

Remote Working Guide for Individuals



Guidance for Individuals: Working Remotely and Managing your Health and Wellbeing

This guide builds on the University's [Coronavirus Homeworking Protocol](#) which we should all familiarise ourselves with. There is also [Guidance for Managers](#), designed to help managers make this transition period as supportive and smooth as possible for all team members.

You may have done some remote working previously or, more commonly, this may be completely new to you. Even if you have experience of remote working, the current context – the unprecedented uncertainty, the change to our whole way of life and having to juggle multiple responsibilities – is new to us all.

Here are some quick tips and suggestions for working practices that can help combat some of the challenges we will face over the coming period. This may take time - we will all need to learn along the way and share what is working well. We will need to be patient and flexible with one another – we don't have to settle on the perfect routine or have all the answers immediately.

The message from our senior University leadership is clear:

"When anxiety is high, when personal plans have been disrupted, and when worries about our health are paramount, the kindness of fellow staff and students can make an enormous difference. We are a decent and caring University community. I am certain that, with each other's support, we will get through what may become a difficult period!"

Professor Stephen J Toope, Vice-Chancellor – 5 March 2020

For the latest institutional updates, policy and a set of FAQs about the University's coronavirus response please visit the [coronavirus webpages](#).

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Top Tips for Remote Working

01

Set up a designated workspace Create a separate space for yourself to work in, somewhere you can focus on tasks without being distracted and set up with everything you need for a normal working day – computer, phone, stationery, papers, etc.

Make sure you have all the tech you need This includes a reliable and secure internet connection, any necessary files, hardware and software, remote access and, importantly, knowledge of how to get IT support.

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Get dressed Changing into work clothes will help you mentally switch to productive work mode. It will also help distinguish between 'home working' and 'home life'.

Write a daily 'to do' list Set out a list of realistic, achievable tasks to keep you focused.

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Know when to step away from your desk Be clear about when your working day begins and ends and take breaks to refresh yourself. It's easy to let yourself be 'always on' when your home and office are the same place. When work is over, be sure you switch off to avoid burnout. Think about having 'core hours' when you know the people you work with are available.

Keep conversations going Contribute regularly to team chats and group emails so you don't drop off the radar. Ask what people are working on and share what you are doing. Being physically separated means you miss the 'water-cooler moments' so this is a good way to stay connected and keep informed.

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Foster relationships Make time for non-work chats as you would in the workplace and use video calling to maintain face-to-face contact.

Be clear in your communication Speaking to someone face to face gives you visual and audio cues that help you communicate. You can also pick up nuances from someone's voice on a telephone call. Conversing remotely online (e.g. via email) removes a lot of that extra information so make your communications extra clear and check understanding to ensure your message has been received in the way you intended. This is especially important with email.

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Ask for support when you need it Not being in the same room means you don't have extra information from body language or tone to get the sense of what people are thinking or feeling. Home in on what's not being said and ask questions to clarify.

Make remote working work for you Create an environment that works for you. Change where you sit, put on music, whatever helps you work. And enjoy the perks – no commute, uncomfortable shoes, and all your home comforts at hand!

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YOUR SITUATION

Each of our personal situations will be different, and fluid, as we find ways to balance work, looking after our own health and caring responsibilities. At times this may feel like you are being pulled in many different directions at once. **These feelings are completely normal and you are not alone.**

The [Coronavirus Homeworking Protocol](#) states that *“If you are working from home, you may have unplanned caring responsibilities for dependants during this period (e.g. due to school, nursery or nursing home closures). In these circumstances, it is anticipated that staff and line managers will need to exercise a certain level of flexibility in order to accommodate this unusual situation.”*

Please refer to the [FAQs on Working Arrangements](#) and discuss your personal situation with your line manager. You may also find the various sources of wellbeing support and resources on resilience and resourcefulness (covered in detail below) useful.

Anyone with caring responsibilities (short or long term) can find useful resources and support at:

- Supporting Parents and Carers @Cambridge ([SPACE](#)) resources.
- [My Family Care](#)

Some schools will be setting structured work, but this will vary considerably between schools and age groups. You may find the following useful if you have school aged children:

- [Yammer](#) Support Group – focused on children, mental health and general chat
- [Dropbox](#) link to educational resources for all ages

top tip Check-in with your colleagues / Connect with colleagues over online calls at the beginning of the day. It provides an opportunity to share concerns, workloads or how you might be able to help each other. It's easier to hide issues behind emails and the written word, but seeing and speaking to other people regularly helps to open up a dialogue and keep communication positive.

From: <https://happiful.com/working-from-home-7-steps-for-a-better-work-day/>



YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING

“The main thing I would ask you to do is to look after yourself, your loved ones and colleagues and always err on the side of caution” Eilis Ferran, Pro-Vice-Chancellor Institutional and International Relations.

We are living through an unprecedented period of uncertainty, stress and anxiety. It is vital that we recognise these feelings and take steps to help alleviate them.

There is an enormous, and at times, overwhelming, volume of resources and guidance about maintaining your wellbeing available.

We have collated some of the most useful ones here and in the Resource Bank at the end of this document.

[Juice](#) have identified ‘Five Ways to Wellbeing’ which you may find helpful.

STEP ONE - BE ACTIVE

Fresh air and exercise are vital for our wellbeing – the latest government advice has recommended that people take the opportunity each day to go outside and get some exercise. You don’t need to run - a walk will work wonders for your state of mind.

If you’re not able to go outside, just opening the window and letting in fresh air can help you feel connected to the outdoors.

You might feel like now is the perfect time to finally get around to tackling Couchto5k, an app designed to help you start running, and there are many other apps available. Alternatively, the Adidas running app, Runtastic, also has a variety of free training plans available.

STEP TWO - CONNECT

Contact with other people is vitally important. Even though we may be physically isolated, it’s never been easier to be connected, thanks to technology.

Organise video meetings with your team to have a coffee break – you would usually spend time in your day just chatting to colleagues about topics other than work so try and keep this up even when you’re not physically together.

‘Meet’ up with your friends as normal. Skype, Zoom, WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, FaceTime all offer the ability to video chat with other people.

Many teams are successfully using ‘Yammer’ to maintain contact with colleagues – some institution wide groups you may wish to join to connect with colleagues are:

Yammer – [ourcambridge group](#)

Yammer – [Remote Working Support](#) (focus on technology and ways of working)

Yammer – [Remote Working - Children, Mental Health and general chat](#)

Yammer – [Remote Working tea room](#)

The University’s [Diversity Networks](#) can also be a useful source of information during this time.

toptip My Family Care webinars / My Family Care are running a series of [webinars](#) focusing on various topics during this uncertain time. They include topics such as Best Practice for Remote Working, Maintaining Domestic Harmony, The School-Free World. If you can’t join live, they are also available to listen to after they have been recorded.

toptip YouTube Workouts / If you don’t feel like going outside there are a wealth of resources for at home workouts:

- 1 Joe Wicks, a.k.a. [The Body Coach](#) is offering daily P.E. classes which are a challenge for children and adults alike!
- 2 [Popsugar Fitness](#) have a huge variety of workouts
- 3 If you’re looking for something less cardio-based, [Yoga with Adrienne](#) offers a number of yoga and meditation videos



YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING (cont'd)

STEP THREE - TAKE NOTICE

During this time you may need to heighten your awareness of your thought patterns as they directly impact how you feel. Everyone is facing different challenges and has different ways of coping. It is important to remember that there is no 'right' way to do things. The best way is the way that works for you.

It can become easy to get sucked into negative thinking, but it is important to remember that we are in control of our own thoughts. Now is the time to practise **constructive thinking** – even when things seem out of control, we can control how we respond to them.

Take a moment each day to focus on gratitude; try making a list of three good things (check out the hashtag on Instagram #ThreeGoodThings). Even focusing on the smallest thing can help to alleviate unhelpful thought patterns.

For support related to your emotional or psychological health see the University Staff Counselling Service. Please note, in order to minimise risk from the coronavirus, from Monday 16 March the [University Counselling Service](#) will be offering telephone consultations for all booked appointments.

Mindfulness and/or meditation might be helpful during this period; apps such as [Headspace](#) and [Calm](#) have free resources available, and offer subscriptions for access to more tools.

STEP FOUR - KEEP LEARNING

Learning new skills or knowledge has repeatedly been found to boost our motivation, job satisfaction and general wellbeing. During this difficult transition period, the idea of dedicating time to learning may seem impossible. However, over the next few months many of us will find more time and space. Why not use the opportunity to gain a new skill?

The following resources are available:

Internally

[University's Personal and Professional Development](#) – including online learning modules and PPD On-Demand

[UIS IT Services Training](#) - including online courses

Externally

[LinkedIn Learning](#) (this will shortly be available for all University staff and students – watch this space!)

[FutureLearn](#)

toptip Stop! / If you are struggling to stop negative thoughts, try this:

- 1 Stop
- 2 Calm your body and mind (breathe deeply)
- 3 Acknowledge your thoughts and feelings (but do not act on them)
- 4 Organise your thoughts
- 5 Proceed

toptip Use Qwell /

Cambridgeshire, Peterborough and South Lincolnshire (CPSL) MIND, launched Qwell (<https://www.cpslmind.org.uk/qwell/>) on 1st April – a service that provides online support and a wellbeing community in a safe and confidential environment. Its services are fully accessible to all domiciled in the UK including University staff and students. Among the resources available is counselling, delivered by qualified and BACP registered counsellors, free of charge. This can be accessed via instant chat or messaging (Mon – Fri midday – 10pm, Sat / Sun 6pm – 10pm BST). It also provides online community forums and materials for exploring emotions, mental health and wellbeing.





STEP FIVE - GIVE (YOURSELF AND OTHERS)

Research has shown that volunteering can, for many people, have a significant positive impact on their mental health and wellbeing.

Can I volunteer at this time?

More than 2.2 million people aged 75 and over live alone in Great Britain. Over the next 14+ weeks many of these people will be self-isolating. Contact from volunteers will therefore be critically important. The University is keen to support local residents in our community. There are likely to be many opportunities to volunteer, either with a recognised charity or with local community groups that are being established. [Should you wish to volunteer during your working time, please discuss this with your line manager and keep them regularly updated on your activities].

For advice on volunteering during the coronavirus outbreak, details of local volunteer centres or to register as an NHS Volunteer Responder, please refer to the [National Council for Voluntary Organisations](#).

If you feel unable to join a formal voluntary organisation at this time, consider what you can do for your friends and neighbours who may need support.

BONUS STEP - ESTABLISH A ROUTINE

This might be especially difficult at the moment, particularly if you have dependents in the home, but try and organise a routine where you can. Planning can help us feel more in control in a situation. You may already be aware of your 'best energy' times, for example, you might be at your most productive first thing in the morning, or maybe later in the afternoon. Consider planning your work, and the type of work, around your energy levels.

Try to stick to your usual routine as best as you can – getting up at the same time, getting ready, eating at similar times. Use your Outlook calendar not just for meetings, but for scheduling set times to work on a project.

For those people with dependants, establishing a routine can be particularly difficult. You could consider an approach called '**Time Chunking**', breaking up your day into chunks of time which will allow you to work productively on your tasks around your caring responsibilities. This can allow you to work the same number of hours in a day, but across a wider timeframe, allowing for greater flexibility.

One of the things we see a lot of in remote working is 'agile guilt' – people not leaving their computers for long periods in the belief they should be connected and 'on' all the time. Think about how you behave in your workplace. You wouldn't feel bad about not being at your screen if you were in a meeting! Ensure you are not tied to your workstation or desk all day and that you take plenty of breaks.

toptip Try the Pomodoro Technique /

The 'Pomodoro Technique' is a time management method based on 25 minute stretches of focused work, followed by a 5 minute break, with a longer 20-30 minute break after four 'Pomodoros'. Using a small block of concentrated time, with zero distractions, can help to focus the mind and help achieve more in less time than it would normally take.



YOUR HEALTH AND WELLBEING (cont'd)

AT YOUR DESK

It's not just your mental health that needs looking after during this time; working at a makeshift workspace can pose risks to your physical health. Aches and pains in the back, shoulders, neck, arms and wrists can occur if your desk station is set up incorrectly. However, there are a few simple ways to reduce your risk of developing any problems.

Short, frequent breaks are vital, and better than longer, infrequent breaks. The aim is for 5-10 minutes break after 50-60 minutes of continuous work so take the opportunity to undertake some gentle stretches to relieve any muscle tension.

For advice on having a safe workspace read [these guides from the Occupational Health and Safety Service](#) and see [this advice](#) from the Health and Safety Executive.

TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGY

Many departments are using Microsoft Teams to communicate within their team. It allows for audio and video calls/meetings, resource sharing and a chat function.

- [Quick Guide to Working Remotely](#)
- [Quick Guide to Accessing Microsoft 365](#)
- [Quick Guide to Microsoft Teams interface](#)
- [Quick Guide to Microsoft Teams Video Calling](#)

For instructions on how to download Microsoft Teams this [guidance page](#) is very useful. **Note: To access Teams in a browser you need to use either Google Chrome or Microsoft Edge - other browsers such as Firefox do not work.**

Once you have familiarised yourself with Microsoft Teams, our colleagues in UIS have created a [Teams Hub](#) where you can get lots of detailed guidance. You can also visit the Remote Working Support group on [Yammer](#), a new self-help space in which anyone can ask questions and share their tips with the University's remote working community. Trying to help each other by resolving common issues in this forum will free up valuable time for both the UIS Service Desk and local IT support desks to deal with the most urgent requests for help.

toptip Desk based exercises / Sitting down for long periods of time can result in aches and pains. Try these eight exercises (see below), designed to be done at your desk to help loosen any tightness in your shoulders, neck and back.

<https://www.bupa.co.uk/newsroom/ourviews/desk-stretches>

toptip Ways of Communicating / If you're feeling overwhelmed by the new methods of technology that are being used now that we are all remote working, then this helpful guide (see below) could help you to decide which communication method is the best for you.

<https://www.ourcambridge.admin.cam.ac.uk/files/which-communication-tool-v1.0.pdf>



Welcome Distractions



In a period of time filled with uncertainty it is important for you to take a few moments away from the news or your desk.

Try to make time to do things that enhance your mood. Here are some resources you may find useful:

Reading

[Scribd](#) is an online resource with books, magazines and audiobooks. They are currently offering the opportunity to subscribe for free for the first month

[Audible](#) is also offering a free 30 day trial. This could be the time to set up a book club with your friends or co-workers!

[Cambridge University Library](#) has a number of online resources that can be accessed with a University Raven password and internet connection. This includes over 800,000 and over 120,000 e-journal titles.

[Cambridge University Press](#) has responded to the emergency by making all 700 titles in its textbook collection available in HTML format, free of charge on its Cambridge Core platform.

Film & TV

There can be a lot of pressure to be productive during this time – make sure you don't succumb to the pressure and feel guilty that you're not as productive during lockdown. A bit of escapism might be just what you need so now could be the time to catch up on that series that everyone's been talking about on Netflix/iPlayer/All4/ITV Player/Demand5 that you've never had time to watch before.

[Mubi](#) – if indie films are more to your taste then check out Mubi who are currently offering three months' subscription for £1. There are always 30 films available at any one time and a new film is introduced every day.

Music & Theatre

With Broadway and the West End now closed, work is going on to put productions online, where possible. For example, a West End production of [Wind in the Willows](#) is available to watch online for free. The National Theatre is also live streaming a play every Thursday night on their [YouTube channel](#).

There are also a number of orchestras who have now put performances online

- The Met Opera – [nightly Met Opera streams](#)
- Berlin Philharmonic – [digital concert hall](#)
- London Symphony Orchestra – [Always Playing](#)

toptip Say 'Stop' /

Often when we're stressed, our thinking becomes too fast and we spiral into panic. The trick to getting out of this is self-awareness. As soon as you recognise what's happening, say the word 'stop', ideally out-loud – but in your head is fine, too.

The 'stop' technique (or thought-stopping) is often used in cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) to help prevent obsessive or worrying thoughts from taking over. By recognising what's happening, you have the opportunity to change your way of thinking.

From: <https://happiful.com/how-to-de-stress-in-5-simple-steps/>



Resource Bank

| CATEGORY | RESOURCE |
|--------------------------------|--|
| University Policy | Working Arrangements FAQs |
| | Coronavirus Home Working Protocol |
| | Coronavirus HR Guidance for Institutions – managing coronavirus-related sickness absence, managing working from home, pay and recording absence, TES and UPS workers etc. |
| University Guidance | Guide for Managers: Managing Your Teams Remotely |
| Health and Wellbeing | Internal Sources of Support – an alphabetical list of the resources available via the University including; University Staff Counselling service, Occupational Health, Chaplaincy for University Staff, and the Disability Resource Centre amongst others. |
| | External Sources of Support – a list of various institutions for physical and mental wellbeing including; Public Health England, Mind in Cambridgeshire, Beat, the Samaritans, Refuge, Rape Crisis, and Time to Change |
| | 10 ways to have a wild isolation without a garden – activities to keep the mind occupied |
| | The Health and Safety Executive has a useful page on considerations for your display screen equipment set-up. |
| | Trade Unions are also able to offer valuable support to staff https://www.hr.admin.cam.ac.uk/hr-staff/trade-unions |
| | Cambridge community support links https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/coronavirus-community-group-contact-details |
| Mental Health Resources | Mind – Coronavirus and Your Wellbeing |
| | Visit the WHO website or download this guide to coping with stress during the Covid-19 outbreak. |
| | How to cope if you're feeling anxious about the outbreak via the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy |
| | Guided Mindfulness Resources – audio files which can be used to help practice mindfulness, either by streaming or download. |
| | The NHS, Every Mind Matters – advice on looking after your mental health |
| | Gov.uk – official guidance for the public on the mental health and wellbeing aspects of Coronavirus |
| School Resources | Twinkl.co.uk – free printable resources for writing, phonics, maths and creative activities |
| | A master list of useful resources for those with children in school (this is kept updated on the Yammer Group – Remote Working (Children, Mental Health and general chat) |
| Working Remotely | 15 Questions about remote work, answered (Harvard Business Review) |
| | 12 Guides to Help Navigate The Remote Life |
| | Working from home – tech solutions for the disabled |
| | LinkedIn Learning Access – free learning path of 16 courses about remote working |

