

COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions - Return to Campus

[Available on COVID-19 FAQ webpage here](#)

I am concerned about contracting the virus if I return to campus – what safety measures are being put in place by the University?

The University is currently conducting a review of health and safety measures in line with the advice from the Public Health Agency. All Schools and Directorates will undergo a risk assessment prior to staff being able to return to campus. Arrangements are also being put in place to enable effective social distancing and staff will be asked to continue to follow PHA advice to maintain good hygiene.

It is important that you continue to familiarise yourself with the [Public Health Agency advice](#). If you have any specific concerns, please discuss with your manager.

I am worried about returning to campus. Can I continue to work from home?

Staff should continue to work from home if they can and only come to campus where work cannot be done at home and they have been asked to return by their manager.

My team has been asked to return to campus, because we cannot work remotely from home and Public Health Agency guidance allows for this. I have dependents and I may not be able to return to work at this time. What should I do?

You should discuss any potential options with your manager so they can factor this in when making plans for work to be carried out on campus. These may include:

- staggering start and finish times
- discussing specific issues with regard to your caring responsibilities
- use of annual leave, unpaid leave, dependents leave or parental leave
- or identifying tasks that may be able to be completed at home.

The University will seek to ensure that any working arrangements accommodate caring and/or childcare responsibilities and develop solutions such as rota systems that may be put in place.

My team has been asked to return to campus, because we cannot work remotely from home and Public Health Agency guidance allows for this. I believe I am vulnerable. What should I do?

Please review the following links, which set out categories of Clinically Vulnerable and Vulnerable staff:

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-vulnerable-people>
<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/guidance-shielding-extremely-vulnerable-people>

In these circumstances, if you are unable to come to work at this time, your manager may allocate tasks to you that can be undertaken at home, even where these are not your normal work activities, provided that you have the skills to undertake the tasks.

My team has been asked to return to campus, because we cannot work remotely from home and Public Health Agency guidance allows for this. I have, or someone in my

household has, underlying health conditions and I am not able to return to work at this time. What should I do?

If you or anyone in your household are not displaying any symptoms, and you are able to leave your home, it is expected that you will return to campus if you cannot work remotely from home. You should discuss your circumstances with your manager so as they can factor this in when making plans for work to be carried out on campus including carrying out a Health and Safety Risk Assessment, a Return to Work (RTW) on Campus discussion and to ask for medical guidance from the member of staff's GP. In certain circumstances, it may be the case that your manager allocates work to you that can be done from home.

Shielded individuals will not be asked to return to campus until further notice.

I have received a letter advising me to shield, what should I do?

Staff who have been contacted by the NHS and asked to stay at home for 12 weeks (i.e. those individuals considered to be at extremely high risk of severe illness with COVID-19) and are shielding but otherwise well should advise their manager. If you are able to work from home during the period of shielding you will continue to be paid as normal.

The Public Health Agency provides advice on who should shield and how to do this effectively. Please follow the advice published on the [PHA website](#).

I live in the same household as someone who is shielding, what do I do?

If you live with someone who has been identified as being at highest clinical risk and is shielding, you do not need to shield. However, you should read and familiarise yourself with the shielding guidance, and strictly follow social distancing measures on the [PHA website](#).

If I cannot complete my work from home and I am not able to return to campus at this time, where can I find tasks that may be completed from home?

Your manager has been asked to look at whether tasks can be redistributed within your team so that those that can be done remotely are allocated to those who cannot return to campus. Also, The Connect Task Portal provides managers and staff with a toolkit for sharing and accessing tasks that require additional support.

Guidance for using the portal can be found on the [People and Culture website](#).

What adjustments (other than working from home) might we have to make for someone who has had the virus?

As with the duty to make reasonable adjustments under equality legislation, the best way of ascertaining what adjustments need to be made is for the Manager to:

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

The most obvious will be a risk-assessed phased return to work if they are still recovering.

Where an employee is disabled, there is a legal obligation for employers to make reasonable adjustments.

Initially, it may take staff some time to recover and they may need a phased return to work, gradually increasing hours until they can return to full capacity.

Staff may need time off for hospital appointments and follow up. It will be important in any event to:

- discuss the employees needs;
- make a referral to occupational health;
- ensure that they can manage the workload.

Access to Work – a government scheme which provides financial assistance by way of a grant to fund special equipment, adaptations or support worker services to help disabled people to do things like answer the phone or go to meetings and which can provide help in getting to and from work – might also be useful.

Discounting virus-related absence from any sickness related absence policy can also be a reasonable adjustment given the circumstances.

Can I change my working hours at this time to suit my dependent needs?

If you wish to move to part-time hours or change your working pattern, you should discuss this with your manager. A request to reduce your hours can be made via the [Flexible Working Policy](#).

As I work from home, can I reclaim expenses associated with acquiring equipment and maintaining a home office?

The University is not proposing to cover additional expenses and discourages staff purchasing their own equipment and printing materials. If lockdown continues for a significant period of time, consideration will be given to the equipment needs of staff working from home.

Can I claim tax relief for working from home due to Covid-19?

Currently the University has no plans to pay a tax free sum of up to £6 per week to staff members in relation to additional household expenses incurred when a staff member is working from home due to Covid-19.

However you may be entitled to claim tax relief directly from HMRC, on £6/wk (tax savings worth £1.20/wk (about £62/year) for basis 20% rate taxpayer and £2.40/wk (about £124/yr) for higher 40% rate taxpayer). Therefore if you have extra costs due to necessary working from home you can ask for the amount to be deducted from your taxable income

If you believe you have higher increased costs then you can claim more than £6/wk, but you will need evidence of the cost increases.

A claim can be made through your HMRC self-assessment form if you complete one. Alternatively you can complete an [online P87 form](#) through your Government Gateway account or by filling out a [postal P87 form](#) and sending it to HMRC.

HMRC has issued guidance on the tax position where employers reimburse expenses for employees working from home as a result of coronavirus and this can be accessed [here](#).

For any other queries, please contact the Salaries Office.

My colleague is not working any more hours than I am, but I am being paid part-time and they are being paid full-time.

The University is managing a major crisis at present and having stability for the workforce at this time is critical to ensuring health and safety. The University acknowledges that remote based work is working well for the majority of staff, but there will be some staff members who will have additional capacity at this time. Managers are continuing to ensure where possible that staff are utilised to their best effect and to full capacity.

When the situation starts to settle, staff will be asked to do commensurate work in line with their hours and they may be asked to work a different pattern to accommodate the Public Health Agency guidance. Staff may also be asked to undertake different tasks as and when required.

I am finding Teams calls are being set-up on a continual basis as we continue to work remotely.

It is important to take breaks throughout the day to maintain your health and wellbeing.

Schedule out some time in your day where meetings are not put in the diary. Staff can also try a meeting free afternoon in the week to offer some time to catch-up and to take a break from Teams meetings.

I am feeling isolated and I would like to return to working on campus even though I can work from home.

If you are feeling isolated at this time, please discuss with your manager to see if there are any options which will help you feel more engaged and connected whilst remaining at home. There also may be opportunities for you to do some work on campus but an appropriate risk assessment will need to be done before this could happen.

The government advice is to remain working remotely for the time-being, if you can do so.

I can do some work onsite and some work from home, how can this be facilitated.

Each School and Directorate are currently working through business recovery plans to facilitate staff to return to the campus as and when it is safe to do so. It will continue to be critically important that staff follow the PHA advice including social distancing.

Therefore, to ensure there is sufficient space to allow teams to move around the office space with relative ease, there may be a need for staggering of hours and rotas to be put in place. Each area has a business recovery representative and if you contact your manager they should be able to help you to understand how this will work, as and when your area is ready to return to campus.

Where can I find more information?

Below are some useful links to further information:

- [Our People and Culture website](#)
- [Staff FAQs](#)
- [Sickness Absence Toolkit](#)
- [Supporting Staff with a Disability](#)

- [Occupational Health Service](#)
- Inspire counselling services – 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 on the [People and Culture website](#)
- [Further resources on managing stress](#)
- [QUB Stress Risk Assessment Toolkit](#) (download document from right hand side of page)
- [FAQs on Managing Stress](#).
- [iRise](#) (QUB BAMEI Staff Network)
- [PRISM](#) (QUB LGBT+ Staff Network)