Guidance for Requesting Flexible Retirement

1. **Scope**
   This document sets out the current provision for Flexible Retirement within the University, and includes guidance for eligible employees considering making such requests, as well as guidance for managers who need to respond to those requests.

2. **Definition of Flexible Retirement**
   Flexible retirement allows employees to request a reduction in their working hours in advance of full retirement from their role at the University. It allows employees to draw a proportion of their pension and tax-free cash benefits but enables them to continue working, albeit at reduced hours and salary.

This scheme is currently only available to:

- **USS members** who are age 55 or over, and have two year’s qualifying service.
- **SBS members** who are age 55 or over, and have two year’s qualifying service.
- **STSS Members** who are age 55 or over, and have been in pensionable employment since 1 April 2007.
- **LGPS Members**: for further information about how flexible retirement works within this scheme, please contact the University’s Pensions Department.

For further information, including factsheets about the schemes, please visit the [Retirement page](#) within the Pensions section of the website.

Employees should be aware that while there is provision for flexible retirement within the relevant pension scheme rules, this does not give employees an automatic right to take flexible retirement.

Employees should also be aware that where a request for flexible retirement is agreed and implemented, there is no automatic right to increase their hours at any point in the future, or decrease their hours further, regardless of whether their pension scheme makes this provision.

Any employee who is not in a pension scheme which provides for flexible retirement may seek to reduce their working hours in advance of full retirement, and any such requests should be made in the same way as they would through the University’s Flexible Working Policy.
3. **Procedure for Requesting Flexible Retirement**

Employees wishing to take flexible retirement should do the following:

- consider the number of hours and working pattern they want to ask for, the implications the changes would bring for the local business area, and how those implications could be managed;
- seek information from the relevant pension scheme about the rules relating to flexible retirement and obtain an estimate of benefits to establish whether or not flexible retirement would be an attractive and viable option;
- discuss the proposal for reducing hours, and the implications of that reduction with their manager, and seek consent in principle for the desired reduction in hours;
- if consent is given in principle, contact the Pensions department who will request a full flexible retirement quotation on the basis of the reduction in hours that has been agreed; and
- on receipt of the formal quotation from the relevant pension scheme the employee should decide if they wish to go ahead with their request, and if so, submit a formal request to their manager, as set out below.

To submit a formal request to reduce their hours, employees should complete the [Request for Flexible Retirement](#) form and submit it to their manager.

The request needs to be formally approved by both the manager and the Head of School/Support Department. If approved, it should then be forwarded to the local College/Support Group HR Team.

HR will forward a copy of the completed form to the University’s Pensions Department who will then advise the relevant pension scheme that the employee is taking flexible retirement (2 months notice must be given to the Pension Scheme of the required change). HR will also issue a contract change letter to the employee.

4. **Considering Requests**

Managers should give full and proper consideration to all requests for flexible retirement. Consideration should only be about whether a request can be accommodated in line with local business needs, and managers should remember that there is no statutory right in relation to this scheme.

Specifically, consideration should be given to the following points:

- If the employee were to reduce their hours, how would their work be carried out on an ongoing basis?
- Would there be a need to recruit another employee to cover the work required, and if so, is this feasible? (e.g. it is sometimes difficult to recruit for a post which is only needed for one day per week)
- Can the employee’s work be covered by reallocation of the balance of work to existing colleagues?
- Is continuity important for students or other colleagues and how would this be achieved?
• Will the employee still be able to carry out the level and range of duties (not necessarily the amount) that their grade / role requires, e.g. teaching / administration / research?
• Would the ‘reduced hours job’ require a different job description or job title?
• Would the ‘reduced hours job’ potentially be at a lower grade?

Managers should also consider the benefits an agreement to flexible retirement may bring, which could include:
• the opportunity to change the way work is carried out;
• the chance to bring in new talent; and
• helping employees achieve the right work/life balance, leading to increased motivation.

5. Discussing Requests for Flexible Retirement
Where possible, employees are encouraged to discuss requests for flexible retirement with their line managers before making a formal request.

An informal discussion gives the manager the opportunity to understand the reasons for the request, but also to consider how it could work and discuss alternatives where the request might not suit business need in its current form.

Where managers feel it is not possible to accommodate a specific reduction in hours, they may wish to propose alternatives to the employee, such as:
• a greater or lesser reduction of working hours, for example where a small reduction would prove difficult to accommodate;
• a move to a different post so that the reduction in hours could be accommodated; or
• a move to a lower graded post (with a commensurate reduction in salary and possible change in job title2) where the reduction in hours could be accommodated.

5.1 Longer Term Planning
When an employee makes an approach to their manager to request flexible retirement it is reasonable for the manager to ask the employee about their longer term plans so that they can plan for any further reduction in hours and also for the time when the employee expects to fully retire.

This open dialogue helps to ensure that any future implications can be understood and planned for.

6. History & Review
This guidance was published in May 2012 and will be reviewed as required ongoing. The policy will be reviewed by December 2018.

6.1 Change control record

2 Where an employee on a Professorial title is considering moving to a lower graded post, advice should be sought from the relevant College/Support Group HR Team.
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<th>Approval date:</th>
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<td>1.</td>
<td>1 August 2013</td>
<td><strong>Section 2</strong>: Inclusion of a flexible pensions option to the University’s Staff Benefits Scheme, as from 1st August 2013.</td>
<td>Pensions Dept. – legal requirement to inform on changes to SBS rules.</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>April 2017</td>
<td>Update to links and terminology.</td>
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7. Alternative Format
This document can be provided in alternative formats on request by email to [UHRS@ed.ac.uk](mailto:UHRS@ed.ac.uk) or by calling 0131 650 8127.