Policy on Exceptional Circumstances Affecting Attendance at Work

1. Introduction

This document outlines University policy with regard to exceptional circumstances which may affect employees' attendance at their normal place of work.

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. If, as a result, it becomes very difficult or impossible for individuals to attend their place of work as expected or agreed, they should in the first instance contact their Head of Unit or immediate manager in order 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 to those required to attend their place of work. If it is not essential or clearly impossible for individuals to attend work, they will be excused the journey for the day. Unless otherwise agreed, such permission must be sought and given for each working day. A member of staff leaving a message that they cannot get into work will not be sufficient.

Heads of Unit or managers may insist on reasonable University work being undertaken at home by those whose journeys to the normal place of work have been excused.

Whenever large sections of University staff are affected by the circumstances described above, the University Secretary or Director of HR will give general guidance on attendance at work.

Where a Head of Unit is satisfied that every reasonable effort has been made to attend work, no leave should be deducted for the absence. All cases should be treated on their merits and according to the circumstances. An employee's previous absence, sickness record or work performance will not usually be relevant.

Due to operational requirements particular units or sub units may be regarded as essential services and individuals expected to make significant efforts to attend work.

3. Adverse Weather Conditions

At Walton Hall, if weather conditions are extremely bad, the Director of HR will advise Heads of Units of the circumstances. Heads of Units may be given discretion by the Director of HR (Walton Hall) or Director Academic Services (Regional/National Centres) to determine whether staff in their Unit may depart early, having regard to the operational requirements of the Unit, individuals travel arrangements, relevant local travel conditions, or any other personal circumstances. If any member of staff is given permission to leave
early, they should be advised that they will be expected to return to work on their next working day.

Decisions regarding the closure of Regional/National Centre are at the discretion of the Regional/National Directors in consultation with the Director Academic Services. The Director Academic Services will be responsible for informing relevant Units at Walton Hall.

Heads of Units at Walton Hall should not close whole units and send all their staff home without the agreement of the University Secretary or Director of HR.

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 Director of HR or Director Academic Services (as appropriate) the principles outlined may be applied to circumstances where temperatures are unacceptably high (according to HSE guidelines) during the summer.

### 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 Director of HR 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 depart early; or
- that all staff will remain until normal closure time; or
- that Heads of Units may exercise discretion in allowing members of 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 all 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 Director of HR 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 Regional/ National Directors, in consultation with the Director Academic Services. The Director Academic Services will be responsible for informing relevant Units at Walton Hall.

### 5. 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 number is (01908 6)55666. This will provide staff with information via a brief recorded message which will also be posted on the homepage of OU-Life.
6. School Closure/Disruption to Usual Childcare Arrangements

There are a number of reasons for schools having to close or an employee’s childcare arrangements being disrupted. Where this affects an employee’s ability to attend work and it could not have been anticipated, the Contingency Leave Policy will apply.

7. Useful References

Contingency Leave Policy