

# Temporary Working from Home due to COVID-19

The vast majority of University staff are now working from home and are likely to be doing so for a significant period of time. For some, working from home will be completely new, for others, it will be an extension of their typical working arrangements. Irrespective, the operational support available and the way you interact with colleagues will feel very different and will take some adjustment.

Under ordinary circumstances, the University would look to support people required to work from home for extended periods to ensure their home workspaces imitate those in place in the workplace. However, these are not ordinary circumstances and having taken advice from the HSE, the University cannot practically look to recreate your usual workstations in your own homes.

Instead, colleagues must do what they can to create a suitable place to work at home and look to offset any deficiencies in this set up with more frequent breaks, exercise or spells away from the workstation. This guide outlines the things all staff can do to successfully work from home and provides line managers with some guidance on how to operate under these unprecedented circumstances.

## All colleagues

You will have by now identified the most appropriate area in your house for you to work in and if you'd created a temporary workspace that is less than ideal, consider reviewing it in light of the extended period we are likely to be working in this manner. The attached PDF "DSE User Guidance" outlines what to aim for, the table below highlights some key points to consider.

<b>Space</b>
<p>Consider what furniture you have available. Wherever possible, avoid working from a sofa or bed, use a desk, dinner table or kitchen counter instead and look to use a solid chair with good back support and additional cushions if necessary.</p> <p>Ideally, your working area should be separate to allow you to concentrate without distractions, but also so you can close the door on your work when you have finished. We appreciate this may not be possible in all situations.</p>
<b>Equipment</b>
<p>Look at what equipment you have available and consider how it can best be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Ideally, you will have an office chair of a similar type that you have at work. If this is the case, using the adjustable seat height will allow you to achieve the ideal working posture. If you do not have such a chair, consider the height of the chair you have in relation to the work surface you are using compared to the ideal represented in the guidance previously provided.</li> <li>▪ If you are working from a laptop but do not have a docking station, you may find it beneficial to make use of a separate keyboard and mouse. You may also find it beneficial to use a</li> </ul>

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separate monitor if you have one, or even raising the laptop on a pile of books so you can work more comfortably.

- If you would normally have specialist equipment such as an alternative to a mouse, ergonomic keyboards, wrist rests, sit/stand desks etc. and don't have such equipment with you, you may find that you require more frequent breaks or spells away from the workstation

If you have any major concerns regarding your home workstation that cannot be offset using the advice in this document, please contact your line manager in the first instance.

#### **Posture**

You can avoid awkward, static postures by regularly changing position, make sure you get up and move around or do some stretching exercises, and avoid eye fatigue by changing focus or blinking from time to time.

#### **Communication & Mental Health**

Working from home can feel strange as we are used to being around our colleagues and students. The University will continue to communicate through email and the web pages but your teams will seek to create their own processes to communicate on a local level. If you notice any changes in the mental health of your colleagues, please highlight your concerns to your line manager.

#### **Access**

The type of work you can engage in will largely be dependent on the systems and software which are available to you. If you have a University owned laptop with a VPN installed, you will have seamless access to all your usual applications. If you do not, you will be limited to what can be accessed through the web or by email. IT Services are looking at web enabled solutions to increase access. Currently you are able to access your personal Z: drive and the research drive R: through Myfiles (<https://www2.le.ac.uk/offices/itservices/ithelp/my-computer/files-and-security/work-off-campus/myfiles> ). You will be informed when other solutions become available.

### **Advice for Managers**

While many of you will be used to managing staff who are working from home, away on research or any number of other forms of remote working, a number of you will not. Additionally, even for those experienced in managing remote workers, this situation poses unique challenges due to the numbers of staff involved, the potential timeframe and the fact that not all staff will be accustomed to this type of work. Due to the extraordinary circumstances, the University will not be able to imitate workspaces for all staff working from home. You may have some staff that use specialist keyboards, mice, or sit-stand desks and in the majority of the circumstances, alternative ways of working will need to be looked at. The factors you should consider are:

#### **Space and Equipment**

The space, equipment and resources available to our staff in their homes will be as diverse as they are and this could create some unique challenges. If staff report problems with their home working arrangements which you cannot easily resolve, please refer them to the appropriate University department (Health and Safety Services, IT Services, Occupational Health or HR) as our support services will continue to operate throughout the closedown, albeit with reduced abilities.

#### **Communication**

It is vital that staff feel connected. Seek to establish regular team meetings and where possible 1-2-1's using the various electronic tools we have available. Skype, MS Teams and other apps such as Zoom can be utilised to allow virtual meetings and collaborative workspaces can be set up

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in Microsoft Teams to share documents and ideas live. Please share with your teams a telephone number through which they can reach you and ask them to share one with you. Ideally, this should be a University mobile and if staff are reluctant to share their private number, be sensitive to this and use, other methods of communication such as instant messaging through Skype instead. By staying in regular contact, you also have the best chance of identifying if any of your colleagues are finding working from home particularly difficult.

As the length of the isolation increases, it is important that channels of communication remain open but proportionate. Consider:

- The frequency and times that staff will be expected to communicate and how this may change as the isolation lengthens
- Whether to focus on team meetings or 1-2-1 communications

#### **Workload**

Great sensitivity will be needed regarding workload. Some staff, free of the distractions day to day tasks bring may be vulnerable to overworking in a home situation while others may find they are able to get little done, either because of their particular home lives and family circumstances or because without normal University operations, work is simply not being generated.

Managers should consider the potential variations in workload over time and how they will communicate their expectations as the situation progresses. Whatever the person's role, as the normal functions of the University have ceased, work that would normally be generated by day to day activities *may* have reduced or stopped. Project work may keep staff happily productive for a while but without new input and without easy access to colleagues from other teams, even these additional tasks may prove challenging to progress.

Managers will need to be cognisant of the work available and seek to provide assurances to staff who are accustomed to being busy and productive.

#### **Mental Health**

Our employees will need to remain connected. Even the most resilient of us will find the isolation challenging, increasingly so as time progresses. Please make special effort to be aware of the challenges we face as individuals when speaking with each other. If you have any concerns over the mental health of a colleague please refer them to Validium, our employee advisory service or seek further advice from Occupational Health or Staff Health and Wellbeing.

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