

MANAGERS' GUIDANCE SUPPORTING STAFF WITH COVID-19 RELATED CONCERNS ABOUT ON-CAMPUS WORKING

This guidance is to support managers to have conversations with staff who have concerns about Covid including about working on-campus.

Up-to-date detailed information about the University's approach to working on campus and to keeping our community as safe as possible (including for example any Covid related measures such as wearing of face coverings, risk assessments etc) can be found [Coronavirus advice at Warwick](#).

Note: The shielding programme [ended in England](#) on 15 September 2021, meaning that people who were previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) will no longer be advised to shield in the future nor follow specific guidance. For completeness, the term "CEV" is still used below, although official guidance now refers instead to individuals with "weakened immune systems" (i.e., "immunosuppression").

1. INTRODUCTION

Following the Government lifting of Covid measures in February 2022, all staff are now able to work back on campus, and, where roles allow, to also work from home under Hybrid Working arrangements.

The University recognises that as we emerge from the pandemic, some staff still may continue to feel anxious about Covid. There may be a variety of different individual reasons, or a combination of reasons, for this:

- Some staff may continue to be concerned about working on campus, be that for their full work hours or on a hybrid basis (where roles allow for this).
- Others may have concerns arising out of specific personal circumstances impacting on their work and affecting their ability to fulfil their work commitments (be that on or off campus) e.g., in relation to health and well-being or caring responsibilities, for example.
- Some staff may be unclear or concerned about arrangements and Covid measures while working on campus.

This guidance is to help managers to support staff who for whatever reason have concerns and are anxious about work, and provides a framework for a discussion. It is complemented by a [flow chart](#) which provides possible means of considering and addressing specific staff concerns on a case by case basis. Staff with Covid related concerns may (for example) include staff:

- who have on-going health concerns and/or meet the definition of Clinically Extremely Vulnerable (CEV) – see note above
- with well-being / mental health concerns which may be exacerbated by Covid-19
- who are pregnant
- who live with or care for someone who is CEV
- who have other / unexpected caring responsibilities
- who have a long commute to work and/or who rely on public transport

- who are not fully vaccinated / boosted against Covid 19
- who are unclear about H&S arrangements / control measures in the work place
- with other Covid-relevant individual concerns and circumstances.

2. HEADLINE APPROACH AND PRIORITY ACTIONS

1. **Staff with concerns** about campus working and/or about how their personal circumstances / issues are affecting their work commitments are encouraged to speak with their line manager at the earliest opportunity.
2. **Line managers** should be maintaining on-going contact with all their team members in order that any staff concerns and the reasons for them can be identified and aired at an early stage.
3. **Conversation** - The guidance below is to facilitate a constructive, sensitive and empathetic discussion between a line manager and the staff member with a view to considering and agreeing mitigating actions and support to help alleviate any concerns, while ensuring key work activity continues.

The suggested approach encourages flexibility, both from managers and also individual staff, in order to consider and alleviate any Covid related concerns about campus working and/or personal circumstances.

3. PRINCIPLES FOR DISCUSSING CONCERNS / PERSONAL CIRCUMSTANCES WITH STAFF

- Open and collaborative approach/dialogue with individual staff members
- Empathetic and supportive discussion, demonstrating an understanding of the individual's own particular concerns and/or circumstances, as well as genuine concern for their well-being
- Recognition of the University's responsibilities (e.g., in terms of learning and teaching and associated functions and other activity), and as such, the University's reasonable expectations about individuals fulfilling their roles
- Ask questions to seek to understand what the concerns are and the reasons behind them, and/or what the specific personal circumstances are
- Flexibility is required from both managers and also individual staff; a "give and take" basis
- Make well-informed decisions, based on reasonableness and in consultation with the relevant HRBP
- Maintain consistency of approach within teams as much as possible.

4. GUIDANCE FOR MANAGERS

Before holding a conversation

- Prepare for the conversation – seek HRBP support and guidance as necessary
- From the information you already know about the concerns / issue, consider possible further questions and information required, as well as possible options to mitigate / address

- Unless the individual makes contact first, managers should contact the staff member as soon as possible to arrange a mutually convenient time to discuss concerns / issues. Managers should prioritise these meetings
- Possible solutions in relation to concerns about returning to work on campus can be found on the [Covid Related Staff Concerns Flow Chart](#).
- Consider the core work activities and priority outputs and services which are essential for the staff member and the team to deliver (useful in cases where the staff member's circumstances or issues may impact on their ability to fulfil their work commitments)
- The use of some annual leave or unpaid leave may be appropriate as part of any solution but explore all possible options with flexibility in the first instance.

During the conversation – see also typical questions below

- Remind the individual that the conversation is confidential, other than for sharing information where appropriate with HRBP / others on a strict need to know basis
- Enquire about the individual's well-being / how they are doing
- Managers should ask questions to gain an understanding of the specific causes of concern about campus working or other issues/challenges faced by the individual
- Ask the individual what possible mitigating actions they have considered / what would most help them while minimising any impact on work
- Jointly consider the options and all possible solutions / actions
- Where the concern is about ability to fulfil work commitments, clarify the essential work to continue / be delivered and associated timescales, consider flexibility on deadlines where possible
- Where the individual's well-being is a concern, then signpost to the Employee Assistance Programme, Wellbeing Services and Support and consider referral to Occupational Health if appropriate
- Where appropriate, agree actions / solutions (including on an interim / temporary basis where appropriate) at the meeting if possible
- Where appropriate (e.g., for significant issues), further consideration of possible solutions may need to be given outside of the meeting (e.g., in order to ensure that the needs of the wider team/work priorities are taken into account). Confirm that you will respond to the individual promptly after the meeting and once there has been time to take into account related factors
- Ensure a further 1.2.1 meeting is scheduled in the near future to check how things are and maintain contact and engagement
- Ensure (as a general point) that annual leave is being booked and managed on an on-going basis throughout the year; where annual leave is part of the agreed solution, managers should ensure that this doesn't mean staff have no annual leave remaining for use later in the leave year; leave throughout the year is important for well-being purposes
- Managers are expected to make well-informed decisions, based on reasonableness and in consultation with their HRBP, ensuring that consistency is maintained as much as possible.

After the Conversation

- Confirmed via email the actions agreed (with an agreed end or review date). These emails should include HRBPs for their information.

- Ensure periodic / weekly reviews with the staff member to monitor implementation of solutions and to check on the individual's well-being.

5. **TYPICAL QUESTIONS WHICH MAY BE USED AS AND WHERE APPROPRIATE (THESE ARE SUGGESTIONS ONLY)**

- What are your particular concerns / challenges?
- What is making you most anxious about working on campus?
- What are you finding most difficult in terms of delivering on your work commitments?
- What would help you most at this time?
- What specifically are you requesting at this time / do you think you need / would help most?
- When can you work?
- Can you work at other times?
- Have you considered other work around?
- Do you have access to other (child) care?
- Are you solely responsible for providing (child) care?
- Can you offer any flexibility?
- Are you clear on controls and measures in place on campus e.g., around social distancing?

Personal Well-being

- How are you taking care of yourself?
- What can you do that will most help your own well-being at this time?
- What can I do that you think would most help you to manage your own well-being?
- Would the Employee Assistance Programme be helpful at this time?

6. **ISSUES & POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS / MEANS OF ADDRESSING**

We are committed to ensuring that staff with concerns are treated in an equitable fashion. Additional consideration in particular should be given where staff have a number of concerns and whose duties require them to spend time on campus.

Colleagues may be asked to supply supporting information to confirm any specific circumstances whilst remaining compliant with GDPR restrictions and respecting reasonable confidentiality expectations.

It is important we recognise that face to face teaching is a fundamental part of the University's delivery model and so in the interests of fairness to others, when working conditions have returned to "normal", it would be difficult to sustain any arrangement in which individuals are allowed to work wholly online for any sustained period of time.

Here are some possible solutions for joint consideration by managers and staff members.

- **Workload priorities** - When considering particular concerns, challenges and possible solutions, think also about workload priorities in order to ensure that there is clarity around the key / core work priorities, timescales for completion etc.

- **Staff who are Clinically Extremely Vulnerable / have a weakened immune system / have other underlying health condition (including eg Long Covid)**
Such staff can work on campus safely with the appropriate health and safety measures and controls in place. Discuss any concerns and reassure the individual that it is safe to work on campus and highlight the measures put in place. It may be appropriate to seek Occupational Health advice, and/or to request a bespoke risk assessment via Health & Safety Services. Where the role allows, consider also hybrid working (ie a mix of on-campus and remote working). While not always possible, single office space on campus may be an option.
- **Caring for CEV / Immuno-suppressed Individuals** - if a member of staff who lives with / cares for someone who is CEV / immune-suppressed is anxious about working on campus, you should seek to understand their concerns and reassure them that it is safe to work on campus, highlighting the control measures in place.
- **Other / Unexpected Caring Responsibilities** – while unexpected caring scenarios may arise at short notice at this time (e.g., children sent home from school), every attempt to minimise disruption on work priorities should be considered. Where a staff member has ongoing challenges balancing caring commitments and work priorities, then the options described below may be considered.
- **Changed working arrangements either on a temporary or permanent basis** – i.e., discussing and agreeing an amended work pattern, or a flexible work pattern. Consider also hybrid working (i.e., a mix of on-campus and remote working) where the role allows.
- **Formal Requests / Contractual Changes** - Unpaid leave, formal reduction in work hours (temporary or permanent) and other family leave options also remain available, and may be worthy of consideration, especially where there are longer term concerns, changes in circumstance or on-going challenges
- **Use of Annual Leave or Unpaid Leave**
- **Other** - Temporary adjustments to timetabled teaching and/or other work may be considered. This may include exceptional approval to teach or work wholly online for short periods of time where the type of teaching and be delivered without compromising the student experience. Such requests should be considered within a defined timeframe (ideally a 2-week turnaround) subject to all necessary information/supporting evidence being provided in a timely fashion.
- **Sources of Support for the individual and the manager** – These include: the line manager, HR Business Partner, Occupational Health, University's Employee Assistance Programme (see link below), trade union representative (if applicable)

<https://warwick.ac.uk/services/healthsafetywellbeing/wellbeing/employeeassistanceprogramme/>