Working on Campus: Line Manager Guidance for supporting staff

In light of the new national lockdown restrictions, staff should only leave their home to attend work if they cannot reasonably work from home. Nancy’s message on 5 January outlined the nature of the roles within the University that would be the exception to this, which would be the few, rather than the many.

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 guidance 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 continue to work from home, even on a part-time basis? 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, and to ensure that their workplace is COVID-safe, as per government guidelines.

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 measures that are in place and that we are following government guidelines. 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, which may prevent them from being able to return,
- 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**

As both primary and secondary school settings are currently closed to most children, one of more of your staff members may indicate 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. In this situation 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 or support bubble? Are they able to form a childcare bubble with another household? Are other family members able to support with carer needs for an elderly relative for example?

If after discussing the situation with your staff member in more detail it remains clear that they are unable to return to work on campus in any capacity at present, then they are advised to continue to work from home for the time being if possible.

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 and furlough leave. Please see [Guidance for staff with caring responsibilities](#) for more detail.
Staff member lives with someone who is considered clinically extremely vulnerable

As of 5 January 2021, the Covid-19 National Restrictions were reintroduced alongside the requirement for clinically extremely vulnerable individuals to again ‘shield’.

If a staff member who is required on campus as part of their role advises that they live with someone who is required to shield, then at present the University would advise that they remain at home and not return to work on campus. This is in order to minimise the risk to the shielding individual.

If it is possible for the staff member to carry out their role, or elements of it from home, then this must be considered and should be discussed in more detail with the colleague to understand what support and resource they may need for this to be a viable option.

If working from home is not possible, then please speak with your HR Partner or Head of HR about the option of your staff member being placed on furlough leave for the time being.

Clinically extremely vulnerable staff members

As of 5 January, the Covid-19 National Restrictions were reintroduced with clear guidance that those individuals considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable should not attend work, and should only leave their home for medical appointments, exercise or if it is essential.

If you have a staff member who is considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable then in the first instance they must work from home during this time. If due to the nature of their role this isn’t possible, then the option of them being placed on furlough leave should be explored. Please contact your HR Partner to discuss this option further.

If furlough leave isn’t a possible option then please speak with your staff member about what alternative options may be suitable to support them during this time, such as taking coronavirus special leave, special leave or annual leave.

Public transport concerns

In line with Government guidance, staff members who are required to attend work on campus should either walk, cycle or drive where possible. In situations where this isn’t possible then staff can use public transport to travel to work.

We must recognise that some staff will be apprehensive about using public transport, especially if it becomes difficult to adequately social 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 the necessary safety precautions, such as the mandatory requirement to wear a face covering, and to follow the most up to date Government guidance 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. 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.

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,
  - 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.

Whether you are considering allowing a period of annual leave/unpaid leave, or for your member of staff to remain on furlough leave, 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.