

## Staff Guidance Note - Temp changes to HR policies & procedures

As COVID-19 continues to spread, we recognise that the university needs to adapt its ways of working.

We want to help reduce the spread of COVID-19 and safeguard the welfare of our staff during the COVID-19 outbreak, while continuing our operations as normally as possible.

This guidance note explains what temporary changes we are making to our usual policies, procedures and practices in relation to flexible working, dependents leave, absence, sick pay and annual leave. The changes will come into effect from **18<sup>th</sup> March 2020** and will continue until further notice. If you have any queries in relation to these changes please contact the relevant member of the [HR Advisory team](#).

Note: This guidance is updated to reflect Government advice as it lands.

### Flexible working

Current arrangements:

All employees with 26 weeks continuous service have a statutory right to request flexible working. If you wish to change your working patterns, such as a change to your working hours, we ask you to make a formal request for flexible working 3 months in advance of when you wish the change to take effect.

What is changing temporarily?

As long as the university's operational needs continue to be met, regardless of your length of service, you will be able to:

- Adapt your working patterns, for example to allow you to travel on public transport at less crowded times; or
- work from home if your role allows for this,

for an extended period without having to follow our formal procedure. You can make a request for flexible working with your line manager with the final decision to approve resting with your Head of School or Department. Your Head will want to be satisfied that - as far as possible - your normal duties are being covered. The temporary working arrangements would then continue until the university confirmed otherwise although they could be adapted at any time (in response to government advice) giving you one weeks' notice.

In order that we can continue to support students and ongoing business operations some staff may be required to work on campus under [social](#)

[distancing](#) conditions. The arrangements for this will be communicated by your line manager should the situation arise.

## **Working from home**

Current arrangements:

The university does not have a home working policy at present however there is a flexible working policy (see above) and there is published guidance for managers to follow should there be a requirement for a member of staff to occasionally work from home. Home working, as it stands, is a voluntary arrangement entered into through agreement between the employee and line manager and must be for a specific purpose i.e. writing a report or marking assessments. It is not an ongoing right nor is it a substitute for caring responsibilities.

What is changing temporarily?

Given the current global health situation, and the most recent advice from the Government, the university has decided to move to home working for the majority of staff.

Homeworking, where implemented, will continue until you are advised otherwise. The work you will be undertaking and the communication arrangements between you and your colleagues / line manager whilst home working is in place will be discussed and agreed with you as soon as possible.

Staff that cannot undertake their role from home may be asked to undertake other duties - they will be capable of undertaking - that will assist the university in meeting its short-term objectives. Employees will be expected to be available during normal working hours to undertake these duties.

## **Dependents leave policy**

Current arrangements:

Short term childcare challenges are dealt with through the Dependents Leave Policy. In brief, if an employee has unforeseen or emergency childcare challenges then they are eligible for unpaid time off to deal with the situation. We don't define how long the employee can take off but its normally a day or two. The policy was not written for a School closing scenario where hundreds of parents request leave at the same time.

What is changing temporarily?

We understand that as a result of the closure of schools and nurseries, and given the current evolving situation, making alternative care arrangements will not always be possible.

Staff who can work from home will be expected to do so, with an acceptance on the university's part that there will be a degree of childcare commitments and responsibilities intertwined with work undertaken. This is not ideal however circumstances dictate that staff need to be as flexible as they can in order for the university to function as close to normal as possible.

It may be the case that work can be done in the evening or spread out over a longer period so it's important that you communicate regularly with your line manager to manage expectations and agree on a work plan.

The university will continue to pay staff at their normal rate for the duration of the school/nursery closure.

## **Reporting Sickness Absence**

Current arrangements:

On the 1st day of sickness absence, an employee must report their absence by telephone to their line manager prior to the start of their normal working day. If the employee does not know when they will be fit to return to work they must phone on the morning of each day of absence until a return to work date is established.

What is changing temporarily?

If you are absent and unable to undertake any work from home as a result of experiencing COVID-19 symptoms and therefore self-isolating, you should inform your line manager (by telephone) on the first day of absence when you first experienced symptoms and when you expect to be fit to undertake duties. You do not need to phone every morning thereafter however you should provide regular updates to your line manager and be available to take a call (if you are fit to do so).

If your absence exceeds 7 days then you should follow any updated government advice on how to notify the university. As it currently stands, if you have COVID-19 or have been advised to stay at home by a medical professional you can obtain an 'isolation note' by visiting [NHS 111 online](#), rather than visiting a doctor. For COVID-19 cases this replaces the usual need to provide a 'fit note' after 7 days of sickness absence. If you are unable to obtain an isolation note then you must inform your line manager. It may be the case that medical certification can be provided at a later date. Be assured that you will not be penalised for being unable to provide a fit or isolation note however we are trying to adhere to the Government advice as much as possible as we may have to report on COVID-19 cases in future.

It's important that you make sure your contact details are up to date and that your line manager has a telephone number they can contact you on.

The university does not expect you to work when self-isolating as a result of being unwell. However, if you consider your symptoms as being mild (as some people are experiencing) or you are self-isolating because you are living with someone with the virus then you may be able to continue working. If this applies to you then you should discuss it with your line manager. It is also noted that people's symptoms can change so if you have intimated an intention to work and subsequently don't feel up to it then don't worry about letting your line manager know. Your health is more important than work.

## Acceptable levels of absence

Current arrangements:

Under our [sickness absence policy](#) we would normally invoke a review of your absence levels when you reach 20 working days' sickness absence; or 5 separate periods of sickness absence in any rolling 12 month period.

What is changing temporarily?

Any absence associated with this outbreak of COVID-19 will not be considered when determining whether or not to invoke a review of your absence levels. This includes cases of self-isolation prompted by experiencing symptoms as well as self-isolation that is based on government and medical advice.

## Sick pay

Current arrangements:

Sick pay entitlements are based on an employee's length of service. See table below:

<b>Service* at Commencement of Absence from Duty</b>	<b>Full Pay for</b>	<b>Half Pay for</b>
Less than 1 year	1 month	1 month
1 year but less than 2 years	2 months	2 months
2 years but less than 3 years	4 months	4 months
3 years but less than 5 years	5 months	5 months
5 years or more	6 months	6 months

What is changing temporarily?

Absence related to COVID-19 will be discounted for the purposes of calculating sick pay entitlement. You will be paid in full, regardless of your length of service, if you are self-isolating as a result of being symptomatic or you have been instructed to do so by a medical professional.

## **Annual leave**

Current arrangements:

All annual leave must be taken in a way that ensures a reasonable distribution throughout the year to meet both the needs of the individual and the university. The university normally allows employees to carry over a maximum of 5 working days into the next annual leave year.

What is changing temporarily?

All annual leave will be required to be taken in the leave year in which it's due. If you have not done so already you should book all your annual leave year now so that managers can plan ahead. As the purpose of annual leave is to take a break from work for rest and relaxation there is an expectation that staff continue to do so during this time.

The Government have recently made temporary amendments to the working time regulations to ensure key workers in key industries don't lose untaken annual leave as a result of COVID-19. As managers are proactively making arrangements for staff to take their annual leave, there should be no requirement for any carry over of entitlement during this period.

It is a difficult call as the university understands annual leave cannot be used for a holiday or getting away for the day however we have to consider the impact on next year and the pressure additional annual leave may put on services and colleagues trying to get back to normal. The approach we are taking is consistent with what is happening in the sector and we will keep it under review.

Unfortunately, we may have periods where a number of staff are on sick leave so you may be asked to cancel annual leave at short notice so that services can still run. If you are asked to cancel annual leave then part of the discussion you have with your line manager at that time should be on when it can be retaken. In those circumstances you may be allowed to carry days over but only if it cannot be taken this leave year. Similarly, if you become ill at the end of the leave year (for example) and cannot use your annual leave as a result, you may also carry days over. We hope these scenarios can be avoided however we have to plan for all possibilities.