200 employees), however roughly 50 employees are now on flexitime pilot schemes and a formal flexible working policy, including flexitime, is currently at the committee stage.

University of Teesside - here a long standing scheme is soon to be reviewed, possibly to remove core hours, extend bandwidth, and encourage use by more groups of staff.

4.2 Use of flexitime in the FEO Project

As mentioned earlier, of the four institutions taking part in the project, only one had a formal flexitime policy, but all the others had a variety of informal arrangements of flexible hours. Flexitime was one of the options available to participants, but its use and experience was very varied. Three departments set up entirely new schemes with a traditional format – two small and one large, while three others chose to extend an existing scheme in various ways. Two departments chose to just expand the bandwidth and therefore the flexible periods at the beginning and end of the day an earlier start and a later finish for the bandwidth and also to slightly reduce the core times, and one more radically chose to abandon core times altogether. The schemes also used a range of recording methods, in one case trying three out before finding one that suited the department. Most used electronic spreadsheets, which in the case of Staffordshire University had been in place some time.

FEO Flexitime scheme used by University of Birmingham,
De Montfort University and Canterbury Christ Church University College

Who is the scheme for?	FEO pilot departments both student/staff support and academic; mainly used by admin staff, but some use by managers
When was it introduced?	Pilot for FEO project 2001-2003; continuing
When amended?	n/a
Basic structure - Bandwidth	8am-6.30pm
Core times	10am-12pm; 2pm-4pm
Flexible times	8am-10pm; 12pm-2pm; 4pm-6.30pm
Accounting time	4 weeks
Debit	4 hours
Credit	7.5 hours
Flexi-leave	Up to 1.5 days

De Montfort University – Flexible working for support staff is very new, but due to the success of the pilot the introduction of further and more university wide flexible working is being investigated by the Personnel department.

University of Birmingham - In one department this formalised an already fully functioning informal scheme, consequently many staff felt they had the flexibility they already needed, but others felt the system was fairer with a more formal scheme.

Canterbury Christchurch University College – Flexitime continuing. One team of about 10 employees all record their hours on the same spreadsheet which they find very useful for office cover and for team planning.

FEO extended flexitime schemes used at Staffordshire University

Who is the scheme for?	All APT&C staff; some managers
When was it introduced?	Original policy 1989
When amended?	In two departments for FEO pilot 2001-2003; ongoing; considering no core hours for main university wide scheme.
Finance -	
Bandwidth	7am – 7pm
Core times	None
Flexible times	All
Accounting time	8 weeks
Debit	4 hours
Credit	10 hours
Flexi leave	Up to 1.5 days
Recording	Excel spreadsheets
Personnel -	
Bandwidth	7am-6.30pm
Core times	10am-12pm; 2pm-4pm
Flexible times	7am-10am; 12pm-2pm; 4pm-6.30pm
Accounting time	8 weeks
Debit	4 hours
Credit	10 hours
Flexi leave	Up to 1.5 days
Recording	Excel spreadsheets

In particular the finance department, who abandoned core hours, are still very happy; no problem with new starters joining the scheme; all keen and still successfully using Excel spreadsheets. As a result of the success of FEO project, a new flexible working policy is currently at the committee stage which aims to remove core hours and increase bandwidths.

As part of the analysis of the schemes, focus groups were held part way through each pilot, and although all the available options were under discussion, the one the majority used was to vary their own hours on a daily basis whether under a new flexitime scheme or an extended existing one. The views of participants in the focus groups are as follows -

Improvements to personal life seen by participants –

- Convenient and flexible
- Makes travelling easier
- Can suit personal preferences
- Reduced pressure to arrive at certain times
- Extended flexi better than current one
- Get extra hours back
- Have control
- Freedom to plan life-work
- Easier to deal with emergencies & home issues
- More on offer than just basic flexitime

Improvements to work/life balance seen by participants -

- Helps to manage workloads
- Improved morale
- Can have time off if needed
- Shown trust by management
- Effective work quiet time available before/after normal hours
- Improved commitment
- Records hours properly and fairly
- Get hours back worked
- Freedom and control over job
- New ideas about ways to work
- Acknowledged personal need and life outside work

Negative points mentioned -

- Flexitime too rigid
- Only working contractual hours so feel guilty
- Medical appointments in own time
- Limited parking for full use of flexitime
- Long hours culture made those leaving early feeling guilty
- A few people feel they are not trusted if they have to record hours
- Can exacerbate existing team tensions
- Often academic staff like support at end of day so not compatible with early starters
- New employees not informed of scheme
- Poor departmental support stopped staff applying

There were other views from employees and managers specifically on flexitime given in the various questionnaires sent out to monitor the progress of the pilot schemes. Participants varied in their responses depending on whether or not they had come across flexitime before. One mentioned applying for a post because flexitime was on offer, while others mentioned having worked previously elsewhere where there had been flexitime and recognized the benefits of the scheme. Some who were very new to being able to choose their own hours were uncertain at first, but all who tried it would not now work in any other way. None of the managers

taking part in the pilots reported flexitime as unsuccessful, and half regarded it as very successful. Other issues that arose are discussed in section 6, and a fuller report on the results from the pilot schemes is available from the FEO project.

The following comments from questionnaire respondents sum up the feelings of the majority -

- *"Very happy with flexitime opportunities."*
- *"Generally need more flexible flexitime; very keen for it to continue."*

Section 5: Moving to formal policies

5.1 Business benefits of using flexitime in HE

In the main the business case for flexitime is the same as that for all flexible working and work/life balance policies, and as such has been covered in detail in research literature and elsewhere. Studies as early as the 1970's revealed the benefits of formal flexitime, and that initial fears around moving away from rigid hours, were groundless. Once flexible hours had been introduced managers and employees were very reluctant to go back to rigid hours. (Wade and Allenspach) Allenspach even suggested that as employees start when they want to, they therefore reach full productive capacity more quickly.

These original reasons for introducing flexitime when it was first developed, still hold true today. Employees can plan their hours to accommodate personal appointments and this can result in a dramatic reduction in short term absence. The concept of being late is eliminated as employees can schedule their journey to work. Travelling to work is a particular problem in large cities - often the very places higher education institutions are located and skilled staff at all levels may not be locally available making long journeys inevitable. Anything that can ease this is a benefit –

- *“I would welcome the opportunity to work flexible start and finish times because I travel a considerable distance to my job and rely on public transport systems.”*

While some newer universities are better off as they are often sited on the outskirts of large towns, others are in town centres with the town having grown up around them. This brings parking as well as travel problems. Being able to choose your own start and finish times for the working day and being able to take a little extra time off in a month all helps to alleviate the general difficulties of juggling travel and work –

- *“I am in favour of “flexi hours” generally. At present, I start half an hour earlier and finish half an hour earlier. Creating flexibility improves motivation and raises morale. It should also reduce absence from work due to sickness. . . Travelling outside the morning and evening “rush hour” not only saves time and energy but is infinitely less stressful.”*

In addition, employees have their own reasons for preferring flexitime – responsibilities for children and disabled or elderly relatives; hobbies; further and continuing education; their own disability or health; or religious observance –

- *"Since I am in my late fifties and have no childcare responsibilities nor (as yet) elderly dependents, some questions are not applicable. But flexible hours are very important to me for personal reasons and ease of living."*
- *"Very useful not have to take half day or day of annual leave for gasman, plumber, delivery, doctor etc."*
- *"As the mother of two small sons, aged 5 and 7, I would welcome the opportunity to work more flexibly to fit in around school hours/school holidays, without reducing my overall working hours. At present juggling between work and childcare commitments is extremely stressful and can occasionally adversely affect my performance at work."*

There is also evidence from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation that carers prefer to use the variable and flexible options available to everyone to manage their responsibilities, rather than ask for special leave which focuses attention on their difficulties.

Flexitime can of course influence those who are applying to work within higher education. Recruits may often now be looking for evidence of flexibility by a potential employer, such as a flexitime scheme, particularly if they have used it in the past –

- *"Flexibility is very important to me, indeed the flexitime scheme was a factor in my applying for the post as I had been on flexitime where I worked previously and wanted to continue this."*
- *"I have worked in flexi-hours environments in the past. I feel they benefit and motivate staff. Different people work better in mornings or evenings and they should be given the opportunity to achieve their best."*

Flexitime can also help higher education institutions in another way – the City of Edinburgh branch of Unison have been negotiating to allow staff the use of flexitime so that they can access higher education – part of the widening participation agenda – allowing potential mature students working for local government to have a better fit between work and study.

There is more information in the accompanying Good Practice Guide on this issue, but it is important to remember that regardless of the benefits for employees, the introduction of such schemes as flexitime can also have a positive impact financially for the institution. Reductions in sickness absence, overtime, turnover, stress, and improvements in recruitment and productivity all make a monetary contribution, in some instances quite considerable when calculated across the whole organisation. The private sector has been clear on this for some time and the research literature cites the published figures. Many of the Sunday Times "100 Best Companies to work for" also appear near the top of the share indices.

5.2 Benefits of formal policies

As seen in Section 3, a high proportion of higher education institutions offer some form of flexibility in start and finish times. However much of this is informal and often even where there are formal policies in place much informal practice still goes on. It seems difficult to clarify who is using what scheme and whether the flexibility provided is meeting the needs of employees or even employers. The extent of informal practice suggests a high proportion of employees within higher education are seeking some form of flexibility in their working hours, and that institutions are responding to this. This is excellent news for employees, but it is clear from the FEO project research that not all employees who seek or who could benefit from being able to vary their own hours on a daily basis have access to this or sufficient control over their own working time.

Some of the informal practice is via a system of TOIL (Time off in lieu), and although it is often viewed by management as flexible working, it is in fact a means of repaying overtime in hours rather than as financial reward. However, although TOIL itself is not a flexible working arrangement, it can enable line managers concerned with the work/life balance of employees to give some flexibility along the lines of flexitime where no other options exist. With flexitime employees can vary their own hours to cope with other issues in their lives while still maximising their working hours. This difference between flexitime or flexible hours and TOIL has important implications for the culture of the institution, trust placed in employees, and the delegation of control over the management of work time.

- *“I think the opportunity to have flexibility in employment is vital to meet the needs of the working population. From a personal perspective, flexible working improves my morale and means I am more willing to put in the hours when necessary because I know I will get them back at some point”*

If formal systems are set up carefully then they can operate much more effectively than informal systems. With a formal policy in place there is a recognised procedure for managers to follow and they understand clearly what is expected of them. The limits are well defined as are the bonuses and penalties for abuse. This means that employees do not feel they are asking for anything special, they feel the system is fairer as it can be applied more consistently, and they understand the process the manager will go through and know they will get a response. The arguments that generally support the use of formal policies for flexible working hold true for flexitime in that they are seen to be –

- Fair
- Transparent
- Effective
- Objective
- Easy to use
- Embedded in the culture

With the same set of rules for all employees, everyone has the same choice and control and there is no need necessarily to state why they are working a particular pattern or need flexi-leave. Everything is above board, and even time sheets should be open access for planning and monitoring.

Informal systems, although quick and useful for local situations and ad hoc requests, can be operated unfairly and are subjective, dependent on the attitudes and perceptions of local management and can therefore be inconsistent. This was one of the problems identified in the Flexible Employment Options Audit (Scott). Staff may feel they need to be a special case to ask for variable hours, or they may feel awkward about asking their line manager if they feel flexible working is not supported or is for "show" only. Having a formal flexitime policy that is accessible to all employees sends out far better signals about the culture of the organisation and how the welfare of employees is viewed.

- *"I have observed staff morale rise significantly with our work team as a direct result of the FEO project. People feel they have permission to vary their hours without having to worry that others may think badly of them because for instance a childcare crisis has made them late one day."*
- *"The section I work in have been understanding and flexible to my needs as a carer, but this is an informal agreement, and one that the overall university would not necessarily agree with."*

Improved morale and productivity resulting from the introduction of flexitime is very real and measurable. For participants in the FEO pilot schemes, the existence of such flexible working options as flexitime had a psychologically positive impact even if they were not used to the fullest extent. Employees also view the employer more favourably because their needs are being addressed or at least considered.

- *"I work for the ... office which operates flexitime which I think has a very positive impact on the morale and productivity of the staff."*

In all research, giving employees control over when to start and finish their working day reaps enormous rewards in terms of morale, loyalty to the organisation and productivity. The added bonus for employees of being able to accrue a little time off increases this.

- *"I do like working flexitime and accumulating enough hours for a day off. However there are times of the year when time off is impossible e.g. start of year and term, regardless of necessity."*

One of the other main benefits from the organisation's point of view is that it gives employees the signal that they are trusted to do their work and have been given responsibility. The response of the majority is to work more willingly and productively. Employees can plan their own work loads, and do not necessarily have to stop a task at a rigid finishing time. Alternatively an employee may finish early and plan a longer day the next day to complete a new task.

- *“Extended flexi means more choice for staff over work times, whilst not compromising overall office productivity.”*
- *“Useful if have extra work to catch up on – getting something in return for working longer hours.”*

Under a formal flexitime scheme there is the potential to reduce or eliminate the need for overtime. Employees, within limits, can be asked to give some extra time in the knowledge that these extra hours accrued can be saved as credit to be taken later as flexi-leave. Employees are usually very aware of what needs to be achieved and when by, and of the pattern of workload over a year. Flexitime is also a means for managers to plan ahead and cope with some of the peaks and troughs of workload. Views of some of the managers taking part in the FEO pilot scheme –

- *“I would be extremely keen to adopt a flexible working approach to my role and my teams as I feel we would all benefit, as would the University.”*
- *“I feel a flexible approach to working hours can generate more commitment from staff. I have worked on a flexible system before and it worked well.”*
- *“The feedback has been very positive; it has given the first line managers more control over their sections activities.”*

As with the implementation of all flexible working and work/life balance options it is generally seen by the organisation that the benefits outweigh any costs involved, and flexitime in particular is viewed as a low cost option. There are some areas where flexitime demands a different style of management which may cause problems depending on the effectiveness of the management already in place, but a well managed department or team will benefit tremendously from access to formal flexitime if it is not already available. Employee expectation particularly over working patterns is also important and ensuring that management have the ultimate decision over hours enabling them to meet workloads and business objectives. The goal is a WIN/WIN situation meeting the needs of both organisation and employees, or a close compromise.

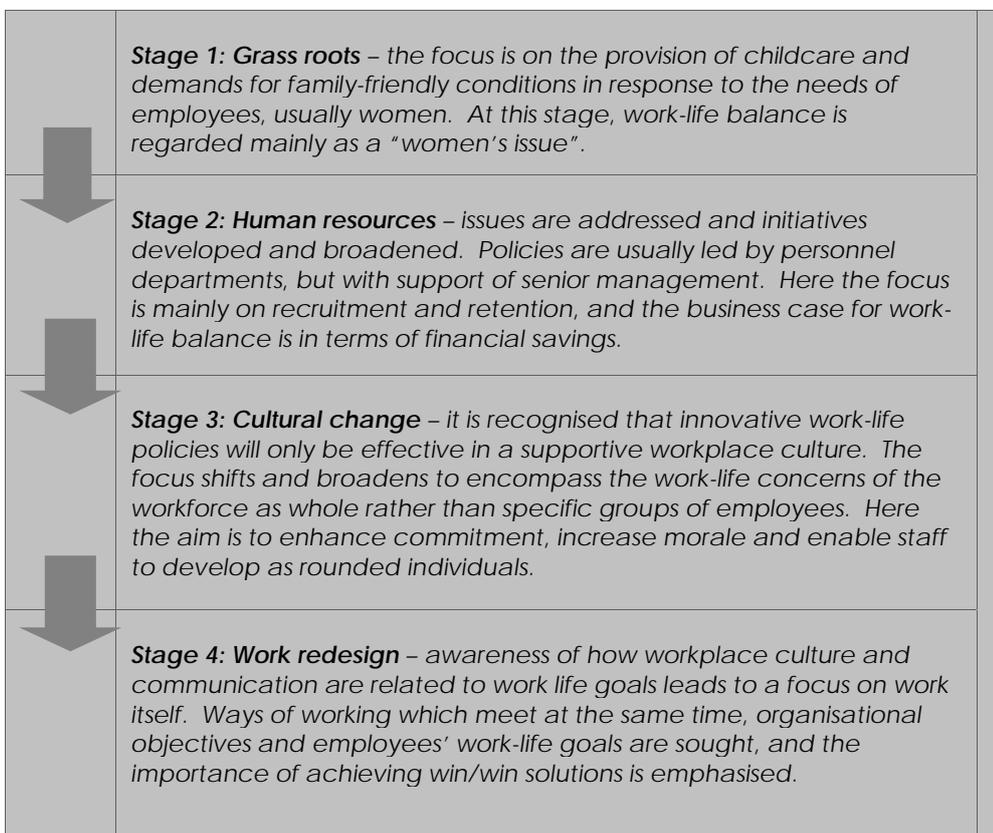
There is more detailed, practical information on preparation, planning and implementing a formal flexitime scheme in the Good Practice Guide, and a list of basic definitions and terms in Appendix One.

5.3 Cultural change and integration

Some organisations prefer to have one flexitime scheme for the whole organisation while others are happy to delegate this to faculties or departments. Although having just flexitime will cover the needs of many employees, there are some roles which are not suited to daily variation in hours by employee choice, and some

employees who need more different flexible working arrangements. This is why the scheme works best when it is one of a range of options available to help employers, as well as employees, maximise working hours to meet business objectives, while enabling individuals to manage other responsibilities or interests. For some institutions a general acceptance of the usefulness of flexible working arrangements is needed, as here even flexitime and allowing full-time employees to vary their daily hours slightly is seen as revolutionary.

There is a recognised 4 stage work/life model that illustrates this change from a reactive approach to flexible working and a more considered cultural approach. It was developed in the USA and is outlined in "Work-life Benchmarking Framework" by Daniels, Lewis and McCarrahar. Although this is an American model, the process of development is also apparent within many UK organisations.



The most difficult step to make is between stages 2 and 3. Those who have managed this are now noted for their overall attitude to work/life balance, and include -

Leeds Metropolitan University – "We are moving towards a 24hour, seven day a week operation. Our employment policies need to reflect this to deliver our service. Flexibility is implicit in everything we do. We are always as flexible as possible in accommodating anyone's wish." (From their policy on flexible working)

Oxford Brookes University – *“Work/life balance isn’t only about families and childcare. Nor is it about working less. It’s about working “smart”. About being fresh enough to give all you need to both work and home, without jeopardizing one for the other. And it is a necessity for everyone at whatever stage you are in your life.”* (Quoted in “Work/life balance: the essential guide”; DTI, 2001)

Section 6: Considerations for HEIs using formal flexitime

For the majority of employees and managers the experience of flexitime is very positive and there are few problems. However there are some factors that can inhibit the full use of the scheme. These were also highlighted by the participants trialling different flexitime schemes in the FEO project.

6.1 Managers' expectations

Some line managers can find it hard to deal with exceptions, and often prefer the certainty of a standard day. This is coupled with fears that it will be harder to maintain full office cover and that busy times will not be covered if staff are allowed to vary their hours. The lack of training for line managers in implementing flexible working was highlighted by the FEO research as an issue –

- Suggestion to improve the scheme - *“more in terms of guidelines/training for line managers/supervisors prior to roll-out to ensure more enthusiastic commitment and a genuine opportunity for staff to explore flexibility in their work.”*
- *“I think as the manager of a small team it is not really practical for me to take up any of the flexible working options without it impinging adversely on the team...So their flexibility makes me less able to be flexible.”*

If office coverage is a particular concern one solution could be to pilot a formal flexitime scheme with broader core times, tighter flexible periods and bandwidth limiting the hours available for flexibility. If this is successful, and managers and employees are happy managing the level of flexibility, then the constraints of the scheme could be loosened.

6.2 Employee expectations

The team should be encouraged to plan time off between them, while ensuring that the office is adequately covered to meet the business needs of the department. Employees should not be led to believe that they can have any time they like off without reference to either department workloads or the needs of others in the department. Areas to be aware of include Monday mornings and Friday afternoons (unless these are particularly quiet); the number of staff wanting to start either particularly early or late; any team conflicts with a weaker member being used to cover “undesirable times”; and those with children always claiming particular times again leaving others to fill in. Everything may be working well, but regular discussions can be used to air difficulties and maintain team

communication. Employees should be encouraged to retain a flexible attitude themselves and most can make occasional changes to a routine, even those with caring responsibilities.

- *“Have staff working different hours during vacations – with agreement from other staff. Essential that flexitime coordinated to maintain service level and prevent colleagues taking disproportionate burden.”*

6.3 Customer expectation and customer service points

Although many customer service points need staffing at fixed times or by shifts giving little scope for flexibility, rarely is a role entirely based around a service point. Most of the departments in the FEO pilot scheme had some form of customer service function, as do most support services within HEIs, either for other staff, students, outside customers or all three. There were a variety of views on this from managers and participants trialling flexitime –

- *“Customers expect to speak to the person who signed the letter during normal office hours.”*
- *“I have certainly received no negative feedback about our service from customers.”*
- *“Whilst I have not needed to take a formal role in the FEO pilot project, I have felt that this opportunity has been of benefit to my immediate colleagues and has helped to reduce stress levels while making no apparent negative effect on the service we provide or our efficiency in general.”*

Benefits of flexitime can include being able to cover an office either side of opening hours more easily, or the very fact that there are core hours can help concentrate telephone calls –

- *“. . . We work a system of flexitime and the office is functioning between 8am and 6.30pm.”*
- *“Very positive response from ex-students seeking confirmation of awards etc. employment agencies seeking references, informal requests from faculties etc. This is a result of my ability to concentrate on my responsibilities between 7.30am and 9.30am free of disturbances from telephones and customers.”*

6.4 Inflexibility of core hours

Participants in the FEO pilot scheme commented particularly on the core times of 2pm-4pm in the afternoon, pointing out that they were incompatible with most school finishing times, and in addition do not reflect working hours of someone regularly starting early. However there also needs to be a way of ensuring cover during the afternoon, particularly if a department has several carers of school age children, and increasingly older employees who are grandparents may be sharing

before and after school care too. Some carers prefer to come in later and stay later, or there may be part-time employees who prefer to work afternoons.

- *"Flexitime has been adjusted so you can now come in 7am instead of 8am but the leaving time has been left at 4pm; should be 3pm to allow for the fact you come in earlier."*
- *"Core hours are 10-12 and 2.30-4. I think core time ending 3.30pm would be beneficial for parents in particular."*

There are arguments for and against core times and arguments for broadening them, but generally an increasing number of organisations are finding that being required to be in work from 9.30 to 4 except for a possible two hour lunch break is not actually very flexible.

- *"I would however welcome the opportunity to vary the core hours. This would make our current flexi system even more useful."*
- *"Flexitime as it exists at the moment is not really flexitime because it only allows a 30 minute option over and below the "normal" 8 hours working day. It would be better if it were extended to the hours of 10am and perhaps 3pm to allow a greater amount of flexibility."*
- *"Further flexibility i.e. no core hours."*

The background section of the report mentions several councils expanding schemes to get rid of core hours and allow for a longer bandwidth, and as seen in the case studies this was also successful in one of the project's pilot departments and is still ongoing. However a department or team wishing to operate like this needs to be used to a more fluid movement of employees, be using team working effectively to cover office hours and be achieving workloads by objective setting.

6.5 Choice of recording system

There can be issues with clocking on systems both in cost and psychologically with employees. Most departments in the FEO pilot opted for a simple open access electronic timesheet on spreadsheet software to record and monitor flexitime. The various means of recording and monitoring flexitime are covered in the Good Practice Guide.

- *"The biggest problem has been with calculating hours owed. We now have a spreadsheet that does this automatically and so hope this will improve."*

6.6 Parking

Two participants in the FEO pilot wanted to start at 9.30 having dropped children at school, but could not do so as their institution's car park was full by 9am. One incurred costs of childminding as a result –

- *“The current demand for places in the car park means that I leave my children waiting together at the school, instead of me waiting with them until they go in, so that I can get to work for 9am, in order to park my car. I had hoped to be able to comfortably take them to school, leaving enough time to get to work for 9.30am. I do feel guilty about abandoning my children outside their classrooms, 15 minutes before they go in. They are only 5 year and 8 years old.”*

This is a dilemma for many institutions particularly those in inner city areas, and also mentioned as a problem by staff at Oxford Brookes University when they were surveyed about work/life balance. Perhaps pressure on parking can be eased by encouraging use of public transport or working at home.

- *“I find the flexible working helps me greatly. However, I feel the pilot scheme cannot be trialled properly as there is limited parking space at work and if you are wishing to start work later than 9am, you are unable to find a parking space.”*

Happily of course this is not a problem for all HEIs and many employees are able to use flexitime to come to work for around 9.30 and still be able to find space to park.

6.7 Heavy workloads

With a formal flexitime scheme the debit/credit position, although regulated by the accounting period, is usually subject to additional rules when the scheme is set up to avoid excess accumulation. However this can cause problems in departments where workloads are heavy and it is usual to work long hours. Of course there is no difficulty in accumulating credit, but there can be no time available to take flexi-leave, and even ordinary leave can be hard to book. It may be necessary to retain some form of overtime in these cases.

- *“When overwhelmed with work, flexibility/flexitime doesn’t really help.”*
- *“Members of my team are happy with the scheme. Putting in extra hours is no problem, but taking time off is often difficult because of pressure of work – but we manage.”*

6.8 Long hours’ culture

This inhibits flexible working in general as working hours can become too great to provide any room for flexibility. In the case of flexitime this often manifests itself as too much credit being built up and then being lost as there is no time to take it in, or in the case of senior managers as a reason why they should not use flexitime. Bandwidths, along with the amount of credit, can be one way of regulating or even limiting excessive hours.

- *“This flexible working hours scheme had benefited me as I never realised, how much extra time I worked (and never claimed) in a week! It is also made me feel much happier to have “a cushion” of time owed as I don’t feel guilty when I am called out of work to*

collect my children from school when they are unwell. It is good to keep a record of time worked."

Some employees, particularly managers, find compressed hours are also a useful way of managing excessive hours. However working regular long hours to cope with workloads may be hiding resourcing problems, and are generally considered to be unhealthy in the long term.

6.9 Overtime

Some institutions may make more use of overtime than others, while some may also have a system of TOIL (Time off in Lieu). If a system of TOIL is in widespread use it can be easily translated into flexi leave when a formal flexitime scheme is introduced, but if overtime is regularly used and employees have come to rely on it to supplement their salaries, the introduction of flexitime can be perceived by employees as a severe loss of benefit. If there is still a need to allow for overtime then an agreement should be made as to after how many hours or at what time overtime starts to operate, both for full-time and part-time staff, maybe at the end of the bandwidth, and when its use is appropriate. While some staff are happy to work overtime others cannot or do not want to do so.

As many support services have to operate regularly at weekends and even in the evening, provision can be made in a timesheet for this. Some institutions have provision within the flexitime policy for busy times when credit hours cannot cope and offering overtime is necessary, such as Graduation and Admissions. There may be many such regular, predictable additional hours at certain times of the month, term or year that could be managed with extending the flexitime scheme with a long accounting period or banking time for quieter periods. Other flexible working solutions may also be useful to provide a better fit between workloads and employee availability, such as seasonal hours, staggered or compressed hours, or annualised hours.

A dilemma that flexitime can sometimes pose is that because employees are now monitoring their hours, they become aware of the hours they work over and above their contractual hours. Therefore some employees after the introduction of flexitime may need to be paid for hours that they regularly used to work over for free.

- *"Consider the whole option of working flexibly is fantastic, ensures that I can cover the necessities of work and home life when they are required, I now keep to 37 hours a week instead of 40+ and I now wouldn't work in any other way due to my caring role at home."*

6.10 Part time staff

In the past, often part-time employees have not been actively included under formal flexitime, however now the European Directive on part-time workers requires parity with fulltime employees. Once a standard day and half day are calculated for their hours, part-time employees can fill in start and finish times on a timesheet like other staff, and even be allocated their own core time. In the FEO pilot some part-time employees were unclear on their position, while others knew they were definitely included –

- *“If flexitime was introduced, not sure whether I would qualify as I am part-time. If I had the choice, I would welcome flexible working hours.”*
- *“As a part-timer working in flex-time system, I already have some access to flexible working. I would welcome the opportunity to take up more flexible working, should the need arise in future.”*

6.11 Conflicting policies

There may be a need to standardise terms and conditions to avoid conflict and perceived inequality -

- *“The office already operate a flexitime system – the disadvantage being that doctors, hospital and dentist appointments are expected to be taken in your own time – whilst other areas in the University do not expect staff to make up their hours for important medical appointments.”*

6.12 Individual solutions

Sometimes just a traditional flexitime scheme is not enough and for a few employees other solutions or a mixture are needed -

- *“I feel it would be better for me if I could do flexitime and work it around my husband as he does shift work, so one week I could work late but the following week I would have to finish early as . . . I have a 3 year old daughter who starts school this year, with no one else to pick her up. (But I would still do full time)”*
- *“My needs were not falling into a specific category among those presented, I needed to work extra days during term-time to meet demand in lieu of longer holidays during the summer vacation.*
- *“My oldest daughter is due to start school in September. I am hoping to be able to take more flexitime in school holidays than currently allowed by making a request under the new Employment Act.”*
- *“I would like to work a longer week in the winter months and have shorter weeks in the summer.”*

The solution may be to widen the current flexitime offered or the accounting period, and in addition widen the range of options available for employees and managers trying to find best fit solutions.

6.13 Employees in roles deemed unsuitable for flexitime

Flexitime tends to be aimed at administrative, clerical or secretarial workers - office based staff in services that have traditionally worked 9am to 5pm. It has been extended successfully to junior managers, scientists, engineers, technicians and other laboratory workers, and generally employers are increasingly finding ways of allowing some control of working hours so that all employees can have some say in their own work life balance.

Flexitime tends not to be suitable for those solely in client facing or frontline roles, such as receptionists, and those roles which have fixed time functions. For higher education this may include some roles in facilities management. Choice in hours is usually offered by operating a shift system, or more recently offering flexible options such as self-rostering of shifts by a team or even annualised hours. The hardest part of introducing a scheme can be dealing with feelings of those whose job roles are not suited to flexitime and finding some alternative ways of empowering them. The perceived advantages that others are getting can create discontent –

- *“Other offices feel left out and wanted to be part of flexitime.”*
- *“General envy from colleagues that our boss was prepared to run the pilot.”*

However managers can have conflicting views and in some cases flexitime is operating successfully for roles that others would see as unsuitable –

- *“Cashiers have been told that we are not allowed to take part in flexible employment scheme because we have to be available to our customers 9-5 . . . ”*

However another finance department seemed not to find this a problem –

- *“Already flexitime within pods in cashiers prior to new scheme and happy with hours worked.”*
- *“. . . cashiers office has to be covered 9-5 Mon-Fri. . . . The team works well to cover holidays, flexi days and illness.”*

Interestingly the staffing of small offices and teams seems also to depend on the attitude to flexibility of the managers and employees rather than any operational problems –

- *“The only downside is if there are only 2 of you in the department, meaning that you can’t take time off together (same time). This reduces the flexibility quite considerably when also trying to fit in holidays as well. I suppose that’s the nature of the job.”*
- *“There are only 2 staff in my office so we just operate a slightly more flexible version of the previous flexitime.”*

6.14 Academic staff and senior management

In most organisations senior management are on contracts which do not specify hours. They are expected to vary their hours to achieve business objectives, and so have no need for formal flexitime and would possibly find it too restricting. However, this leaves them vulnerable to long hours and heavy workloads with no mechanism for reconciling this other than their own time management skills. This is also an issue in higher education where academic staff too are often on open contracts and there is evidence that as workloads and pressures increase so the balance between teaching, administration and research becomes more difficult. There may be a difference between pre and post 1992 institutions, where higher education institutions formed after 1992 were often associated with local government and retained some of the original working conditions, including flexitime. In addition long established institutions may have a stronger demarcation between the flexibility for academic and academic related staff and that allowed support staff. Some comments from the FEO scheme –

- *“In terms of flexible hours (etc.) I already operate/have the benefit of this via my contract but strongly support its introduction for staff on ATP&C contracts.”*
- *“Make available to academic staff this would have the interesting effect of making our employers define working hours and holiday entitlement.”*
- *“I already vary my hours on a daily basis to fit in with work and study.”*
- *The post I am in has permitted flexible working hours so that I could drop off and collect children when needed and put the extra time in at home – this was very useful indeed.*
- *“The ability to vary the working schedule is vital for academics, seeking to balance research-teaching-admin. In theory, we have it, in practice we do not, because understaffing limits our options. NB A balance work commitment, with some freedom at the edges, proper breaks, and less long hours is the healthy option.”*

However the apparent flexibility available to academic staff is not always present in practice due to workloads and other facets of the work academic staff undertake, and consequently there is increasing national concern about stress levels for academic and academic related staff.

6.15 Summary

Despite the seemingly long list of points above flexitime remains a simple and effective way of giving the majority of employees whose contracted hours are specified, freedom to manage their own working time. Often the first step of handing over such trust and moving from rigid timings can be the most daunting. However flexitime does work within the higher education sector and works well.

Section 7: Recommendations for use

The FEO project was set up to look at such flexible options as flexitime as an element in the recruitment and retention of employees within the higher education sector. In addition one of aims behind the second stage of the project was to reach groups of staff who felt unable to take advantage of current options, and to reach other groups who would benefit from further flexibility across the whole diversity of the working population. In terms of flexitime the following have been identified as helpful –

- **Trusting employees and offering control and empowerment**

“I asked our Investors in People assessor to see what the impact of FEO had been on staff. There were no negative findings. The main comment was that staff now felt empowered and in control of their own working hours. They did not need to ask if they wanted to go early one day and stay late another – they would just do it.”

- **Adopting a formal scheme for equity and accessibility**
- **Gearing flexitime to particular business needs and circumstances of each part of institution.**
- **Placing flexitime within a range of options available for all employees to better balance their work and personal lives, as classifying all flexible working under “family friendly” makes formal flexible options inaccessible and irrelevant to other employees.**
- **Allowance within flexitime for religious observance**
- **Allowance within core hours for local school finishing times**
- **Core hours to allow for early finish or late start if there is a broad bandwidth**
- **Where possible, loosening the parameters, including the consideration of no core hours**
- **If unsure, to pilot a flexitime schemes, perhaps at first with limited flexible periods and allowing for future extension**
- **After careful consideration, if flexitime is still viewed as unsuitable allowing a range of other flexible options to be available.**

Anglia Polytechnic University was the education sector winner for flexible working in the Business in the community (BITC) Opportunity Now Best Practice Case Studies annual awards 2004. This was for their emphasis on what works best in a particular work area, and on a "results based" approach to flexibility. They offer a range of options to aid work/life balance, most importantly backed by a supportive institutional culture

- Generally the FEO Project team recommends moving towards an integrated work/life organisational culture in which flexibility is the norm. A formal flexitime scheme is recommended as an important part of this.

Section 8: Conclusion

“Cultural change has long been seen as the core to the issues of work-life balance – for the take-up to increase, this challenge remains.” (Walton) Flexitime is a good starting point on this journey, as although some control is passed to employees and signals of trust are given out, the pattern of hours and the limits of flexibility are under control of the organisation. In the early 1970s the benefits of flexitime were clear and known about, however it seems now that a formal “one size fits all” approach may not be appropriate and long standing users of flexitime are moving away from core hours, seeing traditional flexitime, in the light of newer ways of working flexibly, as bureaucratic and rigid.

For some employees such schemes as flexitime are essential to give them a better work life balance and to help them deal with such issues as caring responsibilities. As more women have entered the workforce the resultant consideration of family responsibilities benefits both male and female employees, and flexitime and other flexible options can be used as benefits to attract potential applicants. However it goes much further than that, and as the FEO project found over 80% of employees would like access to flexible working and most of all the option to vary their hours of work on a daily basis. The majority are happy to work whenever required, mainly working a routine pattern, but like the flexibility to manage day to day personal issues with the possibility of saving up a few hours for some time off. Often employees do not want much variation within the working day, but to be able to take responsibility for their working time in the same way that academic staff and managers do. The effect that even tiny changes to a rigid timing can make to people should not be underestimated and permission even to be able to vary daily, within half an hour or so, your start time can be very empowering.

In spite of this, flexitime is still seen by many in higher education as an employee led parent’s and women’s issue, and although there appears to be widespread flexibility in working arrangements, much is informal, patchy and open to abuse. Many institutions are unsure of which working arrangements employees are using and how many are doing so, even with flexitime, and if such arrangements are meeting the needs of these employees or those of the institution. Formal schemes do not have to be restricting, but can free employees from asking to be a special case, and allow them to choose a working pattern that suits them and enable them to do their work more effectively.

The original FEO Audit suggested that higher education institutions focused on flexible policies to deal with specialist situations rather than considering the changes that the sector has undergone, its new challenges, and the way in which flexibility might be utilised to develop more modern and efficient working

practices. However, many are now realising that work/life balance and flexibility can help employees and the business objectives, creating a WIN/WIN situation. There are moves in the sector towards an integrated work/ life culture in which flexibility is the norm, expanding the range of options available as well as expanding the groups of employees they are offered to. There is a growing realisation that taking on board the approaches used by the private sector to invest in people can impact on the bottom line too. Flexitime is one of the ways in which this can be achieved, benefiting the organisation and employees, particularly when we are striving to “work smarter not harder”.

Appendix 1 - Bibliography

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Appendix 2 – Basic definitions

A formal definition –

"Formal flexitime schemes divide the day into core times and flexible times. The flexible periods allow employees some freedom to vary their starting and finishing time, while they are expected to be at work in the nominated core periods. Hours are recorded and over the course of a set accounting period (usually four weeks) individuals must roughly balance their actual hours worked with their total contracted hours. Schemes usually allow a small number of credit or debit hours to be carried over into the next accounting period. In most cases, these credit hours may be converted into extra leave." (*IDS study 725 on flexitime schemes*)

Basic elements of a typical scheme -

To operate a typical, traditional flexitime scheme the following are defined:

Bandwidth - the time between the earliest start time allowed and the latest finish time, and it sets the limit on the total hours that can be worked in any one day. Typically a standard scheme allows employees to start work at 8am and finish by 6pm. In some cases this is extended, but it depends on normal office hours. Expansion of the bandwidth to 7am to 7pm is becoming popular to cover increasing customer demand and global contact.

Core time - specified time periods when all employees must be at work. A survey by the National Joint Council for Local Government Services found that the most common core times were 10am to 12 noon, and 2pm to 4pm, although some workplaces still have a fixed lunch break. Very occasionally employees can negotiate their own core times, but nearly all schemes are either department or organisation wide.

Flexible periods – These are the times other than the core times when employees can choose when they start and finish work within the confines of the scheme. Typically these are 8am to 10am; 12 noon to 2pm; and 4pm to 6pm.

Accounting period – the set period over which the total contractual hours should be reconciled. Typically this is set to four weeks to coincide with monthly payroll.

Credit – hours worked over and above contractual hours. There are usually limits set on the hours that can be accrued and taken as leave, and also on the number that can be carried over to the next accounting period. Often any surplus is lost. Typically the credit allowance is somewhere between 8 and 10 hours for an accounting period of four weeks and a full-time contract of around 38 hours a week.

Debit – there is also usually an allowance to work less than normal contractual hours in a week, and then make these up over the rest of the accounting time so that the account is still reconciled. In addition there is usually a facility for carrying some debit over to the next accounting period. Typically, the number of hours debit is usually about half that of the credit number. There is usually agreement that any debit owed over a certain amount is deducted from pay or annual leave. In the early days of flexitime employers feared a debit build-up. In fact the opposite happened, and it was found that employees preferred to be in credit with debit only usually occurring due to illness

in the family or other emergencies, and was always made up the next month. (Bolton)

Flexi-leave – any credit hours built up during accounting time can be taken as extra leave, with agreement from the line manager.

Any flexitime policy or agreement specifies how the leave may be taken, whether it is hours, half days or full days, and any limit on how much may be taken in any one accounting period. One of the reasons why flexitime is generally so popular is that employees enjoy building up a few hours to enable them to take a little extra day or so of "holiday". An initial enthusiasm for amassing credit wears off once the scheme has been operational for a while. Although in principle, accounts should be settled by the close of the accounting period, in practice most schemes provide for flexibility across accounting periods by allowing staff to carry over a small credit or debit balance. The rules concerning the amounts of debit and credit do vary enormously from scheme to scheme, and a useful summary can be found in the IDS study.

Standard day - to enable the flexitime scheme to work, a standard day is calculated based on contracted hours of work, and used on timesheets for sickness absence, annual leave, flexi leave and so on. Calculation of a standard day based on different weekly contractual hours and discussions around core hours allows for increasing numbers of part-time staff to be included in flexitime schemes.

Breaks - Of course, normal working terms and conditions apply, so for instance anyone working more than 6 hours in the day must take at least a 30 minute break and record this on their timesheet, or clock out and in. Usually if working full-time this will be during the flexible period allowed for lunch.

The guidelines for a flexitime scheme typically make provision for its suspension if necessary at very busy periods. As with any flexible working scheme it remains a concession within normal working terms and conditions not a right and the needs of the organisation remain a priority. Even where policies are informal, most institutions will have some rules or guidelines for use and application of flexitime.

Appendix 3

Flexible Employment Options Project



Organisation

Name

Telephone

E-mail address

1. Approximately how many employees (headcount) do you have in your organisation?

(Please include all permanent and temporary staff but not casual workers or part time hourly paid lecturers)

Formal Policies

2. Do you have a formal policy for any of the following:

(please tick as appropriate)

	Yes	No	Don't know
▪ Job Share			
▪ Flexitime			
▪ Home-working			

If yes for any of the above, go to question 3, If no or don't know for all 3, go to question 6

3. How many years has each one been in place?

(please tick as appropriate)

	Less than 2 years	2-4 years	5 years or more	Don't know
▪ Job Share				
▪ Flexitime				
▪ Home-working				

4. Which staff groups does each policy apply to?

(please tick as appropriate)

	Academic staff	Admin/ support staff	Management/ Professional/ Academic related staff	Manual staff	Research staff	Clinical staff
■ Job Share						
■ Flexitime						
■ Home-working						

Definitions of each group of staff can be found at the end of the questionnaire.

5. Approximately how many employees within your organisation currently do any of the following under a formal policy?

- Job share
- Use flexitime
- Work from home on a regular basis (e.g. once a week/month)
- Work from home on an ad hoc basis

Informal Policies

6. Do you have employees who use any of the following on an informal basis:

(please tick as appropriate)

- Job Share
- Use flexitime/Toil (time off in lieu)
- Work from home on a regular basis (e.g. once a week/month)
- Work from home on an ad hoc basis

Yes	No	Don't know

If yes for any of the above, go to question 7, If no or don't know for all 4, go to question 8

7. Approximately how many employees within your organisation do any of the following under an informal policy?

- Job Share
- Use flexitime/Toil (time off in lieu)
- Work from home on a regular basis (e.g. once a week/month)
- Work from home on an ad hoc basis

8. Is there anything unusual about your flexitime scheme, e.g. no core hours, very early start or finish?

Yes	<input style="width: 60px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>	Details	
N/A	<input style="width: 60px; height: 20px;" type="text"/>		

- *Academic** Staff on academic contracts primarily undertaking a lecturing/teaching role up to and including professors
- Research** Staff on research contracts primarily undertaking a research role
- Manual** Staff undertaking a practical role such as cleaners, gardeners, drivers, security staff, catering and craft workers
- Management/Professional Academic Related staff** Staff primarily undertaking a management role, such as senior administrators, managers, heads of department, and academic related staff (usually those earning over £25,000)
- Admin/Support** Staff undertaking a support role such as clerical and secretarial staff, technicians, and junior administrators (usually those earning less than £25,000)
- Clinical** Staff undertaking a clinical role, such as doctors, nurses and physiotherapists