



Staff Forum Consultation Questions

Questions most frequently asked by staff through means of Staff Forum discussion sessions, drop-in sessions and emailing the Staff Forum directly. The FAQs were presented to the Consultation group on 23rd July 2020. John Brady (Director of HR) provided the responses to these questions on 29th July 2020.

Questions related to 4-day Week:

JB: It is worth noting that a possible FTE reduction in the form of a 4-day week is only one of several options being considered, and at this point in the consultation process it is fair to say that the practical and operational difficulties associated with such a change have been well-recognised.

Q: If contracts are changed and reduced to a 4-day week will the University clearly state that staff are allowed to seek alternative employment on their non-working day?

A: Should there be such an agreement then seeking alternative employment during what would then be personal time will allowable.

Q: If a 4-day week is implemented would the University allow staff to study on their non-working day for a reduced fee or no fee? Would the University invest back in staff by offering free courses?

A: It should be borne in mind that any general reduction in FTE that might be agreed is intended to achieve savings and therefore reduce the number of potential redundancies that might be required. Therefore it is unlikely that the University would be in a position to commit to such additional expenditure. However colleagues can access free learning and development resources via UoRLearn:

*https://uorlearn.sabacloud.com/Saba/Web_spf/EU2PRD0149/app/dashboard
and other resources via <https://www.futurelearn.com/>*

Q: Would the working pattern adopted by staff under the 4-day week option be consistent week to week in order to enable changes to childcare arrangements or allow for training or alternative paid work?

A: Working patterns in respect on any general reduction in FTE would be a matter for local agreement with relevant line managers. However the University's normal expectation is that working patterns would be consistent from week to week.

Q: If the 4-day week option is implemented, would the University consider allowing staff to work from home on a more permanent basis to help reduce commuting costs? This is a particular consideration if the 4-day week was spread over 5 days.

A: All members of staff at the University already have the opportunity to request flexible working, which could include working from home where this is consistent with operational needs and the nature of the role.

Q: How does a 4-day week affect part-time staff? Will they be expected to reduce their current part-time hours by a further 20%? Staff working 0.5FTE or less may no longer be able to carry out their function/role due to reduced time.

A: Any general reduction in FTE would be pro-rata'd for existing part-time staff, and managers will be consulted to ensure that any such reduction does not constrain the ability to perform the duties of the role.

Q: If a 4-day week is implemented, will University procedures and turn-around times be reviewed for efficiency and appropriateness?

A: Any general reduction in FTE will require a review of practice and process to ensure that the University can continue to operate successfully.

Q: Will staff who have recently reduced their hours through a flexible working request or who had planned to do so in the next few months have their hours further reduced if a 4-day week option is taken?

A: Where there have been recent requests (we would need a reasonable definition of "recent") this would have to be reviewed on a case-by-case basis. For anyone currently considering such a request the advice is to defer any discussion until the consultation process is concluded and a clear agreement is in place.

Q: Has the option of a 9-day fortnight been considered?

A: Yes, a 9-day fortnight has been included in a number of options being discussed via the consultation process.

Questions related to pay reduction:

Q: If a temporary reduction in pay is implemented will all staff be asked to make the same degree of sacrifice regardless of pay grade or would there be a difference between grades or some form of sliding scale? What would any differential pay cut/sliding scale look like?

A: A range of options are being discussed via the consultation process, including pay reductions that are tiered across bands of grades and include some protections for certain grades.

Q: After the implementation period will salary and spinal point resume from what they were before the pay-freeze/pay cut or will they increase to where they would have been had no pay-freeze/pay cut been implemented?

A: If a temporary pay freeze is agreed the intention at the end of the agreed period will be to restore pay to the level it would have reached; this will be subject to further discussion and may require a phased approach. Any agreed temporary freeze of incremental progression will delay the next relevant spinal point increase until after the agreed period (e.g. an incremental increase scheduled for 2021 may be deferred until 2022).

Q: If redundancies are made after the implementation of a reduction in pay and/or hours, what contract would the redundancy payment be based on?

A: Should redundancies be required any redundancy pay would be calculated using the relevant substantive salary, i.e. the salary that existed prior to any agreed pay reduction.

Questions related to pensions:

Q: If a temporary reduction in pay is implemented are pensions protected at the previous higher salary? If job cuts are made following the implementation of any of the current options would pensions be based on the new reduced salary?

A: The University operates three separate pension schemes – USS, UREPF and URPS. Any agreed temporary reduction in pay may have a small impact on final pension benefits but this cannot be quantified in general terms. Should this impact on a member of staff consequently made redundant the University will consider what intervention may be possible on a case by case basis.

Q: How would the 4-day week impact on pensions?

A: As above.

Q: How will staff pensions be affected if the reduction in hours/pay puts them below the minimum threshold for automatic enrolment into a workplace pension by the University?

A: As things stand the exemptions to pay reductions being factored into proposals should avoid such a scenario.

Questions related to differences in staff status/contract:

Q: For those close to retirement would there be an option to take early retirement before other measures (pay cut/freeze/4-day week) are put in place?

A: Staff wishing to retire early, or take a form of flexible retirement where scheme rules allow for this, are advised to request a quotation from the Pensions Office. There is no funding available to offer any enhancement to pension benefits.

Q: What happens to staff who are on external funding? Will they be subject to these cost saving measures?

A: Any agreed pay cut will not be applied to externally-funded staff. Any agreed pay freeze will be applied universally.

Q: Would staff on fixed term contracts be subject to the same change in salary/hours as staff on permanent contracts?

A: Staff employed on fixed-term contracts will be treated in the same manner as those on permanent contracts, excluding externally-funded staff as noted above.

Q: Would a cafeteria style approach to options be considered so staff could choose depending on their individual circumstances?

A: Subject to ongoing discussions there may be an opportunity for colleagues to opt for an equivalent (at least) FTE reduction rather than a pay cut, subject to local agreement with relevant line managers.

Other:

Q: Are there any figures available for the amount saved by the furlough job retention scheme?

A: The University has made two claims via the JRS, currently totalling £1,519,811. However, £201,973 of this relates to payments recouped and made directly to Campus Jobs workers.

Q: Would the University consider a voluntary redundancy scheme?

A: Subject to ongoing discussions it is possible that a time-limited VR offer will be made available.

Q: If staff are made redundant will support be provided to help them find a new job, e.g. CV writing, interview assistance, retraining?

A: Yes, the University will offer practical support in such circumstances