



**QUEEN'S
UNIVERSITY
BELFAST**

COVID-19 STAFF HEALTH AND WELLBEING GUIDANCE

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SUPPORTING YOUR WELLBEING

We recognise that this is a difficult time for staff and that it is now more important than ever for all colleagues to take care of their mental, as well as physical, health.

The Staff Wellbeing team, working together with key partners, will continue to provide you with information and guidance, and will endeavour to deliver staff wellbeing events remotely, where possible.

Please continue to visit the [Staff Wellbeing webpage](#) for further information, including tips around managing your wellbeing when working from home.

Accessing help and support:

If you have been affected by the virus and the situation has caused anxiety or stress, you can contact the University's Employee Assistance Programme, Inspire on 0800 389 5362. They are available 24/7, providing a confidential advice and counselling service.



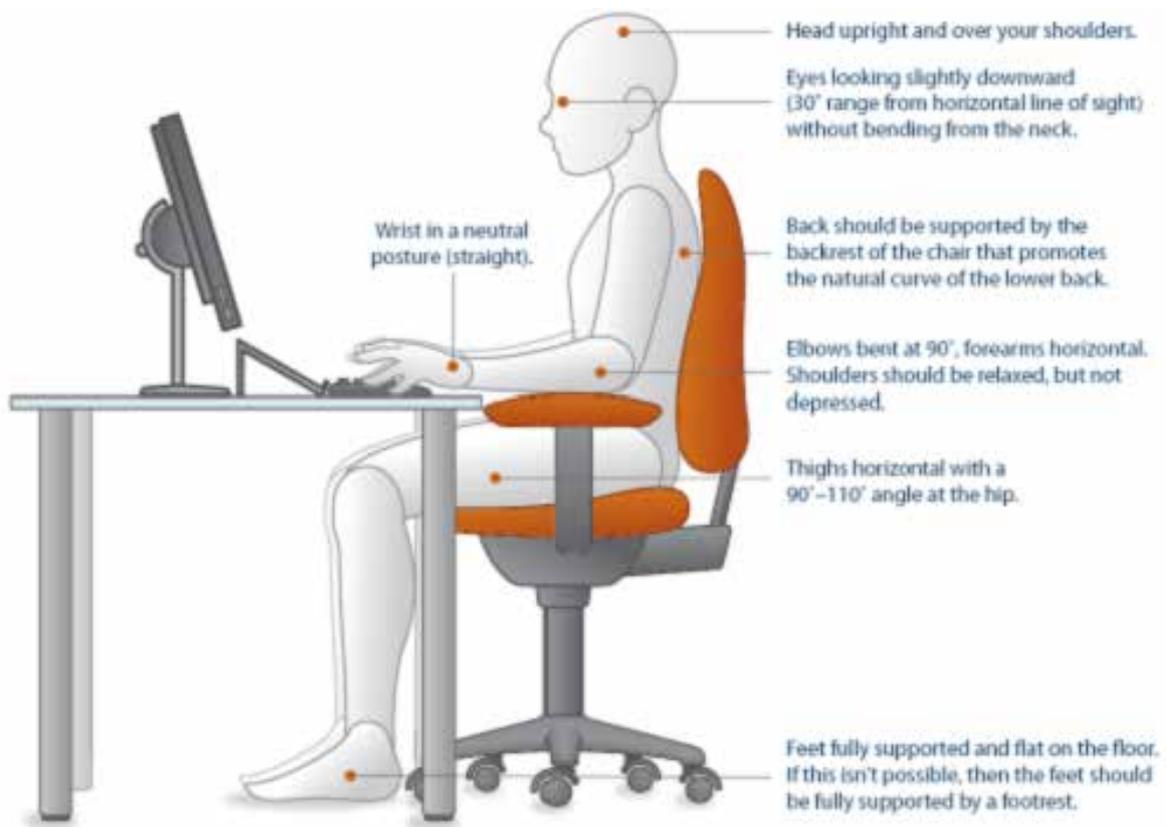
SETTING UP YOUR WORKSPACE

Introduction

During the COVID-19 pandemic more of us will be working at home. This document provides some practical advice to enable you to achieve the best possible workstation set-up and look after your musculoskeletal health. Additionally this guidance is also intended to enable those who are working from home for short periods of time or for extended periods of time to assess any relevant hazards at home and put in place

sensible management controls. There are also some helpful links to information on working at home and tips on maintaining a healthy work/ life balance together with tips on how to manage staying indoors and help with wellbeing.

While the University has a duty to take reasonable care of staff's health and safety, staff are expected to take primary responsibility for ensuring safe working conditions in their home.



I will be working from a home office

Setting up your workstation correctly at home is equally as important as when you are in the office, and the same principles apply. If you have a home office with a desk, chair and personal computer, please try and follow the [DSE checklist](#) as far as you possibly can and try and achieve the ideal sitting position (see image below). If you can't achieve this you could try implementing some of the measures suggested in the rest of this document, where relevant.

Office equipment

With many staff now working from home, there may be items of equipment that you may need to collect from your office, to make working from home easier for you, such as, keyboards and footrests. If you need to collect equipment, please arrange to do so through your School Manager or Director/Head of Department.

I will be working from a kitchen/dining table with a laptop/tablet

Location

Use a table and chair rather than your sofa or bed. Check your electrical equipment is still safe to use. Do not overload sockets or daisy chain extension leads. Take care to avoid cables running across the floor which may present a trip hazard to you or other family members. Use adhesive tape to temporarily

fasten the cables to the floor if this cannot be avoided. Try to maintain the area as you would at work and designate this as your home office area.

Sitting position

Have a look at the ideal sitting position image above. Try and mimic this as far as you can.

Chair

Try and keep your knees below your hips and an open 100 degree hip angle (see image above). As it is unlikely that you will have an adjustable chair you can try to get into an ideal sitting position using a cushion or pillow (folded in half) to sit on and a rolled up towel against your lower back for lumbar support. These measures will help to take the strain and load off your spine but only use them if they feel comfortable. If you are unsure, contact a Safety Officer (see 'Additional Help and Support' on the following page). Make sure that your feet are planted on the floor. If you can't do this use a biscuit tin, Tupperware container or similar as a footrest. If you have a footrest at work and can take it home, please do so.

Screen Glare

If you can, try not to put your laptop/tablet directly underneath a bright artificial light. Try and use natural light as much as possible. Where possible, position yourself sideways to a window rather than having the window directly in front or behind you.

Screen height

If you have a laptop or tablet stand, use this to raise your screen. If you do not have one of these, raise your laptop/tablet up using books, biscuit tins etc. as best you can. You may not achieve the ideal position but aim to raise your laptop/tablet by a minimum of 15 cm. Your eyes should be level with the top third of your screen when you are looking straight ahead. Even a small height adjustment should help. The goal is to avoid dropping your head as much as possible to try and avoid neck and shoulder strain.

Mouse and Keyboard

If you are raising your laptop/tablet, use an external keyboard and mouse so that you are not working with your arms too high. See if you can take your keyboard and mouse home with you, particularly if you already have ergonomic ones. Make sure that you have enough USB ports to connect these. Your elbows should be at a 90 degree angle, tucked closely to your body, and your wrists should be in a neutral position. This posture helps keep you from rounding your shoulders and pulling your neck muscles.

If you can't attach an external mouse and keyboard, leave your laptop in place on the table rather than raising it up but you must take more breaks. Try and move every 15 minutes (more on taking breaks and exercises below).

Wellbeing – Taking Breaks and Exercise

It is important to take regular breaks and maintain positive wellbeing when working. Regardless of your set-up, the best way to look after your musculoskeletal health is to take regular breaks and to move around as much as possible. The more 'makeshift' your set-up, the more important it is for you to move regularly. If you have a good home office set-up, take a break for 5-10 minutes every hour. For other set-ups take a break every 15-20 minutes.

Here are some tips to help you to move more:

- Stand up every time you use the phone
- Try and do more work activities away from the screen e.g. reading paperwork
- Set up a reminder e.g. a timer on your phone. You can also install apps such as Break Reminder (find it on Microsoft Store) on your computer that allow you to set reminders.
- Take your breaks/drinks and refreshments away from the home office workspace to help with your work/life balance.

Here are some [workstation exercises](#) you can do in your micro-breaks.

It is important to stay connected when home working. Keep in contact with your team leader and colleagues. All team leaders should maintain contact with their teams. Using Microsoft Teams is an ideal way of doing this and will let you share conversations with all team members or individually.

Webinar

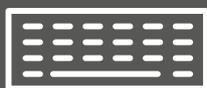
We recommend that you watch this [Posturite Webinar \(YouTube\)](#), which discusses issues around working from home with computers and will help you to put this guidance into practice.

Additional Help and Support

You can find more advice and guidance on the [Posturite website](#).

If you have any questions contact safety@qub.ac.uk and one of the Safety Officers will be able to offer support.

MIND the mental health charity, have released a ['plan for staying indoors/avoiding social contact'](#) which is full of information and ideas to help with taking care of your mental health and wellbeing.



Keep elbows
at 90°



Adjust screen
height



Support the
lower back



Remember to
take breaks

GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS



Absence and Pay arrangements related to coronavirus (COVID-19)

The health and safety of our staff and students is the University's first priority throughout the coronavirus outbreak. To ensure that critical work continues, you may be asked to work on different duties outside of your current role.

Health and wellbeing: Keeping in touch

If you are working from home, it is expected that you remain in regular contact with your manager and those you manage.

Working from home is undertaking your day to day work activity off site, given the exceptional circumstances. Keeping in regular contact will help manage workloads, but also support our staff's wellbeing and mental health. Managers should consider ways to encourage mental health safeguarding appropriate to their area; for example, daily MS Teams video calls to encourage establishing new routines and taking regular breaks.

Even if you are not working in your normal workplace, you are expected to engage regularly with your manager.

Technical guidance and set up for remote working

Guidance for technical aspects of working from home can be found [here](#).

Annual Leave

We recognise that the current situation is stressful and we appreciate the extensive effort that all our staff are making for the benefit of our students and communities and to ensure that their learning continues. Given that this is a difficult situation, which may continue for some time, for your own wellbeing we would strongly encourage you to ensure that you take your annual leave proportionately throughout the year. The end date of the current restrictions are not known at present, and operationally it will not be possible to allow all staff to take all of their leave in the last quarter of the year.

Contingency planning within your team

If a line manager becomes ill, they must ensure staff know who else they can liaise with; for example, their manager, or another appropriate department member of staff. Managers should agree a deputy and other appropriate points of contact at this stage.



Absence

In line with Government advice, at Queen's, staff will continue to work from home where possible. If you are working from home and you are not sick, then there is no requirement to record any absence. All periods away from work referred to in the table below should be reported using the normal absence process from day one.

Record Absence	Definition
Sickness – Covid-19	Case confirmed after NHS test and not able to work due to sickness
Sickness – Covid-19 Self-isolation	Showing symptoms of Covid-19 in line with the Public Health Agency advice.
Covid-19 – Dependent Leave	If you are not able to work from home due to young children and/or other dependents up to 10 working days. Carry-forward leave from the previous year should be used before Dependent Leave.
Covid-19 – Special leave ¹	For those with dependents, if there are no alternatives to working from home, or other options, you can discuss exceptional circumstances special leave with your Line Manager. Special leave should only be utilised where there are no alternatives, such as using carried forward leave, dependents leave and pro-rata annual leave. Special Leave is a maximum of up to 5 working days.
Covid-19 – Underlying Health Conditions	Member of Staff has underlying health conditions as defined by the Public Health Agency and they are not able to work from home.

¹The University has agreed as a last resort, if there are no other alternatives the University will permit time off on unpaid leave in light of the exceptional circumstances faced. This should be recorded as Unpaid Leave. This will be kept under review and is at discretion of Line Manager.

NB: Any other sickness absence not relating to Covid-19 should be recorded as normal in accordance with Sickness Absence Procedure.

Scenario	Still able to work	Not able to work (sick)	Unable to perform existing duties
Fit for work	NA	NA	Contact Line Manager to be assigned other duties
Employee has Covid-19, confirmed after NHS test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay at home as per PHA guidance Work from home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay at home as per PHA guidance Record absence "Sickness – Covid-19" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially mobilised to do other work Keep in-touch with manager everyday Continually review work that can be done Engage in Professional Development activities
Employee has a persistent cough or a temperature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay at home as per PHA guidance Work from home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay at home as per PHA guidance Record absence "Sickness-Covid-19 Self-Isolation" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially mobilised to do other work Keep in-touch with manager everyday Continually review work that can be done Engage in Professional Development activities
Someone in your household has a persistent cough or a temperature, but you do not have symptoms	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stay at home as per PHA guidance Work from home 	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially mobilised to do other work Keep in-touch with manager everyday Continually review work that can be done Engage in Professional Development activities
Employee is over 70/has underlying health condition/ pregnant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adhere to measures as per PHA guidance Work from home 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adhere to measures as per PHA guidance and seek advice from GP If sickness not related to Covid-19 record absence reason in the normal way If related to Covid-19 see table above 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially mobilised to do other work Keep in-touch with manager everyday Continually review work that can be done Engage in Professional Development activities
School closure and dependent responsibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work from home if possible Stagger working hours Make alternative caring arrangements at the earliest opportunity Share caring responsibilities where possible 	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potentially mobilised to do other work Keep in-touch with manager everyday Continually review work that can be done Use carry-forward leave first Engage in Professional Development activities Record as Dependents leave (up to 14 calendar days) Record as Special Leave up to 5 working days if pro-rata annual leave has been used

Please bear in mind that in this fluid and rapidly evolving situation advice may change. Please continue to refer to the [Public Health Agency website](#) for the latest information as well as the [University's FAQs](#).

A CONNECTED WORKFORCE: WORKING TOGETHER AS A TEAM

Movement to a work-from-home model means that it is now more important than ever to keep in touch with colleagues and to work together closely within our individual teams and as part of the wider university team. Managers have an important role to play in supporting colleagues during this transition.

KEEPING IN TOUCH WITH COLLEAGUES

Discuss with your colleagues and manager the frequency and type of contact required while working from home - over and above the normal meetings.

Try not to rely too much on email (you can say a quick “hello” or “are you free” nudge through Office 365 Teams). This is the remote equivalent of dropping by a colleague’s desk or office to say ‘do you have five minutes?’ Sometimes a question can be asked and answered in the exchange of a few quick messages, while at other times it seems to lead quickly and naturally to an agreement to ‘have a quick chat’ using video or audio.

Work Priorities and Review

Agree with your manager your work priorities and how these will be reviewed. Think about what work you could do during an extended period of working from home and discuss this with your line manager. Work may not flow as usual so this could be a good time to complete, for example, any outstanding mandatory training, archive work, review policies and practice, and update template documents.

Use video

While you can connect with colleagues with your camera turned off, it is much more social to turn it on and to be able to see the person you are talking to from time to time. If working from home for any length of time, seeing a friendly smile from a colleague can make a big difference to your day.

Homeworking trial and error

Take a few minutes at the end of your working day to consider what worked well, what didn’t and what you might do differently tomorrow. Apply the changes to your next working day.

MANAGING A TEAM REMOTELY

As a manager of a remote team you should consider the following:

- Think about how you will replicate the social aspects of work for your team with some regular informal chats.
- Make sure your team can all access Microsoft Office 365 Teams and any other resources they need.
- Plan for tasks that your team can undertake during an extended period and any online resources that may be needed to facilitate this.

Build trust

One key success factor for home working arrangements is to build trust. This can be achieved by:

- Discussing how you will work together, including how you will agree and review work priorities
- Build in time for development
- Communicate effectively and keep connected

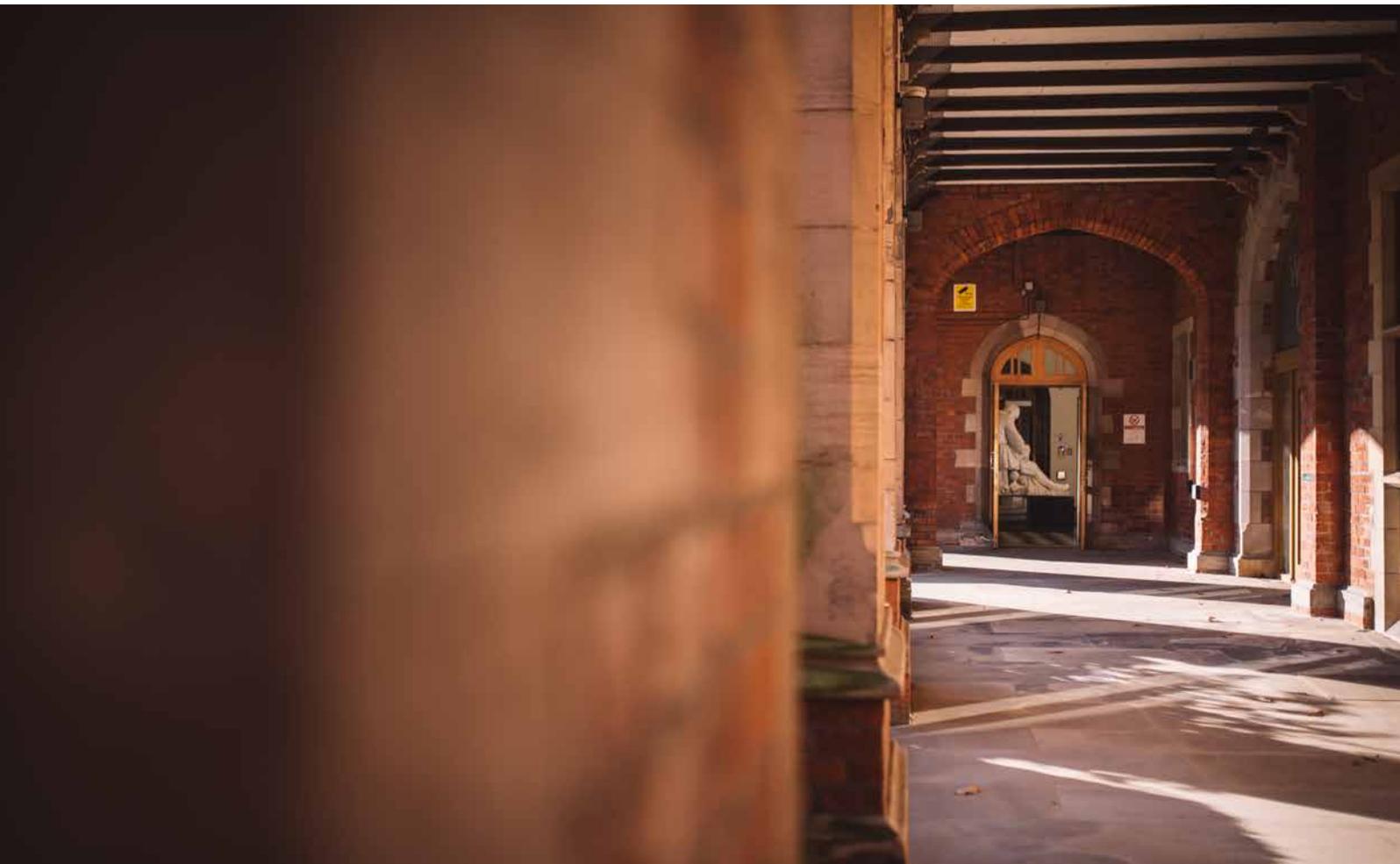
Supporting your team

Managers and employees are likely to have to try harder to foster these connections than they would if they were based in the same workplace. When working from home, you may need to make extra effort to keep colleagues up to date on how work is progressing and to offer help to others, building a spirit of co-operation.

It is also advisable for a manager to check in with homeworkers to make sure they do not over-work. Some staff who work from home can feel the need to work too hard as justification for working from home.

Regular face-to-face meetings via Office 365 Teams can help employees overcome any feelings of isolation and keep in touch with the rest of the University.

Establish a system where colleagues on the team are aware of their day-to-day availability status.



CONTINUING YOUR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT



All colleagues are encouraged to take time to identify and prioritise some development items. What are your needs and how can these be met when working remotely? These may include additional personal and professional development, or some processes required for your role, your team or skills you need to work more effectively.

Due to the need for social distancing at this time, 'face-to-face' workshops, seminars and conferences have been postponed unless remote delivery can be facilitated, so seek out available resources and sources of support within Queen's and build your professional online networks and external development resources.

LinkedIn Learning

All staff can access to LinkedIn Learning which has more than 13,000 online courses and video tutorials. The topics range from business skills, personal and professional development, IT/ digital skills to education, leadership and many more. The resources comprise high quality video learning resources plus downloadable exercises and workbooks. LinkedIn Learning uses subject matter experts to produce content that is being used by businesses (including many Universities), as well as individuals all over the world. The resource is being extended and improved continually with new material being added every month.

To further support you while working remotely from home we have created a dedicated collection of courses in LinkedIn Learning.

[LinkedIn Learning - Remote Working](#)

[If you require a LinkedIn Learning account go to LinkedIn Learning Information and Sign Up.](#)



KEEPING YOU INFORMED: INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

Along with information and communication you'll receive from your School or Directorate, there are a number of university-wide internal communication channels for staff and you are encouraged to regularly engage with the following for the latest updates and information:

- **Staff Round Up** – online communication distributed to staff each Monday via email providing key announcements, training, features and events for staff.
- **Team Brief** – A core staff communication channel, the Team Brief is about keeping everybody up-to-date with key university decisions, information and progress, supporting a culture of two-way communication within the University. Issued each month during term-time.
- **Staff News and Community Gateway website** – latest news, information and events for staff, including 'Spotlight on our Staff' profile features exploring the work and contribution of individual colleagues. Previously known as the 'Staff Gateway'.
- **Senate News (internal only)** – online communication distributed to staff via email after each Senate Meeting.
- **Vice-Chancellor's communications** – latest news and updates from the Vice-Chancellor's Office.
- **All Staff emails** – used to communicate urgent news and announcements, or messages from the Vice-Chancellor or the senior management team. All staff emails are available to view on Queen's Online.
- **Queen's Online** – staff intranet.
- **Corporate Plan website** – latest updates on news and progress on our strategic priorities.
- **Social Media: Staff Twitter account** – Follow the @QUBStaff staff twitter account
- **Publications:**
 - **Corporate Publications** – including Corporate Plan and Vice-Chancellor's Annual Report
 - **Reflections Magazine** – learning and Teaching Newsletter for staff
- **University News** – Keep-up-to-date with the latest news from Queen's by viewing the news section of the website.

Bespoke internal communications advice for your area

Looking for advice on how to communicate more effectively with colleagues? Need help finding a solution to an internal communications challenge within your area in the context of remote working? We're here to help.

Strategic Marketing and Communications's Internal Communications team can offer advice and guidance on departmental communications challenges.

The Internal Communications team helps gather feedback from colleagues, develop conversations between teams, and is responsible for ensuring all our employees are well informed about matters affecting them and have a voice in the way our University is run.

For advice and help in finding a solution to your internal communication challenge, please email: internalcommunications@qub.ac.uk.