COVID-19 “Coronavirus”

Questions and Answers

As coronavirus (also known as COVID-19) continues to spread, we would like to explain how we are responding to the global health crisis.

We would also like to remind you of the steps that we can all take to reduce the spread of coronavirus, while continuing our operations as normally as possible.

What you can do to reduce infections spreading
You should wash your hands often and thoroughly with soap and water. In particular you should wash your hands after going to the toilet, before eating or handling food, and when you get to work/get home. The College also provides hand sanitiser dispensers throughout our work locations.

In addition, please ensure that you:

▪ cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze;

▪ put any used tissues in the bin straightaway and wash your hands immediately after handling used tissues;

▪ try to avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth if you have not washed your hands recently; and

▪ try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell.

What to do if you, or someone you have been in contact with, has coronavirus symptoms

If you, or anyone you live with, develops a:

▪ fever, particularly a high temperature (i.e. a temperature of 37.8 degrees or over);

▪ continuous cough; or

▪ loss of sense of taste or smell,

you must not attend work and must follow the self-isolation guidance below.

You should notify your line manager by telephone before you are due to start work, or as soon as possible if that is not practical.
You do not have to get medical advice from NHS 111 to self-isolate. However, if your symptoms worsen during self-isolation or are no better after seven days, you should contact NHS online at https://111.nhs.uk/. There is a tool at https://111.nhs.uk/service/covid-19 for you to carry out a check if you think you have symptoms.

If you have no internet access, you should call NHS 111. Please dial 999 only if you have a medical emergency.

**Updated Government advice and College actions**

In the light of the [current government guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-the-public) the College is continuing to implement its plans for homeworking. Deans and Directors have been communicating to their staff to take forward these plans and highlight the actions and next steps for individual areas.

Staff and Managers are all adapting to new ways of working and will continue to do so in the coming weeks to face challenges both in our working and wider lives. The core principles and values that have always guided us though still stand. We are a community regardless of location. The basis of our community is care, connection, comradeship and commitment to our mission. We will be working hard to maintain and preserve those values, and their translation into practice, regardless of where and how we work.

**Flexibility and wellbeing**

We recognise the Government directive to work from home where possible will place demands on colleagues that may require flexibility around work patterns / shifts. We anticipate that managers will be open to flexible arrangements and keen to accommodate these, where possible.

Whilst the college is closed, staff will need to think about how they need operate to a more flexible working pattern, for example they may have to share computers with other members of their household who are self-isolating.

Where and how you work from home is very important to ensure that you are looking after your own wellbeing. It is really important that members of staff do not put themselves at risk of any unnecessary discomfort whilst working from home. Please familiarise yourself with the [working from home information sheet](https://www.college.edu/working-from-home).

The college also recognises that staff have different levels of accessibility to fast or reliable broadband or that at this very unusual period there is a greater demand on bandwidth in general with work and social related internet use.

Parents and carers will have additional responsibilities that will reduce their ability to respond as quickly as normal as schools will be closed. This will often mean a higher of volume work being done in the mornings and evenings and less during the normal working day.

Staff must have regular conversations with their line managers and teams to let everyone know what flexibility they need.
Whilst working from home time for social interactions are equally as important, if not more so, that when at work. Staff can feel isolated and we would like to remind staff to keep in touch with each other and encourage getting together as a group on Microsoft Teams to reduce the disadvantage of not having social contact.

To help ensure that we have services in place to support staff, we have launched a new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Members of staff should log into the Employee Assistance Programme (Organisation code birkbeckWELL) or use the telephone counselling & information Line - 0800 1116 387.

**Staff who are unwell whilst working from home**

The notification requirement is unchanged in that if you become unwell for any reason, including that related to COVID-19, they must inform their Manager. Notification to your line manager, during this time of increased remote working, should be made via Microsoft Teams. If the line manager or departmental record keeper is unwell or on leave you need to inform Human Resources.

Line managers/recordkeepers will still need to log the absence on My Birkbeck for Staff, by selecting the staff member from the directory and record their absence.

Members of staff that stop working from home following advice from NHS 111 or their medical practitioner must inform their manager, as above, and the Manager is required to log the absence on My Birkbeck for Staff as either ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) self-isolating’ or ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) confirmed’ as appropriate.

**Staff who are unwell whilst working at the College**

The normal procedures are still in place for staff that become unwell, as above, however if they stop working following advice from NHS 111 or their medical practitioner then they must inform their manager, as above, and the Manager is required to capture the details of individual cases in the form at appendix I.

The form is then sent to the Executive Dean and Director of Operations or Director of Professional Services Department and copied to the Academic Registrar (students) or to the Director of Human Resources (staff) as appropriate.

A staff members personal health data is ‘special category data’ i.e. it is confidential information and therefore must be omitted from any communication with the rest of the workforce. Under no circumstances should any member of staff send out communications to other staff or students concerning the personal health information of other staff or students.

**Certification, confirmation that staff are unable to work due to COVID-19**

**Self-isolation**

If you live alone, you should self-isolate for seven days from when symptoms, however mild, start.
If you live with others, a minimum 14-day household self-isolation period begins from the first appearance of symptoms. The first individual with symptoms can return to their normal routine if their symptoms clear after seven days and there is specific advice on what to do if anyone else within the household subsequently displays symptoms. See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance) for the latest guidance if that happens.

Anyone with symptoms should arrange to have a test to see if they have COVID-19 - see [www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-for-coronavirus/](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/testing-for-coronavirus/) for more information on how to get tested.

If you are ill and in self-isolation, your absence will be treated as sickness absence and you should follow our normal reporting procedures. However, evidence requirements are being relaxed during the coronavirus situation: we recognise that you may not have a fit note from your doctor, which we would normally require for more than seven days' absence.

For more than seven days' absence, we ask that you provide us with an "isolation note" from NHS 111, which you can obtain by completing a simple questionnaire at [https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note](https://111.nhs.uk/isolation-note).

If you have been advised to self-isolate by the NHS test and trace service, the service will provide you with a notification that you can use as evidence of the reason for your absence.


If you are not ill, your line manager will discuss with you what, if any, work you can do from home.

**Staff who have received a “Shielding” letter/notification**

Individuals defined as “clinically extremely vulnerable” by the NHS would have received a letter from their GP notifying them of this. The letter strongly advises this group to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact to protect themselves. This is called ‘Shielding’.

The Government is currently advising this group of people to shield until the end of June and is regularly monitoring this position.

Members of staff that are shielding will be entitled to receive sick pay and need to forward a copy of their shielding letter/notification to their manager or another designated person. If the period of shielding is extended, they need to send any subsequent letters to their manager or another designated person.

The absence is then recorded on My Birkbeck for Staff as ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) shielding.'
Staff that live with someone in receipt of a shielding letter

If staff members are living with somebody categorised as “clinically extremely vulnerable” and it is not possible for them to work from home due to the nature of their role, they will still be expected to attend work and follow the guidance issued by the government on living with people.

Members of staff may well be worried about several things related to coming into work during this period of the COVID-19 pandemic. It is important that these members of staff arrange either a face to face “Teams” meeting with the member of staff or a one to one telephone conversation. Managers will be very supportive of the concerns of their staff.

Staff members need to discuss all their concerns with their line manager who will be sympathetic and able to give advice and reassurance as to the measures that the College is taking to protect them whilst at work such as social distancing and the availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Members of staff will need to discuss how and when they currently attend work and explore if adjustments can be made to ease any anxiety about working or travelling to work.

Members of staff can access the College’s Employee Assistance Programme telephone counselling & information Line - 0800 1116 387. This is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, where expert advice is there for staff and dependants whenever they need it.

The College is not in a position to pay staff that are unable to work if they are not certificated as shielding, self-isolating or sick and if staff do not attend work and do not provide a statement (as above) then their pay will be paused.

Members of staff that are too anxious to come to work need to discuss this with their line manager to try and come up with a solution which may include Leave for family emergencies or taking annual leave.

Staff who are on leave whilst working from home

Annual Leave

These are very unusual circumstances and we are all adapting to very different ways of working, nevertheless, we also want to encourage staff to take annual leave as and when they require it to help to maintain their health and wellbeing whilst remote working.

We accept that annual leave patterns will change and that you are less likely to want to book longer periods of leave, but your manager will encourage you to take regular short breaks where possible.

It is important to note that the Government temporarily amended the law regarding annual leave. The new temporary regulations are intended for key workers and allow up to 4 weeks of unused annual leave to be carried into the next 2 leave years, easing the requirements on Birkbeck to ensure that employees take their statutory annual leave in any one year. The key workers in Birkbeck have been identified and written to and it is only this category of staff that can request annual leave to be carried over from this leave
year, 2019/20, into the next two years if it was not reasonably practicable for them to take holiday due to the effects of coronavirus.

For all other staff, which is the majority of staff at Birkbeck, we are temporarily amending the normal rules for carry over of annual leave for this year as follows:

Leave may be carried over to the next leave year with the advance agreement of your line manager and in conjunction with any local arrangements such as approval of the Director. In recognition of the impact of COVID-19, the College has agreed to increase the maximum days leave which may be carried forward to the 2020/21 annual leave year to 10 days (for part time employees this will be pro rata). The increased level of carry over leave is likely to have an impact on future demands on our services, so it is a requirement that the additional days carried forward, over and above the normal five days, are taken by 31 December 2020.

All leave not given permission to be considered as carry over leave will be lost. The College will not pay employees for leave not taken as an alternative to carrying it over to the next leave year.

You should request annual leave in the normal way, and you need to ensure that you take your annual leave, regardless of whether the remote working arrangements apply over a prolonged period of time.

If you need to cancel or change planned leave, you need to discuss this with your manager who will be prepared to be as flexible as possible, whilst encouraging you to have a break and reminding you of the requirement to take your annual leave by the end of the leave year on 30 September. Annual leave needs to be cancelled in the usual way.

Other forms of leave
All other forms of leave are still relevant during this difficult time, including Family leave. Staff should request any form of leave in the normal way using Business World.

Volunteering Leave
Birkbeck has a Volunteering leave policy, which is benchmarked across the sector, and enables staff to take one day's paid leave a year. Normally, any additional days for volunteering leave would be unpaid, however during these extraordinary circumstances, Birkbeck has decided to allow staff to be able to undertake volunteering for a recognised scheme such as the NHS scheme. In these circumstances, the number of paid days volunteering leave will be increased to one day per calendar month. It is anticipated that this change would apply for the duration of the Government restrictions imposed due to COVID-19.

Staff who take this opportunity to volunteer for a recognised scheme need to log onto Business World and book this as Volunteering Leave.

Staff with a season ticket loan from Birkbeck who apply for a refund due to coronavirus
Staff can apply for a refund of their season ticket if they are not commuting to work for any agreed reason relating to the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
If you are eligible and once you've been refunded, you should contact the Finance Department via payroll@bbk.ac.uk to notify you have obtained a refund. Finance will then advise you of the outstanding balance on your loan and what you need to do in order to return the funds to the College as you are no longer using the loan to pay for your travel to work.

**Staff that are asking to be reimbursed for increased utility bills**

Any additional utility costs incurred as a result of working remotely would need to be offset against the savings made for not traveling into work. The Q&A above advises members of staff to gain a refund for their season tickets and members of staff who use contactless or Oyster pay as you go will be saving on their commute.

If members of staff still feel that they are incurring additional costs they need to contact their line manager clearly stating what legitimate costs, relating to working from home, have been incurred with receipts and what savings have been made.

If following a discussing with the line manager, they are supportive of the case the staff member can claim the difference via expenses on Business World with supporting documentation.

Members of staff may be able to claim up to £6 a week (£4 a week before 4th April 2020) tax relief for some of their utility bills as they have been asked to work from home. Staff can only claim for things to do with work, for example, business telephone calls or the extra cost of gas and electricity for your work area. They cannot claim for things they use for both private and business use, for example, rent or broadband access. In addition, any payments claimed on expenses from the college (as above), cannot be claimed as tax relief as well.

Members of staff can check their eligibility on the tax service website. Staff who complete a self-assessment cannot claim this particular tax relief as they can make their claim when they complete their self-assessment.

**Communication concerning COVID-19**

All communications to staff and/or students concerning COVID-19 will be issued by the College Secretary, and/or the Academic Registrar (for cases involving students) and/or the Director of Human Resources (for cases involving staff).

There is a dedicated SharePoint site called Coronavirus that will contain information concerning the virus and help and advice for staff and managers that will make remote working as easy as possible.