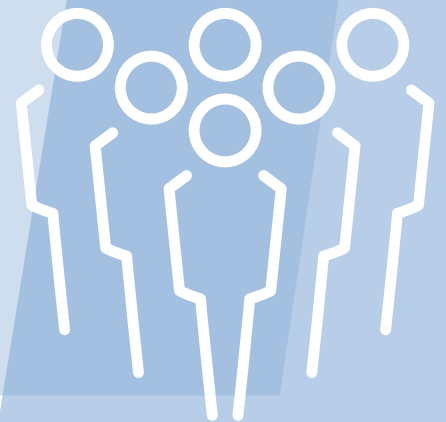


*MANAGING  
STAFF RETURN  
TO CAMPUS*



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# Managing staff return to campus

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## Section 1- Introduction and background

The effects of the Coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic societally, educationally and economically have been immense as we have witnessed the abrupt transformation of our social and working lives. Early on in the pandemic the Higher Education (HE) sector had to move rapidly to deliver online teaching. Operations at campuses significantly reduced with some students remaining in university accommodation and others returning home. At the same time, Higher Education Institution (HEIs) were having to develop remote working strategies whilst facilitating research and maintaining essential core campus activities including supporting students who have remained on campus.

We are now at the point in the [UK government's roadmap](#) out of the current lockdown where campuses are starting to open up and increasing numbers of students are returning. We acknowledge that UCEA members in different nations are emerging from national lockdowns at different times in line with each nation's specific guidance. This guidance aims to cover general principles and key considerations for managing a safe return of staff to campus irrespective of the timing of the lifting of lockdown restrictions.

Whilst planning the safe reopening of campuses, HEIs will no doubt, keep their students' needs and expectations at the heart of any redesign of services including teaching delivery. However, there may be challenges in managing the return of staff to campus, particularly in light of the differing experiences of the pandemic faced by staff and general anxieties about returning.

### The guidance

UCEA has therefore developed this guidance to support HEIs in managing the return of staff. The guidance is divided into 10 sections, including this one, and covers the following main areas:

- Introduction and background
- Managing the psychological transition back to campus
- Managing change
- Hybrid working
- Leading a return to campus
- The role of line managers
- Health and safety considerations
- Legal framework
- Case studies
- Appendices

The focus of the guidance is on managing a safe return of staff to the workplace. Significant numbers of staff, both academic and professional services, have worked from home during the various lockdowns and are continuing to do so as the UK moves out of lockdown. Other staff have worked on campus throughout the pandemic whilst still others have worked both on and off campus depending on the national and local restrictions at the time. Staff who have been working from home and those who have been shielding who now need to return are likely to feel differently about returning and have different concerns to those staff who have been working on campus throughout the pandemic. The latter group of staff may have concerns about increasing numbers of returning students and staff. The appendices of this guidance include a guide for employers and line managers of staff who have been shielding and a guide for staff who may have anxieties as they return from shielding.

HEIs have reported that staff have expressed a range of concerns and anxieties about returning to campus. These vary from staff who are fearful about returning because they are

worried about contracting Covid-19 and may have been shielding to those who would prefer to retain their working from home arrangements and not return to campus at all. There are other staff who have found working from home very challenging for a variety of reasons and who are keen to return as soon as possible. HEIs have to consider and balance the needs of students and the provision of a high-quality teaching and learning experience with the needs and preferences of staff. It is important also to acknowledge that there are other issues that may lead to staff anxieties, for example financial issues and concerns about job security in the pandemic.

The section on managing the psychological transition back to campus and Health and safety considerations address some of these issues and highlight important takeaways for consideration.

There is no doubt that the Covid pandemic has brought about one of the biggest changes in people's lives across the globe. It is no surprise therefore that many HEIs have been using change management principles both during the pandemic and as they plan the return to campus. The section on Change management shares thoughts and practice from across the sector.

A repeated theme that has emerged is the way in which HEIs are engaging in reflection over the past year and using the lessons to look at new ways of working, primarily hybrid working; with some HEIs referring to it as agile working, blended working or dynamic working. Clearly any planning around hybrid working will need careful thinking across a range of resourcing requirements including estates and IT. Whilst this guidance touches on the safety aspects relating to teaching and other settings, it does not purport to go into any detail regarding more significant estates considerations including rationalisation of HEI estates. Similarly, any hybrid working models will need to be backed up by fit for purpose technology as we have all come to realise during the pandemic. We are conscious that not all HEIs will have the resources to make the changes in a speedy fashion and key stakeholders will need to accept that the change will be a gradual process. The guidance does not attempt to go into any detail regarding this key piece of the hybrid working jigsaw.

Leaders and Managers will play a key role in facilitating a safe return to campus. Open, honest and empathetic communication will contribute to successful transitions. The section on the role of leaders includes thoughts from six heads of institution as they navigate their HEIs through the challenges of the pandemic. The section on the role of Managers emphasises the key role that managers are playing in supporting the safe return of their staff.

The final section is the legal framework which addresses key considerations when moving to new ways of working and also addresses issues of challenging scenarios relating to staff anxieties relating to return to campus.

All the sections are supplemented with vignettes, case studies and summaries of the key takeaways which we hope will help bring to life some of the key considerations for managing a safe return to campus.

Roshan Israni, UCEA's Deputy Chief Executive's blog, [The end in sight? Managing staff return to campus](#) focuses on UCEA's new guidance. The blog underlines the fundamental role staff play in supporting students and the importance of managing their safe return to campus and explains how the guidance's rich information, useful examples and case studies help reiterate key basic principles and bring these to life.

## Staff engagement and working with stakeholders including trade unions

Nationally, UCEA has had several roundtable meetings with the trade unions to explore opportunities for joint work to support the sector through the pandemic. The main areas of work are:

- **Covid-19 Testing:** UCEA and the national trade unions have agreed a [joint statement](#) on Covid-19 testing for staff. The statement reflects the continued efforts of UCEA and the trade unions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of HE staff and to limit the spread of Covid-19.
- **Vaccinations:** UCEA and the trade unions have agreed a [joint statement](#) on staff vaccinations to support the roll out of Covid-19 vaccination across the UK and encourage staff take-up of vaccines.
- **Job security:** UCEA and the trade unions are updating the Acas Digest on Job Security that was published by UCEA and the unions in 2010. UCEA is focusing this work on a cover note on the impact of the pandemic on the workforce, drawing from a statement published by the University of Glasgow and its union branches.
- **Safe re-opening of campuses:** In June last year, UCEA and the unions agreed a set of six [high-level principles for safe working during the pandemic](#). These were also appended to Universities UK's principles for emerging from lockdown. These principles have stood the test of time through various lockdowns. The trade unions' repeated pleas continue to be around review of risk assessments.
- **Exploring the challenges and opportunities relating to flexible and remote working:** the unions are keen to not lose some of the benefits of flexible working that some staff have experienced over the last year. In response, UCEA has outlined proposals for a sector-level discussion to explore whether, using the experiences of the pandemic, there could be increased opportunities for flexibility in the delivery of services and flexible working including remote working across the sector, subject to business needs. We are awaiting feedback from the unions.

UCEA has been working jointly with the trade unions, the Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA) and the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) through the [Higher Education Safety and Health \(HESH\) Forum](#) and increased the frequency of the HESH Forum meetings in order to discuss and consider the health, safety and wellbeing impact of the pandemic on the sector. UCEA, the Department for Education (DfE) and the sector trade unions are also meeting regularly as a tripartite forum to discuss Government policy around Covid-19 including the impact on staff health and wellbeing.

Whilst national conversations with trade unions are happening as described above, we are aware of significant engagement and partnership work that is ongoing and that will continue to be required at local HEI level both with local trade unions and staff groups to manage a safe return to campus. Examples of engagement with both staff and trade unions are described in the case studies section.

We all accept that navigating through the fast-moving pandemic has been difficult. However, it has also offered an opportunity for reflection to take stock of how we deliver our services and whether there is a different way of delivery that, whilst taking into account the needs of our customers and staff, results in improved outcomes. To that end, we hope this guidance helps progress the challenging task ahead.

Our grateful thanks to the following for their contributions to this guidance:

Professor Graham Baldwin, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Central Lancashire  
Professor Neil Budworth, Chair, Universities Safety and Health Association  
John de Pury, Assistant Director of Policy, Universities UK  
Deborah Griffin, Learning and Organisational Development Manager, University of Bath  
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Professor Debra Humphris, Vice-Chancellor, University of Brighton  
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Professor Nick Petford, Vice Chancellor and CEO of the University of Northampton  
Professor Nigel Seaton, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Abertay University  
Sarah Setchell, Director of HR, University of Derby  
Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth University  
Laleh Williams, Head of Organisation and People Development, University of Greenwich  
Malcolm Willis, Director of Human Resources, University of Winchester

### **Case study HEIs**

University of Aston  
Lancaster University  
University of Leicester  
University of Northampton  
Sheffield Hallam University  
Staffordshire University  
University of Wolverhampton

### **Blogs**

Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and COO at University of Manchester – [Placing our values at the heart of hybrid working](#)  
Raj Jethwa, UCEA's Chief Executive – [Students and flexibility are key when it comes to HE hybrid working](#)

## Section 2 - Managing the psychological transition back to campus

### Introduction

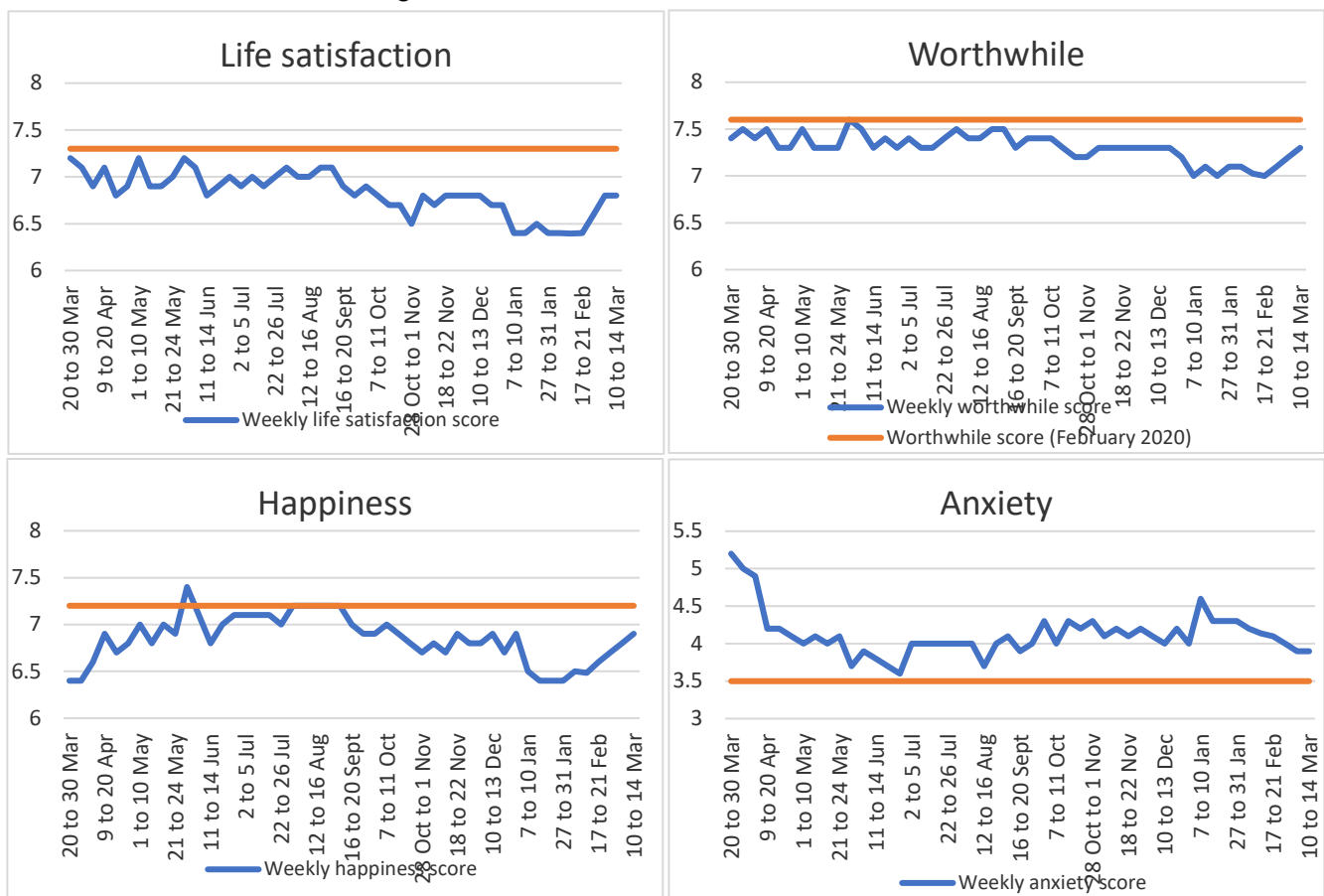
This section of the guidance considers the psychological impact of the pandemic on individuals working in the HE sector. Protecting the physical wellbeing of staff has been paramount for HEIs throughout the pandemic, with risk assessments and subsequent control measures having been put into place to protect staff physically. However, the presence and impact of psychological factors can be more difficult to gauge. The aim of this section is to provide an insight into the considerations that are relevant in managing the return to campus from a psychological perspective. Ultimately, wellbeing is influenced by a range of factors, and interventions should be considered within each specific context. Many within the sector will feel uncertain, even without experiencing mental ill-health. Whether suffering from a known mental health condition, or feeling anxious from a non-medical perspective, everyone will need to make a psychological transition of some degree when returning to campus in a “new normal”.

### Managing the psychological transition

In March 2020, the whole country suddenly found itself in its first national lockdown without any realistic preparation or full understanding of the evolving global infective situation.

The four graphs below from the UK Office of National Statistics' (ONS) regular survey show the fluctuation of the nation's emotional wellbeing response to this global crisis over the 12 months from March 2020 to March 2021. In particular, the data suggests that the level of generalised anxiety has been particularly heightened with life satisfaction, feeling of worthwhile and happiness all below the previous (red straight line) pre-pandemic (February 2020) baseline figures for the UK population.

#### ONS - health and wellbeing, 12-month data

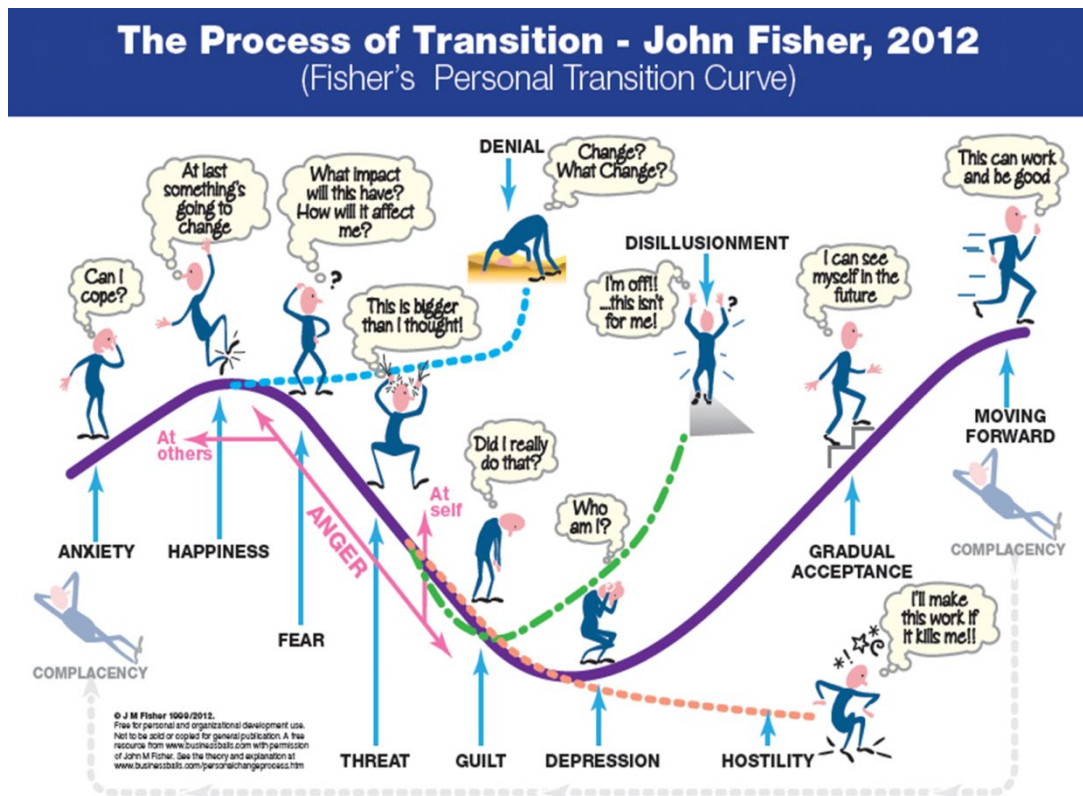


[www.ons.gov.uk/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/19march2021](https://www.ons.gov.uk/bulletins/coronavirusandthesocialimpactsongreatbritain/19march2021)



Extrapolating from the ONS data and taking into account corroborative (sector specific) research conducted by Mind<sup>1</sup>, the HE sector is unlikely to be an exception. As in other areas of the economy, the HE sector has responded to the “rollercoaster” of evolving government guidance on population infection control, uncertainty of when normality will return and repeated national lockdowns limiting normal social contact and freedoms. From a health and wellbeing perspective, staff anxiety will be borne out through personal and individual journeys.

Staff would have found themselves trying to manage their emotions in an unpredictable world, which on an individual basis can be reflected in the Fisher theory on personal transition through change. The reaction cycle below and the disaster response model overleaf serve to illustrate the fact that people need time to move through these cycles and the constant resetting has inhibited peoples’ ability to do this.



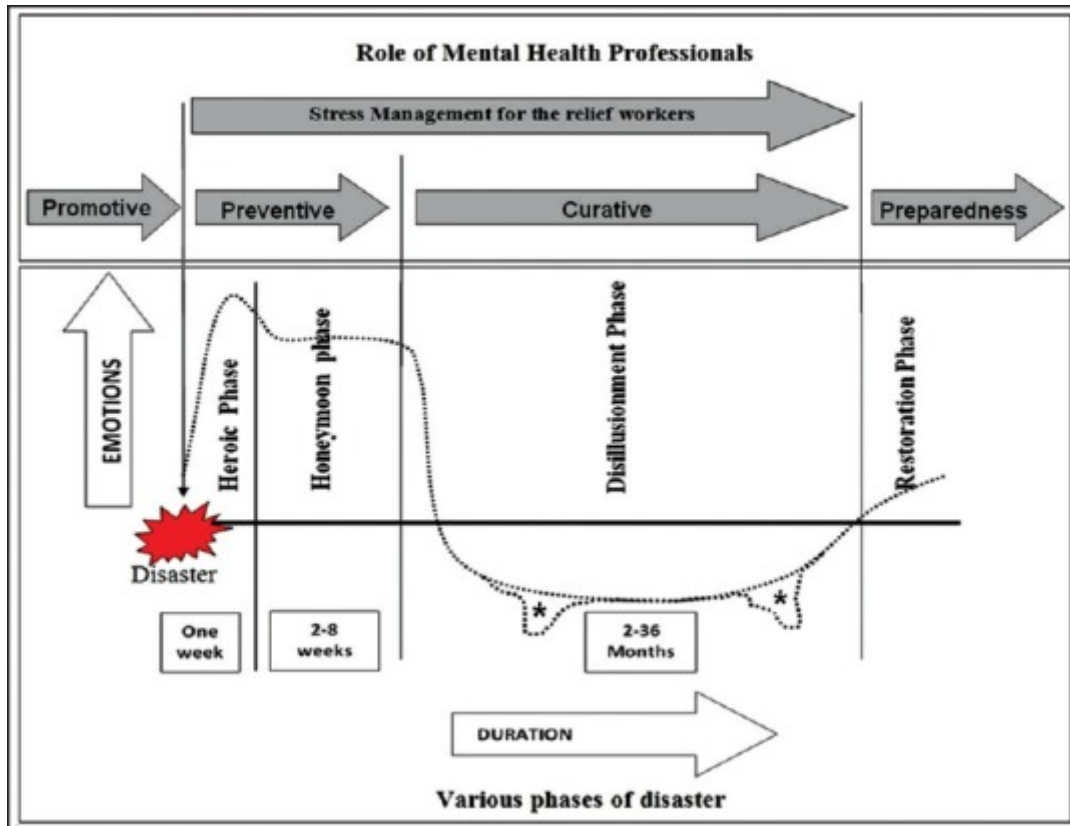
[www.dpac.tas.gov.au/change\\_management/transition\\_and\\_change](http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/change_management/transition_and_change)

In more normal times, most organisations would have had a disaster plan which may have been “trialled” in order to “stress test” an organisation so they could learn from its findings and put into place more effective adjustments and strategies for a future real event. Whilst some HEIs will have had pandemic preparedness plans, it is unlikely that scenario planning would have foreseen the scale of impact of the global Covid-19 pandemic.

<sup>1</sup> The Mental Health Charity MIND shared findings with UCEA about staff mental health during the Covid-19 pandemic with a specific focus on HE. This included results from a pilot with nine HEIs through Mentally Healthy Universities which cited increased workload, lack of downtime, staff overextending themselves, uncertainty, social disconnection and anxiety about returning to campus.

## The four phases of disaster response

Figure 1



<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.4103/0253-7176.162915>

Following the first national lockdown, most of the general population's emotional-behavioural response would have been as portrayed in the different phases of the disaster cycle above.

After a period of heroic and honeymoon phases in the first few weeks, a period of disillusionment and uncertainty is usually the natural process. Unfortunately, as there have been repeated national lockdowns, each event would have been a "micro disaster" all leading to further disillusionment phases, with shortened (or nil) heroic/honeymoon phases resulting in the mental health distress/dilemmas/dysfunction that has been observed in recent times in all social and work environments.

In particular, there has been a concern that some higher risk individuals are likely to be more vulnerable as organisations start to explore a return to some type of normality as the UK government roadmap begins to gradually move forward. These include:

1. Pre-existing vulnerable and/or emotional issues before the Covid-19 pandemic.
2. Shielding or prolonged remote working staff requiring encouragement to return to normal work/learning role environments.
3. Staff who have been redeployed on a repeat basis to different work roles that they were unfamiliar with but having had limited transitional local skilled clear support and direction.
4. Inexperienced HE staff with less than two years' stable employment experience.
5. Staff experiencing significant bereavement issues over the last 12 months.

Figure 2 In the aftermath of any disaster, people will experience varying degrees of psychosocial distress



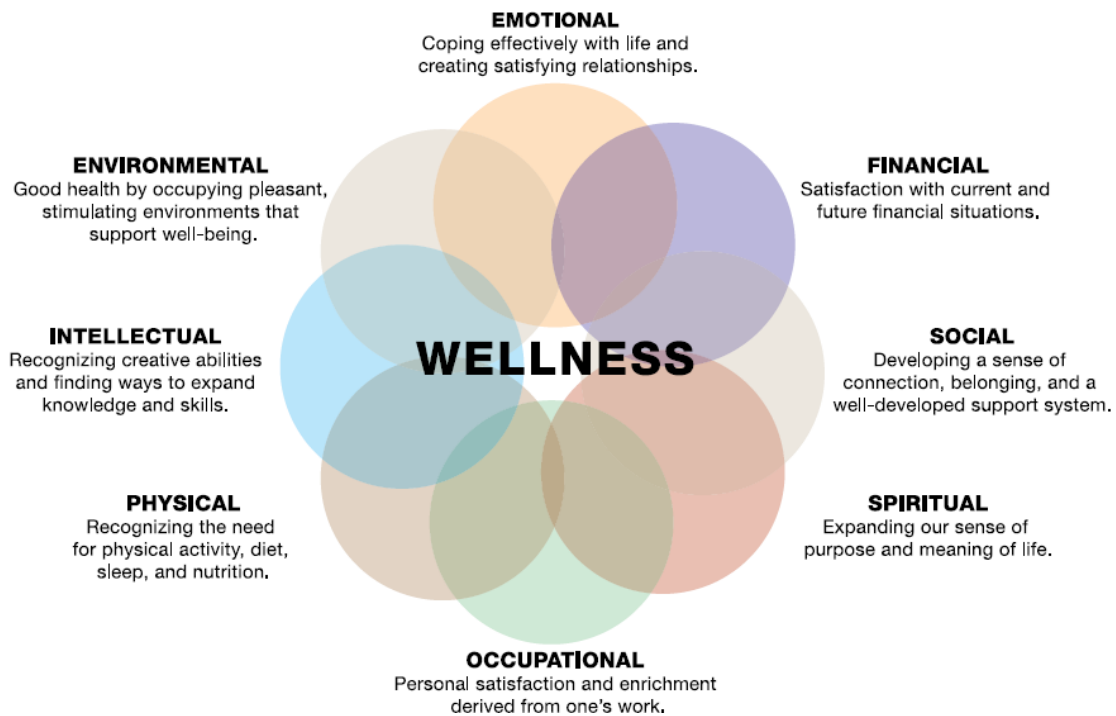
**Around 75 per cent**  
no disorder, transient stress,  
worry, feeling upset

Lockdown and the pandemic has been traumatic for some, uncomfortable for many and disturbing for others. Some experts have gone so far as to suggest that modelling from within the field of disaster medicine might be broadly transferable to the pandemic situation in the UK. Certainly, the findings illustrated by the above diagram paint a disturbingly bleak picture when applied to the pandemic situation. However, it should be noted that the diagram is based on theoretical assumptions as there is no direct precedent with which to compare the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Based on modelling from the field of disaster medicine, experts have suggested that three out of four (**75%**) individuals are more likely to have **transient normal distress**. This would be manifested through normal feelings of being worried and upset, without being attributable to a clinically diagnosable disorder, nor requiring any active psychological treatment. Furthermore, it has been suggested that one in five people (**20%**) may develop **mild-to-moderate disorders**, and therefore require standard psychological support. Such support might include some short-term pharmaceutical treatment with phased return to work and job role adjustments (either temporary or permanent).

Experts relying on the assumptions derived from the field of disaster medicine have claimed that one in 20 (**5%**) may go on to develop **severe disorders** requiring more prolonged combination pharmaceutical/psychological treatments with prolonged time away from work. There are ongoing mental health studies that have begun in health and social care occupations which may shed further light on these perceptions of how the population at large may respond when trying to reset and get back into normal routines.

## The concept of “wellness”



In order for an individual to remain well, there are a number of linked factors that need to all reasonably coalesce from a stable, secure and positive perspective. Good health and good function in a good work environment depends on the majority of these factors being regularly satisfied.

In order to sustain a return to normal working conditions over the next few months/years after the pandemic starts to resolve, it is important for organisations and individuals to be mindful of these wellness factors. It is not necessary that HEIs as employers are able satisfy all of them all of the time, but a reasonable aim would be to have in place plans and strategies listening to the “voices” on campus. Responsibilities for “*positive sustainable action*” for wellbeing are equally shared between the employer and staff member. It is just as important for staff to take such steps outside of work as well, as these factors are not disconnected.

For staff returning to a new hybrid working environment, the **University of Leicester** (UoL) offers some practical examples of sustainable HE wellbeing initiatives.

*The pandemic, coupled with UoL’s shift towards more agile styles of working, has led to a greater recognition of the need to ensure effective staff wellbeing initiatives are in place. Despite the remote landscape of the workplace over the past year, UoL has introduced a number of wellbeing offerings ranging from a virtual wellbeing café on Fridays to online physiotherapy stretching and relaxation classes and a commitment to digital wellbeing by ensuring Fridays are TEAMS-free.*

Please see the full case study on the University of Leicester in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

With new working models on the horizon and the planned transition back to campus, **Staffordshire University** is keen to ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of staff remains paramount and have developed a new wellbeing strategy informed by the feedback from their work on culture and their culture survey. Their wellbeing initiatives include refreshing and relaunching the University's academic workload framework, including training for managers and staff and launching a new digital system to record academic workloads more effectively. They also recognised that the delays between staff departure and replacements were too long which impacted on the workloads for existing staff and have made a commitment to faster recruitment to enable better handovers. A review of their health and wellbeing programme suggested there was a disconnect between the decisions of senior leadership and how those decisions affected staff and they have put in place a structure for communicating key decisions, addressing peripheral issues and supporting staff more widely.

Please see the full case study on Staffordshire University in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

Recent experimental statistical data on Covid-19 in HE students within England from the Student COVID-19 Insights Survey (SCIS) highlight the following points:

- Over a quarter (26%) of students reported feeling lonely often or always, compared with 8% of the adult population in Great Britain over a similar period.
- Almost two-thirds (63%) of students indicated that their wellbeing and mental health had worsened since the start of the autumn term 2020; this level of concern has remained stable since January 2021.
- Although average life satisfaction scores for students have improved following a dip in January 2021 (8 to 18 January 2021) from 4.8 to 5.1 out of 10; this remains statistically significantly lower than the average life satisfaction scores for the adult population in Great Britain at 6.4 over a similar period.

[www.ons.gov.uk/bulletins/coronavirusandhighereducationstudents/latest](http://www.ons.gov.uk/bulletins/coronavirusandhighereducationstudents/latest)

**Therefore, it is important to remember that HE staff clearly play a fundamental role in supporting students, delivering education and research, maintaining safe environments, and mitigating the impacts of Covid-19 on the student population.**

A staged and staggered return to campus of staff should be considered by HEIs to grow and develop the sense of **community campus connectedness** within a well-developed support system. These ideas are further expanded on in detail within UCEA Guidance for employers and line managers in [Appendix 1](#) on how conversations need to begin on returning to work in a “blended and balanced” approach. Additional guidance is available in [Appendix 2](#) on generic concerns for all staff returning back to campus in a “new normal” environment.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) also offer some guidance in this area.

- [www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/talking-to-your-workers/index.htm](http://www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/talking-to-your-workers/index.htm)

The NHS has developed some guidance on how to conduct wellbeing conversations, which will be a key skill to nurture or develop for line managers in supporting staff.

- [www.nhsemployers.org/supporting-your-line-managers/health-and-wellbeing-conversations](http://www.nhsemployers.org/supporting-your-line-managers/health-and-wellbeing-conversations)

In particular, guidance on how to have a wellbeing conversation with a colleague and using a positive wellbeing action plan may be helpful.

- [www.nhsemployers.org/Having-a-well-being-conversation-with-a-colleague-How-to-guide.pdf](http://www.nhsemployers.org/Having-a-well-being-conversation-with-a-colleague-How-to-guide.pdf)
- [www.nhsemployers.org/Positive-emotional-well-being-action-plan.pdf](http://www.nhsemployers.org/Positive-emotional-well-being-action-plan.pdf)

The CIPD offers well balanced and practical guidance on how to conduct such reviews with potential vulnerable employees for the line manager planning to return to normal work.

- [www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/mental-health-support-report](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/mental-health-support-report)
- [www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/supporting-mental-health-workplace-return](http://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/culture/well-being/supporting-mental-health-workplace-return)

The British Psychological Society provides advice to both employee and employer on ways of coping with pandemic related anxiety and distress.

- <https://BPS/2020/09/Covid-related-anxiety-and-stress-in-the-workplace.pdf>

A basic leaflet has been developed by Health Education England as well for its trainers in the health and social care sector to talk about mental health:

- [www.minded.org.uk/LearningContent/LaunchFileForGuestAccess/670069](http://www.minded.org.uk/LearningContent/LaunchFileForGuestAccess/670069)

The links above may assist HEIs in developing a local mental health strategy. There may be some HEIs who are more developed and advanced with these “road map” systems having relevant “in-house” expertise or interest, e.g. health and social care academic divisions, in having a clear system-wide mental health strategy post-pandemic already well established.

### **What works wellbeing**

What works are an independent collaborating centre that develops and shares robust and accessible wellbeing evidence to improve decision making that is used by governments and businesses. They have developed a simple evidence-based model of what drives wellbeing in the workplace model: [Work wellbeing questionnaire and methodology](#)

### Proposed preventative model of an occupational mental health strategy

The following is a proposed basic workplace mental health strategy following a national conference delivered by the Society of Occupational Medicine in February 2021 for the health and social care sector. It may be useful in developing HEIs’ own templates.



**Primary interventions tackle stress at source:** Interventions at the primary level are the most effective and even though the perception is that they are costly and disruptive, many organisationally led initiatives involve little time and financial investment. Options include:

- A risk assessment approach: (for example, using the Health and Safety Management Standards framework) to diagnose the key psychosocial hazards and using the findings to implement interventions. Involving staff in shaping (or co-producing), options for interventions will optimise their relevance and acceptability. Creative approaches to facilitating employee involvement may be required, for example using virtual focus groups.
- Training line managers: Line managers play a vital role in managing stress and supporting staff. Therefore, having a broad overview as mentioned in this document, including skills of wellbeing conversations that are culturally competent, will assist in limiting stress for both the manager and the employee. A HSE toolkit is available to help managers assess whether they have the behaviours found to be effective for preventing and reducing work-related stress. This includes online resources to help manage staff in ways that prevent and reduce stress. [www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrpdf/rr633.pdf](http://www.hse.gov.uk/research/rrpdf/rr633.pdf)

**Secondary interventions help people cope more effectively:** These are far more common than primary initiatives, but generally less effective, especially if the source issue is not tackled, particularly at a group level.

- Initiatives include psychoeducation, training in self-care, mindfulness and cognitive behavioural strategies, acceptance and compassion therapies, gratitude journaling and reflective groups.

**Tertiary interventions support people back to work:** They seek to rehabilitate staff and adapt their working conditions to their needs and circumstances.

- Such interventions are typically implemented via occupational health (OH), as well as rehabilitative and return to work programmes, but line manager behaviours are particularly important in helping employees back to work.

- Good communication and support while off sick, inclusive behaviour on return, ensuring support at the team level, as well as sensitivity and knowledge of people (HR) organisational/operational procedures have been identified as crucial.

HEIs will do well to partner with in-house OH teams where applicable and properly utilise outsourced services where available as they provide a valuable resource. For those HEIs who directly employ OH teams, it would be prudent to ensure that professionals are adequately trained/skilled in supporting and advising on mental health issues among the workforce. Where OH services are provided externally, proper governance should be exercised in procuring and monitoring appropriately competent providers.

The professional well-developed relationships of HR professionals with OH practitioners is vital to the provision of competent and timely support for line managers in these challenging times.

#### **Key Takeaways for HEIs:**

- **Those returning to campus will need to make a psychological transition**
- **Staff anxiety will be reflected at an individual level**
- **Some will be more vulnerable from a mental wellbeing perspective**
- **HEIs should be mindful of wellness factors affecting individuals**
- **Listen to “voices” on campus when drafting wellbeing strategies**
- **A staggered return may help rebuild community campus connectedness**



## Section 3 – Managing Change

Before considering any previously tried and tested models for change it must be recognised that the Covid-19 pandemic has imposed radical change on conventional working practices in an unprecedented way. In March 2020, HEIs were thrust into homeworking mode overnight together with a multitude of other industry sector employers. This unavoidable ‘sink or swim’ approach left HEIs looking for ways to support staff, with some staff finding it more difficult to adjust to remote working and others adapting more easily. There are a range of complex reasons why some staff have fared better in response to Covid-19 driven changes than others. Now that the HE sector has over a year of experience of the pandemic to draw on, HEIs will want to ensure that the next phase of change – returning staff to campus - is managed as smoothly and sustainably as possible.

HE staff will have had different experiences during the pandemic depending on their role, HEI and personal circumstances. This means they will have differing expectations and preferences for their current and future work arrangements and work patterns. The HEI will also have specific needs in terms of delivering services to students and conducting research. A ‘one-size fits all’ approach will not be appropriate. HEIs will be seeking to consider individual staff preferences when outlining business and operational needs, the strategic objectives of their institution and ultimately the delivery of a high-quality student-centred teaching and learning experience, all at a time of great uncertainty.

Given that Covid-19 is likely to be with us for some time, HEIs will have to manage ongoing change at a faster pace than the sector is used to. Maintaining some robust change principles, incorporating appropriate pre-pandemic approaches to change management and sharing good practice will help to manage change in a way that is smooth and sustainable. This will best be achieved through effective communication with staff and embracing new models as they emerge, e.g. considering new hybrid working opportunities for staff.

The message/feedback to UCEA from HEIs is that they are taking a structured change management approach to the return to campus and this section sets out some high-level principles which HEIs may want to consider as part of their preparations for return to campus. We also include some links to the CIPD’s resources on change management.

### Principles underpinning the change management process

A useful starting point is to acknowledge that everyone is going through a change process in some form or another and that it is unlikely that many people’s lives and work will revert to exactly how they were before the start of the pandemic. One of the building blocks of change management is a clear vision which incorporates a range of perspectives as well as an organisation’s underpinning values. HEIs that have undertaken regular pulse surveys of staff during the course of the pandemic can use the results of these surveys to inform and develop their approach to managing the transition back to campus. Communicating with staff prior to and during change management is essential using a range of communications, methods and tools. HEIs will be able to draw on their experience of communicating with staff working at home and on campus during the pandemic. It is important to consider employee engagement in the context of the HEI’s business needs and work to get staff ‘buy-in’ to the HEI’s vision and values.

There are many well-established change management models and frameworks that HEIs may find useful including [John Kotter’s eight-step change model](#), [Kurt Lewin’s three-step change process](#) and the [McKinsey 7-S Framework](#).

From a discussion with the Learning and Organisational Development Manager at the University of Bath about the process in the context of the pandemic, the following points are highlighted for HEIs to consider:

### **Context and vision**

It is essential to engage and involve staff including identifying people who may be influencers within the organisation. It will help to have the buy-in and support from these staff, which may warrant including them from an early stage. Having all staff on board with an organisationally aligned vision will make for a smoother change management process. This may also reduce the scope for influential staff to drive through their own agenda at cross purposes to the organisation, which could be highly unsettling.

### **Engaging people**

HEIs can engage staff in a number of ways including through pulse surveys, or larger staff surveys and focus groups. It is crucial to obtain a range of perspectives of both academic and professional services staff and this can be done by utilising existing consultative mechanisms as well as academic fora and through facilitating different groups of people, such as interdisciplinary groups. From an equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) perspective, it would also be prudent to take into account potential impact on different protected characteristics being aware of the impact due to intersectionality in some cases. This might be achieved through tapping into existing staff networks such as gender or Black and Minority Ethnic staff groups. It is important to be aware of which staff are being given a voice and to identify where organisational knowledge lies within the organisation in order to share the specialised knowledge and experience of different staff within the HEI and therefore have better situational awareness. This will be relevant at all levels in both formal and informal contexts.

### **Communications**

Communications are two-way so it is important to actively listen, reflect and talk. Communication should be via multiple methods e.g. virtual staff briefing meetings, written and verbal and should reflect the values of the organisation and be clear and consistent. HEIs will already have access to a range of internal networks and hubs which may prove to be useful channels for disseminating information and encouraging discussion and feedback from a variety of perspectives. For example, an HEI's dedicated EDI Network might be a good starting point to communicate commitment to aligning change management objectives with EDI policy and values. It may be worthwhile to re-assess communication strategies in line with the unprecedented changes imposed by the pandemic as demonstrated below.

**The University of Wolverhampton** thought that it had been effective at communicating with its staff pre-pandemic. A year on, it realised that staff communication was not always effective (or, worse still, the University was unaware whether it was effective or otherwise) and involved limited two-way communications and engagement: telling but seldom listening. The pandemic and the crisis communications requirements that transpired kick-started a significant change in the 'old' ways of communicating internally. This was built upon when engaging staff on return to campus communications and the ongoing development of future working. The University identified the need for 'conversations' and a range of communication channels and there are now a number of these, new, old and revised.

Please see the full case study on the University of Wolverhampton in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

## Co-creation

Co-creation creates better buy-in and builds on best practice, bringing people together to problem solve and develop solutions. HEIs may want to consider enabling 'bottom up' co-creation as far as possible/practical and to involve staff and students via student unions in decision making based on the HEI's values. This inclusive approach can make for a smoother journey towards change because staff will have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in the change process. There are a number of ways in which co-creation opportunities can be mobilised, e.g. by establishing working groups or inviting participation via existing hubs and networks (*See the paragraph on Communications above*).

**Patrick Hackett, Registrar, Secretary and Chief Operating Officer at the University of Manchester discusses Manchester's co-created approach to hybrid working in his blog for UCEA. In the blog he says:**

*"Hybrid working has been referred to as the 'great working from home experiment' and we are certainly taking an experimental approach here at Manchester. For me, this is the exciting part – our values of courage and pioneering spirit in action, informed by the knowledge and wisdom of colleagues.*

*When we launch policies or programmes at our university they are typically quite defined and prescriptive. It's not very often that as a leader I will say: 'We don't exactly know how this is going to work'.*

*But I freely admit that senior leaders don't have all of the answers, so our hybrid working pilot approach has truly been co-created by colleagues. We've held open sessions with a wide range of staff to hear their views. Sometimes these involve a hundred or more people, sometimes like at our 'In Conversation' sessions we gather smaller groups to have a deeper discussion with members of our Professional Services Leadership Team."*

Please see Patrick Hackett's full blog, [Placing our values at the heart of hybrid working](#) on UCEA's website.

## Staffordshire University

Before the onset of the pandemic, Staffordshire University had launched the 'Staff Makes Staffs' culture programme in early 2020. The programme was overseen by a Culture Steering Group comprising a cross-representation of staff from across the University and commenced with a cultural survey aimed at identifying Staffordshire's cultural strengths and weaknesses and understanding what would need to change to help maximise performance. In summer 2020 the University engaged with all staff directly at a series of communication events to share the survey results and to have 'honest conversations' about the feedback that had been provided. During the next phase in their journey through change:

- Improvement plans were drawn up with staff feedback at heart
- Change champions were appointed to support local level cultural improvements that were identified at the communications events
- Four cross-university workstreams were identified designed to have a major impact on Staffordshire's culture.

The feedback from the communication events helped SU also to develop its return to campus arrangements in September 2020 including developing a framework for new ways of working entitled the 'Blended Working Framework' which took account of the feedback from staff.

Please see the full case study on Staffordshire University in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

### **Recognising and acknowledging current uncertainty**

It is important to appreciate that staff (and students) have experienced the pandemic differently. Senior leaders and managers should recognise the uncertainty of the times and the impact the pandemic and ongoing uncertainty has on staff and acknowledge that the organisation does not have all the answers – things are 'messy'. HEIs will gain more respect from staff by being open and transparent about matters outside of their control.

### **Coaching through change and training**

There is an opportunity to make change and the change process a positive learning experience. Developing a coaching culture and an environment of continual learning from each other will enable staff to work through problems and reach solutions. The role of coaches or mentors can be key in helping those who are particularly anxious about returning to campus.

HEIs should make their best endeavour to provide staff with the skills and knowledge that will be needed to effect any change; trials and pilots to test out new arrangements, systems or operations are invaluable in this regard. However, given the pace of change it may not be possible to pilot new initiatives, therefore HEIs should build in the opportunity to capture learning in real time and share across the wider institution as it is important to recognise that it is not always possible to get changes (such as designing new ways of working) right first time.

### **Knowing your culture**

Former ways of working have been disrupted, possibly on a permanent basis but the pandemic has provided opportunities to do things differently and has driven rapid and positive change. One example of this has been the rapid move towards online delivery of teaching and flexible working. The comments and views expressed in staff surveys are a key source of valuable information. Survey results are likely to be particularly helpful when considering staff preferences on a range of possible options for future ways of working and work patterns.

### **Other suggestions for managing the change**

- HEIs may want to consider appointing change champions as part of the change management process. A change champion may be a senior leader or organisations may decide to appoint change champions in every department. Change champions are **individuals within an organisation that volunteer or are selected to facilitate change**. The [Cambridge dictionary](#) describes a change champion as, “a [person](#) who is very [interested](#) in new or different [ways](#) of doing something, and is [determined](#) to make [changes happen](#)”. Change champions usually demonstrate a positive mindset/propensity for change.
- Run re-induction sessions for returning staff, for example, to clarify health and safety and social distancing arrangements so as to reassure staff and ensure they are aware they are required to comply with the various social distancing measures etc. Using videos or imagery is useful for staff to see what the campus looks like and how they are expected to behave once they get there.

- Bring back staff on a staggered basis rather than all at once – social distancing will be a driver for this in any case.

## HEIs' experiences

### **Aston University**

As part of their gradual return to campus, Aston University have developed a model for working they are calling dynamic working which is their take on hybrid working. During the consultation process with staff they have been clear that there needs to be a balance between personal and university needs.

Richard Billingham, Executive Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development told UCEA that in order to help Aston think about what ways of working would look like after the pandemic, “*we developed five principles to guide our thinking:*

- *Primarily, our work arrangements should be determined to best serve the needs of our students and other beneficiaries.*
- *Our work arrangements should foster a culture of collegiality: Aston is a community with shared values, joint activities and significant social interaction.*
- *Our work arrangements should be inclusive; we recognise that our staff have significant other roles that sit alongside work and we want to encourage a balance between the two.*
- *Our work arrangements demonstrate the trust and respect of our staff: we trust our staff to self-manage their work.*
- *Work arrangements should be established in line with university-wide principles but agreed locally based on function and culture – dynamic working isn't a one size fits all.”*

Please see full case study on Aston University in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

### **University of Northampton**

The University of Northampton (UON) started their journey on new and agile ways of working in 2018 as part of preparations for the move to their Waterside campus. The Covid-19 pandemic required further adjustment to ways of working and UON were able to reflect and build on their experience moving to the Waterside campus in managing this next tranche of change. UON know that new ways of working can only be achieved with the right IT and equipment, training, support and engagement and that good communications underpin any successful change management. As Deborah Mattock, Executive Director HR, Marketing and International Relations put it, “*Communications, Communications, Communications.*” UON developed a range of messaging techniques to bring their vision to life including roadshows with the VC, staff newsletters, website spaces for comments and recruiting early adaptors as ‘champions’. Without good communications the rumour mill will quickly fill in any gaps so UON developed a ‘myth-buster’ page on their intranet to dispel misconceptions. UON involved their trade unions early on in their discussions.

Please see the full case study on UON in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

### **Sheffield Hallam University**

The development of new ways of working, including hybrid working, is a first step in a wider move towards what Sheffield Hallam University is describing as an Extended Campus. This is the term that is being used to describe the future campus and fusion of physical and digital ways of working and environments. The period from now until the new academic year is therefore one of transition, but it is also the start rather than the end of a journey to working differently, building on trust and flexibility as having both benefits the organisation and the individual.

Whether the transition and move to hybrid working is a success will depend on leadership at all levels. Leaders will need to understand the importance of bringing everyone together, particularly the effective and equal inclusion of people working from home and those working in the office. Sheffield Hallam recognises that it will not get everything right the first time and that it is a learning and iterative process - at its heart this is cultural change, which is never easy. Staff are overwhelmingly in support of moving to a form of hybrid working and as an organisation it is aligning support behind a successful transition.

Please see the full case study on Sheffield Hallam in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

### **External resources**

#### **CIPD**

The CIPD have a range of change management resources to enable organisations to manage, enable and support change management initiatives effectively including factsheets and case studies. Please see links below:

[Change management](#)

[Change management and agility](#)

#### **Key Takeaways for HEIs:**

- **Taking a structured change management approach to managing return to campus will drive sustainability**
- **Effective staff communication is essential for a smooth transition**
- **Pulse surveys and focus groups can help to gauge staff perspectives**
- **Endeavour to onboard all staff with the change management plan**
- **Recognise and acknowledge current and ongoing uncertainty**
- **Change management objectives should be aligned with EDI policies**
- **Build a positive coaching culture**
- **Consider adopting trials and pilots, where possible, ahead of change**

## Section 4 – Hybrid working

The pandemic has had a significant impact on the way people work, live and study. The way that many people work may be permanently affected and there has been widespread commentary both in the UK and internationally on the benefits and disbenefits of working from home, more flexible patterns of work and the opportunity to reshape and redesign organisations. When planning the return to the physical workspace, it is important therefore to 'lock in' the positive aspects of the rapid switch to home working and the flexibility which that provided and to develop patterns of agile or hybrid working that benefit both organisations and individuals. The [2020 Employment Trends Survey](#) by the Confederation for British Industry (CBI) showed that 76% of businesses expect flexible working to become more common in their organisation post-pandemic and the [CBI/Ipsos MORI research](#) indicated that 47% expect most of their workforce to adopt hybrid working beyond 2021.

The fundamental underpinning tenet for the HE sector is that students are at the heart of what HEIs do. In terms of managing staff return to campus it is crucial to keep student needs at the centre of organisation and work design when considering future ways of working and work patterns just as another other business would keep their customer/service-users' needs at the heart of their offering. Many HEIs, for example, have expressed their intention to continue to develop and enhance their online learning and teaching provision in light of positive feedback from students but this is unlikely to entail a permanent shift to full-time homeworking for academic or professional services staff. The reality is likely to be a blend of on-campus and off-campus working informed primarily by business taking individual needs into consideration. There is no one way to implement hybrid working and the development of long-term hybrid or agile working will of necessity be an iterative process nuanced by HEIs' local plans and local policies.

The type of HEI will influence the scale and development of hybrid working. At a campus university, for example, the starting point may be that most staff are expected to work from campus but there will be assessment subject to individual and business needs. In an HEI with a city campus it might be that there is a more flexible approach to the requirement for staff to be on campus. If the provision of a vibrant campus is important for students (and staff) it follows that staff will be required on campus to some extent.

IT and Estates issues will be significant factors for HEIs when developing hybrid working models and policies. For example, whether a single or multi-campus HEI or a city based HEI, space is likely to be at a premium for most HEIs particularly as social distancing measures require sufficient space. It is unlikely that all staff could in fact return to campus at the same time and reduced office space, together with the need to utilise the estate effectively, for example, may be drivers for hybrid or flexible working. Hybrid working will depend to a great extent on technology to work successfully, for example, where there are mixed teams of remote and campus staff.

**Raj Jethwa, UCEA's Chief Executive blogs that students and flexibility are key when it comes to HE hybrid working. In his blog Raj says:**

***“When looking at higher education (HE) as a whole, it is important to remember that this is a sector of significant diversity in terms of employers. Each HEI will reach its own decision about the future patterns of work within the organisation. However, what has been noticeable over the last year is the desire among virtually all of UCEA's 172 members to learn from the experience of remote working. Our members are determined to offer work patterns which meet the desire of staff for greater work flexibility, while providing a world-renowned high-***

*quality learning experience for their students, many of whom are seeking their own flexibility.*

*A range of new hybrid working models is emerging among HE employers. Many have signalled their intention to continue to offer and develop a blended approach to delivering learning. However, this does not necessarily suggest a permanent shift to remote working. The reality is likely to be a combination of working on and off campus for most academic and professional services staff, informed by specific business and individual needs.*

*HEIs understand that students' needs and expectations should inform any organisational and work redesign when considering future ways of working and work patterns. Some are focusing on further developments in online learning and teaching provision in light of positive feedback from students. Others are looking at the balanced blending of off and on-campus delivery.*

Please see Raj Jethwa's full blog, [Students and flexibility are key when it comes to HE hybrid working](#) on UCEA's website.

### **Key issues**

HEIs may wish to agree the terminology they choose to use to describe hybrid working and what that means in their institution. There are important factors that HEIs will need take into consideration when looking to develop hybrid or balanced/blended working.

1. The expectations and needs of students.
2. The expectations and needs of staff.
3. Going to work is essential for maintaining good staff mental health particularly for maintaining social connectedness, social support and creativity.
4. Collaboration, innovation and effectiveness.
5. The physical environment, materials and equipment needed for roles which may need to be resourced on campus and at home.
6. External factors such as reducing carbon footprint – [a BBC news article](#) highlights Cardiff University as citing reducing carbon footprint as a driver for the shift to hybrid working.
7. Hybrid working requires a shift away from focussing on where work is done and how long it takes to focus on outcomes, outputs and trust, which means that performance management becomes more about coaching staff to achieve those outputs. Those on campus will have access to a wider range of resources than those who are working remotely therefore coaching and empowering staff in dispersed teams to achieve those outputs is critical.
8. Teams will need to consider how they work together inclusively so that staff who work remotely are not disadvantaged.
9. It is essential to consult with a range of stakeholders including trade union representatives when developing hybrid working models.
10. It is important to give due weight to the equality considerations when designing a hybrid working model to understand its impact on various groups of staff, for example women/care givers and those with disabilities have cited that reduced commuting as a result of remote working has levelled the work playing field and led to productivity gains.
11. People are social beings and organisations need to provide environments in which staff can 'spark' from each other, create, develop and move the organisation forward and working from home inevitably limits those opportunities.



### **Cranfield University**

Having listened to feedback from staff about some of the benefits of lockdown and homeworking, Cranfield University is piloting a new working arrangements framework (NAAF) from September 2021. The University initially surveyed staff to better understand their views on new ways of working and how to make it work for the University, stakeholders as well as for staff. There was a high level of engagement with the survey (66% response rate) with 88% of respondents saying their role would benefit from hybrid working. The key benefits highlighted by staff included less commuting and better work life balance and overall wellbeing.

The survey results clearly demonstrated that a 'one size fits all' approach was not the best solution for Cranfield and that high-level guidance with local implementation, was the right way forward for the pilot. Cranfield are aware that they will need to be flexible and listen and learn as the pilot progresses. The NAAF will provide staff with the opportunity to work in a balanced way, typically spending an average of 40-60% of their working time on site over a month, with the remainder spent at home. Cranfield believe that being on site for at least part of the time will help to reinforce and re-build a sense of community, as well as provide opportunities for connection and collaboration. Employment contracts will remain unchanged during the pilot, including the contractual place of work.

The key principles underpinning the scheme are:

- Enhance the experience of staff, students, business partners and the wider Cranfield community.
- Ensure that staff wellbeing is at the heart of the new arrangements, which need to be consistent with Cranfield's values and commitment to equality, diversity and inclusion.
- Implement in a way that is reasonable, balancing University-wide principles with local-level implementation.
- Maximise the efficient and effective use of resources, including estate and IT.
- Ensure the University's plans are flexible and adaptable throughout the lifetime of the next five- year corporate plan.

Please see the full case study on Cranfield University in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

### **Line managers and communications**

Effective communications with staff are essential for developing effective hybrid working both at the development stage and once operational. Good communications between line managers and staff teams are integral to ensuring that hybrid working arrangements actually work for all parties. Line managers will need to decide when and how often teams meet physically, as well as coaching staff as mentioned above. It is important that hybrid working arrangements are inclusive and this will involve managers being explicit about the need for individual staff to be responsible for keeping abreast of change and enhancing their digital skills, particularly in view of the continuing trend for online training and underpinning the student online experience.

HEIs may consider setting up special projects to progress hybrid working in their institutions, an approach taken by some HEIs below.

## Examples of approaches taken by HEIs

### **Lancaster University**

As a campus-based university, it is important to Lancaster University to retain its vibrancy on campus whilst responding to staff needs and expectations around flexibility. The University has established a project around future ways of working using the insights from the pulse survey at an institutional level to plan space and consider the differing requirements of staff from a contractual, equipment and personal perspective including equality, diversity and inclusion considerations. At division, faculty and departmental level the data is being used to inform local working practices whilst balancing the needs and expectations of students and maintaining a vibrant campus.

Please see the full case study on Lancaster University in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

### **The University of Greenwich**

The University of Greenwich has focused on preparations for welcoming students' and staff return to the campus in summer 2021. During lockdown restrictions the University developed interim flexible working guidance which has been monitored and reviewed to support returning to the campus. The University will continue to use this process to support staff and students' agile and safe learning and working whilst the pandemic continues. Concurrently the University has been reviewing its Strategic Plan, with the appointment of its new Vice-Chancellor. The plan is to build on some of the successes of remote teaching and working, and to support the University's longer-term vision for maintaining students' and staff aspirations for technology-enabled learning. This will take time, however information from pulse surveys, strategic reviews of the estate, and aims for a new digital and people agenda focused on wellbeing, sustainability, inclusion and talent progression will support this change.

### **The University of Wolverhampton**

The University of Wolverhampton has established an 'Agile Working' project which aims to bring about a significant culture change around performance management as managers shift to measuring outputs and outcomes together with appropriate systems and procedures to enable them to do this. The project group comprises stakeholders from across the University, including trade union representatives and is focusing on interim measures and longer term more innovative ways of working which will see a re-configuration of the University's estate.

Please see the full case study on the University of Wolverhampton in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

## Hybrid or agile working models

Hybrid working will require a rethink of how jobs are structured. All jobs are made up of tasks which change and develop (and sometimes become redundant) over time. Some tasks lend themselves to remote working, others can only be carried out in a specific location. Initially this combination of tasks will define the 'hybrid' nature of a specific job. But with a creative approach it will be possible for jobs to be restructured; and tasks to be automated or reassigned to change the mix of location requirements. Job redesign will be critical for those

employers ready to embrace the benefits of offering remote working options. There are a number of models which HEIs may find helpful when considering hybrid working including 'personas'.

### Personas

At its heart, hybrid working aims to improve people's effectiveness, enabling them to have more control over how, when and where they work. Matching work tasks to worker types and location can help HEIs determine the right type of hybrid working with their employees. An example of this could be to look at how much of a role is required to be on campus to support infrastructure or people practically versus how much of a role could be performed in a non-office location. It is also important to note work which requires multi-part communications will be done better face to face e.g. individuals who need to look at and consider complex information will find being in same location supportive. Other tasks which require the development of rapport and maintaining social bonds will also be performed better in same location.

Type of worker	
Agile/flexible worker	Can operate both remotely and on campus – will travel
Remote worker	Can undertake the majority of work online so can work remotely but is required to access an office/campus for team and training reasons/events
Office/site operational worker	Needs to be on campus to support students and staff practically/infrastructure

As part of their discussions with staff, HEIs may wish to develop some broad ratios for the proportion of time that various types of workers are expected to be on or off campus. For example, where appropriate and where it is possible to deliver the job off campus, e.g. an agile worker, staff may be expected to be off campus for 60% of the time and on campus for 40% of the time. For other roles this split may be 50:50 or 40:60. HEIs may find the Interaction Design Foundation's [article on personas](#) a useful reference.

#### Aston University

Aston University have used personas in their work on developing a new model of working they are calling dynamic working. Aston reviewed a range of roles across the campus and developed three personas as follows:

1. Campus worker, whose roles mean individuals will need to be on campus for the vast majority, if not all, of their working time.
2. Hybrid worker, who will need to choose a location to best suit the range of activities required as part of their role. Campus attendance will be required for collaborative activities or to use particular equipment, for example.
3. Remote/offsite worker, where most activities are best done off campus, such as work that is completed through a range of digital tools, for example. Although campus attendance will be expected on an ad hoc basis for creative meetings, for example.

Many roles will fit into the hybrid persona, but the extent of 'hybridity' will vary depending on the role.

Please see the full case study on Aston University in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

## Resources

The CIPD has published comprehensive advice for organisations including [lessons from the pandemic: practical guides](#) and [planning for hybrid working](#) including the short-term safe return to the workplace and longer term hybrid working. A video and slides from a CIPD webinar [on facilitating an inclusive hybrid working culture](#) are also available.

The CBI has developed a practical guide, [Adapting to hybrid working](#) which highlights the key considerations and top tips for businesses making the long-term shift to hybrid working. The CBI identify four areas where organisations should focus their efforts to transition effectively to hybrid working as follows:

- Health and wellbeing
- Recruitment and development
- Leadership, management and engagement
- Operations and practical support

ACAS has published [advice](#) for employers on how to consider, discuss and introduce hybrid working.

Advance HE has published [Hybrid Higher: Hybrid working and leadership in higher education](#), a leadership intelligence report for Advance HE members exploring the opportunities and challenges involved in hybrid working.

Timewise is a flexible working consultancy, working to help employers deliver [hybrid working](#). HEIs may find Timewise's article on [making a success of hybrid working](#) a useful reference. The article covers key points including:

- The main business benefits
- Issues to be aware of such as fairness, inclusivity, collaboration and innovation
- How to develop a hybrid culture

### Key Takeaways for HEIs:

- Lock in the positive and mutually beneficial aspects of homeworking
- Student needs will be paramount in considering future ways of working
- Consider scope for hybrid working within the context of the specific HEI
- A one size may not fit all departments/business areas within an HEI
- The terminology used to describe hybrid working should be applied consistently
- Consult with stakeholders including staff and trade unions when developing hybrid working models
- Hybrid working should be inclusive and digital training may be required for some
- Hybrid working will require a rethink of how jobs are structured and designed
- Consider setting broad ratios for percentages of time required on campus per role

## Section 5 - Leading a return to campus

As senior leaders think about the future they want for their organisations post-pandemic, they may also be thinking about *how* they lead return and recovery. This will include moving away from the command and control structures that were triggered during the March 2020 lockdown, capturing and embedding the best of the new ways of working that emerged during the first 12 months of the crisis and, perhaps most importantly, continuing to support staff health, wellbeing and confidence. As senior leaders consider the move towards more open and collaborative forms of leadership, they will be looking at how to reset cultures and governance to improve organisational resilience and ability to respond to opportunity. This chapter reflects a few principles alongside thoughts from leaders of HEIs which will serve as a guide to leading the return to campus.

*“While the pandemic has presented Universities with unrivalled challenges, for me the key to good leadership has been trust. The virus will not be defeated on campus by a heroic lone saviour. Part of inclusive leadership is knowing when to step back and let the experts take over, trust them to make the right decisions and provide cover to enable them to do their job with minimal interference and distraction. Confronting the virus has been a tiring and relentless slog, staff have been asked to go far beyond what may be reasonably expected of them, while students have borne with good grace the brunt of restrictions aimed at keeping the vulnerable safe. There is however light at the end of the tunnel. With millions now vaccinated, case rates inside many of our universities are consistently lower than the community outside. At the University of Northampton Waterside Campus there is no recorded evidence of transmission between students and staff where Covid safety measures were observed. With robust preventative measures ongoing, it’s now time to press play and get on with our lives once more.”*

*Professor Nick Petford, Vice Chancellor and CEO of the University of Northampton*

### Leading through crisis

As the nation went into lockdown in March 2020, HEIs triggered command and control structures, the kind used in business or in the NHS, with senior leadership responding day on day – sometimes hour on hour - to government and public health guidance, making rapid strategic decisions – often based on uncertain information - and cascading these to wider staff and student bodies. The situation demanded tight and focused leadership, inclusive of the right people, with immediate and effective communications and clear lines for implementation and accountability.

There is no doubt that the response of the HE sector to the pandemic has been remarkable, a galvanised, collective effort to make campuses Covid-secure, to move working, learning and support online and most recently to establish a national programme of asymptomatic testing. At the same time, the sector made major – though still overlooked – contributions to the national effort to combat the virus including to the science and delivery of testing, emerging therapies and vaccines.

At the heart of this response has been the commitment and agility demonstrated by HE staff. The pace of work and change has been unprecedented. However, as the crisis has continued, this sustained effort coupled with the wider consequences of the pandemic – distance from family, friends and colleagues, exhaustion and sense of loss, ongoing anxiety, frustration and uncertainty - is undoubtedly having an impact on staff wellbeing and confidence.

Leaders will be keen to use this change to set the tone for the rest of the HEI by focussing on the opportunities that have become apparent since the pandemic. The pandemic has presented valuable lessons, alongside its challenges. In particular the importance of encouraging a culture of reflection in their HEI where individual staff members, teams and leaders themselves learn from their experiences over the past year.

*“The role of leadership in ensuring the safe return of staff and students to campus simply builds on the previous 14 months of leadership actions. In times of uncertainty, it was important to restate the university’s vision and ensure that was preserved regardless of disruptions in the short term. The establishment of teams with clear delegation and authority to act in defined areas has been critical, all with accountability to an executive member. Teams are representative of groups but also of ability and characteristics to enable innovative thinking. Above everything, communication has been critical using frequent and regular two-way messaging with staff, students and stakeholders. As the university moves forward everyone knows how decisions are made and, I trust, what their role is. Explaining the unknown and the need for flexibility remains challenging, but an open and honest approach to what we face has helped understanding of this most challenging situation”.*

*Professor Elizabeth Treasure, Vice-Chancellor of Aberystwyth University and UCEA Board member*

## Key Leadership principles

### Clear communication

Candour, defined as honesty without ambiguity (Forbes - [7 Leadership Traits For The Post COVID-19 Workplace](#)) is mentioned as a top leadership trait in the post pandemic workplace. Communicating during the pandemic has presented challenges exacerbated by the fast-moving pace at which HEIs have had to adapt. At times the sector has been met with situations where there have been no clear answers and the messages to be delivered have not been popular ones. Leaders will need to continue to engage in open and clear communication, being honest about when they do not have all the answers. This builds the case for authentic leadership to underpin the basis for interactions.

*Leading at a time of a global pandemic has been a new and challenging experience for us all and, not surprisingly, has been dependent on the nature of your own particular institution. As specialists in health care and science, we have had the relative advantage of maintaining academic activity throughout and also the early returns of many of our undergraduate programmes. Despite this, the leadership challenges are enormous for everyone in Higher Education and has been associated with a great deal of stress and hard work. For me, supporting and motivating my team, helping enable them to do their jobs the very best they can, has been one of my most important functions. This includes empathetic and explicit signalling that you want your team to take time off to avoid burnout and to access support if they need it.*

*To a largely dispersed institution, I have regularly communicated and included positive messages of “what we do really matters” to staff and students alike, but*

*alongside this, acknowledged the individual difficulties of isolation and despondency. In my view, a leader should be realistically positive, with a clear sense of direction about the future, balancing “we can do this”, whilst understanding it is tough. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the leaders voice must be authentic and honest to be believed”.*

*Professor Jenny Higham, Principal of St George's, University of London and UCEA Board member*

### **Focus on wellbeing**

The pandemic has put health and wellbeing centre stage. It has also deepened understanding of the importance of mental health and wellbeing as individuals, as leaders, in workplaces and across communities.

UCEA is working with UUK to shape and implement StepChange<sup>2</sup> which positions a whole university approach to mental health and wellbeing across HEIs. This includes work with 12 senior leadership teams to develop a Mental Health Leadership tool to adopt a deliberate approach to their own mental health and wellbeing<sup>3</sup>, to recognise health as a strategic driver and to inspire/create the right conditions/culture to embed mental health and wellbeing across the student/staff experience.

Leaders will want to embed staff wellbeing at the heart of the return and recovery plan by considering whether to include it on the institutional risk register and making it subject to regular review.

*Over the past year the extraordinary challenges we have all faced across the university sector have been met with leadership, resourcefulness and humility by so many colleagues in our institutions. I for one am enormously grateful to so many colleagues and students at the University of Brighton, but the resilience and care that has brought us to this point needs to be maintained. There is so much to reflect upon and learn from this experience in terms of the world of work”.*

*Professor Debra Humphris, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Brighton and Chair of UCEA's CASAG Committee*

### **Leading through uncertainty**

Given the extreme uncertainty experienced during the pandemic, leaders will be very aware of the importance of staff motivation and confidence as face to face teaching and work resumes. They will want to co-produce further change with those it impacts and to ensure it makes sense to staff as well as meeting the needs of students and other business needs.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/stepchange-mhu.aspx](http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/stepchange-mhu.aspx)

<sup>3</sup> <https://hbr.org/2021/04/make-time-for-me-time>

[time?utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_source=newsletter\\_daily&utm\\_campaign=dailyalert\\_actsubs&utm\\_content=signinnudge&deliveryName=DM125903](https://hbr.org/2021/04/make-time-for-me-time?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter_daily&utm_campaign=dailyalert_actsubs&utm_content=signinnudge&deliveryName=DM125903)

***“If leading through adversity is hard, then leading through uncertainty is harder still.***

***Many staff are looking for answers and timescales which simply do not exist, and which will be subject to constant change as the new academic year approaches. In this context, effective leadership encourages staff to focus on what is most important and on what they can influence – at Central Lancashire, that is the student experience. This reminds staff what the University is all about and maintains their motivation and sense of purpose, which are crucial to effective performance.***

***Leadership means staying visible and available to staff – digitally if not physically. As staff work remotely, we must trust them and keep a personal connection, contacting them to check in not to check up.***

***We must also remember to listen. Giving staff a voice in their new working arrangements is the basis for the engagement which underpins future success”.***

***Professor Graham Baldwin, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Central Lancashire (UcLAN) and Deputy Chair of the UCEA Board***

### **New ways of working**

The sudden shift to remote working has been a positive experience for many staff, arguably boosting agility, inclusion and productivity. Noticeably it has led to a different interpersonal experience with colleagues and teams encouraging a deeper appreciation of lives and identities<sup>4</sup> outside work. Many predict that hybrid working<sup>5</sup> – across home and the workplace – will be a lasting outcome from the pandemic. This puts the onus on leaders to stay connected, to support the authentic interaction and to encourage the creation of new staff networks. But also to recognise the risk of digital exhaustion and wider risks to work-life balance.

***“Like other universities, we are thinking about what the next months will be like as the campus opens up. What will it be like to study at the University? What will it be like to work there? Indeed, what will ‘there’ mean? The pandemic has been difficult for all of us, but we have also learned a great deal. At my university, we have experienced ten years’ worth of pedagogical reform in a single year, and we have challenged our preconceptions over how we should work together. What is emerging is a more trusting approach, less bureaucratic and with greater flexibility in how, when and where we work. So many interesting conversations are taking place. Just a few days ago, we were discussing how we might use telepresence robots in future; can we imagine routinely attending meetings in which some of the members are present (really, in their own bodies) and some are represented by robots? This is a good example of the way thinking is changing, I feel. It’s not primarily a response to Covid, but it shows how our field of view has expanded over the last year.”***

***Professor Nigel Seaton, Principal and Vice-Chancellor, Abertay University and UCEA Board member***

<sup>4</sup> <https://mhfaengland.org/my-whole-self/>

<sup>5</sup> [www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work?utm\\_content=160903239&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_channel=tw-224412878](https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/worklab/work-trend-index/hybrid-work?utm_content=160903239&utm_medium=social&utm_source=twitter&utm_channel=tw-224412878)



### **Leading with the head, heart and hands**

Boston Consulting Group's [Leadership in the New Now](#) (2020) concludes that organisational success will depend on leaders who are empathetic as much as capable. The examples above showcase that HE leaders are already on this journey, one that will stand them in good stead as they lead the way for staff back to the campus.

#### **Key Takeaways for HEIs:**

- **Encourage a culture of reflective learning about the pandemic experience**
- **Harness the best of the new ways of working during the pandemic**
- **Prioritise staff health, wellbeing and confidence**
- **Consider placing staff wellbeing on the HEI risk register**
- **Look for positive opportunity when resetting the organisational tone**
- **Communicate openly, factually and without ambiguity**
- **Support agile decision making with a disciplined project methodology**

## Section 6 – The role of line managers

As part of the [Mentally Healthy Universities programme](#), Mind, the mental health charity, carried out a survey of nine pilot HEIs and emphasised in its recommendations about the importance of the role of line managers in having good open and proactive conversations with their staff around workload, priorities and wellbeing. These three factors, Mind concluded, are key to managing the return of staff to campus following the restrictions introduced by the Covid-19 pandemic, which have prohibited high numbers of HE staff from attending their workplaces for many months.

Line managers play a fundamental role in facilitating the return of staff to campus including supporting the psychological transition that may be needed. They will be tasked with supporting individual staff and teams but will also need to be supported in turn by their managers. There are several aspects to take into consideration during this process, including:

- Leading and facilitating team and individual discussions about working patterns, workload etc.
- Having good quality conversations with individual staff about their return to campus.
- Supporting staff in their initial return and transition back to the workplace and on an ongoing basis.
- Contributing to the development of hybrid working projects and policies at HEI and local level.
- Managing the transition to any new models of teaching or service delivery.

Further detailed information about managing the psychological transition of staff back to campus is provided in [section 2](#) of this guidance.

### Return to campus - team discussions

At department or unit level, line managers will need to lead and facilitate individual and team meetings to discuss the return to campus. Team meetings are key to managing the initial transition back to work and to any longer-term hybrid working. They are also a key element of creating a socially connected and cohesive work environment. In the words of Tracey Hulme, Director of HR at the University of Wolverhampton:

*“We have all learnt just how important effective staff communication is. Unlike pre-pandemic, staff are now explaining that because of what and how we are delivering, they feel far more connected with their university. It is really bringing our university to life after such a difficult time”.<sup>6</sup>*

Line managers are a key stakeholder group for HEI wide projects on hybrid or agile working. It will not be possible to develop effective hybrid or agile working without the input and support of line managers. HEIs should not assume that line managers will welcome this brave new world of hybrid working which impacts on all aspects of employment. Increased flexibility or hybrid working practices will naturally lead to a need for managers to adapt their approaches, potentially affecting their workload in the short to longer term. On a practical level it is likely to be more complex and challenging to manage staff and teams where there is hybrid working, particularly when there are a mixture of working arrangements within the team, with some staff working remotely and others who are campus based. Whether line

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<sup>6</sup> Quoted from the sub para ‘*If at first you don’t succeed..*’ included in UCEA’s case study with the University of Wolverhampton on the topic of *Working Together in Developing Future Working*.

managers themselves will be working remotely and for what percentage of time will also impact on the team and working arrangements.

Line managers will need to provide the right balance for team conversations as no doubt there will be different perspectives about a whole range of matters starting from anxieties and concerns relating to safety, to views about future models of learning delivery, to whether the HEI is doing enough to make the campus safe and whether the organisation is doing enough to support staff. The line manager will have their own view on these matters as an employee and the organisation will do well to provide channels for line managers to express their views in a safe space. This will help to ensure that line managers have a voice within the organisation, while avoiding the risk of conflating the views of line managers with those of their teams.

**Lancaster University's** Reimagining Working Practices programme encompasses many aspects of staff return to campus and line managers are seen as key to the project's success. Lancaster consider ongoing insightful conversations between managers and staff (supported by HR) to be crucially important and are empowering managers to try out things and for it to be okay if some things do not work. HR colleagues at Lancaster told UCEA that this approach will require increased emotional intelligence from managers, and that some will find this easier than others. It will require a change in how success is measured, on outputs and outcomes for example and not relying on presenteeism. Lancaster are clear that much depends on managers and have developed a comprehensive toolkit to support them to manage their staff successfully through the transition.

Please see the full case study on Lancaster University in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

### Support for line managers

HEIs already offer a wide range of training and development opportunities to line managers and may wish to review or refresh this offering and pro-actively encourage line managers to undertake training. The areas for training and development could include:

- Leading and facilitating meetings or discussions
- Team design and structure
- Managing remote teams
- Conflict resolution
- Line manager networks, support groups and action learning sets
- Performance management policies
- Employment policies such as discipline and grievance, sickness absence management
- Risk assessments.

HEIs will do well to remind line managers that they can also draw on expert advice and guidance on all matters relating to staff employment, learning and development and organisation development (OD) from Humans Resources (HR) and OD departments. It is also essential for HEIs to ensure that line managers themselves receive support and guidance from their managers.

## Sheffield Hallam University

The importance of local leadership and supporting line managers through management development is a key theme for Sheffield Hallam University as they transition to new ways of working. Sheffield Hallam is taking a coaching approach and their future leadership and development offer emphasises the importance of managing performance effectively. Support for line managers includes:

- Running workshops to equip line managers with the skills and confidence to undertake wellbeing conversations with staff
- Providing resources and information through corporate platforms to ensure line managers feel confident in supporting future plans for returning to campus
- Planning workshops on resilient leadership, leading change and having challenging conversations.

Please see the full case study on Sheffield Hallam in [section 9](#) of this guidance.

### Supporting individual staff and good quality conversations

The support that staff get from managers has a significant impact on mental health and wellbeing. National Wellbeing Hub Scotland's [wellbeing hub](#) has some [Top tips for supporting staff](#) including being available, showing appreciation, creating ways to maintain social connection and acknowledging the challenges.

Line managers will play a key role in establishing a culture of support for someone who is anxious about or reluctant to return to campus. In such situations a blended and balanced return to campus for individuals may have a positive impact on their mental wellbeing. Line managers may therefore work to agree a return-to-work/campus plan with the individual. Please see [section 2](#) on managing the psychological transition of staff back to campus for further information.

### Topics for line managers to consider in individual discussions:

- Recognise and acknowledge challenges.
- Adjust workload if needed.
- Signpost to other resources and sources of support such as Employee Assistance Programmes, wellbeing hubs, occupational health and counselling services.
- Undertake and review risk assessments.
- Consider taking a blended approach i.e. a gradual return to campus with a mix of remote working and/or completion of mandatory and essential training.
- Agree appropriate time scales for a return to the workplace – timescales will vary according to HEI and individual needs, but might cover a gradual period over four to six weeks to arrive at a stable, structured working environment/pattern.
- Consider whether there are any training needs or knowledge gaps, particularly for staff who have been furloughed e.g. is there information on new ways of working, changes to the team, changes to systems and processes that returning members of staff need to know about before they are back on campus.
- Allocate a buddy - consider allocating a named person to go to for day-to-day support to the member of staff as they gradually assimilate back into the campus.
- Arrange regular 1:1 meetings with individual staff members.
- Check in with returning staff regularly to enable a smooth return to campus and provide an opportunity for signposting to support services.

UCEA's [mental health and wellbeing webpages](#) signpost a range of mental health resources to support members and staff and include resources aimed specifically at [facilitating good quality line manager discussions](#) with staff including the following:

Source	Resource Type	Description	Link
Mind	Guide to Wellness Action Plans	Guides for line managers, employees and working from home/remote working to facilitate discussion.	<a href="#">Guides to Wellness Action Plans</a>
Mind and CIPD	People Manager's Guide	Section 8 covers how to support staff to stay well at work and provides an overview of Mind's advice on the subject.	<a href="#">Mind and CIPD People Manager's Guide</a>
Education Support Partnership (ESP)	Guidance	General advice for managers and staff on having open staff welfare discussions.	<a href="#">How to talk to colleagues about mental health and wellbeing</a>
NHS	Guidance	NHS resources to support employers in having health and wellbeing discussions.	<a href="#">Wellbeing conversations</a>  <a href="#">Health and Wellbeing conversations guidance</a>

### Key Takeaways for HEIs

- **The role of line managers is central to managing staff return to campus**
- **Line managers should consider individual and team discussions**
- **Discussions around workload, priorities and wellbeing are recommended**
- **Line managers should be reminded of access to expert guidance via HR and OD colleagues**
- **Line managers will need to develop a culture of support**
- **Line managers may need refresher training or development**
- **Line managers should also be supported by their own managers**
- **HEIs may wish to consider offering line managers access to a forum to express their views**

## Section 7 - Health and safety considerations

The situation in HE, and indeed across the country, is very different to what it was at the start of the 20/21 academic year and when returning to campus it will be helpful to remind colleagues of those differences.

At the start of the 20/21 academic year the prevalence of coronavirus (Covid-19) was such that HEIs would effectively be 'importing' an unknown live number of cases at the start of term, with no way of identifying who was infectious. This was made worse by the poor access to testing and delays in reporting, as well as the relatively high density of accommodation and the desire of students to form new friendship groups.

Now prevalence is lower and ready access to rapid testing means that infected asymptomatic students can be quickly identified and supported to isolate. Self-isolation support has improved and good social distancing reduces transmission. These measures fundamentally change the risk within the university setting.

The fact that other than where there was a clear breach of social distancing arrangements, no Covid-19 cases have been identified through the teaching environment is hugely encouraging and is testament to the hard work and dedication of the sector.

It is also important to note that nationally the impact of the vaccination programme is increasingly evident with the link between case numbers, hospitalisations and deaths being broken. More and more colleagues will have been given access to vaccination, with the most vulnerable being vaccinated first.

Using a variety of communication platforms to remind staff and students of these changes and the difference this makes to the Covid-19 risk can go a long way in reassuring those returning to campus. Podcasts, question and answer sessions with specialists and active email and social media campaigns echoing the government message will help to provide reassurance. However, it is important that the communication is in a language that is easily accessible to the target population.

Perhaps the most important step that can be taken in encouraging staff to return to campus is providing the opportunity for short unpressured visits to allow them to see the vast array of precautions that have been put into place.

### Communicating risk controls

HEIs have all implemented controls in line with risk assessments, but this needs to be constantly and clearly communicated to staff and trade unions. This extends to communicating the fact that risk assessments have been reviewed to include additional considerations such as new variants.

Staff and students should also be reminded about the continued need to comply with social distancing precautions. All of the factors already mentioned means that there will be a temptation to relax adherence to restrictions, but the risk has not yet passed. There is still danger from new variants and not everyone can be, or has been, vaccinated.

Reminding colleagues of the multiple layers of controls, social distancing, education, hygiene, testing, ventilation and face coverings will help to reassure colleagues and keep compliance high.

Ensuring that risk assessments are kept up to date as situations change, or new information becomes available and are then communicated, and that there is an ongoing dialogue with

trade union colleagues are all important elements in keeping controls current, used and effective.

As the UK Covid-19 roadmap becomes a reality, risk assessments will need to be revisited to match the risk levels and controls.

### **Travel**

Travel, particularly travel on public transport, is likely to be a source of anxiety for many staff. The social distancing and capacity limits on public transport have proved to be effective so far and reminding colleagues of this can be helpful, but some additional actions should be considered to support staff.

At the moment, the use of public transport should be a last resort as far as practicable. However, some small actions can make a significant difference. For example, providing some flexibility around working hours is an obvious starting point to help those staff who rely on public transport. Allowing staff to travel outside of the main travel peak periods will be appreciated and reduce risks. This is also the time for HEIs to remind staff of the green travel options available – cycle to work schemes, walk routes etc.

International travel is likely to prove problematic for the foreseeable future. Staff wishing to travel overseas on business will need to be prepared to manage a number of risks depending on where they are travelling. The level of Covid-19 security in the destination country may not be the same as the country of origin. HEIs will also need to be prepared for travel restrictions and quarantine requirements being imposed at short notice.

### **Physical space and distancing**

It is unlikely that everyone will return to the same physical spaces due to the need for distancing or that the campus workplace will return to 'normal' in the foreseeable future. Social distancing and mask wearing may be required for some time. The implication of this is that office layouts may need to be reviewed, or colleagues may be asked to work on campus on a rota basis. Particular attention will need to be paid to the cleanliness of shared workstations. Striking the balance between maintaining a cohesive team, a vibrant campus, social distancing and the needs of colleagues is likely to be challenging.

It is extremely likely that flexible multisite working will be here for an extended period. HEIs will need to consider policy, training, equipment and support arrangements for these new ways of working – please see [section 4](#) of this guidance on hybrid working.

USHA (the Universities Safety and Health Association) will shortly be publishing guidance on managing the health and safety aspects of multisite flexible working.

Those colleagues working on campus will need to be reminded of the importance of not only social distancing, but the physical controls e.g. the use of ventilations, the role of CO2 monitors, the use of face coverings and face masks etc.

### **Mental Health**

There is no doubt that the pandemic, social restrictions, uncertainty, bereavement and home schooling have all had an impact on the mental health of both staff and students. HEIs will need to consider their support arrangements – the availability of Occupational Health (OH) support, online self-help resources and Employee Assistance Programmes are likely to play an important role in the next few months – please also see [section 2](#) of this guidance on managing the psychological transition back to the workplace.

The demands of the pandemic have meant that for some the volume and intensity of work has increased. Proactive management of those factors which are known to be underlying

causes of stress e.g. change, clarity of role, support, demand, control and relationships will pay dividends.

Broader wellbeing and lifestyle medicine approaches are also likely to play an increasingly important role in supporting colleagues to manage through challenging times and situations.

### **Long Covid and Covid Anxiety**

The full impact of 'long covid' has yet to be determined, but what is certain is that HEIs will need to prepare themselves to manage a higher volume of both chronic fatigue cases and cases of anxiety. This is likely to mean a review of policies and a review of the availability of OH support.

### **Covid-19 Outbreak Management Plans**

Whilst hoping for the best, it is wise to plan for the worst. Planning positive actions as part of an outbreak control response prevents transmission, and a possible return to tighter social controls in a geographical area or settings. The Outbreak Management Plan is key to risk control as it ensures an effective and coordinated approach to a Covid-19 outbreak with our Public Health partners. Also, it provides advice, reassurance and connects with good practice around Track and Trace practices.

### **Further resources**

Please see links to [USHA guidance documents](#) on coronavirus risk assessments. USHA has developed a [short guide on managing self-isolation in shared university accommodation](#) and is also developing flexible working/DSE guidance which will be available to access in due course.

#### **Key Takeaways for HEIs:**

- **Remind those on campus to comply with social distancing control measures**
- **Use a variety of communication platforms**
- **Reassure the HEI community that risks have been reduced with multiple layers of controls**
- **Communicate messaging in language accessible to the target audience**
- **Offer short unpressured visits to campus to help prepare for the return**
- **Ensure risk assessments are up to date and that compliance remains high**
- **Consider offering flexible working times for those reliant on public transport**
- **Adopt an effective Outbreak Management Plan**

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## Aston University: hybrid working: a case study

This case study developed via a virtual interview on 23 March 2021 between UCEA and Richard Billingham, Executive Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development at Aston University focuses on how Aston plan to make hybrid working a success.

### Dynamic working

Richard Billingham's responsibilities include business continuity and emergency planning. Throughout the pandemic Aston have had regular critical incident response meetings and discussions there about how to start to open the campus for more onsite working was the catalyst for developing their thinking.

While the last 12 months have been strange, many members of staff have valued some aspects of how they have lived their lives over the past year. As much as possible, Aston want to allow staff to continue to work in a way that maintains some of the things they have valued. They are clear they are not going back to the way they worked in March 2020 - too much has changed and the opportunity right now is to harness the positives and create a fundamentally new way of working.

Over a gradual return Aston will be adopting a different way of working and have developed a model that they are calling dynamic working. It is their take on hybrid working. This has been developed in part from insights from staff surveys, which they ran to ask staff what has worked for them, sought feedback on how they were supporting staff and monitored their wellbeing. There were clear themes regarding positives and these were greater flexibility, improved balance between work time and time for other things including balancing caring responsibilities and also many people did not miss commuting!

Richard Billingham told UCEA that in order to help Aston think about what ways of working would look like after the pandemic, *"we developed five principles to guide our thinking:*

- *Primarily, our work arrangements should be determined to best serve the needs of our students and other beneficiaries.*
- *Our work arrangements should foster a culture of collegiality: Aston is a community with shared values, joint activities and significant social interaction.*
- *Our work arrangements should be inclusive; we recognise that our staff have significant other roles that sit alongside work and we want to encourage a balance between the two.*
- *Our work arrangements demonstrate the trust and respect of our staff: we trust our staff to self-manage their work.*
- *Work arrangements should be established in line with university-wide principles but agreed locally based on function and culture – dynamic working isn't a one size fits all."*

From these principles, Aston turned their attention to the range of roles they have across campus. To help them make sense of this, they developed three personas:

1. Campus worker, whose roles mean individuals will need to be on campus for the vast majority, if not all, of their working time.
2. Hybrid worker, who will need to choose a location to best suit the range of activities required as part of their role. Campus attendance will be required for collaborative activities or to use particular equipment, for example.
3. Remote/offsite worker, where most activities are best done off campus, such as work that is completed through a range of digital tools, for example. Although campus attendance will be expected on an ad hoc basis for creative meetings, for example.

Many roles will fit into the hybrid persona, but the extent of 'hybridity' will vary.

This change is not about working longer but working more effectively. It will require quite a significant culture change. Aston believe implementing dynamic working will set the culture: people act their way into a new way of thinking, they do not think their way into a new way of acting.

Aston see dynamic working as being distinct from flexible working, which is about working patterns, e.g. start times, finish times and hours worked per week. Dynamic working is about the most effective location and mode of working to maximise productivity.

### **People, digital, space and leadership**

There are four key pillars that Aston believe are key to making dynamic working a success:

- a. People policies that provide choice and empowerment, workplaces that encourage agility and collaboration and working styles that improve productivity and wellbeing.
- b. Digital technology that enables people to do their jobs in the most appropriate place is essential.
- c. Need to have multiple settings for distinct types of work, people should be squeezed into a space, but spaces should work for people.
- d. Good leadership is essential, need to focus on team and individual effectiveness and wellbeing, not presenteeism.

### **The importance of good management**

The importance of good management to dynamic working cannot be underestimated. This is about trusting and respecting their staff to self-manage their work and requires a particular way of managing people which is based on outputs and outcomes. It also requires managers to be able to coach staff and not to rely on 'tell' approaches.

Decisions about how best to manage work will be made locally, those that are doing the jobs and are managing the work are best place to know how the work is most effectively done. There will not be a uniform approach across the whole staff body. Previously work from home seen as a privilege of hierarchy, not anymore.

When making these decisions, there needs to be a focus on the team as well as individual effectiveness.

Particular team members that will need specific approaches such as junior staff members, for example. They will need to consider more carefully how they develop, this needs to be more intentional and work online, rather than being based on them physically observing more senior colleagues in their place of work.

Aston will also need to think carefully about how they onboard new members of staff, again this will need to be more structured and intentional.

Individuals will need to manage themselves more and take more responsibility for their wellbeing and resilience and for their learning and development.

Aston are providing support for managers to make these adjustments, such as training on managing outcomes and HR business partners are working with teams to think through how adapt and what framework is required to facilitate decision making.

They know that they will need to support managers on an ongoing basis, particularly as there will be issues that arise that they have not yet considered or thought through.

Aston are comfortable with the fact that they don't have all the answers yet, for example there may be some unintended consequences that no amount of thinking or planning upfront will solve. The key will be ensuring that learning is captured fast and the approach is iterated on the basis of experience.

### **Advice to other HEIs**

Richard Billingham urged other HEIs not to miss the opportunity and leave it too long because the moment for change will have gone. Sometimes the only way to adapt is to do.

While the executive team has to be onboard, HEIs can get stuck in 'analysis paralysis' and there is no substitute for just getting on with it. For example, there is a difference between piloting and prototyping something: with a prototype there is intention to do it.

Aston have moved at pace, broken down silos, broken down functional and physical barriers too, which they are confident will have significant benefits.

### **Key challenges**

It is so important to sell the concept to colleagues and across the organisation. The way they did that was to present it not as one-way street, that there will absolutely be a balance between personal and university needs. It helped that as an institution Aston were already thinking about estates and working space, so they built on that as a platform.

Aston were not sure how our local unions would respond to the idea, but the unions engaged early, and they were in fact incredibly supportive. They saw it as real positive for support staff and felt it could act as a leveller between the perceived disparity in status between academic and support staff.

But of course, some staff will not see much of a change in their personal working style because their roles require them to be on campus much of the time. It has been and will continue to be a challenge with how the 'campus cohort' are engaged in this change.

A further challenge will be for function and project teams to re-establish what it means to be a team in the model of dynamic working. Everyone will need to work on establishing a new normal. However not all the lessons have been learned yet, so there will continue to be challenges ahead that they will need to overcome.

### **Judging success**

There are a number of factors Aston will use to judge success. They would expect this change in way of working to have a positive effect on student satisfaction and on the quality of learning and teaching. They would of course also expect staff satisfaction to increase too.

There are also some hard metrics regarding productivity that Aston expect will improve, such as the effectiveness of processes. They will also need to further develop processes and exploit the digital investment which is being made to support this change in the way the university operates.

### **Further information**

This case study was developed via a virtual interview on 23 March 2021 between UCEA and Richard Billingham, Executive Director of Human Resources and Organisation Development at Aston University.

## Lancaster University: Reimagining Working Practices Programme: A case study

This case study was developed via a virtual interview conducted on 22 March between UCEA and Catherine Harrison Associate Director of People, Culture and Inclusion, Catherine Ellwood, HR Partner and Annette Robinson, Organisational Developer

### Introduction

The focus for Lancaster University is on balancing individual preferences and circumstances, and business needs regarding work models and patterns.

The work started with two pulse surveys, the first in June 2020. At this time, the University didn't know how long lockdowns and significant restrictions on movement would last. They wanted to understand what staff members' experience of working from home had been, what were the views about returning to campus and what people's preferences about how they wanted to work in the future.

They found that most could work successfully from home, that digital solutions that had been put in place to enable remote working had largely been successful; that many members of staff were enjoying the flexibility remote working brought, despite its challenges and communication between teams was working well. Staff were nervous about coming back to campus at that time and expressed an interest in retaining flexibility in the longer term.

By September 2020, the tiered system of restrictions was in place and a second lockdown was announced in October. Lancaster undertook a second pulse survey in January 2021 to check in on staff and explore mental health and wellbeing.

Staff were still reporting digital solutions were working well and that they wanted to retain flexibility when a 'new normal' was in place. However, staff were also now telling Lancaster that their wellbeing had been adversely affected by the continuing restrictions and this affected both professional and academic staff. Staff were feeling socially isolated and missing their previous connections and relationships from being on campus.

Most staff who completed the survey, consistently expressed a preference to work part-time from home and part-time on campus in the longer term.

The results were published, as both comprehensive reports offering various breakdowns of the data as well as more accessible summary reports. Senior leaders were asked to use the data in their areas to initiate insightful conversations; to discuss with staff how their concerns could be better mitigated.

This further insight, along with the results of the pulse surveys, have been used to inform planning regarding returning to campus, with proactive discussions with key stakeholders including the trade unions progressing throughout the summer term.

Lancaster had ambitions to introduce more agile ways of working pre-pandemic, however this has been the catalyst to develop that thinking.

### The Reimagining Working Practices Programme

The Reimagining Working Practices programme is wide ranging and encompasses many elements of what return to campus looks like including people, space and technology. Lancaster are going to use pilots and lessons learned to shape the programme going forward.

The approach will be collaborative; HR as a division has piloted a number of facilitated workshops with managers to think the various people elements through. Facilities have started to do the same to help people to think about the office space, and they envisage this to be rolled out across other Professional Service and Academic Areas.

Lancaster have had a reduced operating model on campus and that has demonstrated that there are many aspects of work that don't need to be done in-person. They haven't set any targets or have a need to reduce office space and want to retain flexibility to meet business need and align with any Covid-19 restrictions.

A key principle has been to consider and balance both individual preferences and circumstances, and business needs and for the reconciliation of those to be as local as possible. The business need is not just about the activities involved in different roles, Lancaster is a campus-based university and it is important not to lose that sense of campus vibrancy.

Whilst all staff will still have a place to work on campus, they are planning a hybrid way of working, to maximise the benefits of on campus and remote working. Lancaster know staff have missed collaborating in the same physical space and social interaction with colleagues in an office environment.

When Lancaster first started this work, they were thinking about a 50:50 split between campus and remote working, but quickly realised that this would build in rigidity and what staff told them they enjoyed most about their working arrangements over the past year was the flexibility.

Now, what they are working towards is having an understanding about when it is necessary to come to campus and what for, and managing diaries accordingly. They will continue to evolve what the 'new normal' looks like for them but they know there will not be a one size fits all approach.

Lancaster will also continually review the benefits of in-person working, once members of staff start returning to campus, to ensure they are meeting business needs and staff preferences. They expect to have to adapt and revisit issues, for example the pandemic itself will have impacted staff preferences, which may evolve over time.

Lancaster have conducted risk assessments, to consider health and safety issues and to help put practical measures in place, such as one-way-systems, which will need to be properly explained to staff when they return.

The office space is being re-planned to have fewer fixed desks and more collaborative space and they are rethinking what a meeting room needs to have – it is more complicated than just desks and chairs.

### **Key elements of success**

Insightful conversations between managers and staff, supported by HR, are ongoing and crucially important. They are empowering managers to try things and for it to be okay if some things don't work.

This approach will require increased emotional intelligence from managers, and some will find this easier than others. It will require a change in how success is measured, on outputs and outcomes for example and not relying on presenteeism.

Lancaster appreciate a lot depends on managers and have developed a comprehensive toolkit to support their managers to manage their staff successfully through this transition.

They have built on a strong leadership and management development focus that was already in place, where they have worked to embed 'soft skills' in managers and creating a coaching culture.

Also they have built on new institutional values which have been developed over the past 12 months, this is the perfect opportunity to have conversations to embed new values in practice, so

they are not just theory or words on a poster, e.g. respect for each other, building strong communities, and creating positive change.

They want to build confidence in managers, to lead when not in same space as their teams. There is a strong role for HR Partners, to build on and embed the formal learning managers have had.

### **Key challenges**

Lancaster are conscious that they need to take staff with them, it's a considerable change for staff after a lot of upheaval and uncertainty. Also they know that people are creatures of habit. When restrictions lift and the vaccine roll out is complete, many may simply go back to old ways of working, which of course, they are working to avoid.

There will be ongoing risks of building in discriminatory practice when rolling out this kind of change, for example women with young children work from home more often, are less visible and therefore risk not being promoted at the same rate as other colleagues. They have been proactive in seeking to avoid this.

Lancaster also know that young workers just starting out on their career journeys, who normally learn so much through observation, have missed out a lot during extended remote working. So, they need to find particular ways to support them, such as the recent establishment a 'young staff network'.

There is a risk that all the introverts prefer to stay at home and the extroverts come back to campus and they of course want to avoid a 'them and us' culture, between those that have high levels of flexibility and those that have lower levels due to the roles that they fulfil.

There are big tests up ahead, when there will be inevitable mistakes. How they respond to failure in this new way of working will be crucial.

### **Advice to other higher education institutions**

Communication is so important, and organisations can never communicate too much. Lancaster felt they could probably have communicated more. Also, they recommend not relying too heavily on the more formal communication channels and embracing informal methods such as virtual town hall gatherings.

Also they are clear that HEIs should seize the opportunity: if people go back to the office and re-engage in old habits, the opportunity to make fundamental change is lost.

### **Judging success**

There will be a lot of ways Lancaster will be able to tell that they have been successful. They would expect productivity, staff satisfaction, staff engagement all to increase. They would also want to be able to attract talent to come and work at the University that do not live locally, and importantly to also retain talent.

Most of all, they are looking forward to watching existing staff develop and grow and their students continuing to choose to come and enjoy all that Lancaster has to offer.

### **Further information**

This case study was developed via a virtual interview conducted on 22 March between UCEA and Catherine Harrison, Associate Director of People, Culture and Inclusion, Catherine Ellwood, HR Partner and Annette Robinson, Organisational Developer at Lancaster University.

## University of Leicester: New normal approaches to Leadership and governance on campus – A case study

In March 2021 UCEA conducted a virtual case study interview with Neale Goff, Director of Health and Safety at the University of Leicester (UoL) who shared leadership and governance insights relevant to the spring return to campus. This case study focuses on some of the robust strategies adopted by an HEI that has been constantly subject to the harshest restrictions throughout the pandemic.

### Approaches during the first lockdown

During the first lockdown in March 2020, UoL formed a working group chaired by the COO which was referred to as Lockdown Exit Group, or LEG. A range of sub-groups were also created to report into LEG on specific Covid-19 related areas, including (but not limited to) Health and Safety; Research; Education, Travel; Estates/Operations and Communications. LEG was instrumental in informing UoL's approach when planning to exit the first lockdown and membership comprised senior stakeholders from across the University. However, there was a need to change direction in summer 2020 when the government announced increased local lockdown restrictions for the city of Leicester and surrounding areas.

### Covid Oversight Group

As preparations for exiting lockdown were progressing well and Covid-19 was being managed on campus, the group changed to become the Covid Oversight Group (COG). The group developed the Covid-19 response framework to map out a journey from local lockdown through to the easing of restrictions in readiness for the start of the 2020/21 academic year. The Chair of COG sits on the Executive Board and all UoL decisions relating to Covid-19 measures must be referred to COG, reporting in turn into the Executive Board. Most recently, COG has been involved with formulating a high-level response to the government's spring road map out of lockdown. COG's response considers the University's approach at each stage in the government's road map and identifies the actions required from the UoL perspective to mobilise the increased reopening of campus. The areas specifically covered in COG's response are as follows: Operations; Education; Student wellbeing; Students' Union; Careers; Sports; Library; Student recruitment; Core activities; Facilities; Staff; Research.

From a governance perspective, the response formulated through COG has proved helpful in plotting out what is permitted at each juncture of the government's road map. This in turn feeds into UoL's leadership strategy, which is to work within the restrictions but enable safe operations. An example of how COG works in practice can be drawn from UoL's development of a programme of events for students. Exposure to Covid-19 has been relatively low at UoL even when students were on campus before Christmas and given that approximately 1,500 students are either already resident, or expected to return to halls in the near future (in addition to those returning to private accommodation), UoL is planning a programme of events that students can enjoy in a Covid-secure environment. The government's recommendations on social distancing reduces the scope of events that could be offered but UoL is looking to ensure they are in a position to act as they progress through the easing of restrictions. If a decision is needed on social distancing, sub-groups report their recommendations into COG.

The University works closely with and consults with its three recognised trade unions. Decisions developed through COG are shared with the trade unions at an early stage. Arrangements are in place at UoL for ongoing channels of consultation with trade unions, which helps to inform discussions at the monthly Extraordinary Health, Safety and Wellbeing Committee meetings. UoL's good working relationship with trade unions facilitates open communication, helping to influence and inform leadership decisions.

### **Leadership strategies relating to vulnerable groups**

One of the sub-groups reporting into COG is led by the HR team. This includes representation from the Equality Diversity and Inclusion and Occupational Health (OH) teams. This sub-group proposed to COG UoL's approach to staff classified as Extremely Clinically Vulnerable (ECV). The leadership decision taken as a result was that ECV staff would not be expected to attend campus. For those staff who were clinically vulnerable but did not meet the ECV threshold, a risk assessment process was established by the team which included an OH referral. The result of an OH referral informs UoL's decision as to whether a return to work can be safely accommodated on a case-by-case basis.

Like many HEIs, UoL has remained partially open since Covid-19 restrictions were introduced in March 2020 and some staff have worked on campus throughout the pandemic. From a governance perspective, appropriate controls have been put in place to ensure that those at increased risk are supported in working safely and getting to and from work. A high number of staff, including the vast majority of professional services staff are working from home in line with government guidance and will continue to do so for the rest of the academic year.

### **Governing new ways of working now and in the future**

Covid-19 restrictions presented UoL with the opportunity to review its estate strategy and working regimes. Like many other private and public sector organisations, the restrictions created by the pandemic have provided an opportunity for UoL to consider new and creative ways of working and operating the campus and buildings. In doing so, they have moved from a work base on campus to a position where, in future, agile working will be the new norm for many staff. This reflects a significant shift in working habits and their culture. In relation to academic and teaching staff, in September 2020, the University launched an "Ignite" program, an approach to formally blend on-line learning with face-to-face teaching. It is envisaged the new blended approach to teaching will continue post pandemic giving students and staff greater flexibility.

The pandemic, coupled with UoL's shift towards more agile styles of working, has led to a greater recognition of the need to ensure effective staff wellbeing initiatives are in place. Despite the remote landscape of the workplace over the past year, UoL has introduced a number of wellbeing offerings ranging from a virtual wellbeing café on Fridays to online physiotherapy stretching and relaxation classes and a commitment to digital wellbeing by ensuring Fridays are TEAMS-free.

### **Challenges on route to a new normal**

Strategically, the biggest challenge for UoL was interpreting and responding to the fast-changing environment. This included regular changes to government guidance and legislation that has at times been conflicting. For example, when tier restrictions were put in place, universities were largely exempt (with caveats) from some, but not all. This made it difficult to know how many students could attend both University and Students' Union events. UoL experienced a phase during the pandemic when certain parts of Leicester were in local lockdown and others were not, with the landscape changing almost weekly. This meant that staff had to be vigilant to keep abreast of guidance and requirements but also be very responsive and adapt to making changes quickly.

### **Onwards and upwards**

UoL has invested significant time and resources into making buildings safe, in meeting Government expectations and ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of staff and students. Neale Goff emphasised to UCEA that with regard to the spring reopening of campus *"the health safety and wellbeing of staff will be at the forefront of our thinking and will inform our decision-making processes"*.

### **Further information**

This case study was based on a virtual interview conducted by UCEA with Neale Goff Director of Health and Safety, at the University of Leicester.



## University of Northampton: Introducing mobile working: a case study

In early April UCEA caught up with Deborah Mattock of the University of Northampton (UON) about their experience of introducing New Ways of Working. UON embarked upon their journey to 'smart' or 'agile' working three years ago in preparation for their 2018 move to the new Waterside campus, which afforded less office space. While this undoubtedly left them better prepared than many, the Covid-19 pandemic still required further adjustment to ways of working. And 'mobile' working proved a success, which helped to further cement the practice of with all the stakeholders.

### Preparation for the Waterside move

Planning the new ways of working in advance of the move emphasised the change from a fixed desk, possibly in their own office, to mobile working on campus or at home. This involved strategies for decluttering, working online and reducing the number of printers, and centralising stationary to encourage the paperless, rather than 'no-paper', approach.

Most importantly it required three things:

1. Top-down support from the Office of the Vice-Chancellor who led by example
2. Investment in IT and office equipment – a laptop for everyone with a connected soft phone, investment in office furniture chair to ensure reasonable adjustment requirements were met
3. Massive training support for staff and managers, both on IT systems but also in support for behavioural management, managing and working as a 'smart' team, remote performance management training and etiquette for mobile working.

UON identified which teams would be most suited to 'mobile' working, leaving areas such as Finance, Payroll, the Recruitment team and the Student Academic Services teams working at fixed desks. A Professional Services building was established to provide office space for these teams.

### Staff engagement

Reflecting on the earlier experience moving to the Waterside campus, managing the new ways of working could only be achieved with a whole university approach. It required collaboration between Estates & Campus Services, HR, Staff Development, IT, Academics, and the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. The right IT and equipment, training, support and engagement was essential. As Deborah put it: '*Communicate, Communicate, Communicate – even when there is nothing new to say, Communicate*'. UON utilised a multi-channelled approach to communication to help share the vision and to allay any concerns. These included:

- Roadshows with the VC and other key leaders
- Regular dedicated Staff newsletter entitled 'UNify'
- Website portal spaces for comments
- Dedicated email inboxes for queries with a guaranteed individual response
- Information boards and exhibitions to walk staff through and share the Waterside experience
- Early adopters were recruited as 'champions'

Good communications are essential for change management as the 'rumour mill' will quickly fill any gaps. UON developed a 'myth-buster' page in their intranet to dispel misconceptions.

Teams were encouraged to develop their own ways of working and communicating within the seven News Ways of Working Principles. The need to be contactable, to be clear when people were or were not available and not to use emails by default were all emphasised.

When they first developed 'mobile' working, UON involved the trade unions (UCU and Unison) early, conducted and shared Risk Assessments for the whole university, and for Health & Safety, Estates, Staff Development etc. They had some difficult conversations and meetings with some staff, and with the trade unions who were initially not supportive of the move.

## Smart training

For 'mobile' working to be effective staff needed to be fully proficient with the new technology and ways of working. The biggest challenge was providing training and support, particularly to middle managers on remote performance management techniques, based on trust and managing by outcomes. For Deborah the benefits of staff motivation, wellbeing and flexibility outweighed the risk associated with performance management issues.

## Covid-19 lockdown

When the Covid-19 pandemic struck, around 70% of staff had already adapted to agile working, with circa 30% more fixed in an office location. Nonetheless there was the universal rush to equip all staff in the expectation of 'ticking over' for 12 weeks or so. The fact that lockdown lasted longer than anticipated proved that it was possible for even the staff who usually had fixed desks to adapt creatively and perform successfully, be it in conducting regular payroll runs, producing year end accounts, recruiting staff, enrolling and progressing students.

## Business benefits and staff benefits

Following the period of forced home working, UON conducted a survey of staff to gauge opinion of ways of working in the future. UON's aims were to listen to staff, recognise the positive benefits of mobile working and build on those rather than automatically default to return to previous work patterns.

Staff were clear that they enjoyed the flexibility of working at home with two or three days in the office, greater work/life balance reduced travel time and enhanced mental wellbeing. 42% of respondents said they specifically liked the blended way that they were working. (Another term for blended working is hybrid working). 18% of people said they liked working from home and the work/life balance that it gave them. In addition, 26% commented that they would like to be able to work at home sometimes as well as on site in future.

Online meetings worked effectively and presented an efficient use of time. Efficient working was also seen as beneficial for the organisation, improved communication and enabled UON to sell another building and reduce estates costs. Thinking more broadly it is also better for the environment to reduce the amount of traffic and parking on campus.

<b>Benefits for UON</b>		<b>Benefits for our employees</b>	
More efficient working	31%	The increased flexibility	30%
Improved communication (between staff and to students)	11%	Greater work/life balance	18%
		Reduced travel (and time)	17%
Improved customer service	4%	Enhanced mental wellbeing	8%

The results of the survey were shared with UON staff and used to inform the development of a Framework for Post-COVID Working which will allow the majority of staff to work flexibly. A full Equality Impact Assessments (EIA) was conducted on the proposed Framework. While there were some questions about equality, and a concern that presenteeism might be favoured, there was also recognition that flexible working could have a positive impact for individuals juggling caring responsibilities and might facilitate better career progression for women.

UON are also mindful of local competition for Professional services staff, with Nationwide, another large local employer having announced that they will offer 100% home-working. The Professional Services building established three years ago has just now been sold, with the obvious benefits to the UON balance sheet. For Deborah, the main benefits of the UON's blended way of working remains having a motivated, loyal and engaged workforce, who are happy in their work and know they are trusted and valued.

## Further information

This case study was based on a virtual interview with Deborah Mattock, Executive Director, HR, Marketing & International Relations, at the University of Northampton.

## Sheffield Hallam University – the transition to new ways of working - case study

In June 2021 UCEA conducted virtual case study interviews with Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) colleagues Sarah Akhtar, Co-Head of HROD - Organisational Performance and Culture, Tina Needham, Head of Facilities Management and three of the leads for New Ways of Working on Campus - Sharon Taylor, Head of HROD – Resourcing & Reward, Toni Schwarz, Dean for the College of Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences and Libby Wilson, Director of Transformation. Through the interviews they described the University's approach both to the return to campus for the 2021/22 academic year and the longer-term development of new ways of working. The conversations included the University's approach to developing the trust and flexibility experienced during the pandemic, whilst also balancing business needs. The importance of local leadership was a strong theme in this case study.

### A position of positivity

Whilst recognising that the pandemic has been an exceptionally challenging time, Sheffield Hallam is starting from a position of positivity, looking to build on all that has been achieved over the past 16 months and identifying which of the changes to maintain over the longer term.

Staff engagement and wellbeing have been key priorities for the leadership team. In autumn 2020 resources relating to healthy working practices were developed for managers to use with their teams and wellbeing was a regular focus running through the all-staff communications. The cadence of communication was high, with weekly all staff emails and a weekly video message from the Vice-Chancellor.

Sheffield Hallam conducted three staff surveys during the pandemic with high participation rates. The surveys asked specifically about remote working and line manager support, as well as a range of other topics. The results showed huge recognition for the role of line managers, especially in terms of wellbeing support, and an ongoing appetite for remote working as a part of a regular working pattern. Many staff also commended the support they have had during lockdown, and the provision of equipment to support remote working.

As they look back at what has been experienced and learnt over the last 16 months, Sheffield Hallam University is committed to retaining the positive aspects of greater flexibility – whether in terms of how staff divide their time between on and off campus working or in how they approach their use of space and resources.

### Planning the return

Alongside fortnightly briefing sessions and weekly leadership emails, the Senior Leaders Group has also used some of their longer quarterly meetings to consider the organisational development aspects of transitioning to a hybrid working model, where working both on and off campus becomes the norm.

The operational details and planning for transition have been undertaken by a cross-institution group, positioned at the 'silver group' level within the incident management governance arrangements that have been in place during the pandemic. Chaired by the Director of Transformation, with a steering committee of the Group Director of Estates & Facilities, Dean of College for Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences, and a Head of Human Resources and Organisational Development, this group has proved a very effective cross-academic and professional services forum for shaping the transition from a largely remote working model during 2020/21 to a new hybrid model for 2021/22 onwards.

The group is primarily focused on the short-term steps from June to September 2021 but is also informing and shaping the longer-term development and transition from September 2021 onwards. It is important to Sheffield Hallam that its short-term decision making is framed by its future strategy and that these early steps towards working differently are both a learning exercise and part of a broader direction of travel. There is no one pace in these early steps; local context and leadership is key to determining the business need and opportunities for greater flexibility in how and where colleagues work.

### **Listening to feedback**

During the early part of 2021 Sheffield Hallam started workshops and conversations across the organisation, beginning first with professional services and widening out to focus on academic departments, getting into the detail about what staff wanted to see continue and exploring an activity-based approach to what might be done on-campus and off-campus in the future. Staff survey data overwhelmingly indicated that colleagues would welcome the opportunity to work some days off-campus, which began to shape the plan for a hybrid approach to workplace. Throughout this, Sheffield Hallam has sought to recognise the differing experience of people throughout the pandemic, including those who worked on campus throughout the period. As in wider society, staff had mixed views about the idea of returning to on campus working after such a prolonged period of home working, with some very keen to return quickly and others highlighting concerns such as travel to work and childcare provision. Sheffield Hallam's approach has been gradual, with strong emphasis on the importance of an individual return to work discussion with the line manager prior to resuming on campus working.

Sheffield Hallam emphasised the importance of working with their recognised trade unions and have worked closely with them throughout the pandemic, meeting on a regular basis on key issues. Meetings with the recognised trade unions have been focussed and worked through some challenging issues but have formed a strong basis upon which to continue discussions and consultation on the new ways of working.

### **Approaching new ways of working**

Sheffield Hallam has developed a set of high-level principles which lay out the expectation that colleagues will work in a hybrid way where the role enables it, that space will be used more flexibly, that staff will be equipped with mobile working equipment as a step towards a single-device policy, and that the culture of trust and flexibility will be supported, promoted and encouraged. This includes moving away from a 'presenteeism' culture to one more focused on clear objectives and outputs. The expectation is that there will not be a 'one-size fits all approach' and that leaders across the organisation will develop the pace and approach which reflects student needs and the nature of the business.

In support of the new digital ways of working, Sheffield Hallam has been looking at how the University uses its space and in particular how to create more flexible and less single-purpose spaces. A first step towards this has been a move towards clear desks and already benefits have been realised in the ability to co-locate areas of professional services, thereby promoting collaboration as well as making more effective use of space.

### **The importance of leadership**

The role of senior leaders in successful change management is recognised and strongly supported at Sheffield Hallam. There has been highly visible endorsement and support for this work from the Vice-Chancellor and strong sponsorship from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Strategy and Operations). Team leaders and line managers have not only been critical throughout the pandemic, but also recognised as a key part of this important transition phase. Trust, flexibility and local leadership are the basis of Hallam's approach, working closely with the senior leadership team, heads of department and heads of professional services so that they in turn can support local managers in their areas.

### **Communicate well**

Clear, consistent and continuous communications have been, and continue to be, essential. Sheffield Hallam sends weekly update emails to all staff on the same day and at the same time every week, as well as weekly senior leader emails and a fortnightly senior leader briefing. There is

a dedicated section on the intranet containing guidance and additional details including specific information for managers and different groups of staff. This is also supported by monthly digital all staff briefing sessions and local team cascades. These communications focus on explaining clearly to staff what they are doing, why and how and to signal areas of work ahead.

### **Supporting line managers**

The pandemic has emphasised the importance of management development. Sheffield Hallam is taking a coaching approach and the future leadership and management development offer emphasises the importance of managing performance effectively. Current support for line managers includes:

- Rolling out workshops to equip line managers with the skills and confidence to undertake wellbeing conversations with staff (following feedback from staff surveys and in anticipation of how staff might need to be supported going forward). Training also covers the importance of inclusion.
- Providing resources and information through corporate platforms to ensure line managers feel confident in supporting future plans for returning to campus.
- They are planning workshops on resilient leadership, leading change and having challenging conversations.

### **Gradual transition**

As a part of planning the return to campus working as a part of a hybrid offer, Sheffield Hallam has been encouraging leaders to review spaces with new ways of working and teaching in mind, and has supported colleagues to come onto campus on a pre-arranged day to collect personal items, tidy their desk, clear papers etc. In some areas this has been a first step towards a clear and flexible desk policy, in others it has been about re-engaging with the space and being ready for the new academic year.

For all staff the focus has been on understanding what activities benefit most from being on campus and what activities can be managed more flexibly – whether on or off campus. This puts significant emphasis on the value of the campus for collaboration, use of facilities or resources, peer-to-peer engagement and student-facing activity.

### **Hybrid working and Future Strategy Programme**

The development of new ways of working, including hybrid working, is first step in a wider move towards what the University is describing as an Extended Campus. This is the term that is being used to describe the future campus and fusion of physical and digital ways of working and environments.

The period from now until the new academic year is therefore one of transition, but it is also the start rather than the end of a journey to working differently, building on trust and flexibility as having both benefits to the organisation and the individual.

### **Continuing the journey**

Whether the transition and move to hybrid working is a success will depend on leadership at all levels. Leaders will need to understand the importance of bringing everyone together, particularly the effective and equal inclusion of people working from home and those working in the office. Sheffield Hallam recognises that it will not get everything right the first time and that it is a learning and iterative process - at its heart this is cultural change, which is never easy. Staff are overwhelmingly in support of moving to a form of hybrid working and as an organisation it is aligning support behind a successful transition.

### **Further information**

This case study was developed based on interviews conducted by UCEA in June and July 2020 with Sarah Akhtar, Co-Head of HROD - Organisational Performance and Culture, Sharon Taylor, Head of HROD – Resourcing & Reward, Toni Schwarz, Dean for the College of Health, Wellbeing and Life Sciences, Libby Wilson, Director of Transformation and Tina Needham, Head of Facilities Management.

## Staffordshire University - A cultural journey through change - case study

In April 2021 UCEA conducted a virtual case study interview with Paula Cottrell Director of HR and OD at Staffordshire University (SU) who described the HEI's unique journey through change. This case study places workplace culture at the heart of managing and responding to the changes imposed by the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic.

### A Steadfast Approach

Before the onset of the pandemic, in 2019 SU had embarked on a programme of work to strengthen its organisational culture. Overseen by a Culture Steering Group, made up of a cross-representation of staff from across the University, SU launched the 'Staff Make Staffs' culture programme in early 2020 which commenced with a cultural survey aimed at identifying the University's cultural strengths, weaknesses and understanding what needed to change to help to maximise talent and drive performance. The insights from the survey would play a critical role in helping to shape the University's future workforce development strategy. The culture survey rendered an encouraging 62% completion rate and was completed during the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. SU made the considered decision to continue their work on culture, the feedback from which would help inform their learning from the pandemic and ultimately also helped to start planning their return to campus.

### Mapping the Journey

When they originally mapped out their journey, SU could not of course have predicted that Covid-19 would raise its ugly head. Fortunately, their timely work on culture found SU travelling in the right direction.

In summer 2020, SU took the first step towards embedding a new working culture by engaging with all staff directly about the culture survey outcomes. Led by the Dean of a School or Director of a Service and supported by the Culture Steering Group members, this involved holding a series of communication events to share the survey results and to have 'honest conversations' about the feedback that had been provided. SU was particularly keen to listen to staff views about what had worked well and not so well for them during the pandemic. Notably, attendance at these virtual communication events was significantly higher than it had been when events were held in person and SU noted that staff were more forthcoming with their feedback at these virtual sessions, taking the opportunity to provide significant and honest comments in the 'Teams' chat bar.

During the next phase in their journey:

- improvement plans were drawn up with staff feedback at heart;
- change champions were trained and put in place to help to support local level cultural improvements that were identified from the communication events;
- Four cross-university major workstreams were also formulated which were the priority areas designed to have a major impact on the University's culture in providing more of a structured career framework to harness and develop talent, develop work across boundaries and reduce silos. This helped to create an environment which drives innovation and look at ways to increase empowerment – all of these workstreams were developed as a consequence of the culture survey and communication event feedback.

The University had started to consider its return to campus arrangements and what that would look like in September 2020. The feedback from communication events helped in supporting those arrangements, with the following being put in place:

- SU was aware that health and wellbeing was a particular concern during the pandemic and it conducted pulse surveys with staff a further four times on a six weekly basis covering a

range of questions surrounding mental health and wellbeing, organisational and personal factors. As a consequence of the survey feedback, online training was made available, a dedicated webpage was developed and the feedback also helped inform the University's approach to a new way of working.

- In addition to its statutory risk assessment obligations, personal online assessments were developed for all staff to complete prior to returning to campus. The assessment result formed the basis of a discussion with their line manager in helping to prepare for the return to campus and reducing concerns that staff may have.
- SU also published internal guidance for staff on returning to campus in addition to re-induction campus videos which familiarised staff with the practical return arrangements being put in place.
- When on the cusp of planning for a transition back to campus in June 2020, SU ran Q&A and communications sessions, addressing the more practical issues about returning.
- Finally, SU took all of the feedback into account and mapped out a framework for a new way of working entitled the 'Blended Working Framework'.

### **Journeying towards a new working culture .....Blended Working**

In accordance with the framework they had developed, SU implemented a blended approach to working. Factoring in both the current and future stages of their journey, they communicated their framework to the trade unions.

The framework established an expectation that staff would spend the majority of their time on campus, with flex around the edges where work could be better performed away from the workplace. The framework set out a full range of activities, indicating where these would be best performed, e.g. remote/on campus. Although there would be scope for staff to work remotely, the framework recognised that there would also be a need to get together in teams which also reflected the feedback from staff that they wanted to interact with each other and missed seeing colleagues. It was also established within the framework that some roles would need to be solely campus based, e.g. estates.

### **Prioritising Mental Health and Wellbeing on Route .....**

With new working models on the horizon and the planned transition back to campus, SU was keen to ensure that the mental health and wellbeing of staff would remain paramount. Informed by the feedback gained through their work on culture and the survey, SU developed a new wellbeing strategy. The strategy focused on and beyond mental health considerations and included leadership and other wellbeing development initiatives, some of which were:

- Refreshing and relaunching its academic workload framework (based on feedback from the culture survey and a separate engagement survey) which included the provision of training for managers and academic staff on operating the framework and the launch of a new digital platform – co-created with staff in Digital Services – to record academic workloads more effectively.
- It was recognised that delays between staff departures and replacements were too long which impacted on workloads for existing staff. Commitment was made towards faster recruitment to enable better handovers.
- A review of the health and wellbeing programme suggested there was a disconnect between decisions of the senior leadership team and how those decisions affected staff personally. This led to SU putting in place a structure for communicating important decisions (e.g. academic board outcomes), addressing peripheral issues and supporting staff more widely.

### **Journeying on .....**

Although this is not the end of the journey for SU, they have found having a framework in place to be helpful in facilitating new blended working arrangements. An infrastructure has been put in place to log how the blended offering is being utilised and to understand take up of blended working. The intention is that take up will be reviewed under the framework and a decision made as to whether to adopt the same approach going forward.

### **Further information**

This case study is based on an interview conducted by UCEA with Paula Cottrell Director of HR and OD at Staffordshire University on the 23 April 2021.

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## University of Wolverhampton: Working together in developing future working: A case study

### Introduction

In March 2021, UCEA met virtually with HR colleagues from the University of Wolverhampton. Tracey Hulme, Director of HR and Joy Levesley, Associate Director of Organisational Development, kindly shared their experience in helping the University with its seismic shift in attitude and ongoing planning relating to future working. This case study focuses on how the University continues its progress in working collaboratively, determined to achieve improved, flexible and effective ways of working for the immediate new future.

The University's planning is being driven by a project titled 'Agile working', which aims to bring a significant culture change around performance management as managers shift to measuring outputs and outcomes together with appropriate systems and procedures to enable them to do this. What has been pivotal to this project, and all the challenges that the pandemic has thrown at the University, has been communications. But not the staff communications that were taking place before the pandemic. This has developed into engaging, effective, evolving staff communications.

This case study has been written a year after the pandemic first began to impact on the University and the HE sector as a whole. It has been a year of unprecedented challenges. But what this difficult period has seen is positive developments in how nearly all staff at the University can work more effectively and flexibly in future. It provides evidence in just how important engaging in effective communications with your staff is to develop major change.

### Good was just not good enough

The University of Wolverhampton thought that it had been good at communicating with its staff pre-pandemic. A year on, it realised that staff communications were not always effective (or, worse still, the University was unaware whether it was effective or otherwise) and involved limited two-way communications and engagement: telling, but seldom listening. The pandemic and the crisis communications requirements that transpired kick-started a massive change in the 'old' way of communicating internally. This was soon built upon in engaging staff on return to campus communications and the ongoing development of future working. The University identified the need for 'conversations' and a range of communications channels. There are now a number of these, new, old and revised, including:

**'Live' staff Q&A sessions** - These now take place on roughly a fortnightly basis and are hosted by the Director of HR, the Vice-Chancellor and the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. These are honest and open, and soon became a very effective way of responding to staff concerns and distributing key messages. The University's Communications Team reports regular attendances of up to 350 staff, from staff in all roles. These are also recorded and viewed by staff unable to attend 'live'. Staff have really embraced these sessions with precious, positive feedback, confirming that they are effective. Most of the questions relate to return to campus concerns.

**Weekly meetings with trade union reps** - These meetings have ensured that the UCU and UNISON reps are fully engaged in effective risk assessments in returning campus. This has ensured that there has been no unwelcome 'noise' at local level when it comes to returning to work, unlike at sector level.

**Employee Engagement Champions** - The University's established group of around 20 university employee engagement champions across all four campuses have been instrumental in two-way communications, reaching into each and every Faculty and Directorate. Their role is key in feeding into the 'Agile Working' (see below!) developments.

**Website working** - While Wolverhampton's website is such an obvious space when it comes to communicating to staff who are remote working, there are also excellent and interactive one-stop

shops on offer now. Internally, The Staff Wellbeing Hub is an interactive one-stop shop focusing on wellbeing provision for staff, offering presentations, chat options, reflection and fitness. Externally, the '[Road to Reopening](#)' section of the website includes a vast range of FAQs and guidance for staff.

### **If at first you don't succeed...**

Tracey explained that when it comes to communications, the past year has been a steep and bumpy learning curve, despite her experience. The biggest 'lesson learnt' has surrounded communications and the need to keep trying to succeed. Tracey explains: "We have all learnt just how important effective staff communications is. Unlike pre-pandemic, staff are now explaining that because of what and how we are delivering, they feel far more connected with their university. It is really bringing our university to life after such a difficult time."

### **Be bold and brave, thrice**

Joy was even more specific, relaying that prioritising staff communications was always difficult and that there used to be a fear that trying something new would not work. Now the HR team collaborates quickly and is more brave and ambitious when connecting with staff. Joy also says: "It made me realise that you need three strikes to guarantee important messages." The range of new and revised channels provided effective options. This was backed by a 'Communications Command Cell', a group of cross university representatives including HR colleagues and the Communications Team questioning itself and involving others on communications planning and what the vital key messages for the week should be.

### **Agility in future working**

So, what has all this effective communication helped to develop? While concerns around the pandemic and campus working have been vital it is the proactive and positive work to develop future ways of working that is developing the University's work culture shift. The 'Agile Working' project is being driven by a group comprising stakeholders from across the University (including trade union representatives). The project is focusing on interim measures and longer term innovative ways of working which will see a re-configuration of the estate and the performance of staff.

The project involves seven work streams: Estates and Space Utilisation (see below), Student Satisfaction, Employee Engagement, Learning and Development, Health and Wellbeing, Governance and Policy and Technology and Equipment. The new policy, setting in motion more agile ways of working, is in its final stages. It is bringing a significant culture change around performance management as managers shift to measuring outputs and outcomes together with appropriate systems and procedures to enable them to do this. While this case study doesn't go into all the details of the Agile Working project, it is clear that work and work patterns at the University will never return to how they were pre-pandemic. It is also clear that such project planning would not have progressed with such success had it not been for the role of effective communications.

### **Building for the future**

And finally...shiny, new buildings on any university campus are often criticised by staff and trade unions who question why the money isn't invested in staff pay rather than bricks and mortar. At the University, expanding rapidly in recent years to 23,000 students across four campuses, new and necessary building still fell short of requirements. With insufficient Estates being an ongoing problem the University is using Agile Working to tackle the problem differently. The University aspires to free up a significant percentage of their estate with agile working in place. An excellent financial benefit at the University as it adapts to future working and service provision.

### **Further information**

This case study was based on a virtual interview with Tracey Hulme, Director of HR and Joy Levesley, Associate Director of Organisational Development, at the University of Wolverhampton.

## Section 9 – Appendices

### Appendix 1

#### Returning to work after shielding: Guide for employers and line managers, UCEA advisory briefing

People previously considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable will not be advised to shield again from 15 September 2021, as the government agrees to end the requirement for centralised guidance for these groups following expert clinical advice. The closure of the shielding programme follows a pause to shielding guidance in place since 1 April 2021.

This decision is based on there being far more information available on the virus and what makes individuals more or less vulnerable, the ongoing success of the Covid-19 vaccination programme and the emergence of proven treatments, such as dexamethasone and tocilizumab, to support improved outcomes in clinical care pathways.

Since 19 July 2021, the guidance for clinically extremely vulnerable people has been to follow the same advice as the rest of the population, with the suggestion of additional precautions people may wish to take. Research and evaluation for some individual clinical groups will continue.

This will move the country towards the situation pre-Covid-19, where people managed their own conditions with their health professionals, who know the needs of their individual patients best.

For some who may have a reduced immune response – for example those who are significantly immunocompromised or have particular cancers such as blood (haematological) malignancies – and who are at risk from infectious diseases more generally, a return to routine individual advice from relevant specialists is now recommended, on a case-by-case basis.

This guide is designed to offer line managers /employers supportive guidance to help to transition staff back into the workplace in a safe and comfortable way.

Where this is not possible and it is agreed that individuals cannot work from home, employers should undertake a comprehensive, individual, workplace risk assessment reflecting the current working context (i.e. improved testing, mixed hybrid workplace attendance, full vaccination response and geographical relationship with environmental transmission risk).

All staff should continue to follow national education sector guidance on infection prevention and control and on the use of Covid-secure workplace strategies on campus.

Clearly Occupational Health (OH) and HR have an important advisory role to support line manager and employer decisions and should provide evidence based and sensible effective guidance if requested.

Emerging evidence may inform future OH guidance for clinically extremely vulnerable staff including for those who have not been able to be fully vaccinated, or staff who have a health condition that is associated with a weaker level of protection after vaccination. Employers will clearly need to keep abreast of these issues.

Despite the welcome reduction in individualised infection rate risk and hospitalisation, many staff may still be concerned about their risk of exposure to Covid-19 if they return to working on campus. These discussions that line managers have with them should be sensitive and understanding, and focus on both individual and workplace risk. (Also see the UCEA individual guidance for staff who have been shielding on returning to campus).

### **Practical steps to take:**

- A.** To review individual risk assessments for clinically extremely vulnerable staff who are currently shielding to agree a plan (blended and balanced approach) that will enable them to work safely by being physically on campus premises and other times agile working. This should be a graded approach towards a newly jointly agreed working pattern perhaps over 4-6 weeks. In some cases, this may mean continuing to work remotely for a longer term. In the spirit of the work employers have been doing to improve the health and wellbeing of staff, risk assessment conversations should be a safe psychological space for staff to discuss any 1:1 concerns they have and further support they need. It would be helpful if a buddy was allocated, who has been on campus premises already to reassure such individuals about new ways of working. There may be local environmental knowledge gaps that need supporting or a DSE review as well.
- B.** Staff who are on significant immunosuppressive therapy may remain at higher risk from Covid-19 and should be supported with an additional OH consultation to help ensure they are deployed to roles and sites with lowered risk of infection with appropriate training and protection if required.
- C.** Ensure, where possible, coordination between OH, HR and line management of staff, to enable staff to return to work safely and with continuous monitoring (as required) including regular check-ins with line managers. This should include the offer of ongoing psychological support at what may be a challenging time for these colleagues over the next six months (Spring 2022).
- D.** There should be locally-devised processes for bringing staff back to work, considering the current working context, to ensure that they are safely re-orientated to the workplace at what may be a daunting time to re-enter after perhaps 18 months of premises absence to a “new” unfamiliar workplace. Consideration should be given where additional training is required and supervision needed.

### **Finally....**

These staff are valuable members of the team and your organisation and returning them back to the work environment to make those very important social connections will help the wider university community and general society, as well the individuals themselves.

## Appendix 2

### Understanding your anxiety about returning back to normal work routines – Guide for staff

It's a frightening and uncertain time for all of us in the UK. As we remain in the grip of a worldwide pandemic, with many EU countries at least partially shut down due to what appears to be a third wave, others are struggling to consider immunising their populations and are confused about which vaccine may be best. Some of us are in UK areas where the coronavirus variant infection rates are getting worse. Other areas are bracing for what may come next with the UK government road map and opening up of local social and business environments. All of us are watching the headlines and wondering, *"When is this going to end? When can I meet my family and friends without face masks and physical distancing?"*

For many university staff, the uncertainty surrounding coronavirus and its unpredictable impact (even after 12 months) when we are trying to get "back to business as normal" in our educational environments remains the hardest thing to handle. We still don't know exactly how we will be impacted, how long this potential return to normal campus type activities will last, or how undergraduate/postgraduate students have been coping or will cope in completing their studies. All these factors make it all too easy to catastrophise and spiral out into overwhelming dread and panic. But there are many things you can do - even in the face of this unique and unprecedented crisis - to manage your anxiety and fears.

#### Stay informed

It's vital to stay informed, particularly about what's happening in your community, so you can follow advised safety precautions and play your part to slow the spread of coronavirus. But there is an abundance of misinformation on offer, as well as sensationalistic coverage that only feeds into fear. It's important to be discerning about what you read and watch.

- Stick to trustworthy sources such as the gov.uk, NHS, the World Health Organisation sources, and your local devolved country public health organisations.
- Limit how often you check for updates. Constant monitoring of pandemic news and social media feeds can quickly turn compulsive and counterproductive—fuelling anxiety rather than easing it. The limit is different for everyone, so pay attention to how you're feeling and adjust accordingly.
- Step away from media if you start feeling overwhelmed. If anxiety is an ongoing issue, consider limiting your media consumption to a specific time frame and time of day (e.g. thirty minutes each evening at 6 pm).
- Your university's senior executive team will share reliable and important updates. Please read them and if unclear, discuss with colleagues or supervisors.

#### Focus on the things you can control

We have been witness to a time of massive upheaval. There have been so many things outside of our control, including how long the repeated national lockdowns last, how other people have behaved, and what has happened in our communities. The reality has been difficult to accept, and many of us have responded by endlessly searching the Internet for answers and reading different science research papers. But as long as we have been focusing on questions with unknowable answers and circumstances outside of our personal control, this strategy will have got us nowhere - aside from feeling drained, anxious, and overwhelmed.

When you feel yourself getting caught up in fear of what might happen, try to shift your focus to things you can control. For example, you can't control how severe the coronavirus

outbreak is in your city or town, or concerns about outbreaks on campus, but you can take steps to reduce your own personal risk (and the risk you'll unknowingly spread it to others), such as:

- washing your hands frequently (for at least 20 seconds) with soap and water or a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.
- wearing a face mask in environments where you have been asked to do so.
- avoiding crowds and gatherings within communal workplace environments as far as reasonably practical - limiting prolonged human density contact time.
- if possible, ensure campus premises having adequate ventilation, if you are in them.
- keeping 2 metre of distance between yourself and others in offices or teaching/research environments. The planned UK government road map may shorten this distance in time.
- get plenty of sleep, which helps support your immune system.
- follow all recommendations from health authorities and your educational establishment as part of workplace Covid-19 secure instructions.

[www.who.int/docs/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf](http://www.who.int/docs/getting-workplace-ready-for-covid-19.pdf)

[www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)

### **Plan for what you can**

It's natural to be concerned about what may happen about your workplace job security, if your children have to stay home from school, you or someone you love gets sick, or you have to self-quarantine. While these possibilities can be scary to think about, being proactive can help relieve at least some of the anxiety.

- Write down specific worries you have about how coronavirus may disrupt your life. If you start feeling overwhelmed, take a break.
- Make a list of all the possible solutions you can think of. Try not to get too hung up on "perfect" options. Include whatever comes to mind that could help you get by.
- Focus on concrete things you can problem solve or change, rather than circumstances beyond your control.
- After you've evaluated your options, draw up a plan of action. An idea from Australia [www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/self-care-planning-during-coronavirus/](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/self-care-planning-during-coronavirus/)

### **How to stop "what-ifs" from spiralling**

Relinquishing our desire for certainty and control is easier said than done. If you feel yourself start to spin out into negativity or panic, grounding yourself in the present moment can stop the negative spiral and allow your rational brain to come back online.

### **[5-4-3-2-1-coping-technique-for-anxiety](#)**

The technique is simple yet effective: Bring your attention to your breath and your body. Focus all of your attention on the here and now: noticing the sights, sounds, and smells around you and what you're feeling in your body. Continue to breathe slowly in and out — gently bringing your mind back to your body and breathe every time it drifts — until you feel more calm.

### **Relaxation Audio-Guides**

[www.nhs.uk/moodzone-mental-wellbeing-audio-guides/support-now/wellbeing-apps/calm-amongst-chaos/](http://www.nhs.uk/moodzone-mental-wellbeing-audio-guides/support-now/wellbeing-apps/calm-amongst-chaos/)

### Stay connected — even when physically isolated

Evidence shows that many people with coronavirus - particularly young, seemingly healthy people - don't have symptoms but can still spread the virus. That's why the biggest thing that most people can do right now to make a positive difference is to practise social distancing. But social distancing comes with its own risks. Humans are social beings. We're hardwired for connection. Isolation and loneliness can exacerbate anxiety and depression, and even impact our physical health. That's why it's important to stay connected as best we can and reach out for support when we need it. Checking in on workplace colleagues' wellbeing can simply involve asking "how are you?" Even stating that "it's okay not to be okay", normalising mental wellbeing conversations.

- Make it a priority to stay in touch with friends and family. If you tend to withdraw when depressed or anxious, think about scheduling regular phone, chat, or MS Teams/Zoom dates to counteract that tendency.
- While in-person visits are currently limited, substitute video chatting if you're able to. But remember supportive face-to-face contact is like a "psycho-social vitamin" for your mental health, reducing your risk of depression and helping ease stress and anxiety.
- Social media can be a powerful tool—not only for connecting with friends, family, and acquaintances—but for feeling connected in a greater sense to our communities, country, and the world. It reminds us we're not alone.
- That said, be mindful of how social media is making you feel. Don't hesitate to mute keywords or people who are exacerbating your anxiety. And log off if it's making you feel worse.
- Don't let coronavirus dominate every conversation. It's important to take breaks from stressful thoughts about the pandemic to simply enjoy each other's company—to laugh, share stories, and focus on other positive things going on in our lives.

### Emotions are contagious, so be wise about who you turn to for support

Most of us need reassurance, advice, or a sympathetic ear during this difficult time. But be careful who you choose as a sounding board. The coronavirus is not the only thing that's contagious. So are emotions! Your employer may offer free in house counselling / psychotherapy sessions or access to a mental health digital platform. There are some recommended NHS emotional wellbeing apps [www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/](http://www.nhs.uk/apps-library/category/mental-health/)

### Take care of your body and spirit

This is an extraordinarily trying time, and all the tried-and-true stress management strategies apply, such as eating healthy meals, getting plenty of sleep, diaphragmatic breathing and meditating. Beyond that, here are some tips for practicing self-care in the face of the unique disruptions caused by the coronavirus.

- Be kind to yourself. Go easy on yourself if you're experiencing more depression or anxiety than usual. You're not alone in your struggles. [www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/your-mind-plan-quiz/](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/every-mind-matters/your-mind-plan-quiz/)  
[www.nhs.uk/oneyou/apps/](http://www.nhs.uk/oneyou/apps/)
- Maintain a routine as best you can. Even if you're agile working from home, try to stick to your regular sleep, meal, or work schedule. This can help you maintain a sense of normality.
- Take time out for activities you enjoy. Read a good book, watch a comedy, play a fun board or video game, make something - whether it's a new recipe, a craft, or a piece of art. It doesn't matter what you do, as long as it takes you out of your worries. Some more unusual ideas from young people.... [www.annafreud.org/selfcare/](http://www.annafreud.org/selfcare/)

- Get out in nature, if possible. Sunshine and fresh air will do you good. Even a walk around your neighbourhood can make you feel better. Just be sure to avoid crowds, keep your distance from people you encounter, and obey restrictions in your area.
- Find ways to exercise. Staying active will help you release anxiety, relieve stress, and manage your mood. While gym and group classes may be out or variable access, you can still cycle, hike, or walk. Or if you're mainly stuck at home, look online for exercise videos you can follow. There are many things you can do even without equipment, such as yoga and bodyweight exercises.  
[www.fitnessblender.com/videos](http://www.fitnessblender.com/videos)
- Avoid self-medicating. Be careful that you're not using excessive alcohol or other substances to deal with your heightened stress, anxiety or depression. If you tend to overdo it in the best of times, it may be a good idea to avoid such dysfunctional activities now.
- Take up a relaxation practice. When stressors throw your nervous system out of balance, relaxation techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, and yoga can bring you back into a state of equilibrium. Regular practice delivers the greatest benefits, so see if you can set aside even a little time every day.  
[www.helpguide.org/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief](http://www.helpguide.org/relaxation-techniques-for-stress-relief)

### **Help others (it will make you feel better)**

At times like this, it's easy to get caught up in your own fears and concerns. But amid all the stories of people over buying supplies and hoarding, it's important to take a breath and remember that we're all in this together.

It is no coincidence that those who focus on others in need and support their communities, especially during times of crises, tend to be happier and healthier than those who act selfishly. Helping others not only makes a difference to your community - and even to the wider world at this time - it can also support your own mental health and well-being. Much of the anguish accompanying this pandemic stems from feeling powerless. Doing kind and helpful acts for others, can help you regain a sense of control over your life - as well as adding meaning and purpose.

### **Finally...**

The higher education and research sectors have been at the forefront in the UK at Covid-19 vaccine development and finding effective treatments for patients and that is supporting recovery for the whole world.

Therefore, your unique role during this global pandemic remains essential. So being able to deliver your full job role effectively is vital for the "here and now" but also for the researchers and graduates of tomorrow, in all of your specific departments and divisions.





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