



Flexible Working Procedures

Context: Signum University wishes to organize itself in ways that are different from the normal American workplace but which we think will be to the mutual benefit of the institution and its staff. These will however require considerable flexibility and willingness to adapt working procedures. These practical modifications will help Signum better manage times of peak need and will give staff opportunity to experience other roles and enhance their career prospects.

Appointment

Any person appointed, as an employee or a contractor, to the staff of Signum will be assigned a particular role which will carry a formal grading, used to determine the financial rewards from performance of the role. They will also be placed within a particular team and Division of the University. It is however a condition of appointment that they accept that this is a temporary condition and that they may be required, at any time, to move to other roles or posts within the University, on a temporary or permanent basis, as the University requires.

All staff within Signum are expected and actively encouraged to be flexible. Our structure and working practices are non-conventional and we need people who accept and embrace this difference, recognizing the opportunities that it provides them for career development and enhancement. Those who show the greatest willingness to adapt and meet current needs are likely to be rewarded in various ways, including potentially, special allowance payments and the prospect of promotion.

Roles Sharing

Roles within Signum are often undertaken collaboratively, performing functions that cross traditional Division or section-lines. It is therefore an expected part of the normal working week that staff may spend part of their time with other teams including potentially under the direction of persons other than their normal line manager.

There will also be cases where individual roles will be shared, with multiple people occupying a portion of the role during the working week. Signum will always be open and willing to explore such role-sharing opportunities, provided that consistent standards of work can be ensured throughout the week and that mechanisms exist to ensure unfinished tasks are passed over to others so they are completed in a timely fashion.

Transfers

When particular departments face times of especially heavy workload, for instance for a conference, or during admissions rounds etc, then other staff may transfer temporarily to those areas to provide such assistance. In the first instance the university will seek volunteers but reserves the right to require managers to choose staff to transfer on a compulsory basis.

Staff within Signum are actively encouraged to participate in transfers as a way to get experience in other areas of the university, so broadening their horizons and giving them an opportunity to acquire and practice different skill sets.

Roles within the university are classified according to bands of responsibility. It is anticipated that individuals should have the potential to perform any of the roles within their band, regardless of which grade they have actually been appointed to. Where individuals transfer to a lower-graded role than that they currently hold, then the university will offer pay protection for up to two years. Equally where an individual successfully takes on a higher role then they will be eligible for special responsibility allowance payment as well as having a certificate noting their performance, provided that it meets standard Competency standards, placed on their permanent file which may be taken account of by interview panels for internal promotions.

Redeployment

When a temporary transfer arrangement lasts for a period of more than six months, it may become a redeployment, by mutual consent, with the staff member transferring permanently to the alternative role and/or Division.

Redeployments may also occur where a role is no longer required and a displacement therefore occurs. Rather than enter a redundancy situation, the university will prefer to find an alternative role for the staff member, with pay protection where necessary and appropriate. For the majority of staff the university should be in a position to find alternative roles, but the higher the level of the post the more difficult it will usually prove, and in some circumstances, including where the university has formally declared a reduction in staffing, displaced posts may become formal terminations.

Members of the Employment team will work with displaced staff to determine their skills, interests and aspirations and to try to identify suitable alternative roles for them. Whilst recognizing the concern that displacement can cause, it is a part of the day to day operation of the university and its need to respond to changing trends and patterns, and as such presents opportunities as well as threats.

The online nature of Signum means that the university expects to be able to respond rapidly to developments and take advantage of new technologies. This means that

we anticipate that restructurings and reorganizations will be a frequent aspect of university life as we launch new initiatives and explore new methodologies to refine our services. Signum staff therefore should not expect permanence in role, though we will strive strongly, within our financial restrictions, to provide permanence in employment.

Where casual vacancies occur within Signum, on a temporary or permanent basis, the Employment Team will work with managers to identify staff, including displacements, who might be suitable for these posts. This can offer promotion opportunities where there is evidence that a staff member has the potential to operate in a higher level role than the one in which they are currently working. In line with the Staffing and Employment framework policy, those seeking promotion will need to successfully complete an interview for the post, however where there is considered to be an internal candidate with significant potential to succeed, the Employment Team will have discretion to restrict applications to internal candidates only.

Meetings

Given the unusual nature of Signum, as a distributed institution, and the international-nature of our staff, arranging business meetings poses problems not normally faced in the work environment. For this reason where interactions are required, staff are encouraged to explore the use of collaborative tools, including email, to hold discussions and resolve issues, rather than to schedule meetings in the first instance. The use of meetings as a business tool is generally discouraged and in most circumstances, regular meetings should not need to be held to conduct university operations.

In situations where a meeting is unavoidable, it should be held via remote communication software such as Skype or Go-To Meeting and its scheduling should take account of the time zones of participants, finding a time which is most accommodating for the majority of participants, however non-US based staff should not be allowed to be regularly disadvantaged or inconvenienced when meeting times are chosen. The agenda for meetings should be drawn up so that they are decision-based, identifying decisions which must be made or issues that should be clarified, rather than topics that should be discussed. In this way we can ensure that debate is focused to achieving particular ends, rather than straying into discussions that whilst interesting are non-essential.

For Signum the use of meetings should be regarded as an disruption to normal activity rather than a part of it, and therefore the number and length of meetings should be limited wherever possible.

Hours

In most cases, a conventional clock-based approach to the operation of a role will not be appropriate. We recognize that staff are working in their own homes, and a consequence of that will be interruptions and activities that would not normally be part of the work day. Therefore whilst remuneration will be calculated on a number-of-hours basis, this is an indicative figure only and it will not be the normal practice of Signum to monitor what staff are doing and when, though time-records may be instituted in cases where there are concerns about an individual's contribution and productivity under the Competency Procedures.

We recognize that in the case of Faculty particularly, there are many activities which they can engage in, that are part of their professional role, that are separate from teaching and marking, but which are wholly justifiable and acceptable and a part of their contribution to their enhancement of their academic discipline. It would therefore not be in the interests of the university to define their role too narrowly and so potentially limit the benefits they can bring to it.

Therefore it will be the normal practice of Signum to judge and reward staff on a performance basis only. The criteria that will be applied will be whether work provided is completed in a timely fashion, to an acceptable standard, and whether deadlines are being met. Staff will be expected to organize themselves so as to meet these goals. When there is slack they may legitimately engage in other activities however equally there will be periods of peak demand when they may have to work longer than their paid hours in order to absorb the volume of workload.

We are therefore placing significant trust in the professionalism of our staff, not to abuse the flexibility they have been given and to be willing to work longer and harder, when necessary, to complete some urgent tasks. We however believe in the quality and dedication of our staff and feel that such flexible working practices will enable us to attract many highly capable people whose personal circumstances make such flexibility desirable and who would not be able to commit presently to a more conventional office-based routine.