COVID-19 “Coronavirus”

Managers Q&A

Updated Government advice and College actions
In the light of the current government guidance the College has continued to implement its plans for homeworking wherever possible.

Staff have adapted 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, managers need to facilitate these new ways of working and support their staff during this unusual period.

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.

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 contains information concerning the virus and help and advice for staff that will make remote working as easy as possible. Managers need to draw the attention of their staff to this site and ensure they regularly visit it for updates.

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

Flexibility and wellbeing
The Coronavirus SharePoint site includes guidelines for managers to help them manage their teams remotely, this includes making time for social interactions are equally as important, if not more so, than when at work. Staff can feel isolated and managers should encourage their staff to keep in touch with each other and arrange the team getting together as a group on Microsoft Teams to reduce the disadvantage of not having social contact.

Managers need to ensure that staff are looking after their own wellbeing and 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.

We recognise that whilst the college is closed staff need operate to a more flexible working pattern as they may have to share computers with other members of their
household who are self-isolating, for example working in shifts or taking it in turns. Managers need to be supportive of their staff and discuss any issues that they may have in order to make the adjustments that staff need during this difficult time.

Managers have to take into consideration that schools will be closed, and that parents and carers will have additional responsibilities that will reduce people’s ability to respond as quickly as normal. This will often mean a higher of volume work being done in the mornings and evenings and less during the normal working day.

The college also asks managers to recognise 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, for example with streaming of music or video whilst schools are closed.

Managers must have regular conversations with their teams individually and collectively and let everyone know what flexibility is required when keeping in touch or when expecting correspondence.

**Staff who are unwell whilst working from home**
The notification requirement is unchanged in that if a member of your team becomes unwell for any reason, including that related to COVID-19, they must inform you. During this time of increased remote working, notification should be made via Microsoft Teams, if you and/or the departmental record keeper are unwell you need to let your team know and ask that they 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 recording their absence.

Members of staff that stop working from home following advice from NHS 111 or their medical practitioner must inform you, as above, and you are required to ensure that their absence is recorded on My Birkbeck for Staff as either ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) self-isolation (not able to work)’ 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 managers are 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 and a copy must also be sent to the Academic Registrar (students) or to the Director of Human Resources (staff) as appropriate.

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

Sickness / self-isolation for seven days or less
For the first seven calendar days of absence (i.e. including non-working days), staff do not need to obtain a note from their GP. When staff return to work, they must notify their manager or another designated person to confirm the dates and reasons for absence. The absence is then recorded on My Birkbeck for Staff as either ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) self-isolation (not able to work)’ or ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) confirmed’ as appropriate.

Sickness / self-isolation that exceeds seven days
For more than seven days' absence (including non-working days), we ask that staff provide us with an "isolation note" from NHS 111, which they can obtain by completing a simple questionnaire at 111.nhs.uk/isolation-note.

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

Staff that are required to self-isolate for more than 14 days need to obtain a new isolation note each time the previous note expires. The absence is then recorded on My Birkbeck for Staff as either ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) self-isolation (not able to work)’ or ‘COVID-19 (coronavirus) confirmed’ as appropriate.

Members of staff are responsible for ensuring that all medical statements (isolation notes or 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.

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 managers take a supportive and reassuring stance and have either a face to face “Teams” meeting with the member of staff or a one to one telephone conversation.

Managers need to discuss staff members concerns sympathetically and 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). Discuss how and when they attend work and if adjustments can be made to ease their anxiety. Managers should sign post 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 them whenever they need it.

Managers need to make staff know, during the conversation above, that whilst the Government guidelines are changing as things develop, the current guidance is that if they cannot work from home and have not been told to self-isolate or shield themselves, they do need to attend work. 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. Managers need to let staff know this and discuss any possible alternative options e.g. taking annual leave.

If staff do not attend work and do not provide a statement (as above) then their pay will be paused. If after the conversation with the manager, the member of staff is adamant that they cannot attend work it is important that we do not cause undue anxiety, so the manager needs to try and come up with a solution which may include Leave for family emergencies.

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 staff are less likely to want to book longer periods of leave, but we would encourage staff 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, thereby 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, named as business critical (on site) workers and have all received a letter confirming their status. Only these special category staff 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, 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 annual leave year with the advance agreement of their line manager (in conjunction with any local arrangements such as approval by Director). In the recognition of the impact of COVID-19, the College has agreed to increase the maximum days leave which can be carried forward to the 2020/21 annual leave year to 10 days (pro rata for part time staff). 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.

Staff should request annual leave in the normal way, and ensure that they take their annual leave, regardless of whether the remote working arrangements apply over a prolonged period of time.

If staff would like to cancel or change planned leave, they should speak to their line manager who will be as flexible as possible, whilst encouraging staff to have a break and remind staff of the requirement to take their annual leave by the end of the leave year on 30 September 2020.

Other forms of leave
All other forms of leave are still relevant during this difficult time, including Family Leave. Staff will be requesting any form of leave in the normal way using Business World and managers will still need to authorise this.

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. Line managers need to authorise this on Business World.

Staff with an interest-free season ticket loan 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 they are eligible and once they have been refunded, they should contact the Finance Department via payroll@bbk.ac.uk to notify them that they have obtained a refund. Finance will then advise the member of staff of the outstanding balance on their loan.
and what they need to do in order to return the funds to the College as they are no longer using the loan to pay for their 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 staff to gain a refund for their season tickets and staff who use contactless or Oyster pay as you go will be saving on their commute. If staff have a clear business case showing how the increased cost of utilities is greater than the savings, they should discuss this with their line manager and if appropriate and supported by the line manager, claim the difference via expenses on Business World with supporting documentation.

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, cannot be claimed as tax relief as well.

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.

**Where can I point staff to for advice and guidance on COVID-19?**

Staff can read more about the virus and how to prevent it at Public Health Matters, the NHS Website and government guidance.

The National Health Service (NHS) have produced a list of answers to common questions. You can also use NHS 111 (online or by phone).

The Department of Education have also set up a helpline and this can be accessed via 0800 046 8687.