

Guidance on holding return to campus conversations

Introduction

This guide aims to support managers having conversations with staff around a potential return to working on campus. These conversations with staff should:

- help you build a greater understanding of individual staff circumstances, particularly those that might make a return to campus more difficult;
- help you understand staff preferences around any return to campus; and
- enable staff to better understand how they may be supported in any return.

The guide should be read in conjunction with the [Returning to Working on Campus Manager's Guidance](#).

This guide covers:

- Preparation for the conversation
- Stages of a conversation
- Having a constructive conversation
- Key points of focus

Preparation for the conversation

Appropriate preparation for the conversation allows for a more structured approach and will make it easier to discuss and often address any concerns or questions raised. You should:

- Familiarise yourself with the latest relevant context including:
 - The latest advice from the [UK Government and Public Health England](#)
 - [The wider university plans for re-opening campuses](#)
 - [A-Z guide](#) which includes the health and safety guidance for the university
 - [The university's individual risk assessment processes](#)
- As set out in steps 1 and 2 of the [Manager's Guidance](#), have clarity on the key work /activities that need to be delivered in your area and the required resource

- Have any necessary materials (or links to them) to hand to refer to during the conversation (or to signpost as needed).
- Write down in advance any key points or particular structure that you wish to follow, to ensure appropriate time is given to each element and make the conversation more productive for all involved.
- Choose an appropriate medium for the conversation. Video calls are preferable to phone calls if the technology is available as they may allow for more effective communication.

Stages of a conversation

Structuring a conversation may seem obvious at first, however the quality (and success) of a conversation can be influenced by a wide range of factors, including the skill and awareness of those involved. One simple but helpful model is to consider the conversation as 4 distinct but repeating stages – Inform, Invite, Listen, Acknowledge.



Inform - Provide information or an explanation so that others know what the discussion is focusing on, or what is coming next.

Invite - Ask a question relevant to the information given at the 'Inform' stage to seek input or a response.

Listen - Actively listen to the response. Utilising non-verbal communication (e.g. eye contact, nodding) may help put the staff member at ease and reassure them that what they are saying is being understood.

Acknowledge - Having listened to any response, you can demonstrate that they have listened and understood by acknowledging what was said. Language such as “Ok, I understand” or “I appreciate that” alongside a degree of paraphrasing/feeding back can help to acknowledge what was said.

Example – “From what you have said, I understand that you are concerned about returning to that particular area due to the risk of picking up the virus from colleagues. If we take a look at the measures the university is taking, I can reassure you that...”

At this point the conversation has gone full cycle and is back at the ‘Inform’ stage. The cycle repeats until the conversation is concluded.

Whilst a simple model, it should be noted that it can be easy to stray from this pattern. For example, by repeating the ‘Inform’ stage and not inviting/listening to responses the staff member may feel that their input is not welcome or valued.

Having the conversation

Knowing the stages of a conversation can be helpful, however the finer detail of what is said within each stage is key to ensuring the conversation is productive, supportive and open. When it comes to asking questions, it is generally advisable to use open questioning (i.e. questions starting with ‘How?’, ‘What?’, ‘Where?’, ‘Who?’ and ‘When?’) as these encourage two-way dialogue. Questions starting with ‘Why?’ should be used sparingly if possible. Similarly, closed questions (e.g. did you...?) should also be reserved for confirming points of detail. Key points of focus are outlined below.

Key points of focus

These conversations should aim to build a greater understanding of the staff member’s individual circumstances and their preferences around any return. It should also help staff to better understand how they may be supported in any return.

Points to focus on include:

- Ensure individuals are currently safe and well. Many may have been away from work/colleagues for some time (e.g. if furloughed)
- (If applicable) Discuss any circumstances and/or preferences individuals may have already informed you of or you may be aware of
- Sensitively and confidentially identify, discuss and understand any personal circumstances that may impact on an individual's return to campus. These are outlined in the Manager’s Guide and may include:
 - Clinically extremely vulnerable, previously known as shielding
 - Otherwise being in a known vulnerable or higher risk group
 - Living with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable
 - Having childcare or caring commitments (due to the impact of COVID-19, such as school/nursery closures)
- With the same levels of sensitivity and confidentiality, identify, discuss and understand any personal preferences that individuals may have around their return to campus and how these may be accommodated. These may be:
 - Travel preferences/options (e.g. cycling, walking, car/parking)
 - Shift patterns, start/finish times, staggered/flexible hours
 - Availability around childcare/caring requirements

- Particular duties (if applicable)
- Travel is likely to be a key concern for some staff, particularly those that are in high-risk groups, have accessibility issues or who have less flexibility in their hours and maybe on set shifts. Conversations should be handled sensitively. Remember that staff come from a wide geographical spread and concerns may include the type of transport, length of their journey or the need to take multiple forms of transport.
- Further consideration will need to be given to those raising any of the above issues, as set out in step 4 of the [Manager's Guidance](#). The guidance sets out potential flexibilities and mitigations that may help address staff concerns and should be considered where operationally possible.
- Remember that proposed mitigations, such as altering start and finish times, may address immediate concerns but result in secondary impacts such as issues with childcare or concerns about late night travel.
- Communicate the next steps. It may be possible to advise during the conversation on particular actions that may be taken next, or it may be appropriate to take away the information you have gathered and to then communicate any decisions at a later point. Schedule the next meeting/check-in and/or continue to follow up as necessary.
- Ensure the individual is aware of any other relevant support resources they may need to access. This may include:
 - King's wellbeing - www.kcl.ac.uk/wellbeing
 - Employee assistance programme – phone 0800 243 458 or online at www.workplaceoptions.co.uk. To login, the username is KCL and the password is Strand
 - Employee network groups - [NEST](#), the staff network group for parents and carers, and [Access](#), the university's Staff Disability Inclusion Network.
 - External resources including:
 - [King's Health Partners update](#)
 - [Big White Wall](#)