Managers Guide - COVID-19 “Coronavirus”

Staff Continuing to Work Remotely

During the current national lockdown that began on 6th January 2021 only those staff whose role explicitly requires on-site working, or those who have an urgent, immediate, and unavoidable need to be on-site should currently be required to come onto College buildings. Further detail and information concerning on-site working is provided in later sections of this document.

The first step in easing the UK’s lockdown began on 8 March 2021 with millions of children now back at school. Some of the rules on what you can and cannot do changed on 29 March 2021. The stay-at-home rule has ended, although the government asks that people “minimise travel”; In England, all restrictions could be lifted by 21 June 2021, at the earliest, as part of a four stage “roadmap” based on certain conditions being met, such as the successful rollout of the vaccine programme.

The College recognises the additional pressures that working remotely for the past twelve months and other aspects of the pandemic have placed on the ability of our staff to carry out their work, including the additional pressure of undertaking unexpected caring responsibilities.

Whilst it is understood that colleagues may well find it difficult to work while caring for dependents, we are all asked to do whatever we are able to. For staff for whom this is a particular struggle, you should explore the detail of this with them and consider any of the following options that might be possible and help:

- identifying those key tasks of their role that are essential to continue with and those which might be postponed until a later time;
- agreeing that they undertake a higher of volume work in the mornings and/or evenings and less during the middle part of day e.g., agreeing a different or more flexible working pattern;
- identifying with them particular days or times when caring responsibilities are most acute and agreeing working patterns to accommodate this whilst still maintaining contractual working hours but over for example a period of a week or month;
- exploring the possibility of a temporary reduction in working time i.e., reduced FTE for a limited period;
- if eligible and the staff member opts for this, to consider a period of unpaid Parental Leave’ or other leave entitlement as outlined in the College’s ‘Family Leave’ policy.
- exploring the possibility of any temporary re-deployment options to a different role that might bring with it a greater degree of flexibility in delivery;
- or, for a limited number of roles, accessing the government’s ‘furlough’ scheme might be possible. However, this will not be an option to most staff of the College because the funds are not made available to employers funded by student fees and through publicly funded research.

The College also recognises that staff have different levels of accessibility to fast or reliable broadband or that at this very unusual period, there is a greater demand on bandwidth in general with work and social related internet use.

Whilst working from home, time for social interactions is equally as important, if not more so, than when working on-site. Staff can feel isolated and the College would like to remind staff to keep in
touch with each other and encourage getting together as a group on MS Teams to reduce the disadvantage of not having social contact.

You must have regular conversations with your staff individually and with your teams and this would include information sharing about any flexibility requests and needs.

To help ensure services are in place to support staff, the College has launched a new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) which staff can access via the free 24-hour, confidential helpline: 0800 028 0199. In addition to the helpline, staff will find support through the ‘My Healthy Advantage’ mobile app, which is available to download from Google Play or the App Store. To access the app, staff will be asked for the employer code, which is MHA162410. Find out more information about the EAP.

Shielding and the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable

Although the advice to shield has ended, clinically extremely vulnerable people must continue to follow the rules that are in place for everyone.

We are also advising clinically extremely vulnerable people to continue to take extra precautions to protect themselves. You are advised to follow the practical steps described below to minimise your risk of exposure to the virus.

Further details as they relate to colleagues in this group.

Work Station Setup

The way in which workstations are set up can affect health. The Health, Safety and Wellbeing site includes resources that can help your staff to evaluate their set up and reduce the risk of musculoskeletal injuries by learning where their ergonomic work zones are and making sure that their workstation is set-up correctly. If staff need more guidance or help with their workstation set up, they should be advised to contact the Health and Safety team.

Costs for increased utility bills

Any additional utility costs incurred as a result of working remotely should be off-set against any savings staff make from reduced or eliminated travel costs. If staff believe that they are incurring additional costs by working from home beyond any savings, they are asked to contact you stating what costs have been incurred (including receipts) and details of what savings have been made in relation to their travel.

If you provisionally support any individual case for additional costs, you must first discuss this with your Director of Professional Service/Director or Operations who then decide whether a claim for the difference can be made via expenses on Business World, subject to appropriate documentation being provided.

Staff may be able to claim up to £6 a week (£4 a week before 4th April 2020) tax relief for some of their utility bills if they have been asked to continue working from home. Staff can only claim for work related reasons such as, business telephone calls or the extra cost of gas and electricity for their work area. Staff cannot claim for things they use for both private and business use, for example, rent or broadband access. In addition, any payments claimed on expenses from the College (as above), cannot be claimed as tax relief.
Staff can check their eligibility on the tax service website. If circumstances require staff to complete an annual tax self-assessment, they will not be eligible to claim this tax relief via this route as they will have the option to make this claim when completing their annual self-assessment.

**Returning to Work in College Buildings – 12 April to 21 June 2021**

**COVID 19 Office use Risk Assessments**

COVID-19 office specific templates have been produced. Managers should review their office spaces in the context of these risk assessments and add to them if they feel that any further measures are required.

Whilst the college is encouraging staff to work remotely where possible, it is the responsibility of the relevant Director of Professional Services/Director of Operations/Head of Department to ensure that a suitable risk assessment has been carried out for workspaces. It is also necessary to confirm that any mitigations have been implemented and that processes are in place to ensure that staff have read the risk assessments, as well as the ‘COVID-19 Information for Staff’ and ‘Campus Induction’ documents, prior to them returning to use their workspace.

It is expected that tasks will, in some cases, be delegated due to the potential volume of work required. However, before staff will be able to return, Directors/Heads of Department need to confirm that due consideration has been given to each area that is proposed to be used. To this end a Departmental COVID 19 Risk Assessment Declaration needs to be completed for each department.

Staff will not be permitted to return until such a confirmation has been received.

**Before Staff Arrive at work**

Birkbeck is committed to providing a safe and reassuring environment that complies with a COVID safe environment. If staff must come on-site to work, they are required to observe the following protocols and requirements:

- Please ensure that staff are coming into the College for specific purposes, in particular where they are unable to undertake tasks remotely or they need to access their workstation/office

- Before staff can return it is necessary for everyone to familiarise themselves with the COVID Risk Assessment and COVID secure arrangements that have been implemented to protect our students and staff.

- All staff are required to read and understand the following two documents, and to complete the Staff Declaration Form, prior to returning to use their workspace:
  1. Departmental COVID Risk Assessment
  2. Campus Induction

- In addition, before your staff can return it is necessary for them to consult you as their line manager to review their requirements and agree any necessary arrangements for them to return to site.

- Before coming in, they must consult the guidance provided on the NHS 111 website to ‘self-check’ for the symptoms of COVID-19 and follow any advice and guidance accordingly.
They must limit the number of possessions they bring in e.g., bags or other personal items. This will help to reduce the potential for transferring the virus as well as making the maintenance of social distancing easier within shared spaces.

Staff are encouraged to follow Government advice and take a rapid lateral flow test, available on line, twice a week (every 3 or 4 days) and report the results of the flow test on line the day they or someone in their household takes the test.

The College is also providing 'asymptomatic testing' facilities in Student Central for staff and students. Full details of the service and a related set of Q&As are provided on the University of London website.

During their Visit

As staff enter and leave the building, they are be required to 'tap in' and 'tap out' on the card readers located in building receptions. This will enable staff to move around the building whilst at the same time maintaining the College’s ability to support the NHS test and trace scheme.

Staff are required to wear a face covering or mask at all times*. Staff can remove face covering temporarily if tasks require e.g., online teaching. Further detail on face coverings.

The College has adopted a ‘1M+’ approach to social distancing in circulation areas across the estate. This means that staff should maintain a 2M distance as far as is reasonably possible whilst in buildings but, with the mitigation of face coverings, it is possible for people to be in closer proximity, for example when passing each other in corridors. However, when people are in rooms for prolonged periods, such as in shared office space, classrooms or the Library, then a 2M social distance should be maintained. This will be supported by the lay out of the furniture and/or the permitted occupancy at any point in time, to ensure 2M spacing.

Staff must not move any furniture or seating when using shared or public facilities. This will have been set up with specific distancing and safety in mind.

Whilst using workspace/assigned work space staff should keep any windows that can be opened, open at all times.

Staff are required to take note of all signage and instructions displayed in the buildings with regard to safety, including prompts in relation to regular handwashing, social distancing and the use of toilet facilities.

Staff must not shout or raise their voice to communicate over a long distance or overcome background noise as this increases the risk of transmission. Equally, staff must refrain from generating loud noise e.g., through playing music or loud conversation.

Staff should wash their hands often and thoroughly with soap and water. In particular staff should wash their hands after going to the toilet, before eating or handling food, and when they get to work/get home. The College provides hand sanitiser dispensers throughout the estate.

In addition, staff are asked to ensure that they:

- cover their mouth and nose with a tissue or sleeve (not with hands) when coughing or sneezing;
- to put any used tissues in the bin straightaway and wash their hands immediately after handling used tissues;
• to avoid touching their eyes, nose or mouth if they have not washed their hands recently.

After their Visit

• Staff must continue to monitor their wellbeing after their visit by following the guidance on the [NHS 111 website](https://www.nhs111.nhs.uk/).

• If staff do subsequently need to self-isolate or indeed contract COVID-19 (regardless of where they think they may have contracted it) they must follow the [COVID-19 specific sickness absence reporting requirements](https://www.gov.uk/covid-19-sickness-absence-guidance) as outlined further on in this document.

• In addition to the sickness absence reporting process, staff who self-isolating are asked to update the COVID-19 status via the link available in My Birkbeck for Staff. This will assist the College in supporting the NHS test and trace scheme.

    If you are subsequently contacted by the NHS test and trace programme please provide them with the following e-mail address to enable them to follow up on any contacts that you may have made whilst at Birkbeck.

* Staff are asked to follow the NHS guidance on face coverings. There are legitimate exemptions to the requirement to wear a face covering but equally, individuals who consider themselves to be exempt should give careful consideration of the risks of entering buildings without a face covering, prior to their visit.

The College recognises that these are extremely challenging times and that people will be anxious about their safety, which in turn may lead to assumptions and misunderstandings e.g., in relation to the wearing of face coverings. It is reasonable, for health and safety reasons, to be able to seek clarification through ‘polite enquiry’ of those not wearing face coverings, but also to respect the fact that some individuals may have legitimate exemptions from doing so.

**COVID-19 Related Sickness and On-site Working**

If you staff develop the COVID-19 symptoms of a [high temperature](https://www.gov.uk/covid-19-symptoms), a [new, continuous cough](https://www.gov.uk/covid-19-symptoms) or a [loss of, or change to, sense of smell or taste](https://www.gov.uk/covid-19-symptoms) and they are on-site, they must leave work as quickly and safely as possible. Whether on-site or working from home, they will need to have a test undertaken as soon as possible and within the first five days of having symptoms. [Full details of what staff will need to do to access that testing is available on the government website](https://www.gov.uk/covid-19-testing).

**Stay at home if symptomatic** – if staff are getting a test because they have symptoms, they, or anyone you live with must [self-isolate](https://www.gov.uk/covid-19-symptoms) until they get their result.

Staff must also self-isolate if they cannot get a test because it is more than five days since their symptoms started.

[Full and current details of when to self-isolate and what individuals must do is outlined on the NHS website](https://www.gov.uk/covid-19-test-and-trace).

In addition, staff must notify their line manager by telephone or MS Teams as soon as possible if they were on site but then left due to becoming unwell or, if working from home, before they were due to start work, or as soon as possible if that is not practical. Fuller details are outlined in the following section on ‘COVID-19 Specific Sickness Absence and Self-Isolating Notification Requirements’.

**COVID-19 Individual Risk Assessments for staff**
The College recognises its duty of care to all staff, including those; who are clinically extremely vulnerable, those who have dependants who are clinically extremely vulnerable, and those not in a group identified as being at more risk of being infected and/or of having an adverse outcome if infected with COVID-19 but nonetheless have significant concerns about on-site working.

Any staff member in a role that requires on-site working and who has concerns should raise these you as their line manager in the first instance. You must listen to those concerns and then consider any options or proposals for alternative arrangements. You will explain the risk management measures and controls that have or will be put in place to minimise transmission to keep them, and others, safe.

If alternative proposals cannot be readily agreed, or if the staff members’ concerns are not alleviated, guidance should be sought from the College’s occupational health advisers. In such cases, staff will be provided with a secure link to complete an online questionnaire, which will be assessed by an occupational health professional. The outcome will then be discussed between you and your staff member and could entail the recommendation that a fuller individual health assessment be undertaken or that further exploration of restrictions or adjustments should be explored in support of a returning to on-site working. A copy of the assessment and any agreed actions will be kept confidentially on the staff member’s HR file.

**COVID-19 Specific Sickness Absence and Self-Isolating Notification Requirements**

The notification requirements relating to COVID-19 are the same as when reporting sickness absence i.e., staff must inform their line manager as soon as practically possible. In line with the College’s obligations to support the NHS Test and Trace scheme, there is now an additional requirement for staff to complete a short online form.

If staff develop COVID-19 symptoms, become unwell with COVID-19 symptoms, or are advised to self-isolate they must:

Report their symptoms, sickness or status to you their line manager by telephone or MS Teams as soon as practically possible and confirm their current status as being one of the following:

- COVID-19 confirmed - not able to work
- COVID-19 confirmed - able to work
- COVID-19 self-isolation – not able to work
- COVID-19 self-isolation – able to work
- COVID-19 shielding

Staff must be redirected to either your manager or other designated manager if you are away.

Additionally, staff will need to record their status on the Welcome to My Birkbeck for Staff page via the blue tab towards the top left-hand side of the page titled ‘Report self-isolation’ and complete the short form that they will be presented with. The specific information on this form will be accessed by the College’s COVID-19 track and trace team and most importantly, will provide the information needed if staff have attended any College buildings in the previous 7 days.

Line-managers/record keepers will log without delay the sickness absence and/or self-isolation status of staff members in the usual way that sickness absence is recorded on My Birkbeck for Staff, by selecting the staff member from the directory and recording the appropriate reason for the entry from the options, as outlined above.
Please note that in the situation where a staff member either has COVID-19 or when self-isolating (with or without symptoms) and can still work, this will NOT be counted as sickness absence on the HR reports that are generated from the system. The College is only collecting and recording this information under its statutory obligations to support the NHS test and trace scheme.

A staff member’s personal health data is ‘special category data’ i.e., it is confidential information and therefore, must be omitted from any communication with the rest of the workforce. Under no circumstances should any member of staff send out communications to other staff or students concerning the personal health information of other staff or students.

Certification Requirements – if staff need to self-isolate, they are required to provide the College with an 'isolation note' that will be obtained from the NHS 111 website.

If staff are ill and in self-isolation, their absence will be treated as sickness absence and they should subsequently follow the College’s normal certification requirements for any longer period of related sickness absence.

If staff are not ill but nonetheless required to self-isolate, you should discuss with them what, if any, work they can do/continue to do from home.

Staff are responsible for ensuring that all medical statements (e.g., ‘fit notes,’ isolation notes, or a notification letter from the NHS test and trace service) reach you promptly. Periods of absence that are not covered by medical statements will not qualify for occupational or statutory sick pay. Each case will be considered on its merits before any occupational sick pay is withheld.

Leave from work and COVID-19

Annual Leave – Even though there are few, if any, options to travel at the current time, it remains important for staff to take time away from work to make sure that their leave can be scheduled around that of other members of your teams to ensure we can continue to operate effectively.

Staff are required to request annual leave in the normal way and should be reminded of the importance of continuing to use annual leave during the pandemic. This particularly so as they may have more leave owing at this point in the year, than in previous years, because of the additional leave provided and allowed to be carried over from last year.

Other forms of leave - All other forms of leave are still relevant during this difficult time, including Family leave. Staff should request any form of leave in the normal way using Business World.

Volunteering Leave - Birkbeck has a Volunteering leave policy, which is benchmarked across the sector, and enables staff to take one day’s paid leave a year. Normally, any additional days for volunteering leave would be unpaid, however during these extraordinary circumstances, Birkbeck has decided to allow staff to be able to undertake volunteering for a recognised scheme such as the NHS scheme. In these circumstances, the number of paid days volunteering leave will be increased to one day per calendar month. It is anticipated that this change would apply for the duration of the Government restrictions imposed due to COVID-19.

Staff who take this opportunity to volunteer for a recognised scheme need to log onto Business World and book this as Volunteering Leave.

Communication concerning COVID-19
All communications to staff and/or students concerning COVID-19 will be issued by the College Secretary, and/or the Academic Registrar (for cases involving students) and/or the Director of Human Resources (for cases involving staff).

There is a dedicated SharePoint site for staff that contains wider information which can be accessed through My Birkbeck and the link through to ‘Coronavirus Information for Staff.’