Guide for managers on supporting BAME staff returning to the workplace

Introduction

This document provides a checklist and further guidance for line managers holding return to work discussions with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) staff. It also provides vital context and information on race matters relevant to these discussions in Annex 1.

BAME staff and COVID-19

Coronavirus has claimed more than 45,000 lives in the UK (as at 20/7/20) and a high proportion of those severely affected are from ethnic minority groups. (See Annex 1 for further information).

Evidence suggests that the differences in mortality are **linked to existing structural health inequalities and underlying systemic racism**. Please see [Government guidance](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-understanding-the-impact-on-bame-communities) on understanding the impact on BAME communities for further information.

There has been a global increase in reported cases of racism towards BAME people during the COVID pandemic, ranging from anti-Chinese sentiments relating to the origin of the disease, to an inaccurate perception that BAME staff and students pose an increased risk of infection to other members of staff. Please communicate to staff that such attitudes are racist and unacceptable. Remind staff that the University’s [Dignity at Work Policy](https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/dignity-work-policy) makes it clear that all members of the University community have a role to play in creating a thriving and inclusive environment for everyone, free from racism, discrimination and harassment.

COVID Return to the Workplace

**BAME people are four times more likely to die from a Covid-19-related cause than white people and managers are asked to support their team’s wellbeing accordingly.**

In the absence of specific government guidance in relation to BAME employees returning to the workplace, **we suggest that as a line manager you follow the key points below:**

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| Checklist of points to cover with BAME staff:   1. **Provide Individual Staff Risk Assessment Checklist for COVID-19** *(Please refer to the* [*Safety Office webpages*](https://www.safety.admin.cam.ac.uk/latest-information/covid-19)*)*   Ask members of staff to complete the risk assessment.   1. **Hold an individual return to the workplace meeting** *(Please refer to slide 8 of the* [*RTWP Guidance*](https://universityofcambridgecloud.sharepoint.com/sites/COVIDRecovery/People/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FCOVIDRecovery%2FPeople%2FReturn%20to%20the%20Workplace%2FReturning%20to%20the%20Workplace%20%2D%20Manager%20Guidance%20For%20Supporting%20Staff%20%28Annex%20A%29%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FCOVIDRecovery%2FPeople%2FReturn%20to%20the%20Workplace)*)*   Ask how the staff member is feeling about coming back to work.  Acknowledge – sensitively – that BAME people are at higher risk if they contract the virus, and that therefore they may have additional concerns they wish to address, including the fear of increased risk of encountering racism (cover in discussion in STEP 2 of the [RTWP Guidance](https://universityofcambridgecloud.sharepoint.com/sites/COVIDRecovery/People/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FCOVIDRecovery%2FPeople%2FReturn%20to%20the%20Workplace%2FReturning%20to%20the%20Workplace%20%2D%20Manager%20Guidance%20For%20Supporting%20Staff%20%28Annex%20A%29%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FCOVIDRecovery%2FPeople%2FReturn%20to%20the%20Workplace))  Clearly communicate the safety measures put in place to protect them and discuss whether they are reassuring and what additional measures may be helpful.  Listen to and acknowledge any concerns or fears they may have and explain that you will do everything you can reasonably do to address them.   1. **Talk through the individual’s risk assessment and safe space personal toolkit**   Check how the member of staff evaluates their wellbeing, risk and level of apprehension about returning to the workplace.  Ensure the individual risk assessment reflects the increased risk to ethnic groups and the measures put in place to protect the staff member concerned.  Check whether they have any other risk factors or personal considerations not directly related to race/ethnicity e.g. being a carer, health condition etc.  Follow up any issues or concerns identified and seek advice from your HR School Team, Occupational Health, Counseling or the Safety Office as necessary.  Invite your staff to a voluntary [Safe Space Circle](https://www.ourcambridge.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/safe_space_circles_guide_v.4.pdf) to collectively discuss and address concerns, share ideas and promote peer-to-peer support prior to returning to the workplace.  Discuss whether the measures already undertaken for all staff are reassuring and if they are not, what additional measures may help.  Discuss the context of their current team, how a return to the workplace might raise specific concerns for them (this might include the existing culture of the working environment pre-lock down and how they perceive things might be like after returning to the workplace).  Consider the existing culture of the team and whether it could add to a sense of isolation with BAME member/s of staff being reluctant, perhaps as a result of negative experiences, to speak up about concerns.  Consider constructive ways of addressing this such as making sure that in team discussions everyone is encouraged to contribute not just the more vocal team members, or at one-to-one meetings with BAME members of staff checking they are not experiencing racism or other difficulties arising from conscious or unconscious bias.  *Contact your HR Team if you need advice or support in relation to any matters raised as part of the individual risk assessment or discussion.*   1. **Ongoing support**   Set review meeting dates to ensure staff are receiving ongoing support.  Signpost the [COVID Inclusion Resources](https://www.equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/resources/covid-inclusion-resources) relevant to BAME staff and the [University’s BAME Staff Network](https://www.race-equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/networks/bame-staff-network) (all [networks](https://www.equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/diversity-networks) are continuing to run virtual meetings to support staff). The Equality and Diversity team is also [available remotely](mailto:equality@admin.cam.ac.uk) to answer any queries staff or managers may have. |

Further Guidance

* Ensure that the four key steps under the [Returning to the Workplace](https://universityofcambridgecloud.sharepoint.com/sites/COVIDRecovery/People/Forms/AllItems.aspx?id=%2Fsites%2FCOVIDRecovery%2FPeople%2FReturn%20to%20the%20Workplace%2FReturning%20to%20the%20Workplace%20%2D%20Manager%20Guidance%20For%20Supporting%20Staff%20%28Annex%20A%29%2Epdf&parent=%2Fsites%2FCOVIDRecovery%2FPeople%2FReturn%20to%20the%20Workplace) – manager guidance for supporting staff are followed closely. Please refer to slide 3 for an overview of the process and slide 4 on harassment, discrimination and conflict.
* It is the responsibility of line managers to discuss issues of inclusivity within individual return to the workplace conversations and [Safe Space Circles](https://www.ourcambridge.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/safe_space_circles_guide_v.4.pdf), and to proactively safeguard inclusion rather than only acting in response to incidences. It is important to ensure that each member of staff knows they are returning to a supportive and caring environment.
* Managers and staff need to model appropriate behaviour, be vigilant to discrimination and underlying tensions and actively step in early to challenge racist attitudes, behaviours and conflict in the workplace. Please see the [Dignity at Work](https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/policies-procedures/dignity-work-policy) website for more information and take the time to watch the ‘[Be An Active Bystander’](https://pearnkandola.com/search/active+bystander/) webinar.
* As line managers we invite you to undertake, and recommend that your staff undertake, relevant virtual training before return to the workplace (please see the dates of the University’s [Race Awareness](https://www.race-equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/events) sessions, and [LinkedIn learning on race and racism](https://www.linkedin.com/learning/confronting-racism-with-robin-diangelo).
* Keep communicating with all staff. Keep them informed of measures the University is taking to protect them and ensure they are returning to a safe working environment. Ensure employees are aware of the steps they should take if they start to feel unwell at home or at work.

**Annex 1 Definitions and further information**

“BAME” term

BAME is a commonly used acronym to describe people who identify as Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic. It is the acronym that the University's staff network chose in 2018 to describe itself (as the University’s BAME Staff Network). The University acknowledges that the term has its limitations as it aggregates the distinct experiences of people of different racialised groups.

For more context, see [Advance HE’s guidance](https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/equality-diversity-and-inclusion/using-data-and-evidence/use-of-language-race-ethnicity) on use of language.

BAME staff and COVID-19

According to a recent [analysis](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/birthsdeathsandmarriages/deaths/articles/coronavirusrelateddeathsbyethnicgroupenglandandwales/2march2020to10april2020) by the Office for National Statistics, BAME people are four times more likely to die from a Covid-19-related cause than white people. Even after accounting for differences in age, sex, geography and self-reported health and disability factors, black people are still twice as likely to die from the virus, and individuals from South Asia and mixed ethnicity also have a high risk of death compared with the white population.

Race and racism at the University, and action plan to address racial inequalities

Work undertaken as part of the University’s application for the [Race Equality Charter](https://www.race-equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/uoc_rec_application.pdf) (REC) (see p. 17) highlighted important information about the experiences of BAME staff and a number of challenges for the university.

The work on REC has provided an opportunity for the University to identify **key priorities for action and** [a three year action plan](https://www.race-equality.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/uoc_rec_action_plan.pdf)**.** These include:

1. Embedding the responsibility for race equality across University institutions;
2. Diverse recruitment and student admission;
3. BAME\* representation at senior levels and in governance structures;
4. Improving the support for and experience of BAME students and staff at the University;
5. Inclusive teaching and learning practices; and
6. Bringing about culture change.