Working on Campus: Line Manager Guidance for supporting staff

In light of the Government moving to step 4 of the COVID-19 roadmap, which means that the remaining legal limits on social contact are removed, it is anticipated that some staff members will be asked to return to work on campus in order to support the University re-opening activity.

The University recognises that during this transitional period, some line managers may come across a variety of scenarios when discussing a potential return to work with staff members, including those who reluctant to return. This guidance has been produced to support managers in addressing these potential concerns and supporting colleagues in making their return to campus.

Understandably there may be some concern or uncertainty from colleagues who are being asked to either return to work on campus, or continue to work on campus during this time. A number of colleagues may also have personal circumstances which they feel could impact on their ability to do so. As their line manager it is your responsibility to support staff through this challenging period, with the aim of reaching a workable solution wherever possible.

Communicating with staff

In the first instance when requesting staff work on campus, managers should contact staff via telephone/arrange an online meeting, to explain that they are required back at work on campus and when. As part of this discussion managers, should explain on what basis their return is required e.g. part of the week working from campus, part of the week working from home.

This approach will allow for a two-way conversation, whereby line managers can update their member of staff about the steps that have taken by the University during this time to ready the campus for their return (Campus Management resources), and staff can highlight to their manager any current challenges they may be facing, or concerns they have about working on campus. This is an opportunity for managers to consider any way the concerns of their staff member(s) can be managed, or adjustments put in place e.g. could they phase their return to campus in order to reacquaint themselves with the surroundings/ workspace? Can their start/finish time be flexed so they avoid peak rush hour if they need to use public transport?

Please recognise that some staff may be anxious at the prospect of working on campus at present, so it’s important that line managers take the time to listen to any concerns being raised and that these discussions are held in a sympathetic manner. Please remember that no assumptions should be made about a staff member’s individual circumstances and to treat each individual situation on a case by case basis, if faced with a number of colleagues citing that they are reluctant to return.

Offer an open and collaborative approach throughout your discussion, such as asking colleagues whether they think there are any adjustments you can consider, which would support them in making a return? Are you able to make those adjustments? If not, explain why and ensure your discussion is documented.

As a line manager, it is important that you reassure your staff members and talk them through the steps that have been taken by the University to safeguard their health and wellbeing e.g. carrying out risk assessments on their workspace.

If a staff member is citing that they do not feel sufficient safety measures are in place then please ensure that you fully document this concern, and your response to address them. It is important that staff fully understand the guidelines that are currently in place. For further details, please refer to comprehensive guidance on the Campus Management Group site.
* Staff are encouraged to discuss with their line manager any health or medical concerns they may have regarding their return to campus. It is recognised however, that in some cases due to the sensitive nature of a condition, a member of staff may not wish to immediately disclose this information to their line manager as part of their discussions. In such situations, staff are advised to speak with their HR Partner in confidence to discuss their concerns in more detail and agree appropriate next steps. Please note that depending on the nature of your disclosure, your HR Partner, with your consent, may need to speak with your line manager further, request that you provide medical evidence, and/or self-refer to Occupational Health and share any relevant medical findings with them.

**Difficulties in making contact**

If when you try to contact your staff member there is no answer, (or they fail to attend a scheduled online meeting), then where possible ensure that you leave a voicemail asking the member of staff to return your call by TIME/DATE – within 24 hours would be considered reasonable.

You can also follow up your phone call with an email to their work email address.

In your email, please include the following information:

- That you have attempted to make contact via telephone/arrange an online meeting on TIME/DATE,
- That it has been identified that there is a requirement for them to return to work on campus and that you are providing them with notice, (one week’s notice would be considered reasonable)
- The date they are required back at work and on what basis e.g. how many days on campus, vs working from home
- Can they make you aware of any personal circumstances e.g. childcare/carer responsibilities, which may prevent them from being able to return in the capacity required,
- Request that they make contact with you by DATE to discuss their return in more detail.

If you are unable to make contact with a member of staff, and there is concern about their welfare, then please speak to your HR Partner about whether it is appropriate under the circumstances to contact their next of kin.

Where there is concern that your calls/emails are purposely going unanswered then this potentially could be considered a disciplinary matter. If you feel this may be the case then you must contact your HR Partner in the first instance to seek further advice on appropriate next steps.

**Childcare/carer responsibilities**

If a staff member indicates that they are unable to return to work on campus at present, or may struggle to do so in their normal capacity due to childcare/carer responsibilities, then you will need to discuss this in more detail to establish the full extent of the challenge your staff member is facing, and to understand what possible workaround may be available.

Whilst it isn’t unreasonable to ask staff to talk you through their current and future childcare/carer arrangements, please remember to be sensitive to their situation, e.g. what is the level of support that is required as part of their responsibilities? Is there anyone else who may be able to support, such as a partner/anyone else in the same household? Are other family members able to support with carer needs for an elderly relative for example?

As a reminder to managers, there are several options available for staff who are currently struggling with childcare/carer responsibilities. These include, but are not limited to: utilising up to 14 days of coronavirus special leave, which can be taken in full or half days; taking annual leave; requesting unpaid parental leave (typically up to four weeks is allowed within a 12 month period per child); agreeing a temporary change to their working pattern which may allow them to work outside of core hours for example, whilst still meeting their role requirements; or reducing their hours. Please see Guidance for staff with caring responsibilities for more detail.
Staff member lives with someone who is considered clinically extremely vulnerable

If a member of staff raises concerns that they are being asked to return to work on campus, yet they live with somebody considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable, then in the first instance we would encourage them to speak to their healthcare provider or the University’s Occupational Health team, to understand their thoughts on the member of staff returning to work on campus.

Additionally, discuss with your member of staff whether they can work from home for the time being, and/or what additional supportive measures can be put in place to support their return to campus e.g. allowing them to travel at off-peak times if they need to use public transport.

Clinically extremely vulnerable staff members

If you have a staff member who is considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable then they should be permitted to continue working from home during this time. You should remain in regular contact with them and regularly review the support they have in place which allows them to work from home, ensuring that they remain fit for purpose.

Public transport concerns

We must recognise that some staff will be apprehensive about using public transport when returning to work, especially if it is a challenge to keep an adequately distance from other passengers, however this should not preclude any member of staff from returning to work.

If a member of staff raises a concern with you about the use of public transport then it’s important to discuss with them what workable solutions may be available, taking into consideration the nature of their role and whether there is any scope for flexibility e.g. could their start/finish times be temporarily adjusted to allow them to avoid ‘peak’ travel times?

Where this isn’t possible, staff are reminded to adhere to any necessary safety precautions and to follow the most up to date Government guidance for the use of public transport and that of their local transport operator, who will have their own procedures in place to operate in as safe an environment as possible.

Occupational Health/GP medical guidance

Depending on the level and nature of the concern being raised, you may feel that your staff member would benefit from speaking to their GP and/or a referral to Occupational Health as part of their return to work discussion e.g. if your staff member is displaying signs of anxiety/indicating a reluctance to return. This would not preclude staff from returning to work on campus whilst they wait to speak to their GP and/or Occupational Health, and they should come to work on campus if that is what is required for them to be able to carry out their role.

In addition, you should also sign post them to the wellbeing support available on StaffNet and also discuss with them the option of our Counselling service and confidential support helpline. Please speak to your HR Partner if you feel that a referral to Occupational Health is required.

- Additional guidance around wellbeing support

What to consider if a staff member is indicating a reluctance to return to campus in any capacity, and/or their substantive role/duties

As a supportive employer, we should consider alternative solutions to support colleagues who are indicating to their line manager that they are reluctant to return to work on campus.
Ideally, we should look to exhaust the following before considering any options which may be considered detrimental e.g. unpaid leave:

- **Continue working from home in the interim with:**
  - Regular reviews in place to continually assess the situation/any developments,
  - Make it clear from the outset that the expectation is that they will return to campus,
  - If possible, mutually agree a ‘return to campus’ date to work towards **and** on what basis e.g. days on campus, days working from home,
  - Consider whether a phased approach to returning to campus is workable e.g. starting off on one day a week and building up, especially if it would help ease any anxiety about what to expect,
  - Consider whether you need to obtain medical guidance from OH/GP to support case management.

- **If they’re unable to work from home in their current role, are there any viable alternative role/duties they could do from home on a temporary basis?**
  - If yes, then ensure regular reviews are in place to continually assess the situation/any developments,
  - Make it clear from the outset that the expectation is that they will return to campus and to their substantive role/duties,
  - If possible, mutually agree a ‘return to campus’ date to work towards and how they will return to their substantive role/duties,
  - Consider whether a phased approach to returning to campus is workable e.g. starting off on one day a week and building up, especially if it would help ease any anxiety about what to expect,
  - Consider whether you need to obtain medical guidance from OH/GP to support case management.

- **If their concern is linked to the activity they would be undertaking on campus, and a belief that it would place them at greater risk e.g. regular face to face interaction, is there an alternative role/duties on campus that they could be considered for on a temporary basis, which they feel would be safer for them?**
  - In the first instance, explore what provision of PPE is available for your staff, such as a visor or screen for example, which may help your staff member feel safer in carrying out their role,
  - If you are able to support an alternative role/duties on campus on a temporary basis, then ensure regular reviews are in place to continually assess the situation/any developments,
  - Make it clear from the outset that the expectation is that they will return to their substantive role/duties,
  - If possible, mutually agree a ‘return to their substantive role/duties’ date to work towards,
  - Consider whether you need to obtain medical guidance from OH/GP to support case management.

Genuine consideration also needs to be given to any proposed adjustment the colleague may suggest. If it isn’t possible to implement, even of a temporary basis, then managers need to ensure that they explain why to the colleague.

**The use of annual leave/unpaid leave**

If after discussions have taken place to try and alleviate concerns, and consideration has been given to the above methods of support and discounted for one reason or another, then the proposed next step would be to discuss with the staff member the option of taking annual leave, or unpaid leave for an agreed period of time, whilst both parties reassess the situation.

If however you are having these return to work discussions with a colleague who is currently furloughed, then a potential option is for them to remain on furlough leave for the time being, whilst you explore further the concerns that they have raised.
Disciplinary for unauthorised absence and/or failure to follow a reasonable managerial request

If a staff member refuses to return to work in a role that requires them on campus without what would be considered to be a justifiable reason, and/or line managers struggle to make contact with them to discuss a return to campus i.e. AWOL, then you may need to consider pursuing disciplinary action for unauthorised absence and/or a failure to follow a reasonable managerial request.

As their line manager, you would need to be satisfied that the staff member in question is unreasonably refusing to return to work and ensure that a fair disciplinary process is followed.

Whether you are considering allowing a period of annual leave/unpaid leave or pursuing disciplinary action, please ensure that you discuss appropriate next steps with your HR Partner in the first instance (HR Partners Contact page), before any decision is made.