**Returning to Campus: Line Manager Guidance for supporting staff to return to campus working**

As the University continues with the phased re-opening of campus, some staff members are now being asked to return to work on campus, in order to support this continuing 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 are 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 about returning to work on campus. A number of colleagues may also have personal circumstances which they feel could impact on their ability to return to campus. As their line manager it is your responsibility to support staff through this transition, with the aim of reaching a workable solution wherever possible.

**Communicating with staff**

In the first instance when requesting staff return to 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 reopening resources](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/campus-reopening-corporate-support/resources/)), and staff can highlight to their manager any current challenges they may be facing, or concerns they have about returning to 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 returning to 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 re-opening group website [Campus Reopening Guidance](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/campus-reopening-corporate-support/).

**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**

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.

Although it wasn’t compulsory for children to attend school for the summer term, current government guidance states that it will be mandatory from September. It is important to bear in mind that whilst staff may be able to send their children back to school, they will likely face a new set of challenges based on the operating practices within the school e.g. half days, no/limited wrap-around care, fewer school buses resulting in potential drop off/pick up’s required, so these will need to be factored in and considered when agreeing a suitable way forward.

It isn’t unreasonable to ask staff to talk you through their current and future childcare/carer arrangements, but 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? Dependent on the age of their child(ren), is there an option to utilise childcare provisions such as summer holiday clubs, a childminder, return to nurseries? What do they see as a workable solution at present?

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.

Where possible, and dependant on the nature of their role, you may decide that it would be more practicable to request that a different staff member who has a similar skill set, but is not struggling with caring responsibilities, returns to campus instead

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.

**Staff member lives with someone who is shielding or considered extremely vulnerable**

As of 1st August, the government lifted the shielding recommendations for those individuals considered extremely vulnerable, and advised that they can now return to work providing that their workplace is COVID-secure.

We have taken the necessary measures to make the University campus COVID-secure, and would expect a staff member who lives with someone who was previously shielding, or considered extremely vulnerable to now be able to return to work on campus, if required by their role.

These staff members may want to self-declare to their line manager **if** the nature of their work, or interactions on the campus require measures beyond those already in place to make the campus COVID-secure, and expand on what those measures may be.

Management should give consideration to allowing these staff members to continue working from home in the interim if they reside in a geographical area impacted by a local lockdown that prevents travel to work, and they are concerned about the risk of transmission to their household. This would be subject to review once any local lockdown restrictions were lifted.

**Extremely vulnerable and vulnerable staff members**

As of 1st August, the government lifted the shielding recommendations for those individuals considered extremely vulnerable, and advised that they can now return to work if they are required to do so, providing that their workplace is COVID-secure.

We have taken the necessary measures to make the University campus COVID-secure and support a safe return to work. If however, an extremely vulnerable, or vulnerable staff members self-declares to you that the nature of their work, or interactions on the campus require measures beyond those already in place to make the campus COVID-secure, then please discuss with them what additional measures they feel may be required to support their return, and whether they are feasible.

Management should give consideration to allowing extremely vulnerable staff members to continue working from home in the interim if they reside in a geographical area impacted by a local lockdown that prevents travel to work, and they are concerned about the risk of transmission. This would be subject to review once any local lockdown restrictions were lifted.

**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.

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](http://www.occhealth.manchester.ac.uk/) before they return to work e.g. if your staff member is displaying signs of anxiety/indicating that they are unable to return. In addition, you should also sign post them to the wellbeing support available on [StaffNet](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/wellbeing/) and also discuss with them the option of our [Counselling Service](http://www.counsellingservice.manchester.ac.uk/). Please speak to your HR Partner if you feel that a referral to Occupational Health is required.

**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/refusing 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 for example, and reassure them that if they wish to wear a face covering due to the level of interaction they may face in their role, then they may do so,
* 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**

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.

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 escalate your concerns and discuss appropriate next steps with your HR Partner in the first instance ([HR Partners Contact page](https://www.staffnet.manchester.ac.uk/human-resources/abouthr/contact-us/hr-partners/)), before any decision is made.

**Workloads**

As the current pandemic situation continues to unfold, you may be approached by members of staff who are struggling to maintain their work-life balance, and want to understand what support is in place for them.

You may find that this is particularly applicable (but not limited to) those who are having to balance a full workload and childcare needs, given the continued lack of school/childcare facilities for the majority of under 16’s at present

The University offers staff a number of practical options to help those who may need some additional support, these include but are not limited to: utilising up to 14 days coronavirus special leave, taking annual leave, requesting unpaid parental leave, agreeing a temporary change to working patterns, which may allow staff members the flexibility to work outside of core hours for example, or reducing their hours.

Additionally, where feasible and taking into consideration the scope and nature of the role, managers are encouraged to have an open and honest conversation with staff about reducing/flexing workloads. For those who are struggling to fulfil their current role requirements, managers should be mindful about the levels of output that can reasonably be expected at present. Can some pieces of work be prioritised and others temporarily put on hold? Is it possible for some of the workload to be shared out with others?

You are reminded that these are challenging times for all staff, and that a reduction in output should not necessarily be viewed as a direct reflection of an individual’s capability. Staff should be made to feel supported when having these conversations, and know that you will work with them to try and identify a fair and reasonable solution for both parties. They should not be made to feel that this is their problem to solve on their own.

**Additional guidance around wellbeing support can be found** [here](http://documents.manchester.ac.uk/DocuInfo.aspx?DocID=49733).