

Policy on Exceptional Circumstances Affecting Attendance at Work

1. Introduction

The OU is committed to protecting the health and safety of all its employees but must also ensure that any disruption caused to its services is minimal. This document outlines University policy regarding exceptional circumstances which may affect employees' attendance at their normal place of work.

When large sections of University staff are affected by the circumstances described below, the University Secretary, Chief People Officer, and Director of Estates will provide general guidance on attendance at work and the expectations of colleagues during this time.

If staff have been working from site and are unable to do so due to exceptional circumstances affecting their attendance at work, they should be encouraged where possible to work from home. If staff are unable to attend site and they aren't able to work from home, this will need to be discussed with their line manager.

2. Disruption to transport services

Occasionally, the transport services normally used by staff for journeys to and from their normal place of work are seriously affected by accident, industrial action, weather conditions or other causes. Staff should make all reasonable attempts to attend work, which may involve making alternative transport arrangements. If it becomes impossible for individuals to attend their place of work, they should contact their manager (or another appropriate senior unit manager) as soon as possible to explain the difficulties.

If the Head of Unit or manager believes it is essential that the individual attends work for all or part of the day and this is possible, the individual should arrange to attend. Extra transport costs will not be refunded if a staff member has to travel to work using an alternative method of transport. In these circumstances, managers should make reasonable allowances for staff arriving late or having to leave early due to disruption to normal transport services.

The operational requirements of some units/sub-units may be regarded as providing essential services and individuals will be expected to make all reasonable attempts to attend work. Members of staff in such units/sub-units will be made aware in advance of its essential operational requirements.

Where a Head of Unit is satisfied that a staff member has made a reasonable effort to attend work, but it proves impossible, they will be excused the journey for the day and annual leave will not be deducted for the absence. Unless otherwise agreed, the individual should seek permission from their line manager each subsequent working day of absence. If the line manager is not available, they can contact another senior unit manager. If they are unable to contact a manager, they can leave a message, but must speak to a manager as soon as possible to discuss the situation.

All cases should be treated on their merits and according to circumstances. An employee's previous absence, sickness record or work performance will not usually be relevant.

If the work is operationally essential, Heads of Unit or managers may insist on reasonable University work being undertaken remotely at home by those whose journeys to the normal place of work have been excused, if this is practicable. The line manager and member of staff should discuss this when the staff member calls in to explain the situation.

3. Adverse weather conditions

At Walton Hall, if weather conditions are extremely bad, any decision to close the Walton Hall Campus (including East Campus) will be made by the University Secretary, the Chief People Officer, and the Director of Estates (or nominees). The Chief People Officer will advise Heads of Units of the actions to be taken. Decisions regarding the closure of Regional/National Centres are at the discretion of the relevant Head of Student Support/Nation Director (or nominees), who will be responsible for informing relevant units at Walton Hall.

Heads of Units may be given discretion by the Chief People Officer (Walton Hall) or Head of Student Support/Nation Director (Regional/National Centres) to decide if staff in their unit may leave early, having regard to the operational requirements of the Unit, individuals' travel arrangements, relevant local travel conditions, or any other personal circumstances. If a member of staff is granted permission to leave early, they should be advised that they will be expected to return to work on their next working day unless a decision has been taken by the University to close the site.

Heads of Units at Walton Hall should not close whole units and send all their staff home without the agreement of the Chief People Officer or the Director of Estates.

In certain circumstances, specified critical activities will need to be maintained, and there is a need for University staff or contractors to remain on the Walton Hall Campus (including East Campus). In these circumstances, Heads of Units must seek permission from the Chief People Officer (or nominee), and where permission is granted, ensure Security are notified of the number of staff remaining on campus, their location and estimated time of departure. Where business critical operational Units are hosted in a location (e.g. SRF or Venue Management Team), the operational manager for that activity should liaise with the Nation Director (or nominee) or senior member of Student Support (for the Manchester and Nottingham offices), who will liaise with all relevant parties before making a final decision.

Where severe weather conditions are the cause of disruption to transport services, which in turn affects an individual's ability to attend work, section 2 of this policy will apply.

This section is intended to cover adverse weather conditions such as snow and ice. However, at the discretion of the Chief People Officer or Head of Student Support/Nation Director (as appropriate), the principles outlined may be applied to circumstances where temperatures are unacceptably high (according to HSE guidelines).

4. Other exceptional emergencies at work

In other exceptional emergency situations in relation to health and safety or working conditions (such as power failures, gas leaks, etc.), the Director of Estates will obtain all details of the problem and may advise evacuation of some or all staff in a unit for a period. Where it is not possible to bring the staff back into the Unit, and no alternative accommodation is available, the Director of Estates, in consultation with the Chief People Officer and the relevant Head of Unit will decide the most appropriate course of action:

- that all staff (or all staff in a particular area) may depart early; or
- that all staff will remain until normal closure time; or
- that Heads of Units may use their discretion in allowing their staff to depart early having regard to transport arrangements or any other conditions.

The Director of Estates will communicate this decision (and any necessary revised transport arrangements) to all Units concerned. If the decision is to allow early departure, they will also ensure that Regional/National Centres and other off-site premises are advised of the situation at Walton Hall.

Consequently, if Heads of Units wish to make enquiries at any time concerning exceptional events or emergencies that might result in staff going home early, they should contact the Chief People Officer with regard to extreme weather conditions and the Director of Estates for other emergencies.

Decisions regarding the closure of Regional/National Centres are at the discretion of the Head of Student Support/Nation Director, who will be responsible for informing relevant Units at Walton Hall.

5. School closure/disruption to usual caring arrangements

In an emergency situation that involves disruption to caring arrangements for adult and/or child dependants, which affects an employee's ability to attend work, and where it could not have been anticipated, the [Contingency Leave Policy](#) will apply. Situations could include school closures or cancellation of caring arrangements for a dependant relative.

6. Closure of a University site

If conditions are particularly bad and the decision has been made to close a University site, in this case, all University staff who would normally attend work on that day at that site, will be paid a normal day's pay and not expected to take any additional leave to cover the period of closure.

In this case, the University will endeavour to inform all staff of the closure. This will be through automated text message, the Emergency Information Line 01908 655666 and a message on the homepage of OU Life. Heads of Units should also ensure that adequate processes (such as telephone trees) are in place to notify all affected staff of the closure.

7. Emergency Information Line

The University has set up an [Emergency Information Line](#) to provide all staff with an alternative method for obtaining regular updates when a disruptive event occurs. The Emergency Information Line number is 01908 655666. This will provide staff with

information via a brief recorded message, which will also be posted on the homepage of OU Life. Staff members can find details of this phone number on the back of their security pass.

The University also uses an automated text messaging system to communicate site closures to all staff affected. In order to receive an automated text, staff should ensure that their mobile number and location details are kept up to date on the system.

8. Equality, diversity and inclusion

Policies are inclusive of all Open University staff, regardless of age, care experience, caring status or dependency, civil status, disability, family status, gender, gender expression, gender identity, gender reassignment, marital status, marriage and civil partnership, membership of the Traveller community, political opinion, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, socio-economic background or trades union membership status.

9. Useful references

Contingency Leave Policy
Contingency Leave Procedure