

# Guidance for considering home working and/or team separation

## Introduction

This guidance is temporary for the purpose of managing the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak only. The following definitions apply:

**Home working** – undertaking University-related business at home, primarily on either a laptop or desktop PC.

**Team separation** – a level of social distancing or minimising contact between colleagues in a team if required to work on campus or where home working is not possible or not desired.

## Background

The spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19) is expected to spread significantly amongst the UK population. The government action plan to deal with COVID-19 identifies several measures, some of which relate to physical controls such as working from home or school closures as part of its *Delay* phase.

In preparation for this, the University has identified the need for managers to consider team separation, social distancing and working from home as part of their planning and management. Use the principles and risk criteria set out below.

Some teams and individuals can work from home relatively easily and may already be doing so for some of their working week. As such, they are more likely to have suitable equipment and experience of accessing University software and services from home.

However, there will be other teams and individuals for whom home working is much more challenging. Not all teams will be able to work from home, for example if they need to be physically on site to carry out their role.

Where home working is not feasible or desired by the member of staff, team separation should be implemented to reduce the risk of whole team infection at the same time.

## Principles

- Working from home should be considered for those who:
  - already do so successfully
  - can do so without significant detriment to their role (with some minor adaptations, such as the provision of laptop or other equipment, or reasonable changes in expected outputs or activities considering experience, expertise, knowledge, etc)
  - have the equipment and suitable environment to do so
  - are willing to do so and accept the costs of using their own electricity, heating, etc. Telephone costs may be refundable if these are likely to be high, but this needs to be determined by the budget holder in advance
  - can have their work and performance monitored or assessed remotely by their outputs
  - fulfill the above and are at higher risk by virtue of age or health condition.

- Team separation should be considered for those who:
  - cannot work from home for whatever reason
  - are required to physically stay on site
  - have mental health conditions who may benefit from being with others
  - can commute to work without being exposed to other people.

## What does this mean for me?

### **Staff at risk including those staff who are immunocompromised and pregnant:**

Agree working from home arrangements with your line manager as soon as possible.

### **Academic staff including demonstrators and hourly paid teachers:**

Following the early end of teaching term, staff can work from home where practical or work with appropriate social distancing. Research supervision should continue, enabled by online tools such as Skype where possible.

### **Technicians:**

Following the early end of teaching term, staff can work from home where practical or work with appropriate social distancing. Research supervision should continue, enabled by online tools such as Skype where possible.

### **Staff who have transitioned to New Ways of Working (NWOW):**

As many staff as practical and who wish to do so should work from home, whilst not compromising essential operations.

### **Professional staff who have not transitioned to NWOW:**

Local plans will be made to support staff, including possible use of unoccupied offices or NWOW desks, where appropriate.

### **Operational staff, library and study centre staff:**

Local plans will be made to support staff, including the possible use of rotas and social distancing where appropriate and practical.

## Team separation

### Examples of team separation

To reduce close contact:

- reduce or stop any planned team meetings
- reduce or stop any 1-1 meetings
- keep a distance from one another to reduce the risk of the virus spreading from one person to another (six feet or two metres)
- consider introducing a range of working hours to provide a service without having all staff on site at the same time.

For commuting:

- consider travelling outside peak times on public transport to reduce risk of exposure and to maintain social distancing
- consider alternative transport or commuting arrangements, such as cycling or walking.

For communication:

- use Skype or other communication tools, like setting up a WhatsApp group.

## Risk factors

Data collected from confirmed COVID-19 cases worldwide indicates that the following factors may increase the risk of whether someone suffers a mild, moderate or severe response to the infection:

- age
- underlying or chronic health conditions

For those over the age of 50, the risk escalates for each decade. Those over 60 are identified as being more likely to get a severe illness. Those most at risk are the over 80s, whereas those at lowest risk are under 30.

The presence of an underlying health condition also increases the risk. In line with advice provided by the NHS, those with the following conditions should take additional precautions:

- heart disease
- chronic respiratory disease
- diabetes
- cancer
- hypertension
- significantly impaired immune system

Risk is cumulative, meaning someone over 60 with an underlying health condition working in a front-facing health role will be at much higher risk than someone aged 40 who is physically fit and in the same role.

There are a number of roles which cannot be home based and which may be exposed to higher risk, eg cleaners, catering, estates assistants, porters, health workers (Occupational Health, Student Health Service, first responders, first aiders) security, residential life advisors and those in other front-line services who are more likely to encounter people with the virus whilst at work.

Those identified as vulnerable due to age or health condition should be allocated alternative work where possible, but if the work cannot be avoided, then a risk assessment should be carried out to ensure suitable personal protective equipment (PPE) and guidance is provided.

Some people may ask to work from home for personal reasons. The principles of home working should be followed before considering any personal circumstances. Such requests may be due to the following:

- Being a part-time carer for an elderly and vulnerable adult
- Living with a child or other adult who has a severe and chronic health condition as identified above.
- The use of public transport to commute.

## Notification of underlying health conditions

For a line manager to fully understand and evaluate the risks above and put in place home working or team separation arrangements effectively, it is important that members of staff notify their line manager of any known underlying health conditions that would increase the risk of a severe response to the infection.

The purpose for seeking this information is for the health of the individual member of staff. The manager will, where possible, comply with the principles of the [General Data Protection Regulations](#).

## Risk assessment process

