

Covid-19 All staff briefing 20 July 2020: Questions and Answers

Transitioning from lockdown

Return to campus

- Are we following the science or the government? As the government seem to be ignoring the science
- With the government now stating to get back to work on 1 August and saying that it is up to the companies to make it Covid safe, will this then speed up our return to work for all departments?
- Please could you confirm the exact date for our return to Campus in September?
- Why is a rushed return to campus desirable? Why not do as many other universities are doing and delay this until January at least?
- If staff are not front facing, why is there such a push to get them back onto campus where Working from Home is proving viable?

We are currently working towards a Covid Secure environment and we will work within the guidelines that are out there. From a legislative perspective, it gives us the framework and the structure to base our approach to all of this on but we've also been following the guidance from Public Health England and the WHO and we have to keep an eye on the science as well, which means keeping track of a myriad information sources.

The focus of the university has been to make the campus operational for students and staff by September and that is why we have developed our 11-step plan shared previously to open our buildings safely and in line with social distancing guidelines. This isn't any different to all other universities in the sector, which are doing things to prepare for their students even if that isn't in quite the same way as us.

It doesn't mean we are preparing for the return of all staff at once, and in fact it simply won't be possible in most cases. That is why the decisions around individual staff members need to be made through discussion with line managers and on a department by department basis. We are currently working on giving departments the information they need to make these decisions effectively.

- **Is there a schedule for which buildings will open, when - can this be shared please?**

There is a schedule for the reopening of buildings, which is being managed through our 11-step process. We will share that shortly on our Covid recovery pages on IntraBrunel. Please be aware that this indicates when buildings will be ready for occupation and doesn't mean we will then be expecting all staff to return to campus, something that needs to be managed carefully by departments in discussion with individuals.

Meetings on campus

- **Will meetings still be predominantly online to reduce risk of transmission? If so, what is the logic to pull in non-front facing roles back onto campus?**
- **Will meetings and events still take place remotely when campus opens?**

Arrangements around meetings and use of meeting spaces will need to be made on a departmental basis, however the current social distancing guidelines of two metres will still apply and where this wasn't possible meetings would be held online.

Enforcing social distancing

- **If students will be living in halls, how will their distancing be managed, especially in the evenings?**
- **No matter what guidelines we put in on campus, the problem is that students and others most likely will not follow them off campus and can potentially keep spreading the virus. How can we navigate this?**
- **Will students still be able to purchase and consume alcohol on campus? Alcohol leads to abandoning social distancing.**
- **It's one thing to have the campus "Covid-secure", but how are students going to be managed?**
- **How will you enforce the rules on people who don't wish to follow them?**

A huge part of our response to the current circumstances is to work with staff and students to take personal responsibility for their own actions. We have all become familiar with the behaviours that are expected of us during this crisis and we would expect staff and students to continue to adhere to these practices. We will also be putting in place all of the measures we need to in order to mitigate for the risk, but of course we can't eliminate it entirely should people choose to behave in a way not in keeping with the current climate.

- **Would the University consider fines for students who do not follow university guidelines on C19 in on campus accommodation?**

No, however we will be monitoring the situation closely and will have measures in place should concerns be raised from within the community.

- **How can we manage social distancing in a small office where few people are working?**

These are the issues currently being looked at on a building by building basis and it will be the responsibility of Heads of Department to assess the office spaces for 2m social distancing. One possible solution would be to arrange an on-campus rota so that there is sufficient space to maintain social distancing restrictions in office spaces.

Potential cases of Covid

- **Will the university state a level of illness/Covid cases that will trigger another university lockdown?**
- **What will be the response and procedure once each confirmed case is linked to campus?**
- **Is there any proposal to track and trace in the event of a confirmed case on campus?**
- **If staff or student tests positive what will the implications be through track and trace ?**
- **Businesses such as pubs or hairdressers are being closed if customers are tracked and traced as Covid positive would the university close in the event of incidents on campus ?**

We have existing structures and procedures led by the Infectious Diseases Working Group, and that involves Health and Safety, HR, Security and others. So, although this is a new virus and a new experience, the concept of an infectious disease that can spread quickly through a community is not new and our procedures are designed to manage these. We have very strong links with Public Health England and the NHS and if a case was confirmed we would work closely with these organisations to manage the situation, which would include finding out who the individual had been in contact with and alerting and managing the community accordingly.

We would also encourage staff and students to download the NHS track and trace resource and to participate in that initiative.

- **Government guidance and broad brush policy is one thing but not all spaces inside university are the same, and risk levels must vary, so, to what level are specific risk assessments undertaken for given environments within the Uni?**

All spaces within buildings are being assessed by the Building Custodians, and thorough risk assessments are being carried out as part of the process of reopening buildings.

Entrances and exits of buildings

- **Can we please not use the same set of doors in the same space for entry and exit? Eastern Gateway and other buildings have more than one entry/exit point.**
- **What about buildings where there is no possibility of a "one way" system - how will they be organised?**

This is an area we have been looking at closely as part of our process of reopening buildings, and measuring against mitigations we can put in place as well as the flow of people around buildings – all of which need to be tied together to come up with the most effective solution on a building by building basis. Where entrances allow for 2 metres social distancing we will look to adapt their use accordingly. This work is being done currently and building custodians will also have a big role to play in informing the way we use our buildings going forward.

- **It has been proven that the Dyson hand dryers spread bacteria far more than paper towel drying. Surely they should be disabled during these times?**

- **Where there are hand dryers, will the Uni also be providing hand towels? In St John's there is one hand dryer available in each toilet facility**
- **Can we please be re-assured that toilet and kitchen areas will have sufficient paper towels for drying hands and as in EGW there was always a shortage by the afternoon?**

All accessible toilets and kitchens will have hand towels installed and regularly restocked as part of our additional cleaning operations across campus, this is because the hand driers may be impractical for some individuals to use, however there are no plans to decommission hand driers across campus. The WHO advice remains to dry your hands using a paper towel or a warm air drier. Decommissioning hand driers will mean additional dispensers will need installing in all toilets across campus, which will not only add to the growing financial cost but also has negative environmental impacts as well.

Ventilation of buildings

- **In some buildings, the majority of their windows cannot be opened at all. This means that air cannot circulate. Please can Estates modify the windows so that they can be opened?**
- **In light of increasing evidence of long-range aerosol transmission playing a role, particularly when people are occupying rooms for extended periods of times, is ventilation of buildings and rooms considered?**
- **Given the problem with aerosol remaining in the air, how does the 2 metre measure prevent inhalation while walking through buildings?**

Questions around ventilation of specific buildings will need to be brought out as we work through our 11-step plan and in our work with Building Custodians particularly. The role of the custodians is to consider how the spaces can be managed effectively and to work closely with the Health and Safety team, and Estates, accounting for how staff may be impacted. What we won't be doing is asking anyone to work in a situation where their safety is compromised.

Toilets

- **The toilets in some buildings are very cramped and small now. How will capacity in toilets be managed effectively as these areas will be used most frequently?**
- **How will the toilets be policed? The Bannerman and library toilets are a disgrace at the best of times.**
- **We can't assume people will use 'common sense' we have seen in our everyday lives that it isn't always used. If five people enter the toilet because they don't know how many people are in the toilet as you say, no social distancing can be practiced. How will people know what to do if no direction is given?**

We have many toilets across campus and they will all have their separate issues that need to be considered through the work of Estates, our Health and Safety team and our building custodians. Sanitiser stations will also be in place outside every toilet on campus. But it's clear we will also have to look at this area more generally and consider some standard rules around our behaviours – it's something we will take back to the relevant task and finish group.

- **Is it possible to check all toilets and repair the taps and/or their electronic switching devices, to make sure the water is running from the taps?**

There are different experiences across campus and people are generally understanding of the fact that there are limitations to what we can achieve in a short space of time. It is important that the process we are going through for opening up buildings takes these individual circumstances into account and certainly looks to make repairs where needed, but we also have to be pragmatic about what can be done to adapt facilities. Part of the reason for having hand sanitisers outside every toilet and across campus generally is to ensure that staff and students can always take that step after using facilities regardless of the type of taps they have installed.

- **Would you consider putting temporary toilets on campus? I am referring to "luxury mobile toilets" that look like a caravan...not the type that builders use!**

This isn't something we would currently consider. It would make much greater financial sense to use the facilities we currently have in a way that is safe and well managed, and this should be entirely possible.

Hand sanitisers

- **When will the hand sanitisers and alcohol wipes be fitted/placed into offices/teaching rooms/spaces etc?**
- **Will the hand sanitisers be the ones that drop some in to your hand, as the ones you have to press will harbour more germs?**

We are in the process of placing hand sanitisers across campus, and this work will be done in line with our step plan for reopening spaces on a building by building basis. The hand sanitiser will be hand operated and similar to those used in hospitals, for example. That means touching the dispenser and then being able to sanitise your hands immediately afterwards. The dispensers will also be disinfected regularly throughout the day therefore further reducing the risk of virus transmission. We would also recommend that staff carry their own personal hand sanitisers if they have any concerns – these can be bought at most supermarkets.

- **With the use of hand sanitation, will moisturiser also be available in dispense form, long use does severely dry out the hands?**

We don't currently have any plans to supply moisturiser, and would ask that staff supply their own if they have any concerns.

Face coverings

- **If everyone is expected / required to wear face masks in shops and on public transport should we not wear our own?**
- **If making face masks compulsory in shops is due to the concern of the virus spreading amongst crowds, why are offices not a concern?**

For the time being, we are following government guidance and students and staff are welcome to wear face coverings on campus, but we will not enforce their use. That is one of the reasons we will be continuing the 2 metre social distancing policy and using Perspex screens and other measures to mitigate. As we have tried to show office and teaching spaces will look very different to how we remember them – furniture has been removed and spaces made safer, and we will also be mitigating by focusing on movement around buildings, staggered times on campus, etc.

In England, you must by law wear a face covering in the following settings:

- Public Transport
- Shops and supermarkets [as of 24 July 2020](#)

The university will be complying with this requirement.

- **Why are we not following government guidelines when it comes to Costcutter and not insisting wearing face masks but are choosing to follow government guidelines in other respects? If the government is now requiring face coverings in all retail / shops why aren't we? Can you please explain the reasoning on this specific guideline we are choosing not to follow?**

This rule comes into effect on July 24th and we will be adhering to it from this point forward. We will be reflecting and enforcing government guidelines in retail spaces like Costcutter.

- **Although masks aren't compulsory in the office, will they be supplied for those who would prefer to wear one?**

We are not currently looking to supply face coverings to staff and students but are ensuring mitigating measures are in place across campus.

- **What Covid-19 related measures will be in place for using the Library computers and open access computer labs and will these guidelines be published online somewhere?**

We will be providing keyboard covers for PCs for use in shared areas that can be easily cleaned with an alcohol wipe between users and we will be using signage and sharing online information packs to help inform staff and students of changes in behaviours. The specifics of how areas like the Library will be managed will be brought out through our detailed plan for reopening buildings, informed by the building custodian in each case.

- **What is the situation with regards to staff kitchen areas? Are these to be closed, and if so can we bring in refrigeration for sandwiches/milk?**

Again, all spaces are different and though kitchens are an area for which people flow needs to be managed effectively it doesn't mean that's not possible. That is why we don't have a standard answer just yet while we are working our way through the 11-step process we have identified. The role of the building custodians will be really important here because they have the local knowledge needed to understand the best and safest way of using these spaces.

- **Could you provide more detail on preparations for opening sport and social activities for students? What should we tell students and applicants?**

We are currently speaking with the Union of Brunel Students to try and better understand what options we will be able to offer in the new academic year.

Questions to be taken forward to the relevant Task & Finish Group:

- **Can the Cleaning rotas be published online as we all start to think of returning to work? I think seeing the rota, Floor plans and guides will help people to contemplate returning to work.**
- **Can we have monitors in high-vis walking around crowded areas reminding people what to do when we are first back (similar to Welcome Week advisors), but instead with a health and safety focus?**
- **Will the University provide a face-shield for the ones who might teach face-to-face, and if a member of staff requests it, please?**

Supporting staff

Flexible working/vulnerable staff

- **Will there be a long term plan to allow flexible working as it seems we are able to be as productive this way?**
- **If a role is able to work from home effectively, will line managers have the power to allow staff to continue to work from home full time until there is a vaccine/the risk is removed?**
- **Will "at risk" groups have a different schedule for our return to office? I am asthmatic and am worried about the speed at which things are opening up again.**

At the moment our focus has been on supporting staff to work from home in the short term while preparing to open up the campus. But we're also looking at business as usual and long-term options for staff who have found they are able to work from home effectively. There are a number of benefits here not just to staff but also to the University as we are tight on space in some instances, so this is something we'll be looking at closely.

Line managers are able to make these kind of decisions, but there are various things that need to be taken into consideration here. For example, can the individual work from home effectively without impacting on the experience of our students or on research? Can the individual work from home safely? And what's going on with the rest of the team? Vulnerable members of staff would need to take priority when discussing working from home and this may have an impact on the arrangements the team can make. It would be unlikely that many members of staff would be able to work from

home full-time unless they fall into an extremely vulnerable category and in these circumstances that's something we would look at on a short-term basis.

- **What accommodations will be made for parents who have to deal with staggered start times when schools reopen?**

This is another area which will need to be teased out through conversations between individual members of staff and their line managers. We will do our best to accommodate. HR is currently developing a checklist to help managers and to encourage discussions with staff prior to returning to campus.

- **If an occupational health report recommends that WFH is a PREFERRED option, will this be supported by management?**

Yes, the HR team works really closely with occupational health advisers because they are able to take into account the precise needs of an individual and the support needed. We would take an empathetic and reasonable position and accommodate this where we can.

- **If we're interested in having particular working from home days permanently in our contract can we apply for this now using existing procedures?**

We do have a flexible working policy that already exists and a number of staff have been able to make use of it. The current circumstances are unique - we've not had a situation like this before - so it might be that arrangements need to be kept under review currently.

- **Who are the in the high-risk category?**

The NHS has information about individuals who would be considered high risk [here](#).

- **Do vulnerable staff need to inform HR of their conditions or reasons they might be at risk (especially if not in an obvious category)?**
- **I thought HR would be doing a Staff Survey for the at risk groups?**

Members of staff who consider themselves high risk should let their line manager know in the first instance. They will shortly be looking at staffing and working from home arrangements within their teams. HR is currently developing a checklist to help managers and to encourage discussions with staff prior to returning to campus.

- **What will happen where staff are feeling anxious and unsettled about coming back on campus to work?**

We would encourage staff who find themselves in this position to talk to their line manager, or their HR Business Partner if preferable, so that we can look at what can be done to support you. This is a really difficult time for many and there may be some anxiety about returning to the campus, and there is support available from counselling to occupational health. The most important thing is to have that initial conversation and to raise your concerns.

Public transport

- **Making the university campus Covid safe is one thing, but for staff that commute in on public transport, Covid safety could be a challenge. For those staff that have to commute in via public transport, will homeworking be offered?**

This is a factor that should be considered by teams as they start to look at how they will operate and work under social distancing, i.e. who should be on campus and who should be at home. Staff are also encouraged to speak with their line manager if they have concerns about using public transport as it might be possible to make it easier by looking at things like start and finish times so people are travelling at less busy times for example.

It is currently the law that people using public transport must wear an adequate face covering to reduce the spread of the virus so we would encourage all staff to familiarise themselves with this information.

- **I have to travel on 3 buses to work and back home, what is the status about the bus? It would be great as I would avoid the general public and crowds on the bus.**

The new bus scheme has been put on hold for the time being while our focus has been on our immediate response to Covid-19, but we will be able to return to it shortly.

- **Given that we should be encouraging staff to avoid public transport - why has the cycle to work scheme been cancelled?**

Unfortunately, we have been unable to offer our cycle2work scheme this summer due to the fact that the demand for bicycles has increased beyond expectation in the current climate. We hope to be able to deliver the scheme once again later in the year.

- **Is there potential for a Brunel forum so people could set up car sharing from areas to reduce those who need to use public transport? If people are willing to share a car (with face masks).**

This is something we can look at – we will take forward with the relevant task and finish group.

- **Can we carry over holiday?**

The University has increased the amount of leave that can be carried over by staff from five to 10 days.

- **How long will the furlough scheme continue?**

The Government's furlough scheme ends in October.

Delivering education and student support

Informing our students

- **How are measures such as these being communicated to students. I realise there will be signs on campus but we are being asked (regularly) now. Is there going to be something sent to returning students detailing these measures?**
- **It would be great to know how this is being communicated to returning students.**

We are sharing information around teaching and the return to campus with students in a number of ways and this will continue – through emails before they arrive, in their welcome packs and in their online induction activities, which are being planned currently. We will also be continuing to share more general information and video explainers through the website. We are currently working with academic departments to put together information that can be shared with current and prospective students – this will be information specific to their course or programme and is also required by the Office for Students.

- **Can we talk about teaching/students? Everyone is concerned from staff point of view, but how are lectures going to be managed, what are teaching staff expected to do? Close contact one-to-one teaching, small groups, lectures, etc?**

This is information that is being worked on currently by academic departments and, once available, will be shared with current and prospective students.

- **Does this mean that clearing will happen only in campus or will it still be possible to work on clearing remotely?**

From 13 August, Clearing will take place both on campus and remotely, and we will also try our best to accommodate staff who would like to work from their own office on campus during this period. Clearing plans and schedules are being looked at currently and will be shared with those staff involved shortly.

- **Is there any information on disabled students who are high risk/vulnerable or shielding? Will they be expected to come to campus?**

Our dual delivery system of learning from September will mean that no student will have to come on to campus if they don't want to but still wish to continue their studies. There will be an online option for each programme and departments are working through the specifics of this now.

- **What is the opinion on student 'bubbles' to enable teaching in person and similar at the moment?**

Our academic departments are currently working through the specifics of how they will aim to deliver teaching from September. Our dual delivery approach means that students will be able to study online and, where possible, on campus in groups and as part of a rota system. We think this is the fairest way of delivering the teaching our students expect while social distancing restrictions remain in place.

Ensuring financial sustainability

- **Is there an update on our financial stability?**

We will be in a position to update on this fully in September following our vital Clearing activity.

- **Any more information on whether pay rises will be suspended this year?**

The cost of living rise is negotiated nationally and we will await the outcome of that. Measures specific to Brunel will be considered once we have a better understanding of how successful our recruitment activity has been.

Other

- **Teaching can be done online, research - cannot. After all papers have been written and all proposals are prepared - researchers need to come back to labs. When will it happen full scale? Today it is a very cumbersome procedure and the wait time is a few weeks for a 1-2 day work.**

We are working on making research labs more accessible as part of our building reopening plan, which will be informed by building custodians locally and Colleges more generally, however we have to be prepared to use all spaces on campus differently or at different times in order to reflect social distancing restrictions and to keep staff and students safe. For the time being we are working to prioritise research activity through the relevant approval process for research activity [here](#) and we really appreciate your patience while these measures are in place.

- **What is the scheduling of PDRs this year? Have not heard from the university at all.**

We are designing a more streamlined PDR process this year in light of the impact of Covid-19 on our time and workloads. This will ensure that staff are able to have supportive conversations with their line manager and recognition of their good work before and during this period. We've let staff know [here](#), and more information will be available shortly.