Flexible Working at LSE

4. Making the decision

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This section is primarily written for managers who need to make a decision about a formal request they have received for flexible working. Non-managers may also find this section helpful as a means of understanding the sorts of considerations that their manager will take into account.

What to think about before making a decision

Be aware that there are some statutory timescales when it comes to making a decision about a formal flexible working request. Following the formal meeting, you're normally expected to make a fairly prompt decision and communicate this to HR so that HR can write to the employee within 14 days of the meeting. At the same time, it's important that you're not rushed into making a decision. Let the employee know if you need a little more time – for example, if you need a little more information or would like to explore some practical issues raised by potential solutions – and keep them updated of when they can expect to receive a decision.

When you're making the decision, try to weight the expected benefits of what the employee is requesting against any potential downsides. As a general rule, be positive – remember that you can approve the arrangement with a trial period even if you're not 100% sure at the outset. Also, keep in mind that requests should be treated on a case by case basis, and agreeing to one request doesn't set a precedent for the future.

You may wish to consider the following:

- Don't be shy about seeking advice from your HR Partner – they are here to help!

- Keep in mind that, although you don't have to accept a request simply because someone else is already working a similar arrangement, you also shouldn't turn down a request based only on the outcome of a similar previous request.

- Remember that, beyond the individual request, you should also be thinking about the needs of the team – this may make some requests more challenging to approve, but it can also be an opportunity to take a fresh look at ways of working or the distribution of work in the team as a whole.

- If a number of people in your team or department are already working flexibly, you could ask whether any of them wish to change their working arrangements so that there is enough capacity to approve the new request.

- If the request includes a reduction in hours, you may want to consider any budgetary implications for your department. In the short term, your department will retain the full budget, which can be used to fill the resourcing gap or be put towards departmental cost savings. In the longer term, this element of the budget will disappear during future forecasting. You can speak with Finance Division if you aren't sure about the financial implications of approving the request.

- And remember that, if you're at all unsure about a particular request, you always have the option of proposing a trial period so that both of you can check that the arrangement is working satisfactorily.

Be creative

Try to think of creative ways around any potential obstacles you can see, for example:

- If you think that approving the request would mean an additional financial cost, how could this be mitigated? If there is an additional cost, it's worth weighing this against some of the potential longer term benefits to the team of approving the request (not least that employees are likely to be more motivated and engaged).

- If you feel that approving the request could have a detrimental impact on service to students and/or staff, remember that there are solutions (especially technological ones) that can minimise or remove this impact for even customer-facing roles. You can find out more about this in **Resources to support flexible working**.

- Try not to second guess an impact on the quality of the employee's work or their performance in the role – for example, fewer hours spent in the office need not have any adverse effect on the employee's output (in fact, it can be a motivating factor if it means that the employee feels trusted to manage their own workload).

- If you see challenges with redistributing work among the rest of the team, be sure that you aren't second guessing what other colleagues might be interested in – it's quite possible that they might be interested in taking on some extra responsibilities and haven't mentioned this yet.

- If you think that you might need to recruit extra staff to meet a shortfall in the team, think whether this shortfall could be met by offering a developmental or part-time opportunity to others (HR's <u>Organisational Learning team</u> can advise here).

- If you anticipate that there might be a lack of work during the periods that the employee is proposing to work, think about whether there are any other projects or pieces of work that the employee could get involved in during the quieter times.

- If you can foresee any planned structural changes in the team or department that might affect the employee's post, keep in mind that such changes on the horizon shouldn't necessarily mean that different work patterns can't be explored in the more immediate term.

It's worthwhile to check with your HR Partner before you make your final decision, especially if you aren't sure that you can approve the request. Whatever you decide, it's important that you would be able to explain your thought process – keeping in mind that, if you aren't convinced by your reasoning, it's unlikely to convince the employee.

If you are unable to approve the request, you should include some lines on the form to explain your reasoning – this must be one or more of the eight business reasons for declining a request (as set out in the <u>Flexible Working Policy</u>). Remember that the employee can appeal against your decision, so it's important to make sure that you explain your thought process clearly and by referring to the details of the request.

Completing the form

Once you've made your decision, you need to complete the manager's section of the Flexible Working Request Form and send the completed form to your HR Partner (please see the <u>'HR People' webpage</u> for an updated contact list if you are unsure). They will then arrange for a letter to go out to the employee which will confirm the decision.

If the request is approved, the letter will confirm the start date of the new flexible work pattern, brief details of what it will involve, and any other important contractual information (for example, the updated salary if the request included a change of hours). The letter will also confirm a trial period if one has been agreed.

> Remember…
> If you are thinking of declining a formal flexible working request, make sure that you speak with your HR Partner before confirming the decision.

If the request is declined, the letter will summarise the reason(s) as well as confirming the employee's right of appeal.

What happens next

This isn't quite the final stage of the formal process. What happens next will depend on the outcome of the decision. If the request wasn't successful, the employee has the right of appeal. If the request was successful, it's important that employee and manager take the time to read **5. Reviews and trial periods** – this part can easily be overlooked and it's fundamental to making sure that the arrangement works well going forward.

HR
The London School of Economics and Political Science
Houghton Street
London WC2A 2AE

Email: humanresources@lse.ac.uk

Telephone: +44 (0)20 7955 0000

lse.ac.uk/HR

The information in this brochure can be made available in alternative formats, on request. Please contact: humanresources@lse.ac.uk