

Covid-19 All staff briefing 29 June 2020: Questions and Answers

Transitioning from lockdown

Social distancing

- **For places that are difficult to social distance, such as Costcutter as well as office spaces which do not allow for social distancing, are there any measures going to be put in place?**
- **Could another branch of Costcutter open on campus or the existing one be expanded otherwise people will be queuing for ages to get into the shop? Staff don't have that much time as they pop out to the shop during work**

Measures similar to those you will have seen in any of your local shops are already in place in Costcutter. These include queuing signage outside, limiting numbers within the store and appropriate signage to remind people of the need to maintain distancing while shopping. This will inevitably mean visits to the store will take longer as more people return to campus and you're advised to plan accordingly.

There is also another small branch of Costcutter in the Isambard Amenity building, where there is a plaza outside with chairs and tables to eat your lunch and two table tennis tables if you fancy a game. And we will be considering further pop-up offerings outside.

- **Are you also taking into account the circulation space needed to get around the shared offices? Where I work you cannot stay 2 or even 1+ metres around people just to get to your desk.**
- **In St Johns it is not possible to maintain 1m distance to enter the toilets, how will that be made safe?**

Yes, we are taking into account flow around offices, and if necessary we would put in place a one-way system. We'll be looking at differences in spaces and occupancy as we continue our analysis. Our plans will encompass various different scenarios and we'll need to work closely with individual departments to meet a variety of needs. Shared areas such as toilets will be part of this ongoing work, while signage will act as a constant reminder when entering toilets, etc.

- **Government guidance on social distancing has been referenced several times. If social distancing is no longer a government requirement, will we be back to business as usual on campus?**

Our planning has been guided by Government guidance to date and we'll continue to reference that alongside our understanding of our Brunel community and our specific needs. It is likely that some form of social distancing will be in place (and expected by our community) at least for the remainder of this year and we do not anticipate a sudden return to business as usual.

- **Can marquees be put outside buildings where we expect large volumes of students/staff queueing?**

Yes, marquees are used every September outside the Student Centre in the Howell building as Students queue to complete their documentation. We will assess where other marquees are required on campus.

- **Where toilet facilities are limited resulting in queueing - will temporary toilets be provided?**

The Task & Finish group will consider how practical this would be as part of wider discussion on toilet usage protocols.

- **Sateon records entrance and exit using the ID card readers. Could there be some automatic way of stopping the gates opening once capacity (whatever that is) is reached?**
- **How will you monitor the number of students in the Bannerman Centre?**

The reduced capacity of all rooms will mean a reduction in general numbers of people around usually busy areas but the practicalities of how we monitor the general flow of people are still being considered.

- **Are there plans to have a split of all staff teams in all departments so that A and B teams for instance are on campus on different days?**

Our current focus is on operationalising our buildings so they can be reopened safely. The next stage will be to look at how we return to general use of all buildings. From a solely practical view, current rules around social distancing mean that we won't be able to return to work in the volumes we have been previously, and that will very likely mean decisions being made within teams as to how that will work in practice.

- **How will you police the one-way system around campus?**

We will have directional signage across campus and our security team will monitor and remind people to adhere to the guidance where needed. But we will also be very reliant on our community taking personal responsibility for their own safety and respecting others by sticking to the guidance.

Safety on campus

- **How will open plan offices be made safer for staff who are extremely vulnerable and currently needing to shield?**

We are still working on detail for individual office spaces but we are currently working to a 2 metre distancing plan or, if we move down to 1m, we'll be looking at other mitigating factors such as screens, face coverings etc.

For those who are extremely vulnerable we are aware that the government has announced shielding ends at end of July so people could go back to work on 1 August. This doesn't change the advice that those who can work from home should for now. If you can't because it's not safe or effective for you to do so or if your job needs you to work on campus then we'll do individual risk assessments to ensure the right controls are in place for on campus work.

- **Lift usage would be a concern, what if someone coughed or sneezed in the lift and then someone followed in straight after?**

We'll be providing disinfectant wipes in all lift lobbies which we recommend people use both before and after using lifts to help minimise any transference from buttons alongside a single occupancy policy. This would also be coupled with individual measures such as ensuring you cover your mouth appropriately when coughing or sneezing.

- **When the Library does open are we going to be provided with PPE, gloves, masks, face masks as we work face to face with the students/staff?**

The use of face coverings is something that is being looked at closely by the task and finish group responsible, which is considering the best way of providing face coverings or other PPE where staff require them, but that would depend on the nature of the job. Individuals can also choose to wear face coverings that they provide themselves.

- **Is it planned for staff or student temperature checks to be undertaken?**

At the moment we don't think this will be practical— we have 37 buildings with multiple entrances so it is difficult to do this consistently with so many staff and students over such a large area.

- **How will shared PCs and laptops be kept hygienic between users?**

We will be providing keyboard covers for PCs for use in shared areas that can be easily cleaned with an alcohol wipe between users. For laptop loans we will expect staff and students to wipe down the laptop with an alcohol wipe at the end of the loan period and when collecting the loan laptop.

- **Will you be looking at the hand driers as they can spread the virus?**

All accessible WCs will have hand towels installed, 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.

- **Will the hand sanitiser be pedal operated to avoid touching?**

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.

- **Could bins be put back in the ladies to avoid rubbish on the floors?**

The Task & Finish group will consider how practical this is as part of wider discussion on toilet usage protocols.

- **Has ventilation in teaching rooms/lecture theatres been examined? Most lecture theatres do not have windows that can be opened to aid ventilation.**

Yes, that is being looked at and worked through by the team – an ongoing piece of work.

- **If staff have to use public transport, will it be possible for them to remain working from home?**

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.

Current government guidelines on using public transport can be found [here](#). 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, which also has advice on how to make your own face covering.

- **Are BAME staff classified as a vulnerable group even if they have not been required to shield?**

While the government haven't specifically listed the BAME community as vulnerable it's clear from the data that Covid-19 has had a disproportionate impact on the BAME community. For our purposes, yes, we are considering BAME staff as being vulnerable. Similar to advice issued to NHS employees, we will undertake risk assessments for staff

from BAME backgrounds and make appropriate arrangements. We are currently working with HR, Health and Safety and the Brunel BAME network to look at our approach, review concerns and address any issues.

Face coverings policy

- **Given increasing evidence that mask wearing helps reduce transmission, are there any plans to introduce a strong advice (or even rule) for students and staff to wear masks in indoor educational settings?**
- **Can we please make wearing of face coverings compulsory for students attending teaching sessions in person?**

This is detail that we are currently working through as we consider the difference between 2m and 1m+ social distancing and how we ensure the safety of our teaching and office spaces. At 2 metres distancing we don't necessarily need to mandate face covering but if we move to 1 metre we're likely to need to have other mitigation measures in place which may include mandatory face coverings. 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.

- **Has any thought been given to issuing a return to work pack to staff that are very concerned and perhaps to supply a few masks, mini bottle of hand sanitiser and a personal plastic device to open doors without touching the handle or for pushing lift buttons?**

This is an idea the Task & Finish group will consider as we get into more detailed planning. We're looking at what might happen almost three months from now so we don't have all the answers yet but we have time to plan and look at what other Universities are doing (particularly in countries where teaching has already resumed). We have time to plan and people to learn from to inform our thinking on this. The use of face coverings is something that has already been looked at in some detail by the task and finish group, which is considering the best way of providing face coverings where staff require them.

Returning to campus

- **Based on the second slide, are you planning to have all staff working on campus in September?**

Our current focus is on operationalising our buildings so they can be reopened safely. The next stage will be to look at how we return to general use of all buildings. From a solely practical view, current rules around social distancing mean that we won't be able to return to work in the volumes we have been previously, and that will very likely mean decisions being made within teams as to how that will work in practice.

- **Will I get reasonable notice when I need to return to campus?**

Yes, we won't be asking people to come in at short notice. We'll have a planned approach. We know that people will have arrangements to make at home (e.g. with childcare etc.) before returning to campus.

- **Do we still need to fill in a Risk Assessment form when we go onto campus?**

For the time being yes, all visits to campus (eg to collect belongings/files/equipment) must be approved by your Head of Department using the relevant approval process:

- Access to campus for research activities
- Access to campus for Professional Services and Administrative staff

Please visit the Health and Safety website for the [application process to attend campus](#).

- **Brunel's current guidance is those who are shielded or medically vulnerable don't go on campus. What is the guidance now shielding is being paused at the end of July especially as the uni is being slowly opened?**

Yes, the government has announced shielding ends at end of July so people technically could return to work on 1 August. This doesn't change the advice that those who can work from home should for now. Our approach for all vulnerable groups will continue to be if you can work from home you should, if you can't because it's not safe or effective for you to do so or if your job needs you to work on campus then we'll do individual risk assessments to ensure the right controls are in place.

- **There is uncertainty over a second wave in December, hence a number of Universities are not looking to reopen fully until after December especially with those who can still work from home. Is Brunel expecting to be back on campus from September?**

We are planning for campus to be operational from September but from a solely practical view, current rules around social distancing mean that we won't be able to return to work in the volumes we have been previously, and that will very likely mean decisions being made within teams as to how that will work in practice. Our dual delivery approach is designed to offer a combination of on-campus and virtual learning options from the beginning of the academic year.

- **In addition to following the government guidelines, has Brunel considered the increase in new cases we've seen in countries that have eased their lockdowns? Are there contingency plans being made for a second wave?**

Our focus has been on how we open up again but we have learned a lot over the last few months and should we need to go back into lockdown we will be in a much improved position to that we faced in March. Scenario planning for future lockdowns is on our agenda.

Reopening campus buildings

- **When will the library will open for collecting books?**

While government guidance has changed so libraries technically can open from 4 July we will be looking at the library as part of our building operationalisation plans. Bannerman is being prepared to open to support clearing and summer exams and revision and the timing for reopening the library will be part of the detailed plans for this.

- **Are there any plans yet for the re-opening of the gym, and what will that look like?**

The gym is not currently able to open under government legislation but planning is underway behind the scenes to prepare for when it can.

- **When will there be computing facilities open on site for students to use? Some students are currently unable to study or complete summer (re)assessments because they do not have a functioning laptop.**

Facilities will be offered to students who need them for summer assessments as a priority. These details are currently being finalised and we'll be communicating directly with students shortly.

- **When planning the opening of lab/offices will we be provided sanitisers, signage etc is there a central place to request this or are we putting in local POs to buy sufficient supplies for each area**

General building signage and sanitisers for communal areas will be sourced and maintained centrally. We will purchase a stock of alcohol wipes which will be distributed to offices before the buildings open. Going forward, packets of alcohol wipes will be held at the Distribution Centre and departments can order them online from the DC as paper towels and soap is ordered now.

- **Given the Government's forthcoming relaxation of social distancing rules, it becomes more feasible to re-start occupancy of potentially more confined spaces such as research laboratories. Any news on when this will happen?**

At present the government and university advice is to continue working from home where this is possible – if you have concerns around this or need further guidance you should contact your line manager.

We are developing a plan to enable our transition back to campus, prioritising the safety and wellbeing of staff, students and visitors. We are working to government and Public Health England advice and considering the needs of the more vulnerable members of our community as part of the process. This will mean opening the campus gradually while continuing to follow government guidance on safe working and social distancing.

A Building Preparation Checklist and Schedule has been established, which sets out the measures that need to be in place before a building can be opened fully – this includes introduction of signage, space planning and cleaning procedures amongst other measures

Specific functional areas within buildings are being operationalised in phases between now and September, prioritising spaces required for essential work. These are being prioritised as follows:

- Priority 1: Research labs
- Priority 2: Spaces required for student facing support (eg clearing, TPOs etc)
- Priority 3: Exam and revision spaces for summer exams
- Priority 4: Operationalisation of all teaching spaces for September
- Priority 5: All other office spaces and facilities

As buildings are signed off as fully prepared, we will continue to follow government guidance and advise those who can work from home to continue to do so.

In the meantime, we are asking all work on campus to be approved by your Head of Department using the relevant approval process below:

- Access to campus for [research activities](#)
- Access to campus for [Professional Services and Administrative staff](#)

Reducing touch points

- **Can fire doors in corridors have auto closers on them so that they can be pinned open during working hours so that it lessens the use of handling the doors and doesn't breach fire safety regs by having fire auto door closers? Many spaces have numerous doors in corridors to get to an office**
- **Will automatic doors be installed where possible as well as automatic taps?**
- **Can we ensure that the revolving door at the LC be working and that all auto doors are operational some have been broken for years**

We are preparing a list of changes needed to reduce touchpoints including: auto closures on fire doors; no touch door opening controls, sensors on taps, and other changes e.g. window opening restrictors especially for ground floor windows. This will be addressed as a programme of work, and so will take several months to complete.

Until these are completed it is important that staff use what we have put in place to help mitigate the risks – eg hand sanitisers around all entry/exit points, communal areas, enhanced cleaning protocol etc.

Cleaning

- **I understand that some parts of campus are going to be deep cleaned as they are open to students. Will buildings that are not open to students also be deep cleaned please?**

Yes, all buildings will be deep cleaned before opening to staff and students.

- **Will the cleaning be of a higher standard than what it was like previously?**

Additional day time servicing is currently being arranged for all toilets across campus. Typically a washroom will be visited 2-3 times throughout the day.

- **Will the Cleaning of offices and open plan areas be cleaned on a regular basis, like throughout the day?**

We are introducing new cleaning protocols which all cleaning staff will be trained in as they return to work. This will include enhanced protocols, earlier start times and additional cleaning throughout the day amongst other measures. The enhanced cleaning protocols will be implemented across the campus regardless of usage.

Communicating with students

- **Have the students been receiving information on what BUL is doing? Do they realise what the staff are doing and how they could / may be putting themselves at risk?**

Students have been receiving regular email communications since the start of lockdown as well as social media updates directing them to our Coronavirus portal. In addition our [2020 changes website](#) provides information on how teaching will look in the new academic year and our wider approach to campus safety.

Supporting staff

Annual leave

- **Will you give staff with caring responsibilities more annual leave even if it's at a reduced pay rate?**

We are working on a new scheme that would give staff the opportunity to purchase additional annual leave. More information will be available shortly. Staff may also want to consider parental leave, and further details are available [here](#).

Working from home

- **If a staff member is able to carry out their role entirely from home, without attending the campus, will they be able to continue to work remotely, to increase office space for social distancing.**
- **Will all staff be able to work more flexibly - some days working from home and some in the office?**
- **Where does a review of working practices and flexible working relevant to today's world fit into this?**
- **In the future if we are allowed to WFH for part of the time, how will this work where we currently use BUL equipment at home?**
- **If kids do not return to school full time in September, will the University support staff with flexible working as they currently do? As having to manage working full time, full time childcare and home learning can be very difficult.**

From a solely practical view, current rules around social distancing mean that we won't be able to return to work in the volumes we have been previously, and that will very likely mean decisions being made within teams as to how that will work in practice. One of the positive outcomes of Covid-19 is that we've found that many of us are able to work from home at least some of the time and that brings a much greater degree of flexibility to everyone, however taking a long-term view, we know that there will also need to be a balance as it's also important to many of us that we have the interaction of working in a team. There will also always be some jobs that simply can't be done from home.

We are currently updating our framework to support effective working from home, which is intended to look at all of these issues. There won't ever be a one size fits all response though, and we will need to help teams work out what's best for them and to try to answer some of the very specific issues that we will face in the coming weeks and months.

Equipment for working from home

- **I have had to use my personal laptop since March in order to work from home. The addition of various apps / software and additional hours has proven too much for my laptop and it is now not functioning correctly. I am unable to obtain a laptop from BUL at present due to availability, I am on the waiting list but have not been given any indication of when a machine will be available. Will BUL compensate me for damage caused to my laptop as I will now need to purchase a new one and will the lack of availability of laptops for staff be re-assessed?**

We appreciate that this hasn't been easy for staff who have had to quickly make do with the equipment available and try to carry on working where possible. The IT team are working hard to make laptops available, however we would also encourage you to

contact the [responsible individual](#) for your area if there is equipment on campus that could be recovered.

We are currently updating our framework to support effective working from home and that is around making sure people can work safely and have access to the right equipment. We will have more information about that soon.

- **Can staff keep their work laptops in case there is a second wave?**

We want to ensure that all staff who need to work from home are able to do so and that means making sure that equipment is available where possible. As we update our framework to support effective working from home, we will need to make sure that circumstances such as these are accounted for.

Delivering education and student support

- **Have we determined which students can attend reduced-number lectures on campus? Will they be rotated/first come first serve etc?**

This is a decision that will need to be made at departmental level and teams are currently working to determine what they can offer and how they can manage numbers of students. As of last week, we have information about which modules are being delivered next academic year, which is a starting point for timetabling. Given the reduced room capacity, the programme team will need to decide which aspects of the programme requires on-campus teaching, and how this can best be done (how many groups are required, etc.); and which on-campus activities gives the greatest added value to the student experience.

We will have to provide more detailed information about their programme delivery to students by the end of July, and so the work that is currently happening is very important. Departments received support through our Framework and guide to getting started, and feedback from academic staff is being collected by the Vice Deans Education and regularly shared with the Task & Finish Group for educational delivery. There is also a dedicated Teams site set up for academic staff to engage with each other and the T&FG.

- **Will Registration be held in the Sports Hall? what alternative will there be if not**

Registration will be conducted virtually this year.

- **What will happen if international students are unable to get a tier 4 visa to start studying with Brunel in September?**

- **Is the recruitment of international students affected because of getting a Visa? A number of embassies are still closed internationally.**

We are hoping to be able to welcome students onto our Brunel campus this autumn but cannot issue a CAS until these plans are finalised and until we have clearer guidance from the UKVI on CAS issuing. We will issue them as soon as we can and will keep students informed.

If nearer the start date of their programme it is still not possible for them to commence the programme, we are reassuring students that they can defer their offer to study at Brunel for a full academic year.

- **Do we have news about the recruitment numbers we were expecting from UCAS?**

Yes, as expected – don't forget you can check the recruitment dashboards [here](#) for weekly updates. For international students, the deposits paid are a better indication than acceptances.

Ensuring financial sustainability

- **There are a variety of staff who may want to take voluntary severance, could this be used to try and limit the impact on other staff?**

Brunel doesn't have any plans for redundancies at the moment, but we can't say never because we can't say what our student numbers are going to be. If difficult decisions did need to be made in the future, voluntary severance would be one of the options available.

- **Will there be an opportunity for staff to make suggestions on cost saving initiatives? For example, removal of £25 Xmas meal allowance.**

We have a Task & Finish Group looking at the area of spend and savings and this work more generally will be happening at every level within Brunel. It is important though that staff are able to make comments and suggestions about all of Brunel's practices and decisions, so we will shortly be making a section available on our Covid-19 Recovery pages where staff will be able to leave ideas, big and small.

Optimising the academic portfolio

- **Why does Brunel University not have its own app like most universities in the world? A one stop place for news, alerts, timetable, finance, and perhaps crucially a place for students to face time with academics and join classes remotely as most students use smart phones?**

Having a university-wide app is something that has been mooted and investigated in the past, but isn't currently the University's priority from an IT perspective. Feedback from our students is that they do want a one-stop shop for information about their timetables, news, and events, but that they are less keen to have an app using up space and storage on their smart phone. Rather, we have worked with our students to improve the student intranet, ensuring that it is mobile friendly and therefore sharing the same level of functionality as an app. The next step is to bring more personalisation to the site, which we are working on now.

Other

Parking

- **This is regarding the car parking costs we're still paying. I saw the response last week from HR and it was said that one of the reasons they can't refund people is because the software system can't tell who is/isn't using the car park and also, the system can't refund individually. If we can prove we haven't used the car park over the last 3 months could we not instead use the Chime expenses system individually to claim refunds?**
- **If parking can't be refunded can we be given 3 months 'free' parking from when we are back on campus?**
- **What more can the University do to make people realise what a difficult financial situation they are in, so they stop asking about the few pounds a month we pay in parking?**

We have spoken previously about the difficulties we have in refunding staff for unused parking on campus, and it's not that we don't believe staff or require proof that they haven't been using the car parks – the main issue is the difficulty we would have in claiming back this money because it's attached to how much tax is paid and to reverse that is extremely complicated.

On a more general note, we have tried to show staff in recent weeks the very difficult financial situation the University might be in. We will be lucky if we don't make a loss this year and much relies on how many students we get in this coming academic year. Although we are planning for all eventualities, there is a degree of uncertainty as to how exactly Covid-19 will impact us all. That doesn't stop people being concerned about their personal circumstances too though, and families may well be struggling right now. If the money being spent on parking is a real concern to staff they should speak to their HR

business partner. Staff can also leave the scheme through reception online, but they must remember to reapply when they return.

- **Can we reconsider the time of this briefing? some parents struggle as it clashes with children's lunchtimes so can't take a full part**

It's not always easy to plan briefings around people's diaries and, due to the fact that many meetings are held in the morning and after 2pm, we have had to be very careful about the times that we can hold briefings with the intention of involving as many staff as possible. We make recordings of all staff briefings available on IntraBrunel shortly after the events, and we look to answer the many questions staff have in the following days. We also don't want to limit opportunities for staff to ask questions and so if you do have a question that wasn't answered please contact us on communications@brunel.ac.uk and we will try to include in our next briefing.