



**Ann Craft Trust's Agile Working and 'Right to Disconnect'
Employee Guidance
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Ann Craft Trust's Agile Working and 'Right to Disconnect' Employee Guidance

As an employee of the Ann Craft Trust, you have the right to not be contacted outside our 'reasonable hours' of 8.00am to 6.00pm. We ask you to agree to six rules that help make disconnection easier for everyone.

Why this framework exists

The flexible hours that come with remote and hybrid work are great — letting the plumber in, cooking and eating actual lunch, the occasional lie-in, going to the gym without having to join a waiting list for Zumba — but the data shows flexible working generally leads to working more hours — an average increase of 48 minutes a day since 2020, coinciding with increased flexible, home or hybrid working opportunities.

And it's not just actual working hours that are the problem: the amount of time people aren't working, but *feel like they need to be contactable and responsive*, also appears to be increasing. One of the pieces of evidence used by the French government when passing its 'right to disconnect' legislation in 2017 was a study (in French) showing that communicating (or being contactable) out of regular working hours increases cognitive and emotional overload, which can lead to burnout and anxiety. Essentially, the effect on our brains is very similar to actual work.

Essentially, our communication boundaries haven't had time to catch up now that we work predominantly with our brains. Think back to when people worked mostly with our hands: would a farmer's boss go round to his house at 9pm in the evening, with a cow, and ask them to just milk this one cow, for an important customer? No, of course not! Yet when a colleague sends us a Teams message or an email at 9pm with a request to update a few slides or give an opinion on something, we often do it — and often without thinking twice.

Having a job is like going to the gym: when it comes to achieving your goals, recovery time is as important as the actual work itself. That's why the EU Working Time Directive requires people to have at least 11 hours of non-work time in every 24-hour period.

This right to disconnect guidance is part of a range of policies and information provided by the Ann Craft Trust and the University of Nottingham. This includes our wellbeing policy, our strategic plan and, in particular our values. This right to disconnect guidance is one example of how we live our values – being honest, professional, inclusive and compassionate help us to look after our own and our colleagues' wellbeing.

It is our response to support Ann Craft Trust staff adopt the [University of Nottingham's Agile Working Framework](#)

What your 'right to disconnect' means in practical terms

The right to disconnect is an individual right, not an Ann Craft Trust mandate. However, what we *do* mandate is that *no one should take away another person's right to disconnect*. The guidance doesn't form part of your contract and it doesn't change your terms and conditions.

At the Ann Craft Trust, everyone has the right to take a flexible approach to work which may mean they work outside of our usual 'reasonable hours' (of course, we have to do the job we're being paid for and fulfil the contract we're employed to work to). But everyone also has the right to not be disturbed or asked to work outside of reasonable hours, unless it part of our contractual obligations to deliver support (e.g. training delivery) or it's an emergency (see what we mean by 'emergency' later on). There might also be times where we need you to work during reasonable hours, where service delivery would be implicated if not.

Working late in the evening because you *want to* is very different from working because you feel like you *have to*. This distinction is key, and the latter is what this guidance aims to prevent. There will be times where this creates a conflict in our

own mind – I'm sure we've all 'wanted' to work because we know it will make the following week more manageable, or because we have planned leave. However, when this becomes a regular occurrence it is probably a 'need to' rather than a 'want to'. Developing an effective workplan, which you discuss regularly with your manager, and includes known down time such as annual leave, can help to reduce the feeling of needing to (see our rules below).

Doing individual work out-of-hours is completely fine if you choose to – as long as you're not doing it in a way that asks or encourages other people to work out-of-hours too.

Regular conversations with your manager is key to the success of this. The University's [Agile Working Framework](#) also provides some useful tips and guidance on working effectively in this way

This guidance is made up of two components to help everyone enact their right to disconnect: **(1) rules, and (2) resources.**

At ACT, we define 'reasonable hours' as **8.00am to 6.00pm**. That *definitely* doesn't mean you're expected to work all of those hours; it just means that we deem those reasonable hours to be contacted in. Some people like to start earlier, others prefer to keep working a bit later.

(1) Rules

To help us embed our right to disconnect, we'd like to introduce some rules, for us all to follow:

- 1. Don't judge.**

Our differences are what make us unique and so what is normal to you may not be normal to a colleague and vice versa. The most important rule in our right to disconnect is not to judge when someone chooses to take a break, if someone doesn't wish to be involved in a (recommended) wellbeing activity or if someone is having an off-day and isn't able to connect at a time that suits you (even if they don't have something in their calendar!). [just be

aware that there may be times when your manager needs to speak to about a risk or situation that cannot wait but this should be done compassionately].

2. **Use Microsoft's features such as the 'schedule send' feature for any emails that are out of reasonable hours and 'do not disturb' function on Teams.** This includes both internal and external emails. We have a responsibility not to create harmful standards for people in our wider network too.
When you need some time to think things through, or you just want to get your head down and not speak (it's okay, we all have those days!), use the Do Not Disturb function on Microsoft Teams – this prevents people from being able to call you directly. They can still email you and then you can decide if you're able to speak. Some people also use emojis to show how they're feeling, or write a description – give it a go if you want!
3. **Email the right person, not the person who's available.** There are times, when we want a quick answer, that it's easier for us to contact the person who's at work on the same day as us. This might be okay but, if we 'want' a quick answer rather than 'need' a quick answer, it's better to contact the right person first time rather than the person who is available right now. Doing this can have an impact on that person and means that staff who are contracted to work on more days can become overloaded.
3. **Don't text, call (or video call) a colleague out of reasonable hours.** Unless they've specifically told you that you can on that day for a specific reason or regarding a particular project. Just send a scheduled message for tomorrow morning instead. Alternatively, consider having a message at the bottom of your emails which states your approach to agile working and how this does not mean that you expect a response from the person you are emailing.
4. **Don't log on to your computer, your emails, Microsoft Teams outside of reasonable hours if you don't want to.** Much of the responsibility lies with us as individuals to set good boundaries for ourselves. For more information on how to improve your boundary-setting, see the resources section below.
5. **Create a workplan with your manager and review it regularly.** As we shift from presenteeism to outputs, it's important that you work closely with your manager to agree what work you'll complete, through the creation of a personal workplan – this helps you to manage your work time and downtime more effectively and makes it easier to identify where you're working outside

of our core hours because you need to rather than want to. This approach aims to reduce the risk of 'needing' to work when you don't want to and also encourages reflective practice, when things haven't worked in the way we've planned.

(2) Resources

As a member of staff at The University of Nottingham, your first port of call should be the excellent resources available to help you look after yourself which you can find here: <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hr/your-benefits/your-wellbeing/staff-wellbeing.aspx>

The University also has an [Agile Working SharePoint Site](#) where you can find resources, access to training and find out more about what agile working means.

Our wellbeing policy

Our Strategic Plan

(3) What does it look like in reality?

A right to disconnect and working in an agile way look different to all of us and therefore, the below is not exhaustive, but aims to give an idea of the things you have permission to do and ways you might choose to work:

- You actively have permission to manage your diary/calendar and to add 'break' or 'lunch' or 'gym' in your calendar without being judged by anyone across ACT. To action this – make sure that colleagues can see you calendar and you can see theirs! It's simple to do but ask a colleague if you aren't sure how.

The only ask is that this is reciprocated and that you do not judge when you see others have built in down time.

- You actively have permission to speak to your manager if you have support needs that you don't feel are being addressed – this could be to do with your

mental or physical health, for example, completing a home risk assessment which identifies the need for equipment. If you need equipment to do your job then we will look for a way of supporting you to access this in the most appropriate way, for example, through purchasing an office chair for home use.

- You actively have permission to invite other teams or colleagues to your team meetings, ask for updates about a particular project or piece of work or something that would help you fulfil your job. Although we can try and share relevant information and this is something I will give further thought to, communication is two way and, as an old colleague used to say to me; 'ignorance is optional', so please do take responsibility yourself to check things out.

The only ask is that, when you do, that you are respectful and compassionate to colleagues – we don't always have to agree but being kind and compassionate to everyone, especially colleagues, is fundamental to who we are at ACT.

As highlighted throughout the document, the key to success is open and regular conversations between you and your manager.

'Flexible Working'

The University of Nottingham has a flexible working policy which sets out the formal route to take if you wish to change your working pattern formally:

<https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/hr/guidesandsupport/worklifebalance/flexibleworking/index.aspx>.

'Agile Working'

By its very nature, flexible working isn't always going to be formal or prescriptive. Therefore, this guidance, along with the University's [Agile Working Framework](#) sets out some principles to think about when working in an 'agile' way to meet both the needs of the charity and your own work life balance. These aren't exhaustive but are intended to act as a guide to working flexibly and in line with our values:

- Treat colleagues like adults, and expect to be treated like one
- show honesty and integrity, compassion, thoughtfulness and fairness to colleagues
- have open conversations with your manager about the work you are doing and agreeing deadlines – i.e. outcomes and outputs over visibility and presenteeism
- start and finish earlier or later than our core hours.
- take a break outside perceived 'lunch hours',
- have an extended lunch
- make up your hours on a different day to the extended lunch or late start
- if you work in an evening or weekend, for example to deliver a training session, manage your calendar to reflect this and plan how you'll take this time back in a fair way (although please note that *we must meet our duties as an employee of the University of Nottingham – this means that staff at APM4 and above aren't able to accrue or build up hours over a period of time to take off in lieu*)
- Manage your calendar because you've had a sleepless night, you have a personal appointment, you just need some downtime, or the sun is shining, and you want to go for a walk!

The ask is that you keep colleagues and managers informed where possible and relevant – this may be by updating your online calendar (see first bullet point) or dropping a brief 'teams' message to your manager to keep them updated, particularly where you might be offline for a period of time. It also means being compassionate to colleagues and appreciating that we are all different and therefore have different needs!

What are the exceptions?

There are times where we may need to act outside of this guidance. However, this will only be done when there is no other option and should be rare. This includes:

- *When we are delivering training outside of our core hours or we're travelling to or from an event. This is a requirement of our roles for a number of us but this should still be built into our workplans so that we get the required downtime.*

- *when there is an arrangement in place, between manager and staff member to inform them of safely returning home after a meeting or training delivery.*
- *If the situation is an emergency. An emergency at ACT refers to something that, if left unaddressed before the next working day, might bring about harm (actual or reputational). For example, this might be when someone is delivering training outside of our core hours and identifies a risky situation or is at risk themselves. **The usual way of informing the relevant person who needs to take action is via a telephone call or text message. However, you should agree the best way of being contacted/contacting your managers and staff on an individual basis.***
- *where there is a business need, e.g. you've planned meetings or have an agreed deadline that would be impacted.*
- *where it would impact unfairly on a colleague - showing honesty and integrity, compassion, thoughtfulness and fairness to colleagues is vital when working in this way.*

Remember: someone else's urgency is not your emergency!