**Flexible Work Guideline**



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Purpose and Background

VIU’s People Plan includes the Invitation for Action – Cultivate a Healthy Workplace Culture. The People Plan speaks to our aspiration to create a workplace culture that allows us all to contribute our best at work and to feel energized and fulfilled. One key strategy in the Plan is to encourage flexible work arrangements that are appropriately supported.

Working from home is one of the flexible work arrangement options available at VIU. Working from home is an arrangement in which some, or all work is performed at a remote site for all or part of an employee’s work week while still fulfilling all requirements of the position. Most commonly this will be the employee’s personal residence.

Some of the key benefits to VIU supporting Flexible Work Arrangements include:

* Supporting employees’ well-being, work/life balance, and locus of control
* Furthering institutional sustainability goals (reduced carbon footprint, reduced commute)
* Furthering EDI Goals – (fostering a more enabling, diverse working environment, increased flexibility for individuals from diverse backgrounds)
* Offering flexible arrangements as part of VIU being seen as an “employer of choice,” with positive impact on elevating and sustaining employee engagement
* Alleviating space pressures on campus, and over time creating opportunities to free up space to reconfigure for student usage

Institutional Principles Guiding Flexible Work Arrangements

The successful implementation of Flexible Work Arrangements depends on addressing the following principles. These principles and the overall framework are intended to ensure a consistent approach across the institution in our application of the Flexible Work Framework and approval of flexible work requests.

1. *Sustaining the Vibrancy of Campus Life*

VIU is a university that offers programs and services primarily on our physical campus locations. Sustaining effective services on-campus and ensuring a vibrant campus life are overarching priorities.

1. *Suitable Student Support and Effective Operations*

All flexible work arrangements must suitably consider student and client service, team effectiveness, and operational needs. While flexible work arrangements are individualized within a team or department, they must be constructed giving full consideration to the impact and intersection with the team/department and all of its members.

1. *Team and Institutional Culture*

Maintaining connections and collaborations on our campuses are necessary, to greater and lesser degrees, for all roles. Managers and employees have responsibilities to maintain connections and ongoing interactions. Employees with flexible work arrangements are expected to engage with their team and the larger institution to the same degree as employees who work fully on-campus, including attendance in-person for regularly scheduled department/team meetings and events.

1. *Monitoring and Managing Individual Employee Success*

Flexible work arrangements require clear objectives and results, and they require trust, professionalism and flexibility in order to be effective. Managers need to consider and establish means and methods for supervision in order to monitor workload and results. Flexible work arrangements cannot negatively affect employees’ ability to complete their day-to-day functions.

1. *Flexible Work Arrangements are voluntary and individualized*

Flexible work is not an entitlement and is normally initiated by individual employees. Given the voluntary nature of the arrangement, employees are responsible for costs and expenses incurred by working from home. All requests must satisfactorily address the principles identified in this guideline as well as all institutional policies and critical institutional elements (e.g. IT network security, privacy and information security, employee health and safety).

Flexible Work Guidelines

Introduction

Working from home is defined as engaging in recurring, scheduled or approved ad hoc work performed from a remote location that is not an employee’s regular worksite.

Flexible work arrangements may be appropriate for some employees and some roles but not for others. Positions with a high level of autonomy and minimal requirements for in-person interactions are most appropriate. Positions that require all or most of the work to be completed on campus, such as facilities maintenance, frontline residence staff, and frontline client services such as food services, would not be appropriate for flexible work arrangements.

These guidelines are focused on non-instructional employees of VIU. Instructional faculty will be supported by the guides, materials, checklists, and other associated materials within the Flexible Work Framework, but they will not be required to submit flexible work arrangement requests. Instructional faculty have historically had autonomy to work offsite outside of their designated office hours and teaching obligations.

Flexible work arrangements must be authorized and approved in advance by the manager of the position. To ensure consistency of approach within VIU the manager will consult others as needed, including their direct manager and/or the HR Advisor. It is at the sole discretion of VIU to approve a request.

Subject to the express terms of the arrangement, any arrangement made will be initially on a trial basis for a determined period but may be discontinued by VIU or the employee at any time (whether during or after the trial period). The manager and employee are both responsible for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the arrangement in meeting VIU/the department's needs. Every effort will be made to provide a minimum of 30 days advance notice of such discontinuation. There may be instances when notice is not possible.

This framework does not alter or replace the existing terms and conditions of employment and does not alter the terms of any collective agreement applicable to the employee. Employees must still comply with all rules, policies, practices, and instructions that would apply if the employee were working onsite at a VIU campus.

Approval Process

In order to be considered for a Flexible Work arrangement, an employee must submit a request in writing to their manager (or designate), stating the reason for their request. Employees considering a request for a flexible work arrangement are supported in that consideration by the Working from Home Self-Assessment.

Normally flexible work arrangements will be approved only for employees who have been employed at VIU for more than 12 months. They will normally not be approved for employees who have performance and/or attendance issues*.*

Before entering into any flexible work arrangement*,* the employee and manager (or designate) will evaluate the suitability of such an arrangement. HR Advisors are available to support managers and employees in that evaluation. The employee and manager will take into consideration relevant factors such as:

* whether the employee’s work can be accomplished by working remotely;
* the operational needs of the employee’s department or team;
* the employee’s demonstrated ability to work independently and with little oversight or minimal supervision;
* suitability of the proposed work space in the employee’s home;
* whether the flexible work arrangement will adequately address the privacy and confidentiality requirements concerning data protection and records management;
* potential associated costs;
* any other relevant factors or circumstances.

Hours of Work, Availability, Flexibility and Working Conditions

The regular and consistent daily and weekly working hours of the position shall remain unchanged as a result of the arrangement, unless otherwise specified or varied in writing. An employee working remotely is expected to be available by telephone, email, and any other electronic means as if they were working at their regular workplace. Employees should ensure that the manager (or designate) is aware of any times when the employee may not be available while working remotely, and that the manager (or designate) has approved of such unavailability. Employees will ensure that colleagues and their manager are able to determine their work location (typically through the use of Outlook Calendar), and employees will ensure that their calendar is up-to-date.

Employees working remotely are expected to be free from distractions or interruptions and ensure that working remotely is in keeping with a work style of accessibility, communication, and productivity during their regular hours. Employees working remotely must ensure, in advance, that they have appropriate dependent care arrangements in place. Alternative arrangements must be made for those who require care during the working from home period, just as the employee would when working on campus.

Work hours, compensation, and leave scheduling will continue to conform to applicable policies and collective agreement provisions.

Employees will continue to have a primary campus identified as their work location. A workstation/office will remain available for the employee, which may be shared with another employee(s), depending on the number of days/week the employee attends campus. Employees with approved flexible work arrangements, where they are on campus less than 3-4 days/week, normally will be assigned a shared workstation/office. Employees working remotely are expected to be flexible in addressing the needs and interests of VIU.

Employees’ approved remote work location must within the Province of British Columbia and in the general vicinity of the VIU campuses. Employees must be available to report to their home campus on their normal working from home days, as and when required by VIU, to attend meetings, training, or other events. Advance notice of a minimum of 24 hours will be provided by the manager, save for exceptional circumstances.

In the event that an employee changes roles within the university and is seeking to establish a flexible work arrangement in the new role, a new Request will need to be completed. Should an employee working under an approved arrangement change home office locations, a new Checklist must be completed.

Expenses

VIU will reimburse an employee for necessary and pre-authorized work-related expenses associated with working from home in accordance with its policies in effect.

Employees are responsible for any and all household expenses, such as internet, personal cell phones, home maintenance, insurance, and utilities, and these expenses will not be reimbursed by VIU.

Should employees be required to attend work on their home campus for any reason on a day scheduled for working from home, the employee is responsible for any transportation expenses.

VIU will follow Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) guidelines with respect to the declarations of conditions of employment for working from home.

Performance

A flexible work arrangement should not impede an employee’s ability to complete regular work functions and duties, including communicating with colleagues, supervisors, and other contacts. Employees must stay current in terms of relevant department and work events. Employees must keep their direct manager (or designate) regularly informed on the progress of work in the manner requested by that manager (or designate) and secure support, advice and direction as needed. Evaluation of performance will be consistent with that received by employees working on campus.

Flexible work arrangements are made possible in part by videoconferencing technology because video provides an effective alternative to face-to-face interactions in building rapport and communicating non-verbal cues (facial expressions, body language). Employees working under a flexible work arrangement are expected to participate in meetings as required using video conference technology, with video engaged (as opposed to participating using audio-only). Employees will be provided IT support as necessary to set up virtual or blurred backgrounds when on video, if desired.

Depending on role and/or departmental practice, employees working remotely must continue to track their hours as they would if working on campus.

Managers (or designates) must review the continued validity of flexible work arrangements for their team members at the end of each year or at any time, if necessary. This process ensures that managers (or designates) have the opportunity to evaluate and adjust arrangements to meet operational needs.

Equipment, Home Workspace Setup

VIU will determine the appropriate equipment needs, software, and programs to be used while working remotely in order to maintain data security and confidentiality. Employees must comply with the VIU’s IT policies and procedures, guidelines, and best practices, including software updates, anti-virus software and scanning, password protection, file sharing and downloads, VPN login procedures, and locking the computer when not in use. Employees must ensure that they take the appropriate equipment they require to work to and from the remote work location and their home campus.

Equipment supplied by the institution will be maintained by the institution, and is subject to all applicable rules, policies, and practices relating to use of equipment. Employees must take reasonable steps to protect any VIU property from theft, damage, or misuse. Any equipment supplied by the employee, if deemed appropriate in accordance with IT guidelines, will be maintained by the employee. VIU reserves the right to make determinations as to appropriate equipment, subject to change at any time. VIU assumes no responsibility for any damage to, wear of, repairs, or loss of an employee’s personal property. The employee is responsible for obtaining and maintaining adequate insurance and for consulting with their insurer on any insurance implications due to their flexible work arrangement.

VIU will supply the employee with appropriate office supplies (pens, paper, etc.) as deemed necessary.

The employee will establish an appropriate, professional workspace free from distractions, and interruptions. Workspaces should be ergonomically optimized with proper furnishings and adequate space that supports working efficiently and safely. The employee’s internet must function consistently with sufficient bandwidth so that the employee can work effectively and meet the expectations in this Framework. VIU is not responsible for costs associated with the setup of the employee’s remote work space, such as remodeling, furniture or lighting, nor for repairs or modifications to the space.

Privacy and Information Security

Consistent with VIU’s privacy and information security policies and expectations, and applicable privacy laws, employees with flexible work arrangements will take all reasonable steps to ensure the protection of personal and/or confidential information accessible from their remote location. This will include the following requirements, at a minimum:

* Employees working remotely will be provided with secure access to the institution’s system. Given the security risks associated with remote access, it is of the utmost importance that employees comply with all data security policies and procedures and privacy laws.
* All VIU property, including documents, equipment, and devices must be kept secure to minimize or prevent loss or theft. Such property should not be left unattended when used outside the remote workspace.
* All completed and working copies of documents must be saved on the VIU shared drives and/or MS Teams so that information is available to those who may require its use. Personal email accounts should not be used to transfer or transmit institution information. Only VIU email accounts should be used, to ensure that all proprietary institutional information continues to reside on secure servers.
* Telephone calls and video meetings involving personal information, confidential institutional information, and employment or other sensitive matters must be conducted in private so that others in the remote space cannot hear or see the conversation.
* VIU-provided laptops should be for the sole use of the employee in the flexible work arrangement. During the initial rollout of Project Nelvana, some employees will be authorized to use personal computers. In this circumstance, and if that device is shared with others in the household, employees must ensure that they limit access to files containing personal, sensitive, or confidential institutional information, and that all passwords are kept secure.
* Employees must take the identified IT Cyber Security training at the commencement of their Flexible Work Arrangements and any further/updated training as required.
* Physical files should be taken from the office only if they are essential to carry out the employee’s job duties and if the employee has prior authorization from their manager. Physical files held in one’s home workstation must be kept separate from other personal documents and should be kept private from other individuals.
* Employees must exercise diligence in relation to their home security (i.e., locking doors and cabinets, activating alarms when away from home, etc.

Employees will continue to be bound by the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act of British Columbia and any other applicable legislation.

Health and Safety

VIU is responsible for providing safety guidelines and procedures and is committed to ensuring that remote work sites are safe. Employees are expected to maintain the remote office space in a safe manner, free from safety hazards, and to report any unsafe condition(s) as soon as possible to their manager, including any risk of violence. VIU will provide each employee with a safety checklist that must be completed and reviewed with the manager (or designate) when the agreement is signed. At minimum, employees working remotely will utilize this safety checklist to assess their workspace for any hazards and dangers that could foreseeably affect themselves, and to confirm that their remote work space is safe, healthy, and ergonomically sound. The employee’s manager (or delegate) may conduct worksite visits virtually using videoconference technology or may request photos of the worksite/workstation. A virtual workstation assessment is recommended prior to starting work to ensure that the home set-up supports and fits the employee appropriately. Arrangements for a virtual assessment can be made at safety@viu.ca.

VIU may also request periodic safety or inspection reports from the employee. If the workspace is unsafe and cannot be made safe, the flexible work arrangement may be cancelled.

Employees working remotely must develop their own remote office work protocols for evacuating from the workspace to a safe location if needed, and for contacting VIU in case of emergency.

Employees working remotely must follow safe practices and report all work-related accidents or injuries to their supervisor and to safety@viu.ca when the injury first occurs (or pain/discomfort is first noticed), or within 24 hours of the incident/injury. Injuries requiring time off work or a visit to a doctor must be reported to WorkSafeBC by VIU within 72 hours of the incident/injury. In the case of incidents or accidents that occur in the remote work location, the employer and/or WorkSafeBC may perform an investigation at the employee’s home office. The employee agrees to actively participate in any investigation following a work accident occurring at home.

Employees working remotely must follow VIU policies with respect to working alone and/or in isolation.

Employees on a flexible work arrangement will be covered by WCB for job-related injuries that occur in the course and scope of employment while working remotely. VIU will not be responsible for any injuries that occur at the remote work location that are not related to work.

The employee remains liable for injuries to third parties that occur on the employee’s premises.

Ad Hoc Arrangements

Temporary flexible work arrangements may be approved for unique situations or circumstances, such as inclement weather and special projects. These arrangements are approved on an as-needed basis only, with no expectation of ongoing continuance. The flexible work guideline applies under ad-hoc circumstances.

End of Arrangement

At the end of a flexible work arrangement employees must return all VIU property and supplies to their department/campus.