



# A Guide to Work Life Balance and Good Practice at Oxford Brookes University

A project in partnership with  
UNISON, NATFHE and the Administrators' Forum  
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**NATFHE**  
The University & College  
Lecturers' Union



**OXFORD  
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## Acknowledgements

The Work-Life Balance Partnership Team wish to thank all those colleagues who have kindly agreed to share their positive experience of flexible working and other arrangements by featuring in this guide. They also wish to thank all the colleagues who have supported them through their work by providing useful information, valuable feedback and by generously giving their time and facilitating the work of the team.

## Foreword

Achieving a rewarding work-life balance is a challenge for everyone in these pressured times. The problem is as acute in higher education as anywhere; it is an issue for staff in all areas of activity and at all levels. Oxford Brookes' approach to the problem is an exemplar of best practice and a model for the sector as a whole, developing, as it did, from a sensitive response to views expressed in a staff survey, involving local trade unions from the outset, and finding additional resource for undertaking the initial work through a successful application to the DTI's Partnership at Work Fund. The result is a systematic, comprehensive and flexible set of policies and practices, which are set out in this Guide. The voices that speak within the text show that the benefits are widespread, and the variety of examples clearly illustrate the range of options that can be achieved within a scheme that is well thought out and now embedded within the University's culture. One size – one pattern of work – does not fit all, in the workplace any more than in any other area of life. An institution that promotes work-life balance through a broad range of flexible schemes thus recognises and responds to the diversity inherent in the workforce, and through this makes a major contribution to its promotion of equality of opportunity. Here in this Guide, Oxford Brookes University shows what can be achieved and clearly demonstrates that it is to the benefit of all.

**Professor Joyce Hill**

Director of the Equality Challenge Unit



## **Introduction**

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The University adopted its human resources strategy in May 2002. The strategy supports the delivery of the University's key strategic objectives up to the end of the decade through four principal policy strands. Two of these – recruitment and retention, and equality of opportunity at work – underpin the development of the University's policies for work-life balance and flexible working arrangements.

The University's long-standing and deep-rooted commitment to embedding equal rights into its culture and ethos has led to an understanding that the evolution of family and wider social structures in contemporary society, implies that traditional models of working time management are increasingly likely to clash with employees' responsibilities in their roles outside work. The widespread shift in terminology from 'equal opportunities' to 'diversity management' reflects a recognition that employers will increasingly have to take account of the diversity of their employees' cultural, social and personal life-styles if they are to offer a genuine equality of opportunity to fulfil their personal potential and make the best possible contribution at work.

This recognition of the importance of coming to terms with employee diversity is reinforced by the parallel recognition that, if the University is to recruit and retain some of the best academic and administrative talent that is available, it is more likely to do so if it can demonstrate a genuine capacity for flexibility in the patterns of working-time that are available to its staff.

The Work-Life Balance project has therefore been a key element in the evolution of the University's equal opportunities policy portfolio, and also in its agenda for recruiting and retaining the high quality people that it needs to fulfil its objective of becoming one of Britain's best universities. The project has been a partnership with our recognised unions, the National Association of Teachers of Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) and UNISON, and with the Administrators' Forum, which provides a cross-University co-ordination and information exchange function for administrative staff. The partnership demonstrates the value of collective bargaining and close employee involvement in the development of employment policies.

On behalf of the Vice-Chancellor, the Governing Body and the Executive Board, I would like to thank the many colleagues who contributed to the survey of work-life balance last year, and those who have subsequently carried forward the policy development work within the DTI-funded project in 2004. In particular, I would like to record thanks to Simonetta Manfredi, the project leader, and Michelle Holliday, the University's Equal Opportunities and Diversity Co-ordinator, whose drive and commitment have ensured that the project has been delivered on time and on budget.

Policies are, of course, simply a means to an end. As the University's human resources strategy moves forward, we will be monitoring carefully how effective our arrangements for supporting work-life balance have been in delivering on the wider objectives of genuine equality of opportunity and the recruitment and retention of excellent staff.

**Bob Price**

Director of Human Resources October 2004



## **Oxford Brookes University Work-Life Balance Partnership Project**

The Oxford Brookes University Work-Life Balance Partnership Project was set up by the Directorate of Human Resources in November 2003 in order to implement the recommendations that emerged from a university-wide Work-Life Balance Staff Audit carried out earlier in the same year. This Audit was conducted through an anonymous questionnaire, sent to all staff, and focus group discussions with employees. It provided the University with a wealth of information about its employees' current experience of work-life balance. In particular it enabled the institution to gain an insight into the actual implementation and use of University policies that support work-life balance, to gather information on staff views on work-life balance and line managers' attitudes towards flexible working and to assess potential demand for further flexible working arrangements.

The Audit also identified a number of areas where action was needed in order to develop work-life balance best practice and on the basis of these findings an action plan was devised. Following the guidance of the Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff which recommends that "HEIs work with their trade unions as 'local partners' to develop policies on work-life balance" (Joint Negotiating Committee for Higher Education Staff, Work-Life Balance Guidance for Higher Education Institutions, 2003; p.3), the University chose to implement its action plan by working in partnership with the recognised Trade Unions and with the Administrators' Forum. Additional funding for this project was obtained through a successful application to the Department of Trade and Industry under its Partnership at Work Scheme. The work was carried out by a team of Oxford Brookes staff with specific expertise and interest in this area.

### **Project aims and objectives**

The overall aim of this project was to develop work-life balance best practice to improve employees' job satisfaction and performance and the recruitment and retention of staff. The project focused on four main objectives, which can be summarised as follows:

- To improve communication of policies and practices that support work-life balance.
- To review and further develop existing work-life balance policies.
- To offer staff development opportunities that would encourage an innovative, fair and consistent approach to flexible working.
- To share good practice across the University.

### **Improving Communication**

The Work-Life Balance Audit showed that although Oxford Brookes already offered a wide range of policies to support work-life balance, staff knowledge about their existence and their content was patchy. The following comment from a member of staff provides a good summary of this issue:

*"All these sentiments are very good but getting the message across to everyone who needs this information is where the system fails"* (Manfredi and Holliday, 2003; p.50).

It was clear that there was a need to communicate both the University commitment to work-life balance as well as the content of the existing policies and flexible working arrangements more effectively. This was addressed by producing a user-friendly leaflet that was distributed to all staff with their pay slips. The leaflet provided concise information on University policies which support work-life balance and explained how to obtain further information and the full details of the policies. A dedicated work-life balance web-site was also set up which provides links to the full text of the policies and offers other useful supporting information, such as details of the University childcare facilities.

Improved communication also helped to raise awareness about work-life balance issues and practices and to make staff feel more confident about using their entitlements and asking for flexible work arrangements.

The Audit provided clear evidence that the availability of flexible working is an important recruitment and retention tool. Thus, information on work-life balance practices, childcare and other facilities was included in a brochure aimed at prospective job applicants, featuring examples of members of staff who have benefited from these arrangements.

## Policy review and development

The policy review and development was carried out by the Work-Life Balance Partnership Team in consultation with the Directorate of Human Resources and was informed by three main principles:

- The University's wish to promote work-life balance for all of its employees;
- The statement in the University Human Resource Strategy (2002: p.16) that 'A clear presumption in favour of flexibility in working arrangements to meet domestic requirements and personal circumstances is built into general human resource practice across the University'; and
- The importance of taking into account the needs of employees as well as those of the University when adopting and implementing flexible working arrangements.

A number of existing policies that support flexible working were developed within the context of the University's equal opportunities agenda in order to enable working parents, mainly women, to combine paid work with their family responsibilities. The Project Team looked at these policies and recommended ways to extend them to all staff. New policies have also been developed in response to the Work-Life Balance Audit's finding which indicated that more than half of the respondents would like to have the opportunity to work more flexibly. Some of the arrangements identified as being of most interest to administrative staff were compressed hours and occasional working from home. The Audit also showed that for academic staff the key issue was not so much about flexible working but about the impact of the intensification of their workload on their patterns of work. This indicated the need for a university-wide planning framework which could provide guidance about the numbers of hours that should be allocated to different academic tasks. These issues have been addressed by a separate working party on work load planning led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Registrar and which included representatives of NATFHE and also by the Project Team in its recommendations for of a separate policy on work-life balance for academic staff.

## Staff development

Staff development is key to ensuring that a work-life balance culture is embedded throughout the institution and that good practice and flexible working arrangements are developed in ways which are sustainable in different working contexts.

The Work-Life Balance Audit found that line managers play a major role in implementing effective flexible working arrangements which can support their staff and benefit the University's work. On the other hand, they may be reluctant to support policies for work-life balance if they do not have an appreciation of how such policies can be of benefit to the University. This is demonstrated by the following quotations from staff:

*"I am lucky that my line manager strongly believes in work-life balance, and encourages me to work flexible hours to suit my other commitments and this helps to reduce stress and improve my performance at work".*

*"There seems to be a mistrust of the idea of work-life balance with some levels' of management - almost a view that staff who are interested in it are somehow trying to take the University for a ride. This attitude needs to be dispelled if work-life balance initiatives are to be successful" (Manfredi and Holliday, 2003; pp.47-48).*

In order to help line managers to appreciate fully the benefits of work-life balance policies and practices and handle requests for flexible working consistently and fairly, a series of workshops were organised with the aim of updating line managers on policy development and relevant legislation, discussing work-life balance issues and ways of promoting sustainable flexible working through a case study based approach.

Other staff development initiatives undertaken as part of this project involved:

- A special training session for the University's nine Equal Opportunities and Diversity Coordinators designed to help them to raise awareness of work-life balance issues and practices in their respective Schools and Directorates. As a result, some of them have included aspects of work-life balance in their action plans for equal opportunities and diversity.
- The integration of work-life balance issues in the main staff training initiatives, wherever appropriate. These included the induction seminars for new staff, topical seminars for senior managers, as well as in the Personal Development Review process and the University's Mentoring scheme, both of which offer an opportunity for individual employees to reflect on their work-life balance and to explore ways of enhancing their personal and working life.

### **Sharing good practice**

This Good Practice Guide is one of the outcomes under this objective of the project. Its main purpose is to provide an insight into the benefits of work-life balance practices for both the staff and the University. It summarises the main features of the current University policies for work-life balance as developed through this project. It also shows how they can be implemented effectively by using a number of examples volunteered by Oxford Brookes staff. By sharing these positive experiences, the University seeks to promote good practice across the institution and provide a useful tool to other universities that wish to develop their work-life balance practices. Most of the examples presented in this guide show how people can benefit from a combination of flexible working and special leave arrangements and how the University has been able to respond positively to the needs of its employees. These examples illustrate tangible benefits that the University can derive from these arrangements in terms of staff recruitment and retention, improved working efficiency, improved working relations, greater staff loyalty and an improved willingness to be flexible to accommodate the operational needs of the University.

Other initiatives to share good practice on work-life balance included networking with local employers and the organisation of lunch time seminars open to all staff to present examples of good practice already existing within the University and from other HE institutions.

## The Work-Life Balance Partnership Team

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**Jock Coats** works in Computer Services. He has been a branch officer for UNISON and APT&C staff representative on the University Academic Board. He has been active in local politics which has given him a flavour of the work-life balance issue posed by such outside commitments. *jcoats@brookes.ac.uk*

**Krys Daniels** is Deputy Academic Registrar in Admissions. At the time when the project started she was the Chair of the University's Administrators' Forum. She explains her interest in the project as follows: "As a manager with responsibility for a number of staff, I am interested in looking at ways staff can optimise the work they do for the University and their personal life". *hkdaniels@brookes.ac.uk*

**Dr.Liz Doherty** is Co-Director of the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and a Reader in the Business School. She was the project adviser and she has researched aspects of equal opportunities and work-life balance over the last decade as well as being involved in projects to improve organisational practice in this area. She says this about the project: "The project provides a wonderful opportunity to make sure that work-life balance becomes a reality for many more people at Brookes – at whatever stage they have reached in their life". *ejdoherty@brookes.ac.uk*

**Michelle Holliday** is the University Equal Opportunities and Diversity Co-ordinator. She became involved in looking at work-life practices in early 2003 when she helped to conduct and analyse the Work-Life Balance Staff Audit. Michelle comments: "Managing the requirements of my job and two children means that I am constantly reminded of the importance of work-life balance". *mholliday@brookes.ac.uk*

**Dr.Bob Langridge** is a Senior Lecturer in Economics, Planning, Business and Estate Management and a researcher in transport related issues. He is also the secretary of the Headington Branch of NATFHE and the academic staff representative on the Board of Governors. He has taken part in this project because: "In the past I had to balance my work at Brookes with being a carer and being a County Councillor. I believe that all staff should be able to balance work with a healthy and fulfilling life outside of work." *blandgridge@brookes.ac.uk*

**Simonetta Manfredi** is Co-Director of the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and she has been the Work-Life Balance project manager. She started working for the Directorate of Human Resources to develop a strategy for work-life balance at Oxford Brookes in 2002. She says this about the project: "As an employee of Brookes and a single mother I have a personal interest in contributing towards the improvement of work-life balance policies and practices within the University. As a researcher who has studied work-life balance issues in the workplace I am interested in understanding how sustainable change can be achieved within organisations". *smanfredi@brookes.ac.uk*

**Barbara Moran** is Research Support Officer at the Centre for Diversity Policy Research and she is an active member of the Administrators' Forum and she has been able to give and get feedback on the project developments. Barbara says, "I am pleased that I have been able to make a contribution to the project." *bmoran@brookes.ac.uk*

## Flexible Working

Oxford Brookes University has supported flexible working arrangements for many years. As well as helping employees to combine their personal and working lives, flexible working arrangements can also enable staff to work more effectively, provide extra cover during peak times, and can help retain and attract valuable employees. Reflecting its statutory commitment to flexible working, the University decided to extend the right to request a change of hours of work and/or patterns of work, that was introduced in 2003 to support working parents with small children, to all staff regardless of their personal circumstances and whether they have any dependants. Furthermore, an important outcome of the Work-Life Balance Project has been the introduction of a framework on flexible working which includes existing arrangements as well as new ones that expressly support various forms of flexible working. Under this policy the University 'recommends that flexible working be considered whenever possible' but recognises that there are a significant number of posts (eg. in catering, cleaning and reception functions) which do not lend themselves easily to specific flexible arrangements. In these cases, subject to operational requirements, the University recommends that line managers look for 'other methods of offering staff more flexible patterns at work'. This section of the guide summarises the whole range of flexible working practices which are potentially available to all staff and it shows, through the experience of some of its employees, how they have been put into practice effectively.

### Request to Change Hours and/or Patterns of Work

This policy extends the statutory entitlement of working parents to request a change of hours of work to all University staff to allow them to request changes which provide a better work-life balance. To apply for a change in working hours and/or patterns of work under the terms of this policy staff must have at least 26 weeks continuous service with the University. The policy outlines a clear procedure to submit a request. Staff who wish to apply for flexible working under this policy are encouraged to think about the implications of their request on their job and their colleagues. The University endeavours to accommodate these requests but where this is judged not to be feasible for operational reasons, a written explanation is provided. The possible grounds for refusal are set out as follows:

- The additional costs that would flow from the change
- The likely detrimental effect of the change on the ability to deliver services or the quality of service
- The likely detrimental effect of the change on other members of the team
- The inability to re-organise work effectively among existing staff
- The inability to recruit additional staff
- Effect on quality or performance of service
- Lack of available work during the periods when the member of staff is seeking to work
- Planned organisational and operational changes affecting the pattern of work in the School/Directorate

Here is an example of how the policy can work in practice.

**Suzanne Dawson** is based in the Business School and deals with postgraduate enquiries, she also helps to organise conferences, residentials and workshops. She works a 37-hour week but by starting work each day at 8.00am she can leave at lunchtime every Friday.

*"I wanted to rearrange my hours so that I could collect my daughter from school at least one day each week without losing work-time or pay".*

*"Enquiries are dealt with by me on Friday mornings. Urgent enquiries would be covered by my supportive team colleagues during the afternoon, but so far nothing urgent has arisen after I have left for the day."*

*"I completed the Change of Hours application form when my daughter started school last year and my request was approved at a meeting with my line manager and a member of the HR team".*



## Flexi-time

The University flexi-time scheme, subject to service demands, offers staff an opportunity to vary the times of starting and finishing work outside core hours (from 10am-12noon and 2pm-4pm) and the length of lunch break. This scheme can be particularly helpful to avoid travelling to and from work during rush hours and to working parents who need to take their children to school, as illustrated by the following case:

**Fiona Smith** is based in the Oxford Centre for Staff Learning and Development, which is part of the Directorate of Human Resources, and is the Centre Administrator for external events. She has worked for Oxford Brookes for 6 years and has two young school-age children. For the past two years she has worked to the Directorate's standard flexi time scheme.

Having children of school age *"Flexi time does allow me the flexibility to drop off my children at school in the mornings and to have a flexi-day once a month. Flexi time works well within a supportive team; someone is always in the office between 10am and 4pm and team members always take lunch breaks between 12 and 2pm. Flexi-time has not had any adverse affect on my work."*

Fiona undertakes a great deal of activities outside work - one of which is being an adult instructor in the Army Cadet Force, which means she attends an Annual Camp of about one week and attends training courses and leads adventure training groups. The University has allowed her time off to attend these functions within the guidelines of the Special Leave and Other Leave Policy.

Fiona's flexible working pattern contributes to her ACF activities, and allows her a day each month to catch up on home and family based tasks.

*"I would quite like to work some sort of compressed hours pattern, perhaps taking two half days off rather than one whole day; and will perhaps propose this sort of working arrangement to my line manager in the future after due consideration and planning".*

Fiona has benefited from flexi-time and would like to see work-life balance policy information more widely disseminated. She feels it should be mentioned at interview, induction, and introduction day.

Fiona also successfully undertook an NVQ in Management, a work-based programme, where she was supported by her line manager through time off for study and for writing reports.



## Compressed working hours

This is a working pattern that enables staff to work their total number of hours over fewer days. Examples of compressed hours include working time being reorganised so that weekly hours are worked in four or four and half days or over nine days each fortnight. Other patterns can be considered provided that the maximum number of hours worked in one day does not exceed 10 hours and that at least half an hour is allocated for a lunch break. Once a compressed hours pattern is agreed, its operational viability will be tested for a trial period. At the end of this period if both the line manager and the employee are satisfied with the arrangement, it will then be fixed for a minimum period of twelve months. The case below is an example of how this policy can work in practice:

**Sue Bartlett** is the School Administrator in the School of the Built Environment and given that her husband is now semi-retired, Sue was keen to be able to have an extra day at home with him. She thought about her options and approached the Dean of School to request the compressed hours option with a completed application form, asking to work 4 days from 8am until 6.15pm with an hour for lunch. Realising that in her post Friday would not be a good day off, she opted for Thursday as the 'non work' day.

*"I went on the intranet to find out more about compressed hours, found the form to request a change in hours, considered my options and what would best suit me and the School, filled it in and spoke with my Dean. I then spoke with HR to check whether it would be possible to undertake compressed hours over a trial period of three months to see if it works both for me and the School. There was no problem, so from the beginning of Semester 1 2004, the trial period begins."*

*"The Dean of School commented that longer days may be more productive for me, as they will allow me to finish things off before I leave work in the evening".*

*"I went on the intranet to find out more about compressed hours, found the form to request a change in hours, considered my options and what would best suit me and the School"*

## Shift swapping

Subject to operational requirements, and with the agreement of the line manager, employees may swap shifts with each other, as long as agreed staffing levels are met at all times. Teams who would like to participate in a shift swapping scheme will be expected to demonstrate to their line manager how the scheme could run effectively within their department.

Before requesting a different pattern the following issues will have to be considered:

- What will be the impact of the change on the service that has to be delivered?
- Will it be fair to everyone?
- How will the changed pattern of working be monitored?

Proposals for shift swapping will have to be approved by the line manager in consultation with the Directorate of Human Resources, and the key consideration will be whether the proposed shift pattern will have a detrimental impact on service delivery. Other matters that will be considered by management include:

- Will a more flexible working pattern help to retain staff and aid recruitment?
- Will it help to reduce absenteeism?
- Will it have any impact on equal opportunities?
- How will the scheme be managed?

## Self-rostering

Self-rostering allows staff, in consultation with their line manager, to schedule their working day to meet the requirements of service delivery. Using agreed levels of required staffing as a guide, members of staff can put forward the times they would like to work. Shift patterns are then compiled, matching staff preferences as far as is possible and ensuring that agreed staffing levels are met. Requests for self-rostering will be considered by line managers in consultation with the Directorate of Human Resources. For this scheme to operate it is necessary for all staff within a team to participate. If after consultation with their line managers it is agreed that a trial period of self-rostering can go ahead, staff will be expected to do the following on a monthly basis:

- Individually state their preferred working hours
- Identify hours which they specifically do not want to work, 'veto hours'
- Review the resulting draft roster to see if there are mismatches between available staff and hours which must be covered
- Agree a final roster to cover all hours required.

## Part-Year Working

Part-year working allows a member of staff to work a reduced number of weeks in a year. This work pattern builds on the well established practice of working during term-time only which is used particularly by staff with children of school age in order to allow them to spend more time with their children during school holidays and reduce the costs of childcare. As the University has now changed the shape of its academic year to semesters it was necessary to change the description of this work-pattern from 'term-time only' to 'part-year working'. In formalising this arrangement into its flexible working policy, the University has extended it to all staff. The policy now allows the extra time away from work to coincide either with the school holidays or to take an extended break for other reasons. The following two cases are good examples of how helpful this arrangement can be:

**Elaine Eastgate** joined Westminster Institute in 1998 and moved to the Directorate of Corporate Affairs in January 2004 as a Development Assistant, supporting the Assistant Development Director (Alumni and External Relations) and other senior members of the Development Group. Her role involves administration for committees and working groups, contribution to the overall administration of the Group's events and database management systems.

Elaine requested a change to term-time only working in 2002 when her daughter moved from nursery to full-time education. Her original line manager recognised the advantages of supporting the request, and thus retaining

*"...some employers might be put off by the pattern of hours I want to work, so I appreciate that Corporate Affairs were able to be flexible, which meant that taking the job was possible for me"*

an experienced administrator and not incurring unnecessary recruitment costs. The change was agreed but would be monitored to ensure that the operational requirements of the department were not compromised by the change.

When Elaine saw the advert for her current position in Corporate Affairs it was designated as a part-time post with no mention of term-time only, but she

decided to apply anyway. The opportunity for term-time working was positively discussed at interview and Elaine, as the successful candidate, said *"This was great for me as it allowed me to continue my working pattern within Brookes. I realise that some employers might be put off by the pattern of hours I want to work, so I appreciate that Corporate Affairs were able to be flexible, which meant that taking the job was possible for me"*.

Elaine works 42 weeks throughout the year, working 31 hours each week. Her annual holiday entitlement is taken within the ten weeks she has away from work. These hours allow her to meet her daughter from the school bus on the days she does not attend the after school club. It may become necessary to review her working hours following the recent change in the Oxfordshire school year to a 6 term system, but Elaine does have family members living close by who are able to help occasionally.

"I enjoy my work" Elaine said "but I do think that part-time workers often have to work harder to get the job done – the job itself isn't part-time, just the person who's doing it. Part-time working isn't an easy ride, people work just as hard and often have to go off to do other 'family based' things that keep them very busy once they've finished their 'official' job. Sometimes though I think it is difficult for people without children to fully appreciate the problems and stresses involved with family issues ~ just having to meet a bus at a particular time for instance, or how complicated things can get if you have to support activities outside of your normal working hours. Generally however, my colleagues are supportive of my flexible working arrangements, and I see the arrangement continuing".

*"but I do think that part-time workers often have to work harder to get the job done – the job itself isn't part-time, just the person who's doing it".*

**Beverley Watson** is the friendly face that meets visitors to Headington Hill Hall. Bev was keen to be able to spend more time with her children during the school holiday periods, so applied for the post which was advertised as term-time only. *"I would not have applied for it otherwise. I wouldn't have considered applying for a post that was a full-time job and then ask to reduce my hours".*

*"The term-time only format was agreed before I started. The Senior Management Team are flexible around this. Originally the job was advertised at 9.00-5.30 but I realised not long after arriving that I needed to be in before 9am to get everything sorted in the morning – especially if there are events taking place in the Hall. So I suggested my hours were changed to 8.30 until 5.00pm".*

*"I realised not long after arriving that I needed to be in before 9am to get everything sorted in the morning – especially if there are events taking place in the Hall. So I suggested my hours were changed to 8.30 until 5.00pm".*

*"Given that the activity in the Hall is much quieter in the Summer, the term-time only working suited both myself and the University. However, as my role has developed and grown by supporting the Senior Management Team, we have identified periods when it was appropriate that my holidays shall change. This again has suited us both and worked well for the team".*

## Working from home or other flexible location

The University will consider requests for homeworking for any job role that can be carried out equally well from a flexible location or on site. Subject to the specific needs of job roles and to operational requirements three models of homeworking are available. The first two are:

1. Occasional homeworking that could involve, for example, carrying out specific tasks that require a high level of concentration and minimum interruption such as report writing or other writing tasks; and
2. Regular homeworking on either a weekly or monthly basis that could involve, for example, carrying out regular work from home that requires access to a computer, or any other type of work that could be done appropriately and efficiently from a flexible location.

Many members of both support and academic staff find that patterns of regular homeworking enable them to perform certain aspects of their job more effectively. Academic staff for example find that it can improve the quality of their working time when doing research and marking students' assignments or exam scripts. Here are some examples of academics who benefit from regular home working.

**Anna Klenert** is a Senior Lecturer in Hospitality Operations in the Business School. She started working at Oxford Brookes as an Associate Lecturer in 2001 and successfully applied for a full-time position in 2004. Anna lives in Hillingdon and commutes into Oxford. She works one day a week from home and she finds this particularly useful for doing research, writing and marking students' work. She says *"I find that I can concentrate for longer periods of time when I work from home without interruptions. Of course one has to avoid the temptation to do other things. It is a learning process to be able to compartmentalise and focus on one thing. It is the same process when one goes home and work is finished. One has to resist the temptation to take office work home. It is all about finding a balance."*

Anna is from Zambia and her husband is German. She finds that having an entitlement to 35 days holidays in addition to statutory holidays, is very useful to keep in touch with all her relatives who live in different parts of the world. She commented *"When flying to Zambia we tend to go for a long break as it only makes sense to go there for more than a week. The holiday entitlement not only helps to visit relatives in Zambia for longer periods than a week, but also enables visits to relatives in Germany"*.



**Dr Bridget Durning** has worked at Oxford Brookes for four years, originally as manager for a project investigating the link between teaching and research. She currently covers two jobs – School Research Manager and Research Fellow – working 0.9 fte in the School of the Built Environment. She works a full day on Monday and Wednesday and a shorter day on Tuesday and Thursday, finishing at 3pm. *"On Friday I work from home, which allows me to dedicate time to my research."*



When asked why she wanted such a flexible working pattern, she said *"Two reasons – it is easier to concentrate on my research outside the office and it fits in with my childcare arrangements."*

*"I have found it easier to manage my home and work commitments and it offers me a better environment for my work. I am not aware of any concerns within my department and because I don't live too far away, I can always come into the office if I have to. Colleagues and my line manager have been supportive and I am flexible - although I usually work at home one day a week, I will come in on that day if I am needed for a meeting."*

*"I would like to stick with this working pattern. It works well. Positively I can get much more work done away from the office without all the interruptions and the University also benefits as I tend to work for longer on the day I am at home – it is very easy to work beyond your normal hours when you're sitting at home!"*

3. The third model offered by the University is that of designated homeworking. Arrangements for designated homeworking are based on the scheme that was developed and piloted in the School of Health and Social Care a few years ago. The scheme has run successfully and the University has now included it in its policy for all staff. Staff who become designated homeworkers are provided by the University with adequate facilities in order to work from home. They are expected to use shared office accommodation when working on site. Designated homeworking can help to reduce pressure on office space and car parking, and it can be a very effective staff retention tool in relation to jobs that can be undertaken from a number of flexible locations as in the case below:

**Antony Higgs** is a web developer with Creative Services, in the Directorate of Corporate Affairs. Nine months ago he decided that a relocation was appropriate for personal reasons and moved to Devon. Because of the technical nature of his post, it was agreed that he could work full-time from his new home, providing Health and Safety matters relating to the work environment were addressed.

*“When I needed to relocate, I was able to keep my job at Oxford Brookes. Working from home has not had any impact on my work. My line manager and my colleagues have all been very supportive.”*

*“Home working has not created any problems; my line manager regularly checks that everything is going fine and that I have everything I need to carry out my work and my colleagues are very good at keeping me informed of what’s happening in the office”.*

*“When I needed to relocate, I was able to keep my job at Oxford Brookes. Working from home has not had any impact on my work.”*

The approval of any homeworking pattern is subject to compliance with health and safety regulations and a risk assessment is undertaken at the member of staff's home by the University's Health and Safety Officer. Homeworking Implementation Guidelines are being prepared to enable staff to carry out a self-assessment and to deal with a range of matters which need to be considered, particularly when arranging designated homeworking. These include, for example, the need to check the terms of mortgages, as some exclude the possibility of working from home, domestic insurance and data protection. The University policy on working from home or other flexible location also offers some guidance to line managers who are asked to deal with a request for homeworking. For example, it advises managers to consider whether the output of the work to be done from home can be clearly defined and monitored, whether the member of staff can access required information quickly and easily from home, and whether the absence of staff from the office might inhibit the day-to-day work of colleagues and/or their department. It also outlines some of the potential benefits of home working from both the point of view of the University and of the employee. Homeworking can ease pressures on office accommodation, improve staff morale and loyalty by making people feel trusted and by enabling them to work more effectively and efficiently. From the point of view of an employee, as the cases above show, working from home can help to reduce travel time and the costs associated with it, offer greater autonomy in managing their work and improve the 'quality' of working time.

## Job-Share

This arrangement enables two (or more) members of staff to voluntarily share the duties and responsibilities of one full-time post. It can present a number of advantages to both individual employees and to the University as demonstrated by this case:

**Monica Seeney** is Personal Assistant to the Director and Deputy Director of Estates and Facilities, and has worked for Oxford Brookes since 1997. In February 2000, Monica's daughter was born and she soon realised that although she had originally intended to return to her job full-time, she now wanted to spend more time with her baby. Having very supportive line management she was assured something could be arranged to accommodate her, which reduced her anxiety about how she could manage to combine her job with her home life.



*“Job sharing my role allows me to spend more time with my daughter. I work 21 hours each week, Monday – Wednesday. Kirsten, with whom I share the role, picks up the rest of the time on Thursday and Friday to make it up to 37 hours, but she also has another part-time role within the Directorate. Although originally I worked 9-5 more flexibility has been extended to me, allowing me to start at 9.30-9.45 enabling me to take my daughter, who is now 4 years old, to nursery. I finish at 5.30 or 5.45pm.”*

*“It allows me time to spend with my daughter – I simply could not have carried on working for Brookes if they hadn't been so flexible and I can't emphasise enough how positive the whole experience has been”.*

Monica's flexible arrangements and working patterns were agreed within her Directorate. Job share means that holidays can be covered by the sharer whenever possible and two pairs of hands can be called upon to help in the times of higher than usual work load or special event assistance.

*“Kirsten and I work very well together; we have a shared email address in addition to our own personal email and we copy each other on emails and with information. We both try to finish our working week without too many loose ends, enabling a tidy hand-over. We both talk about issues honestly with each other and try to take-up any opportunity for face-to-face catch up time if we need to.”*

*“My line manager has been extremely supportive, as have all other members of the small team that I work with – they always tell me what's going on, which may not be the case in a larger working environment”.*

*“Anyone who works part-time has to ask questions when they get in to make sure that they are up to date. Sometimes it's a bit harder to 'let go' when you have worked in a full-time capacity, you have to realise that you can no longer be in charge of everything and have to share the role and responsibilities.”*

*“I cannot see myself wanting to change my working pattern whilst my daughter remains at nursery or primary school”.*

## Part-time Work

Part-time work is very common throughout the University and in principle is available in most jobs. Part-time employees have the same rights and are entitled to the same benefits, on a pro-rata basis, as those working full-time. Staff may choose to work part-time for a variety of reasons and to suit many different needs. The case below shows how part-time work can be used as a way to ease the transition to retirement:

**Stuart Soames** is a Senior Lecturer within the Business School. Stuart teaches front-office management and computer information systems for hospitality management and has been with Oxford Brookes University for about 25 years, originally joining as a chief technician before becoming a lecturer.

Stuart reached a period in his life where he wanted to work less hours and spend more time with his wife who is semi-retired, so he took early retirement. However, wishing to retain his expertise in a specific hotel management software package, the University offered him a three-year 0.4 fte post in the same area of lecturing.

Stuart says *“My colleagues are a good group to work with and my 0.4 fte contract has been well supported by them. My line manager also supports this working arrangement. Generally the School supports flexible working arrangements and I believe that it is good for the students, as well as other staff, to experience flexible working arrangements”*.

*“...the School supports flexible working arrangements and I believe that it is good for the students, as well as other staff, to experience flexible working arrangements”*.

## Additional planned unpaid leave

Under this scheme support staff are offered the opportunity to take up to five additional days of unpaid leave per year. This will be added to their annual holiday entitlement at the beginning of the holiday year or for new staff, at the start of their employment with the University. The salary cost of the five days is spread throughout the holiday year in order to minimise the impact. This option provides for additional planned leave and does not affect the right to request leave under the policies for compassionate or special leave.

## Flexibility and equal opportunities

Finally, flexible working arrangements may be useful for managers to support employees with a disability, in order to identify, depending on the circumstances of a particular case, suitable options for making reasonable adjustments under the Disability Discrimination Act (1995). Under this Act the University has a legal duty to make reasonable adjustments to its working practices and/or its workplace to ensure that employees with a disability do not experience any unfair disadvantage. Similarly in the case of employees whose religious faith requires them to dedicate some time during the working day to prayers or other religious practices, flexible working arrangements may allow employees to comply with their religious practices without disrupting their working day. Under the Equality Employment Regulations (Religion or Belief) 2003 the University has a legal obligation to ensure that its employees are not unfairly discriminated against on the grounds of their religion or equivalent belief.

## Workload Planning and Work-Life Balance for Academic Staff

The Project Team recommended that a distinct work-life balance policy for academic staff should be drawn up that would reflect the terms of their contract of employment and conventional working patterns. Academic staff are not contracted to work for a specified number of weekly hours, unlike their colleagues in support roles, who are contracted to work for 37 hours a week. They are required to work 'such hours as are reasonably necessary in order to fulfil their duties and responsibilities'. This implies a certain degree of inherent professional autonomy in the way the academic tasks are managed. This inherent flexibility in academic jobs, together with a supportive working environment, can help staff to strike a balance between the demands arising from their professional and personal life and the following case is an example of this:

**Dr. Lucy Vickers** started work at Oxford Brookes University 13 years ago as a Lecturer in Law. She is now a Principal Lecturer and the Director of the Centre for Legal Research and Policy Studies in the School of Social Sciences and Law. During her time at Brookes she has taken maternity leave three times. When she had her first child she extended her maternity leave by adding four weeks of annual leave. After the birth of her other children she only took the statutory maternity leave period but she explains that: *"I used annual leave to create a phased re-entry from maternity so I could work three days a week rather than five with no loss of earnings. My line manager supported this arrangement which worked very well"*. She feels that the University has a flexible approach to working and says that: *"This is completely essential to get a good balance. I think that at Brookes there is a supportive atmosphere for working parents. In my experience I have found that the flexibility which is inherent in academic life has helped me to combine a career with family life."*



The evidence from the Work-Life Balance Audit suggests, however, that there is a risk that the 'open ended' nature of academic contracts can lead to excessive work loads and make it difficult for academic staff to achieve an acceptable work-life balance. Furthermore, as the formal working day for scheduled teaching at Oxford Brookes extends over a period of 12 hours (8am to 8pm) the University has acknowledged the importance of ensuring that the actual patterns of scheduled teaching allow academics to work efficiently and to strike a balance between work and personal life. The work-life balance policy for academic staff recommends a number of measures to encourage the adoption of sustainable working patterns including:

- The use of a university-wide workload planning framework that provides clear guidance as to the number of hours that should be allocated to various academic tasks. This framework will be piloted in 2004-5 with a view to subsequent application from 2005-6 onwards.
- Reasonable time off to compensate for work undertaken in unsocial hours and at weekends.
- The opportunity for staff to express their preferences with regard to the allocation of teaching slots and a commitment from the University to take such preferences into account subject to the operational requirements of the School.
- The possibility, subject to operational requirements, of taking annual leave during periods of formal scheduled teaching.

Further formal guidelines are being considered following the adoption of semesters in 2004/5, to regulate the incidence and volume of evening and early morning teaching.

Other policies that support work-life balance that apply to academic staff include the right to requests to change hours and/or patterns of work, job-sharing and working from home or other flexible location, career breaks and other special leave arrangements.

## Special Leave Arrangements

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### Study/Development Leave Entitlements

The University actively encourages staff to engage in continuing education and professional development. Paid leave is granted in the following cases:

**Exam-based qualifications routes:** Up to three days for each exam for intermediate or final examinations in professional subjects (e.g. certificate, diploma, degree). Up to two days for essential preliminary examinations (GCSE, BTEC, HNC, HND) and other exams.

Additional unpaid leave may be granted at the discretion of the Dean/Director.

**Work-based qualification routes:** Staff on programmes where portfolio based evidence is required (e.g. NVQs) are entitled to two days leave at Level 2, and 3 days for the higher levels. Staff on programmes that use automated testing, the European Computer Driving Licence for example, are entitled to two and a half days. For those members of staff on programmes that require a combination of portfolio-based and exam-based assessment, leave is worked out with the line manager by considering the above guidelines.

This policy also provides for guidelines for 'in work' study time allowance.

Line managers may also support an employee's study/training by agreeing to a pattern of flexible working as occurred in the following case:

**Nick Rawle** is a receptionist in the School of Arts and Humanities. He is studying part-time for a Law Postgraduate Diploma. Since September 2003 he has had an agreement with his very supportive line manager and colleagues that he can have flexibility in his working hours to help him undertake his studies. The School has been able to operate a flexible approach in order to facilitate Nick's studies.

*"Knowing that I have this support, my stress levels are reduced when I have a time dependant task to complete. I don't need to book time off in advance, or take leave days and have to cram several small tasks into a day, in order to feel that I have had value from taking the day off".*

*"The flexibility in relation to study related activity has proved very useful. For the time being I see the flexible pattern continuing, however I may consider making an application for compressed hours in the future, which would allow me a regular research slot each week to concentrate on finishing and sending papers to be marked".*



## Career Break Scheme

This scheme applies to all members of staff who have 26 weeks or more continuous service, subject to operational requirements. A career break can last from a minimum of three months to a maximum of two years, although it may be possible to extend it beyond the two year period by agreement with the line manager and Dean or Director. Staff taking a career break do not lose continuity of service, although the period of break is not counted as pensionable service. Depending on the terms of the pension scheme to which they belong, staff may be able to make up for the loss of pensionable service by paying voluntary contributions.

This scheme was originally introduced by the University to support staff with caring responsibilities. It has now been extended to all staff and is intended to support long-term career and personal development, and staff retention. Staff may wish to use a career break at some point in their professional life for reasons such as caring responsibilities, travel, study, to pursue a personal interest or simply to have a break from paid employment. The cases below show the experience of staff with very different reasons for making use of this policy.

**Dr. Maggie Wilson** is a Principal Lecturer in the School of Education. She started working at Brookes as a Lecturer in Education in 1983. She worked full-time until 1992 when, after a period of maternity leave, she returned to her job on part-time basis. She has continued to work part-time since that time to combine work with her childcare responsibilities. When her second child started primary school, his first term was on part-time basis, from 9 until 12, making it difficult for Maggie to continue to work. She chose to take a career break for a term to help her to manage her son's introduction to school life. Her career break was not easy to organise due to the difficulty of re-allocating her work load during her absence. In the end, ways were found to accommodate her request, with Maggie agreeing to continue to supervise her postgraduate students during the break. Maggie says that *"being able to use a career break meant that I did not have to give up my job"*.

*"being able to use a career break meant that I did not have to give up my job"*

**Tamsin Barber** has worked at the University for about two years and has undertaken a Masters programme whilst working full-time in the School of Social Sciences and Law. She says *"I decided that I wanted to go on to do a PhD, but felt that I wanted a break to travel before I started and to work part-time upon my return"*. Tamsin discussed her plans with her line manager who advised her about career break opportunities at Oxford Brookes.

Tamsin said *"I was really pleased that the University has policies to support career breaks and flexible working, because if I hadn't been able to take the time off and return to work part-time, I would have had to leave the University"*.

Tamsin appreciates the support and encouragement given by people in her team and this motivates her to *"do a good job in return"* she said. She is impressed by the support offered to staff from the School's management and from the end of September she will be job-sharing a post and working 18 hours each week. Incidentally, she described her travels to Peru, Bolivia and Ecuador as a brilliant experience.



## Special Leave and Other Leave Policy

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This policy offers a range of special leave arrangements to support work-life balance.

### Leave for voluntary public duties

Under section 50 of the Employment Rights Act 1996 staff have a statutory right to take time off work for public duties. These are defined as membership of a local authority, duties as a lay magistrate/justice of the peace, appointment as a school governor, membership of a statutory tribunal, membership of a policy authority, membership of a board of prison visitors or a prison visiting committee, membership of a local health body, membership of a local education body or membership of the Environment Agency. The University supports employees' involvement with their local communities and will consider requests for time off for community or public duty commitments for organisations other than those covered by the legislation. Staff involved in public duties may be granted up to 12 days a year paid leave which can be taken either as a whole or half days. The case below shows how valuable this type of leave can be to enable individuals who wish to serve their local community.

**Jock Coats** is an Office System Analyst in the Directorate of Learning Resources, providing desk-top computer and software support to administrative departments. Formerly at Strathclyde University, he has been with Oxford Brookes for about nine years and for most of this time he has been a branch officer for UNISON. Jock lives on campus and serves as a Halls Warden providing student support in hall accommodation on a rota basis.

*“He has served as an elected member of Oxford City Council, when he was able to take advantage of the 12 days per annum leave offered by the University to support those engaged in community activities”*

Jock is very involved with the local community. He has served as an elected member of Oxford City Council, when he was able to take advantage of the 12 days per annum leave offered by the University to support those engaged in community activities. Although he is no longer a councillor, Jock still needs time to undertake duties as a School Governor and to develop his involvement in a community campaign to provide affordable housing (a campaign which is supported by Oxford Brookes, by making venues available for meetings and the like).

Jock commented that he enjoys being able to participate in these various activities, and being able to take advantage of flexible working opportunities which allow him to have an attendance at various events, and feels that the University's profile is heightened within the community by his involvement.

Colleagues in his office and his line manager are supportive, and cover for him whenever they can in his absence. Overall no problems have been encountered and Jock intends to continue with his activities. He has also been involved in the Partnership Work-Life Balance Project as UNISON representative.

### Leave for Service in Non-Regular Forces

Volunteer members of the non-regular forces who attend summer camps are granted between one and two weeks paid leave in addition to their annual leave, depending on the length of their leave entitlement. In addition, the University offers to those employees who have been involved in active service a return to work plan, which includes the possibility of a phased return to employment.

## **Leave for a Domestic Emergency**

This can be offered to staff to cover emergencies that are unrelated to children or dependants. These include for example flooding in the home, the breakdown of a boiler/central heating system, the breakdown or theft of a member of staff's car, a burglary, fire or similar incident at a member of staff's home. In these cases Deans, Directors, or where agreed, line managers, have authority to grant up to one day's paid leave for each such emergency.

## **Unpaid Leave**

This can be used for short periods of unpaid leave that would not be considered as a career break. Unpaid leave counts as continuous service and may be pensionable for periods of one month or less. Subject to the specific terms of staff pension schemes, it may be possible to pay voluntary contributions in cases where it would otherwise not be pensionable. The policy provides full details with regard to pension implications.

## **Time off for medical appointments**

Deans and Directors have discretion to permit paid time off to members of staff who need to attend a medical appointment, but the employee is expected to make such appointments for times in the day which will minimise the loss of working hours. Necessary paid time off is granted for medical screening and for blood donations.

## **Time off to attend job interviews**

Paid time off is granted to attend job interviews within Oxford Brookes. For attendance at an external job interview, staff must either use annual leave or flexi leave as appropriate.

## **Time off under notice of redundancy**

Members of staff who have at least two years continuous service with the University and are under notice of compulsory redundancy have a statutory right to take reasonable time off, with pay, during working hours, to look for a new job or to undertake training for future employment. The University has extended this right to all staff under notice of redundancy whether or not they have two years continuous employment and regardless of whether the redundancy is compulsory or voluntary.

## **Time off for dependants, compassionate leave**

In addition to the statutory right to time off to deal with an emergency involving a dependant, the University offers paid compassionate leave of up to ten days in cases of serious family emergency. Paid compassionate leave is discretionary and the circumstances of each case will be assessed on its merits. A set of guidelines have been laid down to ensure that this type of leave is used consistently. Typically, it will cover cases where:

- A child or adult dependant falls seriously ill or is the subject of a serious accident or an act of violence.
- A serious incident involving a child, requiring an individual's attendance at a school or college.

## **Bereavement Leave**

Up to five days paid leave is offered to staff on the death of a parent, partner or child. The same period of leave may be granted to members of staff who have experienced the death of an immediate member of the family. Staff who wish to attend the funeral of a relative or a close friend will be normally granted reasonable time off with pay that in most circumstances will be a period of one day.

The University recognises that circumstances and the nature of relationships and the requirements of different religions vary and therefore is prepared to assess each case individually rather than being prescriptive on absolute periods of leave.

## Flexible Working: The Manager's perspective

Research shows that line managers play a key role in the application of work-life balance policies and in promoting good practice. Many studies on flexible working (Wise and Bond, 2003; Clutterback, 2003; Doherty 2004; Coussey, 2000), including the Flexible Options Project supported by HEFCE, have found that the attitudes of line managers are crucial to the success of work-life balance policies. The Work-Life Balance Staff Audit conducted by Oxford Brookes supports these findings and clearly indicates that staff satisfaction with their work-life balance depends on 'their line manager's understanding of University policies and the general way in which they handle requests for special leave or more flexible working arrangements' (Manfredi and Holliday, 2003: p.47). The following two cases show examples of line managers who have adopted a positive attitude towards flexible working and have found that it has brought clear benefits in the management of their staff.

**Mike Newell** has worked at Oxford Brookes for a long time and is currently Facilities Manager within the Directorate of Estates & Facilities. He is a strong supporter of flexible working, and says *"I think that one of the best ways to sum up the benefits of flexible working is that if you're flexible with your staff, they will be flexible with you"*.

Mike allows his staff time to attend their children's school events in working hours, with an agreement made to make up the time lost. Additional working time is particularly useful for the department at busy periods, for example, during the first couple of weeks of a semester. Another example is that staff may take a shorter lunch break for a period and 'clock up' the time to take time off for Christmas shopping.

Mike recognises the importance of building up good working relationships and supporting staff to balance their home life and work life. He commented that *"If staff aren't supported and don't get the balance right, then they can be less inclined to do things while they are at work"*. He is sure that offering staff flexibility improves recruitment and retention and said *"I know of staff who have come here from other organisations and who have been surprised at the flexibility we offer"*.

*"...one of the best ways to sum up the benefits of flexible working is that if you're flexible with your staff, they will be flexible with you"*

**Brian Rivers** is Support Services Manager in the School of Social Sciences and Law and a firm supporter of work-life balance policies. Brian manages 20 support staff, recently two have been on un-paid leave – one to travel in India and Sri Lanka and the other to do likewise in Peru. One of these members of staff will be coming back to a job-share position, enabling her to undertake her PhD studies, a change supported by the School.



*“All staff have the opportunity to vary their start and finish times to fit in with their personal requirements, provided it fits in with the workings of the Department”. As an example,*

*one member of staff works part-time hours that allow her to drop her children off at school before coming into work; another works school term-time only (rather than University term-time) to give her childcare opportunity.*

*“We don’t use ‘official’ flexi-time scheme in terms of logging in and out and accruing time. We tend to agree core hours with people that suit them e.g. someone might work 8-4, someone else 9-5. Generally staff are not worried about accruing additional hours.”*

*“The reason we are so positive is because good staff are hard to replace. By offering staff flexibility it encourages them to stay or come to Brookes. It’s a deterrent to them going somewhere else if they are unable to find the same flexibility. For at least one member of my team the flexibility offered was a major factor in accepting the job. Flexibility encourages loyalty. For instance, offering staff the opportunity to take longer periods of unpaid leave means that although you lose them for a few weeks, or months, they come back. If they are happy then they are going to stay, otherwise they would probably find it easy to get other jobs. Equally having half of an experienced member of staff is much better than not having that member of staff at all. People respond well to being offered flexibility. If they know they can take some time off then they are not worrying at work and are more focused. Staff are very appreciative and will do their best to help you out because you’ve put yourself out for them.”*

*“There is a little inconvenience in having to hire temporary staff cover where necessary, but this is a lot easier than going through the whole recruitment and selection process – that’s even more time consuming and more expensive. So yes being flexible can mean there is time involved, but you keep well-qualified staff and it’s much easier than having to recruit new ones”.*

*“Generally there are no negative feelings amongst staff, there is fairly minimal additional workload on other staff. We’ve generally been lucky with the temporary cover recruited so they have done any extra work. And all the staff know that they could take advantage of the flexibility schemes themselves in the future if they wanted to”.*

*“Everyone works the hours they are supposed to and the work of the department gets done. It’s simply been a question of aligning people to different hours. When anyone new starts, we endeavour to fit in the start and finish times they want. We have to have someone in the office between 8.30am and 5.00pm but as we have some staff who want to start earlier and some who would rather leave later, it’s worked itself out. If we had a situation where everyone wanted to leave early, we would need to have a rota but that’s never happened”.*

*“It isn’t necessary to make people sign in and out at the end of the day as with the flexi-time system. Our approach is simple to operate and we would know if people were abusing the system.”*

*“I know we have staff who would not have joined us if there had been more rigid rules about starting and finishing times”.*

Furthermore line managers can be the most important innovators of leading practice. This was the case for example in the School of Health and Social Care where a few years ago, mainly driven by pressure on office space, it was decided to develop the pilot homeworking scheme.

**Karen Brockington** is Head of School Support Services and she was involved in setting up this scheme. She says: *"We started to develop homeworking in early 2000 mainly because of accommodation problems within the School but we soon found that this working pattern could help staff to strike a better balance between their work and their personal life, especially as we have a high proportion of staff in the School with caring responsibilities."*

The scheme was originally offered to academic staff only and it was successfully piloted between 2002 and 2003 with 5 members of staff, who, at the end of the pilot, were happy to continue with this working pattern. It is entirely voluntary and it involves staff becoming designated homeworkers, which means that their home becomes their main place of work with access to shared office accommodation on site when they need to be at the University.

*"...if staff work from home they can have some individual space; it increases staff flexibility and productivity as they can reduce their travelling time..."*

To become a designated homeworker an employee must have adequate space in their home. The suitability of home space to be used as an office and its compliance with health and safety requirements is checked by the University Health and Safety Officer.

Karen has found that in addition to helping to ease pressure on accommodation, homeworking can: *"enhance staff working arrangements, as most staff have to share offices on campus, if they work from home they can have some individual space; it increases staff flexibility and productivity as they can reduce their travelling time; it reduces pressure on car parking and it can help staff with caring responsibility. For example one member of staff with childcare responsibilities was able to continue to work for the University by adopting this working pattern"*. When staff choose to become designated homeworkers they are provided with all the necessary equipment (computer, filing cabinets etc.) by the School which also pays an annual sum to cover for expenditures such as electricity and heating at the member of staff's home.

She feels that the scheme would not be suitable for all staff: *"we do not encourage new staff to become homeworkers as we feel that they need to build an understanding of the School and their colleagues"* Karen says. Following the success of the pilot the School has now set up a small working party, which includes representatives of the Directorate of Human Resources, to look at ways of expanding the scheme, and to deal effectively with any issues arising from the adoption of this pattern of work. Based on the experience of the School of Health and Social Care, Oxford Brookes has incorporated designated homeworking into its University-wide homeworking policy.

## **Leave arrangements to support working parents**

Oxford Brookes University has made clear since the early 1990s that it is strongly committed to realising equality of opportunity. This means that it provides support to both female and male employees in combining their family responsibilities with their working life in a satisfactory way. Reflecting this commitment, the University has improved on the statutory entitlements to maternity and paternity leave and in some cases has anticipated the introduction of legislation, for example by introducing Paternity Leave in the 1990s. It has also gone beyond the statutory minimum by offering a period of Maternity Support Leave to a partner (including same sex couples) or to a nominated carer of an expectant mother. It also endeavours to accommodate, wherever possible, requests from parents for flexible working and it offers a range of childcare facilities for children of different ages. These include a nursery, a play-scheme during school holidays and childcare vouchers that can be used for a wide range of childcare facilities in the County. Paid Compassionate Leave of up to ten days is also available to help parents cope in the event of a child's illness. All this support helps working parents and also enables the University to retain its employees as evidenced, for example, by the high rate of women returning to work from maternity leave.

## Maternity Leave

Current legislation gives all pregnant employees a statutory right to 26 weeks maternity leave if they have less than 26 weeks continuous service with the University. If they have 26 weeks of continuous service or more at the 15th week before the expected week of childbirth, they qualify for a further period of 26 weeks of statutory additional maternity leave (52 weeks in total). In addition to the statutory entitlements the University offers staff with at least 26 weeks of continuous service a further period of 11 weeks leave. This allows them to take extended leave of up to 63 weeks in total. The period of maternity leave can be further extended by making use of the University's Career Break scheme or by taking statutory unpaid parental leave. Staff with 26 weeks or more of continuous service are entitled to receive full pay during the first 13 weeks of leave and half pay, plus Statutory Maternity Pay (subject to qualifying criteria) for the following 13 weeks. The remainder of the leave is unpaid. The details of the maternity leave arrangements and pay as well as health and safety provisions to safeguard pregnant employees, are set out in the University maternity policy and guide which provide comprehensive information on this subject.

The following cases present the experiences of two female members of staff who have taken maternity leave.

**Dr. Catherine Hobbs** is Head of the Department of Mathematics in the School of Technology. She took up a position at Oxford Brookes as a Lecturer in Mathematics 10 years ago. Since then she has been promoted to Principal Lecturer and, more recently has become Head of Department and has also become a mother for the first time. She took maternity leave at the end of term 3 in 2003 and returned to work in January 2004 when her baby was five months old. While she was on maternity leave she chose to keep actively involved in a number of key aspects of her work that were important to her. One of these was



the European Women in Mathematics Mentoring Scheme that she successfully set up in 2001 with funding from the EU: *"I had to submit the final report of the Mentoring Scheme to the EU in August. My child was born at the end of July and I had to write the report shortly after that. The EU deadlines are absolutely inflexible, despite their professed commitment to encouraging women in science and that was interesting! I also took my two month old baby to a meeting in London of the National Committee of Women in Mathematics of which I am a member."* In October she had the opportunity to apply to the Royal Society to enter the Athena Award competition. This promotes HE projects aimed at helping women in science. Her application was successful and she won the Athena Award. During the same period she was also interviewed for the post of Head of Department. *"I knew that this post was coming up and I was encouraged by my Dean to apply for it. I was faced with an important decision to make: should I return to my previous job or be prepared to take on additional responsibilities? I wondered whether I would be able to combine them with my family life"*

When she returned to work she was able to organise her daughter's childcare by using the Brookes Nursery. However, her first term at work in her new role was not an easy one as her baby was frequently sick: *"She was ill almost every week, and I felt powerless"* but thanks to the support of her colleagues and her Dean she managed to get through this difficult period. Her child is now well settled in the Brookes Nursery and Catherine is very satisfied with the quality of care that she receives. The only disadvantage is the location of the Nursery, which is based at the Headington Campus, while Catherine works at the Wheatley Campus. To avoid the additional travelling in between campuses in the future she might consider taking advantage of the Brookes childcare vouchers scheme in order to use childcare facilities which are closer to her place of work or her home.

She successfully managed to combine her first experience of motherhood with her career and she feels that the support received by the University has helped her to achieve this.

**Rebecca Mander** is Planning and Market Research Assistant in the Directorate of Corporate Affairs and has been at Oxford Brookes since 1997. She has just returned to work following 8 months maternity leave.

When Rebecca became pregnant, she looked at the Maternity Policy information on the intranet and then contacted a member of HR staff to ask for advice. She attended a meeting with an HR representative and her line manager to discuss her plans and make sure all the necessary forms were filled in.

*“After the birth of my daughter, I decided I would like to return to work part-time. My line manager supported my choice and I now work 24 hours a week over three days.”*

*“Working three days allows me to spend time with my daughter and still do my job. I would seriously have considered not returning to work if the part-time option had not been available”.*

*“Working three days allows me to spend time with my daughter and still do my job...”*

*“At the moment I am very happy working three days. My parents look after my daughter so that helps keeps the costs down. I’m not sure exactly how things will work when my daughter is old enough to go to school or nursery, but we will cross that bridge when we come to it”.*

## Maternity Support Leave

This was introduced by the University to acknowledge the diversity of family composition and individual needs. This provision allows any member of staff who is a partner (including same sex couples) or a nominated carer of an expectant mother an entitlement to two weeks’ paid leave, subject to the requirement of 26 weeks continuous service with the University as in the case of paternity leave. Examples of staff that may use this leave include, same sex couples, grandparents, other relatives or a friend supporting an expectant single mother.

## Parental leave

Working parents have a legal entitlement to up to 13 weeks unpaid leave for each child to be taken during the first five years of the child’s life. In the case of children with a disability, parental leave may be taken up until the child’s 18th birthday. Applications for parental leave require 21 days notice and they may be postponed only for operational requirements. Parental leave may be taken in blocks of weeks, but the University also offers the option of taking it on daily basis to provide more flexibility.

## Adoption Leave

Adoptive parents are entitled to most of the maternity and paternity provisions. They are also entitled to take parental leave during the first 5 years of their child’s life or the first 5 years of adoption, or up to their child 18th birthday, whichever comes first.

## Paternity leave

Paid paternity leave was introduced by Oxford Brookes University ten years ago, well before it became a statutory entitlement. Currently all male employees with 26 weeks continuous service ending with the 15th week before the baby is born are entitled to two weeks paid paternity leave. However, the University is still ahead of the legislation and in the event of a multiple birth it offers an additional week of paid leave (up to 3 weeks in total). Furthermore, while the law provides for paternity leave to be taken only in blocks of a full week at the time, the Oxford Brookes policy offers the choice to take it either in week blocks or on a daily basis in order to give greater flexibility to its employees and to suit their needs better. Fathers may also take advantage of additional unpaid leave, statutory parental leave and the University career break scheme. Flexible working options may also be available to further support them with their childcare responsibilities as the case below shows:

**Gavin Barber** joined Oxford Brookes in 1997 as a Quality Assurance Officer, but for the past two years has been the Project Manager responsible for overseeing the introduction of semesters at the University, working closely with members of the Senior Management Team. In this role he has been responsible for providing the implementation structure, identifying project deadlines and supporting those colleagues who have been allocated special implementation tasks. This involves a great deal of liaison with staff in Schools and Directorates and with students.

Recently Gavin took advantage of Brookes' Paternity Leave policy, following the birth of his first child. Gavin said *"the University Paternity Leave policy allowed me to take two weeks off when my child was born with the leave period actually starting when my wife went into labour. I have a very supportive and aware line manager. I was also offered the option of working from home for one day each week, which I have accepted. This proved to be of great benefit not only to me, but also to the University, as I believe I have been able to improve my work output. Not only does the home-working option allow me to help with childcare if necessary, it also gives me the option of working without the interruptions I would get when based in the office. Undoubtedly I am able to complete and concentrate better on some elements of my job when based at home, without day-to-day university 'hussle-bussle'. For example, I find it easier to start and complete reports and to prepare schedules when I am at home and without interruptions – a definite improvement to work output"*.

*"I probably actually spend more time completing tasks at home than I would in the office, because I do not have to think about travel time and traffic jams that I would have to negotiate to get home following a day in the office; I can just get on and finish what I am doing"*.



Gavin commented that he was also lucky enough to work in a team in his previous role at Brookes, that had offered flexible working opportunities and that he felt this was because the team members and line management liaised well and were supportive of each other, which are key elements in flexible working arrangements.

Gavin had investigated his rights to paternity leave, and had found the 'Work Life Balance at Brookes' leaflet, which he had received with a salary slip, to be very informative about policies and opportunities available.

## Childcare and other facilities at Oxford Brookes

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### Oxford Brookes Nursery

The University Nursery is located on the Morrell Hall site in Headington. It was purpose-built only a few years ago, and has a fully equipped kitchen, ample office and staff rest room accommodation, and two large outdoor play areas solely for the use of the nursery children. The nursery can accommodate 60 children between the ages of 4 months and 5 years and is divided into three separate rooms for children in three different age groups.

The Nursery and Childcare Services Manager and her staff aim to provide a secure, safe and nurturing environment, giving encouragement to the children to develop socially, emotionally, physically and intellectually before starting their school life. The Nursery has recently achieved the highest level of accreditation in both the OFSTED education and care inspections. The Nursery operates with a clear Equal Opportunities Policy, which seeks to ensure that no potential or actual nursery user, whether child or adult, receives less favourable treatment on the grounds of ethnic origin, colour, gender, disability, marital status or sexual orientation.

Further details about current opening times, fees, health and safety, introductory visits, meals, etc. can be found on the web site of the Directorate of Human Resources at [www.brookes.ac.uk/student/services/nursery](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/student/services/nursery), or telephone 01865 485050 to talk to the Nursery Manager or her deputy.



### Childcare Vouchers

The University has recently launched a scheme that gives members of staff an opportunity to save part of the cost of their childcare through the use of childcare vouchers. The scheme is operated by KidsUnlimited and saves money by a simple system involving a reduction in the employee's National Insurance contributions. Members of staff receive part of their salary in childcare vouchers, which are exempt from NI, and this means that the employee contributions do not have to be paid.

As an example, if your childcare fees are £400 per month you can expect to save around £45 through the scheme, depending on salary.

The University deducts the amount you take in Vouchers from gross salary in the monthly payroll process and forwards the amount to KidsUnlimited, who then pay individual child carers within 4 working days of receiving the payment.

The voucher scheme can be used for any registered childcare provision – childminders, after school clubs, as well as day nurseries, nannies and family members who may care for your child up to the age of 16 years.

To apply, both you and your child carer will need to complete a simple agreement form, which will need countersigning by Oxford Brookes and should be forwarded to OCSLD at Wheatley Campus for the attention of Michelle Holliday, Equal Opportunity and Diversity Co-ordinator. Application forms can be downloaded from [www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/vouchers.html](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/vouchers.html)

More information can also be obtained from KidsUnlimited at Westhead, 10 West Street, Alderley Edge, Cheshire. SK9 7EG and from their Virtual Voucher Controller on 01625 587340 ([jacki@kidsunlimited.co.uk](mailto:jacki@kidsunlimited.co.uk)) or their Virtual Voucher Co-ordinator on 01625 587337 ([Marcus@kidsunlimited.co.uk](mailto:Marcus@kidsunlimited.co.uk))

## Play Scheme

Every parent has worries when it comes to childcare during school holiday periods. Oxford Brookes has been running a very successful play scheme for a number of years, which is managed by professional and dedicated staff.

The organised daily programmes offer a variety of creative and physical activities and also off-site trips, such as visits to the cinema, museums, climbing, bowling, etc, for school children of students and staff.

Enquiries can be made to the Play Scheme Co-ordinator, Carol Kemp, by email [cakemp@brookes.ac.uk](mailto:cakemp@brookes.ac.uk) or by telephoning 01865 485050.

Policies and regulations are clearly stated on the Play Scheme brochure, which is available from campus reception areas and on the Directorate of Human Resources web site (under the Nursery or Work-Life Balance headings).

Over the years, many people have utilised this very successful and well supported provision, along with other work-life balance opportunities at Oxford Brookes. For example:

**Phil Harpley** has been IT Support Officer within the Business School at Oxford Brookes since 2002, when he joined Brookes from the Royal Air Force. Both he and his partner worked full-time, and the holiday Play Scheme made their lives a lot easier. Phil took his daughter along to the Scheme when care was required during school holiday periods, at half-term and during the Summer.

*"The Scheme was very useful in helping us manage our time when both of us worked. Our daughter was very happy and made friends, one of whom now lives in Israel but is still in contact. My daughter thought it was great, and I would recommend it".*

A future candidate for Brookes Nursery and Play Scheme was born recently to Phil and his wife. After the birth of his second daughter, Phil took advantage of Brookes Paternity Leave Policy and had two weeks off work to support his wife. Phil was aware of the leave opportunity and contacted HR to find out more information and arrange his time off.

Phil's line manager is supportive of work-life balance policies, and suggested that by way of assisting Phil in his journey to work, and allowing him to get home earlier and more easily each evening, that he should change his working hours. Phil now works from 7.30am until 4pm. This change in hours has proved to be beneficial not only to Phil, by experiencing less traffic during his journey times, but has also allowed the IT support team to provide more support hours to the staff of the School.

Phil said *"By starting work early I can undertake IT tasks, working on servers for example, without disrupting other university staff who would not normally commence work until 8.30 or 9am".* Other team members prefer to start their working day later in the morning and work later at the end of the working day, thereby allowing the IT support team to provide extended service provision to the School staff. *"The team have been working this pattern now, successfully, for about a year and I do not see any need for change".*

Phil recognises and has experienced the benefits of some of Brookes work life balance policies and childcare opportunities, and also of having a supportive line manager. He would like to see flexible working opportunities discussed and considered at Personal Development Reviews throughout the university to promote the opportunities, which are available to all.



## Where to go next?

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To find out more about the University policies that support work-life balance you can look at the work-life balance website at: [www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/wlb/policies.html](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/wlb/policies.html)

Or you can look at them in the Employment Handbook that can also be accessed on the intranet on [www2.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/handbook/index.html](http://www2.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/handbook/index.html)

Alternatively you can request a hard copy of the policies which are of interest to you from the Directorate of Human Resources, or you can contact your Trade Union representative.

## How do I go about making a request for flexible working?

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You can download the appropriate form from the intranet. Click on to the Request to Change Hours and/or Patterns of Work on the work-life balance web-site or the Employment Handbook. Alternatively you can ask your HR link manager for a hard copy. If you are thinking of asking to work flexible hours or to make use of special leave arrangements you can discuss your plans confidentially with your school or directorate Equal Opportunities and Diversity Coordinator, or with your Human Resources Link Manager, or you can talk to your trade union representative. Although a formal procedure has been put in place by the University to deal with these applications, in many cases requests for flexible working are informally agreed between line managers and staff and the University supports these arrangements.

More generally you can use the opportunity of your Personal Development Review meeting or a meeting with your mentor to discuss any work-life balance issues, to plan a career break or consider how best to achieve a work-life balance within the context of your job and career aspirations.

When making an application to your line manager for a change in working hours and/or patterns, it is vital to present a well thought out plan. It will add weight to your application if you can demonstrate that you have given careful consideration to how your proposed change in working hours will impact on your team and colleagues, your school/directorate, your students or your customers and on yourself.

It is not advisable to make an application without due thought and planning.

One example of how good planning paid off can be found in the Resource Centre of the Business School at Wheatley Campus.

**The Resources Centre Team** is a well-established team, working together for more than 5 years, they offer a very supportive function by ordering, providing and supplying learning resource materials for teaching and learning and self-development. They provide staff with the necessary resources and services to support their learning and teaching needs, exploiting opportunities and new technologies to stimulate development in accordance with learning, teaching and assessment strategic goals.

The team encourage other staff to develop their IT software and Web CT skills by giving training and support; they produce user and self-help guides. Desk top publishing services are provided by creation of complicated diagrams, animated presentations, and web pages in course materials. Trouble shooting support is provided for staff using AV/IT/multi-media equipment for teaching. The team has responsibility for web editing for internet/intranet sites and also maintains a comprehensive Learning Resources Support Services web based Guide outlining the services they offer.

With the on-set of semesters, requests had come to them from Resource Centre users for later support times. Obviously it wasn't appropriate to ask the team to extend their working week. Therefore the team members felt that they could offer longer cover to support their customers by all three of them working a compressed hours pattern. A member of the team living some considerable distance from the University, already wanted to work more flexibly and a compressed working week for the team for a trial period of one semester meant

that all interests could be catered for, with the option of changing back to standard hours or amending the arrangements at the end of this period if the trial proves unsuccessful. Accordingly they planned their application to their line manager.

They initially informally surveyed Resource Centre users, by offering an outline of their plan, also some Heads of Departments were approached - feedback was encouraging and the idea was felt to be a good one with obvious benefits. They decided what hours each team member would prefer to work given their home circumstances and needs, also taking into consideration customer needs. The team leader has caring responsibilities so she felt happiest starting earlier, 7.30am and leaving at 5.30pm working four days each week. The others preferred 8.30am-6.30pm and 9.00am-7.00pm, which fitted in better with the shift patterns, responsibilities and travelling considerable distances to work.

Following the consultation exercise, a proposal was worked up by the team manager and presented to the School HR Manager and the line manager of the Learning Resources team. The proposal was the first to involve a whole team changing its working pattern. A comprehensive review was undertaken, ensuring operational viability of the proposal and to address any issues or concerns before a recommendation was

*“By knowing I have one day each week free, I can plan to do what I need to on that day”*

made to the Dean. The proposal was adopted over a trial period of about four months, but it is anticipated that there will only be benefits from the change in working patterns for the School, the Resource Centre customers and the team.

The introduction of the new working pattern means that core support can be offered between 8.30am and 5.30pm (allowing for absenteeism of colleagues). Core hours and individual's working hours are clearly displayed on the door of the Centre for all users to see and School staff have been advised of the changes by email.

A customer care survey for support departments is planned within the School later in the year, so this will be the time when the new working pattern of this team is reviewed and responses evaluated. The team are responsive and flexible to change, should the feedback dictate this to be a requirement.

The team leader, Heather Watters said *“By knowing I have one day each week free, I can plan to do what I need to on that day”*.

Heather commented *“I would anticipate the new working pattern of the team to prove a benefit to the Resource Centre users and my colleagues and believe it will continue after the customer care survey. Having given careful consideration to the proposed changes, and discussed the issues both with the team and others, certainly contributed to the success of the application”*.

Heather also mentioned that she would like to see work life balance opportunities promoted to all staff and felt that perhaps the Introduction Day and the induction process would be a good place to start. She also said that she would like to see the current impetus of promotion of Oxford Brookes work life balance policies to be an on-going process to heighten awareness and extend opportunities to all staff.

## What can I do if my request for flexible working or special leave is refused?

Although the University endeavours to accommodate requests for flexible working and special leave arrangements whenever possible, these may be refused on operational grounds. If you think that your request has been unreasonably refused or it has not been given proper consideration you may take one or more of the following steps:

- Ask to discuss the matter with your line manager and your HR link manager.
- Appeal to the Directorate of Human Resources by following the procedure outlined in the policy to Request to Change Hours and/or Patterns of Work.
- Make a complaint through the grievance procedure. Details of how to make a complaint under the grievance procedure can be found in the Employment Handbook or you can contact your link HR manager or trade union representative.

### **Other useful information**

[www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/wlb/links.html#outside](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/hr/eod/wlb/links.html#outside)

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