

## Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

### COVID-19 - Guidance on Considerations around Staff Returning to Campus

In this rapidly changing environment, it is very important to remember this guidance is subject to change.

As such, all staff and managers are advised to regularly check the University's website for the most up to date advice.

It is important to ensure our approach to staff return to campus is fair, respectful and inclusive so that every person feels they are returning to a supportive and caring environment.

The pandemic has had an unequal impact across our workforce in many ways, as different groups of staff, and individuals, will have been affected in diverse ways according to their job role and individual circumstances.

In developing a plan for return to work on campus, careful consideration must be given to an individual's personal circumstances and a range of equality issues.

This includes but is not limited to their:

- gender identity;
- age;
- race/ethnicity;
- sexual orientation;
- disability / health status (COVID19);
- pregnancy status; and
- dependant or other caring responsibilities including home schooling etc.);

Other factors may also be material i.e. whether they are in a partnership, relationship or married to an essential/key worker, which may be directly impacting upon any childcare / schooling arrangements at home etc.

Of primary importance will be determining whether the person meets the definition of Extremely Clinically Vulnerable or Vulnerable, according to government guidance.

#### **Protecting Extremely Clinically Vulnerable Staff (\*Updated August 2020\*)**

The government advice states that the following people are Extremely Clinically Vulnerable:

- Women who are pregnant with significant heart disease, congenital or acquired.
- Solid organ transplant recipients.
- People with specific cancers:
- People with cancer who are undergoing active chemotherapy
- People with lung cancer who are undergoing radical radiotherapy
- People with cancers of the blood or bone marrow such as leukaemia, lymphoma or myeloma who are at any stage of treatment
- People having immunotherapy or other continuing antibody treatments for cancer
- People having other targeted cancer treatments which can affect the immune system, such as protein kinase inhibitors or PARP inhibitors
- People who have had bone marrow or stem cell transplants in the last 6 months, or who are still taking immunosuppression drugs
- People with severe respiratory conditions including all cystic fibrosis, severe asthma and severe chronic obstructive pulmonary (COPD).

- People with rare diseases and inborn errors of metabolism that significantly increase the risk of infections (such as Severe combined immunodeficiency (SCID), homozygous sickle cell).
- People on immunosuppression therapies sufficient to significantly increase risk of infection.

It is highly likely that any staff who meets the definition of Government's Extremely Clinically Vulnerable list would be considered "disabled" under NI equality legislation.

### **Reasonable Adjustments**

All of the people on the Extremely Clinically Vulnerable list are likely to have impairments which impact upon their ability to carry out normal day to day activities or in the case of cancer they are deemed to be disabled.

As a result, we will have, as an employer, obligations towards such staff which will involve making (or reviewing existing) reasonable adjustments to ensure they can continue to work effectively.

The best way of ascertaining what adjustments need to be made is for the Manager to:

- talk to the individual;
- find out what they need in order to do their job;
- and to make the adjustments if it is reasonable to do so.

The Return to Campus discussion may lead to conversations around the feasibility of a phased return to work if they are still recovering; discounting virus-related absence from the sickness absence policy; allowing time off for related hospital appointments etc. These would all be examples of reasonable adjustments.

It will be important for the Line Manager to:

- make a referral to Occupational Health (if required); and
- ensure that they can manage any workload allocated to them, if and when they are able to work.

### **Protecting "Vulnerable" staff**

According to government guidelines, individuals aged over 70; those who are pregnant; and those who have a disability or long-term condition are considered "Vulnerable" and should be protected from possible exposure to Covid-19 on campus.

### **Protecting staff with disabilities/ long term conditions**

For staff with disabilities and/or long term conditions, it will be extremely important for managers to revisit, review and agree upon any reasonable adjustments (e.g. work patterns, hours of work, ability to travel, place of work, equipment etc) which may be required to allow staff to work safely and effectively both on and/or off campus.

It is important to also consider Neurodiverse staff as this period of uncertainty we all face in the current climate may be particularly difficult and present challenges for Neurodiverse staff as they adjust to another new way of working.

Managers can support colleagues by practising clear communication, as they should with all staff, acknowledging the awareness of the challenges which may exist, and discussing with staff how they can accommodate and support their preferred way of working.

### **Protecting pregnant staff**

As an employer we must continue to fulfil our legal duties under existing health and safety law to maintain and protect the physical and mental health, safety and welfare of all staff.

We need to be particularly mindful of the need to eliminate potential health and safety risks which pregnant colleagues are exposed to when working.

Pregnant women are on the NHS list of people at increased risk from Coronavirus and are presently being advised, to a greater degree than others, to follow the [Government's guidance on social distancing](#).

They are advised to be "particularly stringent" in following the guidance, which includes, among other things, the instruction to "work from home, where possible".

It is important that we are mindful of our obligations, particularly the statutory employment and health and safety law provisions that provide for:

- [suspending pregnant staff](#) on grounds of health and safety, on full pay, if workplace health and safety risks cannot be eliminated or avoided, including avoided through opportunities for home-working or the offer of suitable alternative work;
- carrying-out health and safety risk assessments, which should cover, at this time at least, their job, any pre-existing health conditions, social distancing relating to Covid-19, wearing of masks, , the risks pregnant staff may face in travelling to work on public transport and with maintaining continuous adherence to social distancing rules, especially if the work involves dealing with members of the public;
- [protection from suffering any detriment](#) (such as dismissal or loss of pay) that an employee incurs for having taken steps to protect her own health and safety, such as by leaving the workplace because she has not been provided with appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE), where she reasonably believes that she is in serious and imminent danger.

### **Practical advice**

- Carry out a risk assessment for any pregnant member of staff.
- For advice on promoting health and safety in the workplace, and on how to carry-out health and safety risk assessments contact our colleagues in Health and Safety (Safety Services).
- If you cannot provide a safe working environment during the current emergency, you must determine what steps are required to create a safe working environment, informed by the risk assessment, taking all reasonably practicable measures to implement a safe working environment.
- Unless the risk is assessed as reasonable or can be lowered to a reasonable level, for example, by working from home, or by providing PPE, the pregnant employee should be suspended **on full pay** until such time as she can work safely.

### **Sources of information**

- [The Department for the Economy: The Working Through This Together guide](#) (28 May 2020)
- [Equality Commission for Northern Ireland: Protecting Pregnant Employees during the Covid 19 Pandemic](#)

### **Further advice**

- [Advice for employers](#)
- [Public Health Guidance \(NI\)](#)

### **Black, Asian, Minority, Ethnic Staff (BAME) Staff**

The University is aware and sensitive to the numerous reports that Coronavirus (Covid19) has disproportionately affected people from BAME backgrounds, which "*may be explained by a number of factors ranging from social and economic inequalities, racism, discrimination and stigma, occupational risk, inequalities in the prevalence of conditions that increase the severity of disease including obesity, diabetes, hypertension and asthma*" (Public Health England).

As part of its continuing effort to safeguard peoples' health and wellbeing, the University is committed to ensuring that appropriate measures are put in place for BAME staff, who are at a greater risk of Covid-19.

While all staff must share in this collective responsibility, it is particularly important for managers to be aware of the greater impact this pandemic has had, and may continue to have on BAME staff.

We are conscious that our BAME staff community consists of both international members of staff as well as UK & Irish citizens of immigrant heritage. Any experiences that our BAME staff encounter at the University must be sensitive to these multiple dimensions.

We are also conscious and sensitive to the fact that colleagues from BAME backgrounds are not solely defined by their race and ethnicity, and may also be experiencing further adverse impact(s) during this pandemic, as a result of socio economic inequalities, family/caring responsibilities, pregnancy status, gender, religion/ faith, LGBT+ status, nationality and whether or not they have disabilities and long term health conditions.

To this end, the University is keen to ensure that its approach to addressing its response to the pandemic and particular concerns which BAME staff have, or may have about returning to campus, is done so in an inclusive, sensitive and empathetic manner.

**Managers should engage with BAME staff and listen to those concerns and are expected to be reasonable in accommodating staff circumstances.**

The University is committed to ensuring, as part of its continuing effort to safeguard peoples' health, safety and wellbeing, that appropriate measures are put in place for all staff, and particularly those who are at a greater risk of Covid-19, which includes staff from a BAME background.

As indicated above, the adverse impact on our BAME colleagues is not just health related – or in respect of their physical and emotional health and wellbeing. It also extends to their socio-economic wellbeing, networks and support structures.

The University recognises that as a result of Covid-19, BAME and International staff may have faced, or may continue face, challenges which have specific repercussions on their working lives, ability to travel freely, social support from family or friends, their capacity to engage with colleagues, both at the University and elsewhere.

It is particularly important for managers to be aware of the previous and continuing unequal impact of the pandemic on BAME individuals.

The health and wellbeing of all our staff and students remains the University's first priority. As part of the University's continuing effort to safeguard peoples' health and wellbeing, it commits to updating managers and staff about matters relating to the adverse impact on BAME staff.

As stated in the Manager's Guide, the staff risk assessment will take into account the physical and mental health of all BAME staff and is designed to provide a structured conversation between line managers and staff members in order to seek a pragmatic and safe working arrangement for staff.

As the University manages its way through this pandemic, it will continue to engage with staff in many different ways, and this will involve direct and regular engagement with BAME staff and with iRise representatives.

This is a way in which the University is attempting to ensure that different perspectives are sought, and that any specific challenges which are presented, can be addressed in a collaborative manner.

By doing so, we hope this can help shape an inclusive approach to decision making, policy development, and action planning.

We hope that by doing so, our approach can complement existing policies, resources and training which demonstrate our commitment to the promotion of equality and of opportunity while also remaining cognisant of where improvements can be made.

We are committed to creating and sustaining an environment that not only values equality and inclusion, but also safeguards and celebrates the diversity of its staff and student body.

### **Engagement with staff networks**

Engagement with staff and staff networks is being strengthened and prioritised to enable the University decision makers to hear and learn from BAME and International staff's lived experience.

If you wish to contribute to that engagement please contact [iRise](#), the BAME and International Staff Network and/or [PRISM](#) – our LGBT+ Staff Network.

### **Useful links**

Please visit the Useful links section of the Manager's Guide for details of support available within the University.

### **International staff**

The University recognises that as a result of Covid-19, International staff may have faced, or may continue face, challenges which have specific repercussions on their working lives, ability to travel freely, see family and friends and of course, their capacity to engage with colleagues, both at the University and elsewhere.

This is because the adverse impact of Covid-19 and related restrictions is not just health related or in respect of physical and emotional health and wellbeing.

It also extends to socio-economic wellbeing, networks and support structures many of which may differ from Northern Irish cultural norms.

For example, international staff may be less likely to have the same access as local staff to such structures, within the United Kingdom or Ireland; most will have relatives and friends living and/or working in countries more severely impacted by the pandemic, and they may have specific concerns regarding finances, mobility and careers.

Many international staff also identify with the other groupings discussed in this document, and so the particularity of staff members' concerns should be given consideration when you engage with them.

### **International Staff Support**

We recognise that there may be questions or concerns that are specific to international staff.

Any member of International Staff who has particular concerns around issues relating to travel, finance, visa, work etc is asked to contact the following

- International Staff Support: Ray McEvoy or Lourdes Perez Barreiro  
[internationalstaff@qub.ac.uk](mailto:internationalstaff@qub.ac.uk) or
- Emailing the Hub ([hrhub@qub.ac.uk](mailto:hrhub@qub.ac.uk)) or
- Visiting the Covid19 Frequently Asked Questions page. Please click here to access the HR Hub website.

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### **LGBT+ staff**

Reports indicate that there may be some challenges faced by LGBT+ people during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The ***Stonewall LGBT in Britain - Health Report*** states that LGBT+ people are at greater risk of marginalisation during crises, and that those with multiple marginalised identities can struggle even more.

While lockdown is, of course, impacting on all within society, social isolation may have an even greater impact on some LGBT+ staff due to their circumstances and experiences.

For example, colleagues who are not “out” in the workplace may find working from home more difficult – as work calls and video conferencing brings work into a place where they have perhaps always been open about who they are and where they may live with a partner.

LGBT+ people – particularly older LGBT+ people – are more likely to have strained relationships with their family or to be estranged from them, and the stress and loneliness resulting from being cut off from social interaction in the workplace and with friends at this time may, of course, be even more difficult for those in this situation.

Some younger members of the LGBT+ community may not feel able to come out and could be less comfortable at this time if they are staying at home in a family or living environment.

This means it is now especially important for parents and carers and colleagues to offer all the help, understanding and support they can to vulnerable LGBT+ young people.

### **Transgender**

Transgender colleagues may have experienced a lack of understanding of their specific health needs or be facing delays or cancellations on gender-affirming treatment, for which they may have been waiting to access for a long time.

It is therefore important that there is an awareness and understanding that some staff may be affected in this way, and that managers are as supportive as possible.

Transgender Awareness and Sexual Orientation Awareness training sessions will be available for all staff to attend remotely from July 2020, and managers should also be cognisant of the resources and support available which they can signpost staff to.

A full list of external resources regarding support for transgender and/or non-binary people and their families is available [here](#).

With all of this in mind, the University’s Staff Network, PRISM, is working hard to find new ways and opportunities for LGBT+ staff to come together as an LGBT+ community to show each other solidarity and support.

They have been continuing to meet to plan and deliver a range of social activities to bring staff together during this time.

Please encourage any LGBT+ staff to contact the People and Culture Directorate, if they require specific advice or assistance on work related matters.

They can also contact PRISM by emailing [prism@qub.ac.uk](mailto:prism@qub.ac.uk) if they require other support.

### **Childcare / Dependants / Caring Responsibilities & Leave arrangements**

We fully appreciate that many staff have childcare responsibilities and/or other dependants and that access to former support structures (e.g. family, nurseries, crèches, etc) many be unavailable and/or severely restricted at present and for the foreseeable future.

We therefore encourage all staff to carefully consider the range of leave and support available to them at the University including Annual Leave, Special/Dependant Leave, Parental Leave and Shared Parental Leave if appropriate, which might assist them in managing childcare /dependant responsibilities.



Further information on a wide range of leave is available on the University's [People and Culture website](#), from the relevant HR Business Partner or on the [Staff Frequently Asked Questions page](#), which is regularly updated.

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

These are challenging times.

A lot of us may be feeling anxious, stressed or under pressure at home and while working in a new way.

The University is committed to ensuring the positive physical and mental health and wellbeing of all staff, while at work, regardless of whether they are on or off campus.

The risks to health from this pandemic are psychological as well as physical. These include anxiety about the ongoing health crisis and fear of infection, as well as social isolation due to the lockdown.

Some of us may be experiencing challenging domestic situations, such as juggling childcare or caring for a vulnerable relative, as well as financial worries if a partner has had a reduction or a loss of income. Some of us may have experienced illness, or bereavement.

Some of us may be more tired than normal, possibly as a result of stress and adjusting to new ways of working.

Some of us may take more time than others and it's likely that most people will need a period of readjustment.

Some members of staff may have concerns about travelling and socially distancing on public transport – or it may not be as readily available.

Many of us may be finding that we are still coming to terms with the significant change which society has seen, and the familiar workplace routines could feel very different.

Please note that there is a wide range of mental health support available for staff at the University; this includes but is not limited to

- Remote online Mental Health Awareness training available for staff and managers; and
- Our Staff Wellbeing Programme:
- Access to professional, confidential and external third-party support by Inspire Wellbeing (this is available 7 days a week, 24 hours a day).
- Internal Mental Health First Aiders

Our training courses can be accessed via iTrent and Queen's Online.

We also strongly encourage you to speak to your Line Manager if you are stressed or not coping. They can arrange for a Stress Risk Assessment to be carried out.

Alternatively, please note that all staff can contact Inspire Wellbeing directly.

Their Professional Counsellors are fully qualified and experienced in a wide range of issues such as:

- alcohol problems
- anxiety or depression
- bereavement
- bullying and harassment
- debt problems
- drug-related problems
- employment concerns
- experience of a traumatic event
- family worries
- personal relationship problem
- stress at work or at home.

Counselling is provided both by telephone and face to face.

Simply call 0800 389 5362 at any time of the day or night, seven days a week.

Further information on training, advice and a wide range of Staff Wellbeing support [can be accessed by clicking here](#).

Staff who are experiencing domestic violence and abuse may be at greater risk during the lockdown and there may be an increase in reports after the lockdown.

Managers should emphasise the counselling and report services which are available to all staff and be cognisant that some staff may be experiencing difficulty in the living or home environment.