Information for Staff - COVID-19 “Coronavirus”

Staff Returning to Work in College Buildings - September to December 2020

Birkbeck is committed to providing a safe and reassuring environment to support our world class teaching and research during these unprecedented times. However, in order to achieve this, we require the assistance of the Birkbeck community in following some simple guidelines, prior to, during and after visiting College buildings, as outlined below.

These guidelines supersede any previous guidance given to those colleagues who have already returned or who have continued to work onsite.

Before You Arrive

- Please ensure that you are coming into the College for specific purposes, in particular where you are unable to undertake tasks remotely and therefore need to be on site e.g. to deliver teaching, or to use your office/workspace.

- Please ensure that you have read and understood the ‘Campus Induction’ and your departmental COVID 19 Risk Assessment – available from your line manager.


- Bring a face covering or mask that fits well and covers your nose and mouth. Further detail on face coverings is available at: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own

- Ensure that you have confirmed the ‘local arrangements’ for using your workspace with your line manager before your visit and that they have confirmed that you are able to return. This will include approaches such as having ‘office rotas’ for shared workspaces to ensure that social distancing can be maintained at all times.

- Limit the number of possessions you bring with you as far as possible e.g. bags or other personal items. This will help to reduce the potential for transferring the virus as well as making the maintenance of social distancing easier within shared spaces.

During Your Visit

- Prior to entering College buildings, you should expect to be ‘checked’ by a member of the Customer Service Team to ensure that you know where you are going and that you have a face covering to wear once inside. The Customer Service Team will do their best to avoid refusing entry to anyone, however, the College has to ensure that everyone in the building is kept safe.

- As you enter and leave the building, you will be required to ‘tap in’ and ‘tap out’ on the card readers located in building receptions. This will enable you to move around the estate whilst at the same time maintaining the College’s ability to support the NHS test and trace scheme.

- All those entering Birkbeck buildings, including students and staff, should (subject to defined exceptions¹⁾ wear a face covering for the duration of their time inside the building. Where Staff
have single-occupancy offices, they can remove their face covering if tasks require e.g. delivering teaching from their PC or attending online meetings.

- The College has adopted a ‘1M+’ approach to social distancing across the estate. This means that people should maintain a 2M distance as far as is reasonably possible whilst in buildings but, with the mitigation of face coverings, it is possible for people to be in closer proximity, such as sitting 1M+ apart in a classroom or shared office space.

- Do not move any furniture or seating when using shared or public facilities. This will have been set up with specific distancing and safety in mind.

- Take note of all signage and instructions displayed in the buildings with regard to your safety, including prompts in relation to regular handwashing, social distancing and the use of toilet facilities.

- Please do not shout or raise your voice to communicate over a long distance or overcome background noise as this increases the risk of transmission. Equally please refrain from generating loud noise e.g. through playing music or loud conversation.

- 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 provides hand sanitiser dispensers throughout the estate.

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;

- avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth if you have not washed your hands recently.

**After Your Visit**

- Please continue to monitor your wellbeing after your visit by following the guidance on the NHS 111 website [https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/](https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/symptoms/)

- If you do subsequently need to self-isolate or indeed contract COVID-19 (regardless of where you think you may have contracted it) please follow the **COVID-19 specific sickness absence reporting requirements** as outlined further on in this document.

- In addition to the sickness absence reporting process we would also ask staff who are self-isolating to update the COVID 19 status via the link available in My Birkbeck for Staff. This will assist the College in supporting the NHS test and trace scheme.

  If you are subsequently contacted by the NHS test and trace programme please provide them with the following details to follow-up on any contacts that you may have made whilst at Birkbeck covid@bbk.ac.uk.

* Please follow the NHS guidance on face coverings. There are legitimate exemptions to the requirement to wear a face covering but equally, individuals who consider themselves to be exempt should give careful consideration of the risks of entering buildings without a face covering, prior to their visit.
The College recognises that these are extremely challenging times and that people will be anxious about their safety, which in turn may lead to assumptions and misunderstandings e.g. in relation to the wearing of face coverings. It is reasonable, for health and safety reasons, to be able to seek clarification through ‘polite enquiry’ of those not wearing face coverings, but also to respect the fact that some individuals may have legitimate exemptions from doing so.

**Continuing to work from home - September to December 2020**

**Flexibility and wellbeing**

The College recognises that for those colleagues who continue to work from home, in part or in full, this may continue to bring challenges that require flexibility e.g. around work patterns/shifts. It is expected that managers will continue to be open to flexible arrangements and keen, where possible, to accommodate these.

Where and how you work from home is very important to ensure that you are looking after your own wellbeing. It is important that staff do not put themselves at risk of any unnecessary discomfort whilst working from home. In support of this, please re-familiarise yourself with the working from home information sheet.

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 may have additional responsibilities that could reduce their ability to respond as quickly as normal and which might lead to 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 and this would include information sharing about any flexibility they request/need.

Whilst working from home, time for social interactions is equally as important, if not more so, than when working on site. Staff can feel isolated and the College would like to remind staff to keep in touch with each other and encourage getting together as a group on MS Teams to reduce the disadvantage of not having social contact.

To help ensure services are in place to support staff, the College has launched a new Employee Assistance Programme (EAP). Staff can access the services by logging into the Employee Assistance Programme (Organisation code birkbeckWELL) site or by use of the telephone counselling & information line - 0800 1116 387.

**Requests for reimbursement for increased utility bills**

Any additional utility costs incurred as a result of working remotely should be off-set against any savings made from reduced or eliminated travel costs. If staff believe that they are incurring additional costs by working from home beyond any savings, they should contact their line manager stating what costs have been incurred (including receipts) and details of what savings have been made in relation to their travel.

If the line manager supports the member of staff’s case for additional costs, they should discuss this with the Director of Professional Service/Director or Operations who will advise whether a claim for the difference can be made via expenses on Business World, subject to appropriate documentation being provided.
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, if they have been asked to continue working from home. Staff can only claim for work related reasons such as, business telephone calls or the extra cost of gas and electricity for their work area. Staff 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.

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

**Sickness Absence and COVID-19**

If you develop the COVID-19 symptoms of:

- a high temperature
- a new, continuous cough
- a loss of, or change to, sense of smell or taste

and you are on-site, you need to leave work as quickly and safely as possible. Whether on-site or working from home, you need to have a test undertaken as soon as possible and within the first five days of having symptoms. Full details of what you need to do access that testing is available on the government website here.

**Stay at home if you have symptoms** – if you are getting a test because you have symptoms, you or anyone you live with must self-isolate until you get your result.

You must also self-isolate if you cannot get a test because it is more than five days since your symptoms started.

Full and current details of when to self-isolate and what you must do is outlined here.

In addition, you must notify your line manager by telephone or MS Teams as soon as possible if you were on site but then left due to becoming unwell or, if working from home, before you are due to start work, or as soon as possible if that is not practical.

**COVID-19 Specific Sickness Absence Notification Requirements**

The notification requirements relating to COVID-19 are the same as when reporting any sickness absence i.e. if you become unwell you must let your line manager know as soon as practically possible, however, there is the additional requirement to complete a short online form that will drive the College’s track, trace and communication processes.

If you become unwell with COVID-19 symptoms you must:

- Report your sickness to your line manager by telephone or MS Teams as soon as possible and to confirm the reason as either COVID-19 or Self-isolation in relation to COVID-19. If your manager away you must inform your managers’ manager.

- Additionally you also need to report this information on your My Birkbeck Staff page via the link to ‘update my COVID 19 Status’ by completing the short form that you will be presented with.
This specific information will then go to the College’s COVID-19 tracing team and most importantly, will provide the information needed if you have been to any College buildings in the previous 14 days.

Line-managers/record keepers will log the sickness absence in the usual way on My Birkbeck for Staff, by selecting the staff member from the directory and the appropriate reason i.e. as either ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) self-isolating’ or ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) confirmed’.

A staff member’s 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 Requirements** – if you need to self-isolate, you are required to provide the College with an ‘isolation note’ that will be obtained from the NHS via the link [here](#).

If you are ill and in self-isolation, your absence will be treated as sickness absence and you should subsequently follow the College’s normal certification requirements for any longer period of related sickness absence.

If you are not ill but nonetheless required to self-isolate, your line manager will discuss with you what, if any, work you can do/continue to do from home.

Staff are responsible for ensuring that all medical statements (e.g. ‘fit notes’, isolation notes, or a notification letter from the NHS test and trace service) reach their manager promptly. Periods of absence that are not covered by medical statements will not qualify for occupational or statutory sick pay. Each case will be considered on its merits before any occupational sick pay is withheld.

**Guidance on ‘Shielding’ and the Clinically Extremely Vulnerable**

For those deemed by the government to be clinically extremely vulnerable, the advice during the peak of the pandemic, was to take extra precautions collectively termed as ‘shielding’.

The government is advising that people who this was applied to, do not need to shield at the moment. This is because the rates of transmission of COVID-19 in the community have fallen significantly.

As this relates to work, it means that:

- You do not need to follow the previous shielding advice.
- You may return to work on the College’s premises because they meet the criteria of being COVID-secure.

However, the current government advice is that colleagues who were identified as needing to ‘shield’ should continue to work from home wherever this is possible.

**COVID-19 Individual Risk Assessments for staff, including those deemed clinically extremely vulnerable**

As the College considers the phased return to the workplace, it recognises its duty of care to all staff, including those; who are clinically extremely vulnerable, those who have dependants who are clinically extremely vulnerable and those not in a group identified as being at more risk of being infected and/or of having an adverse outcome if infected but nonetheless have significant concerns about returning to on-site working.
Any staff member who has concerns about returning to on-site working should raise these with their line manager in the first instance. The manager will listen to those concerns and will consider any proposals for alternative arrangements. They will also explain the risk management measures and controls that have or will be put in place to minimise transmission to keep them, and others, safe.

If alternative proposals cannot be readily agreed, or if those concerns are not alleviated, guidance will be sought from the College’s occupational health advisers. In such cases, staff will be provided with a secure link to complete an online questionnaire, which will be assessed by an occupational health professional. The outcome will then be discussed between the employee and their line manager and could entail the recommendation that a fuller individual health assessment be undertaken or that further exploration of restrictions or adjustments should be explored in support of a returning to on-site working. A copy of the assessment and any agreed actions will be kept confidentially on the staff member’s HR file.

**Leave from work and COVID-19**

**Annual Leave** - These are very unusual circumstances and we all continue to adapt to different ways of working. Nevertheless, the College continues to encourage staff to take annual leave throughout the full course of the annual leave year so as to support health and wellbeing.

The government has 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, the College has 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).

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 some or all 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.

**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 for staff that contains wider information which can be accessed through My Birkbeck and the link through to ‘Coronavirus Information for Staff’.