WORKING REMOTELY FROM HOME POLICY

1.0   INTRODUCTION

1.1   The University is committed to being an inclusive supportive employer and providing staff with the opportunity to work more flexibly where possible, including working remotely from home.

1.2   As a campus-based University which prioritises teaching quality and student experience, it would not be workable for employees to exclusively and permanently work remotely from home. However, the University is committed to exploring home working for part of an employee's working day or working week in the short, medium or long-term as an alternative to being based wholly on campus. However, noting that employment conditions are subject to English law working overseas (i.e. outside the UK) under this policy is not permitted unless expressly agreed otherwise in the employment contract and planned accordingly.

1.3   Employees who are interested in working remotely from home will need to seek approval from their Head of School / Service. Employees should be aware that the business needs of the University will always be the primary determining factor when considering whether or not to grant approval.

1.4   There may also be times when the University reasonably requires employees to work remotely away from the University and to temporarily amend their place of work (e.g. at their home address).

2.0   SCOPE

2.1   This policy applies where employees are required to seek approval from their Head of School / Service to work remotely from home irrespective of the nature or length of arrangement. It also applies in situations where the University requires employees to work remotely. However, it does not apply where individuals have been contracted on the basis that their home is already their normal place of work.

2.2   This policy should be read in conjunction with other relevant University policies and procedures, including but not limited to the Flexible Working Guidelines and the Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure.

3.0 AIMS

3.1 Through the application of this Policy, the University aims to:

- Continue to support our employees to work more flexibly where operationally possible;
- Ensure a fair, transparent and consistent approach to homeworking across the organisation;
- Provide clarity on how to seek approval for homeworking and how suitability is assessed;
- Provide guidance on the local arrangements necessary to make a success of homeworking.

4.0 HOW TO SEEK APPROVAL FOR HOMEWORKING

4.1 Employees who are interested in working remotely from home will need to seek advance approval from their Head of School / Service. The Head of School / Service should aim to be as flexible as possible, but may refuse a request to work from home for legitimate business or logistical reasons.

4.2 Occasional homeworking requested by the employee

4.2.1 The University recognises that there may be circumstances where employees need to seek approval to temporarily work remotely from home for operational or personal reasons.

4.2.2 It may be suitable to work remotely from home occasionally, on an ad hoc basis, in the following circumstances:

- Where an employee would benefit from the opportunity to work effectively on a particular project or task where concentration is important and to avoid the interruptions that are part of the office environment.

- Where it would be hazardous for an employee to travel to work due to adverse weather conditions (e.g. amber or red warning has been issued by the MET office).

- Where following a period of sickness absence, and subject to medical advice provided by Occupational Health, temporary homeworking is recommended as part of a phased return to work.

4.2.3 Employees are required to seek advance written approval from their Head of School / Service as soon as reasonably practicable.

4.2.4 The decision whether to approve the request will be made on a case by case basis and the needs of the business will be the primary and overriding consideration.

4.3   Regular homeworking requested by the employee

4.3.1   Some employees may wish to seek approval to work from home on a more regular basis. Employees seeking approval for this kind of arrangement will need to submit a formal Flexible Working request in line with the University's Flexible Working Guidelines. The employee should outline the rationale for the request including the benefits of working from home, the expected outcomes and how any implications will be managed. Employees should refer to the University's Flexible Working Guidelines which can be found here:

4.3.2   The University recognises that disabled employees may ask to regularly work from home as a "reasonable adjustment" to accommodate their disability. The University recommends that any employee considering asking to work from home for this reason should inform their HR Business Partner as soon as reasonably practicable. The HR Business Partner will be able to provide appropriate support and obtain medical advice where necessary.   Employees should refer to the University's Sickness Absence Policy and Procedure which can be found here: https://www.bolton.ac.uk/staff-area/professional-services/about-hr/hr-a-to-z/

5.0   ASSESSING ELIGIBILITY FOR REGULAR HOMEWORKING

5.1   The Head of School / Service is required to assess eligibility for regular homeworking carefully taking into account the nature of the post and individual suitability.

5.2   Suitability of the Post

5.2.1   There are certain roles which simply do not lend themselves to home working. This includes manual roles which rely upon access to facilities and equipment (e.g. cleaners, caretakers, gardeners, and technicians). Other roles which are based in a designated location and / or require significant face to face contact will also be considered unsuitable (e.g. receptionists, library shelving staff and catering staff).

5.2.2   Homeworking may be suitable for a variety of other roles. The Head of School / Service should aim to keep an open mind and may wish to consider the following points:

- Can the activity be carried out as well at home as at work?
- Will quality of work be maintained?
- Will other members of staff be impacted? Will their workload increase?
- Will the privacy of the homeworker be impacted?
- Can the work be done without face to face contact with other parties?
- Can the work be done without easy access to IT or administrative support?
- Can productivity be measured?

5.2.3   The Head of School / Service should also refer to the Flexible Working Guidelines and may wish to seek advice from their HR Business Partner when assessing the suitability of homeworking.

5.3   Individual Suitability

5.3.1   In addition to assessing the suitability of the role, it is also useful for the parties to consider the employee's individual skill-set and how they approach their work. Below are the employee skills which are critical for successful homeworking:

- Good time management and the ability to prioritise;
- Self-sufficient and good at problem-solving;
- Ability to work without supervision and distraction;
- Propensity to seek clarity;
- Confident in decision-making;
- Ability to stay focused and achieve objectives to a high standard;
- Ability to give and receive feedback.

The employee will also need to ensure that they have suitable office and IT equipment, together with the relevant insurance.

5.3.2   Regular homeworking may not be suitable for every individual. However, if an employee is not immediately ready to work from home it does not mean that they may not be able to do so at a later date. Employees may be able to develop the necessary skills to make a success of homeworking.

6.0   EMPLOYEES REQUIRED TO WORK REMOTELY BY THE UNIVERSITY

6.1   In exceptional circumstances (such as in response to a pandemic or other business continuity issue) the University may require employees to work at another location on a temporary basis and their place of work be temporally amended. In such circumstances the University will give as much notice as is practicable in the circumstances.

6.2   In such circumstance's employees may be required to undertake their normal duties remotely or, in exceptional circumstances to support University needs, other duties in line with their grade and/or substantive role at the University. Where it is not possible for employees to undertake any work remotely the University will consider alternative measures with the employee. The University will act reasonably in requiring employees to work remotely.

6.3   Employees required to work remotely will be consulted by their Head of Service / School and will be issued formal confirmation of any temporary amendment to their place of work.

6.4   The key principles as set out in this document will apply to those circumstances where the University requires that employees work remotely.

7.0   LOCAL ARRANGEMENTS

7.1   Before the Head of School / Service grants approval for homeworking, irrespective of the nature or length of the arrangement, they must be satisfied that appropriate local arrangements are in place and that both parties know what is expected in terms of communication and supervision; performance; confidentiality and data protection; equipment and facilities; environmental factors; and of course health and safety.

7.2   Communication and Supervision

7.2.1   An employee working remotely from home must agree to remain contactable by phone and email during normal working hours except where their Head of School / Service has approved alternative arrangements.

7.2.2   Regular homeworking should not normally be used to combine work and caring responsibilities. Employees who are working from home and who are also carers are expected to have adequate care arrangements in place during working hours.

7.2.3   The University is supportive of flexibility in terms of working times and patterns to accommodate combining work and domestic arrangements by exception on a short-term basis only providing there is no reasonable alternative and the arrangement does not impact business operations. This should always be pre-agreed between the employee and Head of School / Service.

7.2.4   The University recognises that employees may not always be instantly accessible due to ongoing work commitments but it is recommended that employees check their voicemail and email inbox for messages at least four times during a full working day to enable them to remain responsive to operational needs.

7.2.5   The employee should also ensure that their online electronic calendar is maintained with up to date information clearly showing diary commitments and availability.

7.2.6   It is recommended that the Head of School / Service and employee agree some key principles setting out when and how they will communicate with one another. It is also useful to agree how the employee intends to engage with their team members and the wider university community whilst working from home.

7.2.7   Regular contact during home working helps to ensure that the employee is aware of key developments and can respond appropriately to changing operational needs. It also means that the employee is able to continue to access available support from their Head of School / Service and relevant internal networks to help prevent any possible feelings of isolation.

7.2.8   The University can require any employee working from home to physically attend campus if required.

7.2.9   The University would encourage any employees working from home to actively seek out support and guidance from their Head of School / Service and colleagues in the same way that they would do if they were working on campus.

7.2.10 Should an employee working from home feel unwell, they should follow the normal absence reporting requirements and contact their Head of School / Service.

7.3   Performance

7.3.1   The University recognises that conventional management techniques are not workable in a homeworking situation because the Head of School / Service will not have full visibility and may not have instant access to employees working from home.

7.3.2   Successful homeworking requires mutual trust and productivity will be assessed in terms of volume and quality of output and service delivery. To support this approach, it is recommended that the Head of School / Service and employee should meet to agree and define SMART priorities for the period of homeworking. Of course, normal university standards and procedures will continue to apply to ensure quality. The parties should also agree appropriate mechanisms to share feedback and updates.

7.3.3   An employee working remotely from home must ensure that they remain familiar with all University policies, procedures, and ways of working.   For the avoidance of doubt, the normal terms and conditions of employment will continue to apply.

7.4   Confidentiality and Data Protection

7.4.1   The employee's personal contact details will not be divulged to third parties except where the employee provides their consent to facilitate communication during homeworking.

7.4.2   The University's data protection and confidentiality rules continue to apply and employees working from home are responsible for keeping all documents and information (manual and electronic) secure at all times.   Employees should refer to the IT Acceptable Use Policy which can be found here: x

7.5   Equipment and Facilities

7.5.1   Our main campus remains the principal place of work for our employees and all necessary equipment is provided on-site. Therefore, the University would not normally contribute to any costs or expenses associated with homeworking.

7.5.2   Employees who wish to apply to work from home or who are required to work remotely by the University are responsible for ensuring that they have suitable telephone, broadband and any required PC equipment at home in order that they can work productively and safely. New employees in both academic posts and administrative professional support roles are expected to have suitable IT equipment and a broadband connection at their home. Employees should ensure such equipment is maintained and that they have appropriate home insurance cover in place.

7.5.3   Employees requiring any support from the University in order to work remotely effectively remotely should speak with their Head of School / Service. Should the University agree by exception to provide equipment for home working, employees must take proper care of this. Employees agree to report without delay any damage or malfunction to their Head of School / Service.

7.5.4 If an employee working from home experiences a problem with any IT equipment which means that they are no longer able to work, they should immediately contact their Head of School / Service. If there is a serious problem which cannot be easily resolved within [an hour] and which prevents the employee from continuing to work at home, the employee will need to make arrangements to attend their normal office without delay.

7.6 University Property

7.6.1 The University retains the right to request the return of any University property. This may include the University requesting to visit an employee's home at an agreed time to retrieve any University equipment and / or documents.

7.7 Health and Safety

7.7.1 The University has a legal duty to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of all its employees including those that are working from home.

7.7.2 Equally, all employees who work from home have a duty to ensure, insofar as is reasonably practicable, that they work in a safe manner and that they follow all health and safety instructions issued by the University from time to time. Employees working from home are responsible for the condition of their home-working environment and ensuring that the environment is conducive to such work.

7.7.3 All employees are required to complete a self-assessment form (Homeworkers Health and Safety Self-Assessment Checklist) and to discuss this with their Head of School / Service before commencing regular home working.

7.7.4 Where potential concerns or hazards are identified during this assessment, the Head of School / Service may need to seek clarification or advice from Human Resources or the Health and Safety Manager. Home working may be deemed unsuitable where significant risks are identified and cannot be addressed.

7.7.5 Where home working is a long-term arrangement, the employee should ensure that the self-assessment form is updated on an annual basis or in the event of any material change which relates to home working equipment and / or work environment.

7.7.6 Employees should immediately contact their Head of School / Service with any concerns about health and safety risks or any homeworking arrangements that need to change.

7.7.7 Students should not be invited to visit an employee at home when remote working, nor should employees provide a private phone number or address for correspondence.

7.8 Environmental Factors

7.8.1 The employee should ensure that their home working environment is suitable. Whilst it is not necessary to have a separate room set aside as a designated study,

employees must be able to work in a quiet private place without interruptions. The area should have sufficient space for equipment with sufficient power points and a telephone.

7.8.2   Physical meetings should not be held at the employee's home address except with the agreement of Human Resources. Virtual meetings should be the norm. Physical meetings should normally take place on the University campus or a similar professional setting.

7.9   Insurance and Permissions

7.9.1   The University recommends all employees to check that they have the appropriate insurance in place and any relevant permissions, e.g. from lender, landlord, etc. specifically to include home and contents insurance that provides adequate cover for the fact that the employee is working remotely from home and that any such work does not invalidate their policy.

Employees should ensure this is in place before they request to work from home remotely.

7.9.2   The University has Employers' Liability Insurance (which covers its legal liability for personal injury to staff while acting in the course of their employment) and Public Liability Insurance (which covers the legal liability of the University and its staff for injury and/or property damage to third parties caused whilst on University business).

8.0   ONGOING SUITABILITY OF HOMEWORKING

8.1   Head of School / Services may decide that it is appropriate to enable an employee to trial homeworking on a pilot basis to assess suitability. A trial period would normally last at least three months. In many cases, it may be appropriate to agree a longer trial period of twelve months so that homeworking may be assessed during a full academic cycle.

8.2   Regular home working should also be regularly reviewed by the Head of School / Service. At any time, either by the Head of School / Service or the employee, the home working arrangement may be terminated upon reasonable notice.

9.0   GUIDANCE AND TIPS

9.1   Further guidance and tips on working remotely from home can be found in Appendix One.

DOCUMENT CONTROL

Document Name	Working Remotely from Home Policy
Version No	2.0
Version Date	12 March 2021
Author / Reviewer	Claire Symons / Chris McClelland
Procedure Owner	Human Resources
Post responsible for implementation	Executive Director of HR
Date approved	12 March 2021
Effective from	1 September 2021
Dissemination method	HR A to Z
Review frequency	Every three years (review after 12 months)
Review committee	Executive Board

APPENDIX ONE - TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL HOMEWORKING

1.   Set up a designated workspace

Separate space for yourself to work in, somewhere you can focus on tasks without being distracted and set up with everything you need for a normal working day.

2.   Make remote working work for you

Change where you sit, put on music, whatever helps you work. And enjoy the perks – no commute or uncomfortable shoes, and all your home comforts!

3.   Make sure you have all the tech you need

This includes a reliable internet connection, required hardware and software, access to the University network / systems, any files and importantly, knowledge of how to get IT support and the best from the systems we have.

4.   Get dressed

Changing into working clothes will help you mentally switch on to productive work mode. It will also help you distinguish between 'homeworking' and 'home life'.

5.   Write a daily to-do list

Set out a list of realistic, achievable tasks to keep you focused.

6.   Know when to step away from you designated workspace

Be clear about when your working day begins and ends and take breaks to refresh. It's easy to let yourself be 'always on' when your home and office are the same place.

7.   Stay in conversation

Contribute regularly to team chats/group emails so you don't drop off the radar. Ask about what people are working on and share what's on your agenda.

8.   Foster relationships

Make time for non-work chats as you would in the workplace and use video calling to maintain face-to-face contact, if possible.

9.   Ask for support when needed

Speak out when you need assistance, further guidance or support. Your Head of Service / School, colleagues and you are part of a team and should be supporting each other, even remotely.

10.   Be clear in your communication

Speaking in person gives you visual and audio cues that help you communicate. Conversing remotely removes a lot of that extra information so make your communications extra clear and concise.