

Flexi Time

Working Time and Flexible Working

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Overview

This section defines the British Council's flexible working hours scheme, known as 'flexi-time', which allows staff to vary their pattern of working within the standard number of hours they are required to work. The section covers:

- core hours and flexible time for UK staff
- core hours and flexible time for country-appointed staff
- agreeing the normal work pattern
- recording the hours worked
- unavoidable absences
- distinction between overtime and credit hours
- resignation or retirement
- part-time staff.

Audience

This policy applies to UK-appointed staff. It can provide good practice guidance for country/territory TACOS, subject to local law and conditions. English and Exams/ OAS staff should refer to individual contracts.

Responsibilities

Line managers are responsible for:

- agreeing working arrangements with their staff, subject to the requirement that the work of the unit must not suffer because of flexible working hours
- in all cases, examining the flexible working hours records of staff frequently and at regular intervals to make sure the scheme is operating correctly
- if necessary, withdrawing flexible working hours if staff abuse the system.

Policy

The British Council's flexible working hours scheme allows staff to adapt their working patterns to meet their personal needs, while fitting in with the British Council's operational requirements. The British Council encourages managers to allow their staff to work flexible hours under this scheme wherever possible.

Line managers may agree to a pattern of work outside the limits imposed by the formal scheme if operationally practicable, as explained below under Exceptional flexible working hours arrangements.

Staff are not obliged to make use of the system. The alternative is to work a fixed pattern of hours. But in this case staff cannot accumulate credit or debit hours. Staff can opt into the system at any time.

Guidance

The system is based on an accounting period of four weeks. At the end of each four-week period, staff may carry over either a debit or credit of a maximum of one and a half days. As a manager, you have discretion to allow the normal one and a half day limit to be exceeded if there are good reasons. You must make clear to staff that:

- the work of the unit must not suffer because of flexible working hours
- staff who want to take advantage of flexible working hours must obtain your approval

Core hours and flexible time for UK staff

It is mandatory for staff to be present during certain periods of the working day. These periods are known as core hours. At other times, staff have some freedom to choose their hours. These times are known as flexible time.

Core hours	Flexible time
1000 - 1200 hours	Start 0800 -1000 hours
1430 - 1600 hours	Finish 1600 - 1900 hours

The normal contractual working time is 36 hours, excluding meal breaks. Staff whose standard hours vary from this are informed accordingly in their contract of employment.

Lunch breaks may vary from a minimum of 30 minutes to a maximum of two hours, to be taken between 1200 hours and 1430 hours. Staff must not work more than five hours continuously.

Core hours and flexible time for country-appointed staff

Core hours and flexible time for country-appointed staff may vary from country to country, depending on operational need, local law and custom. However, the details of each British Council office's normal working hours practice should be set out in the terms and conditions of service document.

Agreeing the normal work pattern

Staff must establish with their line manager what their working hours are each day to cover the standard hours they are required to work each week. Staff must inform their line manager as far in advance as possible if they propose to vary the pattern.

Unavoidable absences

Absences due to leave, sick leave, training courses, and so on, must be filled in *Flexible Working Hours Record Sheet SC 52* as the equivalent standard hours.

Visits to the doctor, dentist, and so on, and unavoidable delays through (exceptional) transport disruption, are not regarded as debit hours under the scheme. However, medical appointments must be arranged, as far as possible, so that they have the minimum effect on working hours. Whenever possible, the line manager must be informed in advance. Note that appointments resulting in an absence of half a day or more must be recorded by the line manager as sickness absence.

Union or Staff Association meetings and staff talks generally count as British Council business and therefore contribute towards the calculation of standard hours. Time spent on Trade Union Side (TUS) or Staff Association business by staff who have official roles in the Union or the Staff Association also counts towards the calculation of standard hours (see *Industrial Relations*).

Staff needing advice in this area should contact HR Services or HR Pay and Employment Relations (HR PER).

Distinction between overtime and credit hours

As a line manager, both you and your staff must be careful to distinguish between overtime and credit hours. The flexible working hours system is designed to suit the needs of the individual member of staff. It is not possible to convert credit hours earned under the flexible working hours system into paid overtime. Flexible hours worked at the weekend do not attract overtime payment.

Overtime is worked at the discretion of management in order to meet a particular operational need and must be authorised in advance by the relevant line manager.

Resignation or retirement

On resignation or retirement, staff are expected to clear any debit or credit balance before leaving. Any remaining balance of credit hours is lost, while any debit balance may result in an adjustment of salary.

Part-time staff

Part-time staff can be included in the scheme but must expect some restrictions on the flexibility possible. Their standard hours are stated in the letter of appointment, and their line manager decides after consultation with them what degree of flexibility can be arranged.

Exceptional flexible working hours arrangements

In certain circumstances, you may agree to a variation of the standard flexible working hours scheme provided that operational needs are met. Such arrangements may be for either an individual or for a whole unit or department. In the case of an individual it is normally for reasons such as family responsibilities or travel difficulties. In the case of units or departments, it is normally for operational reasons, for example to cope with a pattern of work which varies according to the time of year. The variation from the standard scheme may be in:

- core times
- flexible times
- amount of credit or debit carried over
- the accounting period.

In considering a request for extended flexible working hours, for example weekend and very late working, remember to consider factors such as security and heating. Consult Global Estates if necessary.

Before refusing a request, contact HR Services.

An exceptional flexible working hours agreement does not confer a permanent guaranteed right for an individual or group of staff. If operational needs or performance problems require it, you may adjust or suspend the agreement.

Procedure for UK-appointed Staff**Implementing an exceptional flexible working hours agreement**

1. Record the arrangements in writing, clearly stating that they may be altered or withdrawn on operational grounds (see Exceptional Flexible Working Hours Arrangements Specimen Record for an example).
2. Retain a copy of the agreement for your records, and send copies to HR Services and Global Estates.

Recording the hours worked

1. The member of staff records the hours worked and the debit and credit hours accumulated on a time recording system based on the Flexible Working Hours Record Sheet SC 52.
2. Before starting to work overtime, staff must enter on their record sheet the time at which normal working ended. This means that staff can simultaneously be in deficit at the end of the accounting period and also have worked overtime; this is acceptable provided the debit hours carried over to the next accounting period are within the agreed maximum of one and a half days.

3. At the end of each four-week accounting period, staff may carry forward a credit or debit of a maximum of one and a half days to the next accounting period. Any credit in excess of one and a half days is lost, and any debit in excess of one and a half days may be deducted from salary.
4. In exceptional circumstances, the line manager may authorise carry-over of more than one and a half days. An example of such circumstances is extended leave that prevents staff from reducing their debit to one and a half days within the four-week period.
5. At the end of each four-week accounting period, the line manager must check the form and approve any credit leave.
6. Credit leave may be used during flexible time or for up to one and a half day's absence (applied for through the line manager). The latter should not normally be more than one and a half days per four-week period and may coincide with annual leave or public/official holidays. The normal operational restrictions governing the granting of annual leave apply.

Procedure for Country-appointed Staff

The procedure for UK-appointed staff provides a guideline for country-appointed staff on how to implement this policy, but some details may vary depending on circumstances in each British Council office.

Exceptional Flexible Working Hours Arrangements Specimen Record

To:
Date:

This is to confirm the exceptional flexible working hours arrangements we have agreed.
From _____ (date) you will normally start work at _____ (time) and finish at _____ (time), taking a _____ (duration) break for lunch.

I have checked the security and heating implications and agree to your attending the office at weekends between _____ (time/day) and _____ (time/day).*

The credit/debit carry-over can be increased to _____ days in a ____-week accounting period.*

* Delete as applicable

This arrangement is subject to alteration or withdrawal if operational needs demand.

Head of department/Line manager

cc HR Services
Global Estates