Considerate Online Communication & Engagement Toolkit

This guidance was initially developed in April 2020 in response to the COVID-19 Pandemic to support the shift to remote online working. It provides guidance and support around style, conduct and duration of online communications and engagement building on King's overarching meeting framework and ensuring consistency with IoPPN Code of Conduct.

The guidelines:

- Recognise that we are in unprecedented times which will impact on and be experienced by everyone differently

- Indicate that participants should start from a position of good intent with a supportive mindset challenging ideas/thoughts, and not people

- State that we need to apply flexibility as the default and have open and inclusive discussions about meeting times and work expectations

- Recommend that meetings should be short, sharp and focused ideally aiming for 45minutes for every scheduled 1 hour

- Recommend that ground rules, expectations and standards are set at the start of every meeting, including how the chat function will be used and who will monitor it

Scheduling Meetings

You can read King's Guidance on virtual meetings and timings here.

In scheduling meetings you should:

- Have an open and inclusive discussion about meeting times – considering what works best for the group as a whole.
- Remember to consider the needs of others including those that might have less flexibility than yourself.
- Consider previously scheduled meetings and other commitments of those invited/participating
- Aim for meetings to be short, sharp and focused

Remember: no one should be expected to attend a work-related meeting outside standard hours – everyone is entitled to time away from work regardless of where that work is currently being undertaken.

Virtual Meetings are to:

- Start on the hour or half hour, to facilitate scheduling across King's.
- End at least 5-10 minutes before the half hour or hour to allow those with consecutive meetings to take a short break between sessions and prepare for the next one.
- Are as closely aligned to King's virtual meeting framework as possible.
- Avoid Fridays where possible.

	King's Virtual meeting framework
09.00-13:00	All cross-University and faculty-level committees; all BCP groups; all staff engagement events; one-to-ones; local project and team meetings
13.00-14.00	No meetings in any capacity
14.00-17.00	One-to-ones, local project and small team meetings only

Chairing Meetings

In line with the IoPPN Code of Conduct, meeting chairs are responsible for creating an inclusive meeting environment that fosters a diversity in perspectives and approaches – everyone should feel encouraged and able to participate.

To create inclusive environments, the chair should:

- Ask participants if any adjustments are needed prior to the meeting to ensure everyone can fully participate and engage

- Ensure the meeting starts on time and finishes between 5-10 minutes before the hour or half hour – if the discussion hasn't finished suggest it is taken offline or a further meeting is scheduled

- Welcome everyone and outline the meeting etiquette and ground rules that will be applied to the meeting – it is important to set expectations and standards at the start of every meeting.

- Recognise personal preferences to use cameras or not; not everyone will have an 'office space', others might have children in the background however, having using camera's particularly when speaking can help those in the meeting to connect and engage with the content

- Clearly explain how the chat and 'hands-up' function will be used and who will be monitoring this, making clear that unacceptable use will not be tolerated

These simple tips can help lay the foundations for an inclusive, productive, engaging and successful virtual meeting:

- Begin with introductions if appropriate or direct people to the list of attendees if it is a large meeting

- Be clear about the purpose and agenda of the meeting, highlighting any specifics that need to be agreed during the meeting

- Let everyone know if the meeting is being recorded, the reasons for recording and how the recording will be used/deleted

- When noting apologies, ask for volunteers to brief absent colleagues at the next available opportunity

- Depending on the meeting, consider spending some time checking in with attendees

- Try not to let participants become distracted by tangents, by asking if unrelated points can be addressed at another time

- Stop periodically to check for comments in the chat box or for larger meetings, consider appointing a facilitator to ensure that questions and comments in the chat box are not missed

- Summarise agreed actions at the end of the meeting

- Periodically review your meeting frequency, timings, membership and objectives

Virtual Meeting Etiquette

As noted above, it is important to set expectations and standards at the start of every meeting. Here is an example of prompts a chair can read at the start of a meeting to set Meeting Etiquette:

- Mute when you're not talking – turn off camera unless you are speaking to save bandwidth

- Use the Chat function to make a comment or to signal that you would like to be invited to make a comment, anything to be kept confidential should not be added to the chat

- Hands-up button

- You can turn on closed captions

- You can view the participants to see meeting attendees

- Recognise that we understand many of you are parenting/caring and have other responsibilities, it's ok if you need to leave/parent/care during this meeting, please just remember to mute yourself

The following meeting etiquette tips can help make sure your meeting is inclusive, productive, engaging and successful:

- Recognise and be aware that we are in unprecedented times which will impact on and be experienced by everyone differently

- Come from a position of good intent with a supportive mindset challenging ideas/thoughts not people

- Allow everyone time to contribute

- Be mindful not to multi-task: close email accounts and turn off pop-up notifications

- Try to minimise background noise

- Remember to mute your mic when you're not speaking, if others are speaking or unmuted while you or someone else is speaking, a polite comment in the chat or noting someone's mic is on and you are getting feedback can solve this

- Turn your camera on when speaking which will help those listening to you to better engage

- When asking questions or making comments wait until the chair invites questions/comments or use the chat box to avoid interrupting the speaker

- Do not use the chat as an opportunity to disagree or put down other people or their views

- Think before you speak and consider that some people may take longer to process information and respond/type virtually

- Try 'speech to text' technology to support those with hearing impairments and neurodiverse participants

Come prepared, be on time and stay fully present	Let everyone participate and don't interrupt others	Think before speaking: don't react in the moment
Listen attentively, with an open mind	Practice empathy for colleagues and assume their good intent	Say 'I', not 'we' or 'people': you can't truly speak for others
Challenge the issue, not the person	Speak up if you feel time is not being used productively	Reflect on your contributions and note your actions

Recording Meetings

Virtual meetings allow us to more easily record meetings than ever before. However, meetings should only be recorded where a clear need has been identified (e.g. to assist note taking, to share with attendees who cannot attend, to make training more widely accessible etc).

If you are recording, the Chair must inform attendees at the start that the meeting will be recorded, the reason for recording, who will be able to access the recording and if the recording will be deleted once notes/minutes are finalised.

An example of a good opening phrase is listed below which you may wish to amend:

"We will be recording this meeting *insert reason for recording* and the recording will be shared with *whoever target audience is* so please keep this in mind throughout the meeting and follow the IoPPN considerate communication guidelines. If you are watching this recording back at a later date information shared was accurate at the time of recording but may have since been superseded."

Remember:

- Recordings are saved on Microsoft Stream indefinitely, even if the individual leaves King's.

- If a recording is deleted it is held in the recycle bin for 30 days before being permanently deleted. IT can retrieve this recording within the 30-day period.

- To share the recording, alter the permissions on the video via MS Stream rather than downloading and sharing the file – this ensures the meeting host retains control over access to the recording.

- Details of how to record meetings, retrieve the recording and share the recording to your target audience can be found on the Digital Skills Hub.

Meeting Chat Function

It is important to remember that chat comments do not include visual or verbal queues. This may mean your comment may be more easily misinterpreted than when communicating face-to-face or verbally during the meeting – if you feel your message could be misinterpreted it is may be better to raise your hand and ask to speak.

The following tips are useful to consider when using the chat function:

- Consider whether an option for anonymous comments/questions would be useful that can be setup through Microsoft Forms with the link placed in the chat

- Chat messages are viewable to anyone invited to the meeting with chat access, even if they are not currently in the meeting.

- Anyone invited to a Teams meeting setup via Outlook will have access to the chat.

- If you have a recurring meeting setup through Outlook and add an individual to this meeting they will then be able to see all previous and future chat messages.

- Anyone invited to a Teams meeting setup via Teams will not have access to the chat until added to that Teams page.

- Chat messages used during a Teams meeting setup via Teams will be stored as 'comments' under the Teams meeting and will be accessible to anyone who joins the Team after the meeting.

- Individuals can delete a chat message once sent which will show as 'This message has been deleted' – any compliance searches performed by IT admins will show deleted messages.

- Messages sent using chat are saved indefinitely, even if the individual leaves King's.

Communicating Remotely

Everyone's experience of remote working will be different. Communicating may become more difficult or face additional barriers. Remember**, if a particular behaviour is not acceptable face-to-face it is not acceptable online.**

These tips will help support effective remote communication

- Flexibility should be applied as the default; recognising that some people will have a lot of additional time while others will have limited time, if any, due to caring or parenting roles and circumstances and situations can change rapidly.

- Have open, honest, inclusive and ongoing conversations about work expectations with your manger/supervisor and team, unreasonable work expectations must not be imposed.

- Consider communicating your working hours in your signature as appropriate – e.g. responses may be delayed or outside standard working hours, please do not respond outside of your working hours.

- Include as much online face-to-face interaction as possible through video calls and regular manager check-ins.

- Chat or emails comments do not include visual or verbal queues which may increase the possibility of misinterpretation than when communicating face-to-face or verbally - consider whether your message could be misinterpreted it is may be better to raise in a meeting verbally than in writing.

- Be explicit in what you say in a written environment, your tone of voice and body language are no longer available to you to communicate key messages, so choose your words and punctuation carefully. Every adjective, full stop and exclamation mark matters.

- Be sociable: loneliness is one of the most common reported challenges of remote working. Try to keep in touch with people by regular face-to-face interaction online through video calls, regular manager check-ins. Consider regular check-in meetings using Microsoft Teams.

- Consider setting up a Teams site to use for more important communications during periods of home working.

- Avoid isolation: consider having work-from-home buddies for a regular daily chat.

- Daily coffee break: experiment with a daily 15-minute coffee break for all staff on teams.

Working Remotely

Everyone's experience of remote working will be different. Here are some tips to support remote working

- Maintain regular hours - set a schedule and stick to it as much as you can. Having clear guidelines for when to work and when to call it a day helps many remote workers maintain a healthy work-life balance.

- Create a routine - try and establish a regular routine as it helps keep focus. What in your morning routine marks the start of work? It might be making a cup of coffee. It might be returning home after a run. It might be getting dressed. Set boundaries to the workday to open and close the day.

- Keep a dedicated office space wherever possible but recognising that this is not possible for many people - look to make sure your home environment as safe and suitable as possible. You should complete a risk assessment (see pro forma within the e-Working Policy (internal)) You should also follow relevant DSE good practice (internal).

- Speak to your manager if you have concerns about your home working environment or if you need any equipment or additional support.

- Take breaks - taking breaks away from your workstation can support your mental wellbeing. Leave your desk for lunch. Make time for proper meals and drink water regularly.

- Take care of your mental health - focus on what you can control and follow trusted outlets and bodies only. You'll find more advise and support on our Wellbeing pages (internal).

- Set goals - start the day with your most important task of the day. Consider making a plan for what you want to achieve each day: what are the goals you'd like to get to? Consider a structure to your time - eg working in 45–60 minute chunks of focused work followed by a short break.

- Look for training opportunities for yourself, your colleagues and direct reports. When you're not in an office with your colleagues you might miss out on training and skills development courses that are taught in person. Look for online courses such as LinkedIn Learning.

Managing a team or staff remotely

Managing a team and staff can be more complicated when working remotely, but it can also provide new opportunities and easier collaboration. However, flexibility should be applied as the default.

The following tips are aimed at support managers support and manage their virtual teams.

- Adopt a virtual mindset - Measure performance by output - trust in your colleagues is essential during this period of uncertainty.

- Transparent management/leadership - Remote working necessitates a new level of transparency and trust in teams. Our virtual management revolves around the ability to trust your teams and share information openly with them.

- Agree ground rules with your team - This includes agreeing office hours or variations to 'normal' office hours that support your staff balancing home and work commitments. This is particularly important for parents and carers who may have lost access to established support mechanisms or face regular but unpredictable disruptions to childcare or school. When there are different working patterns agree when staff will be available or how changes/disruptions are communicated.

- Be realistic - Be realistic about what someone can achieve if they have children or are caring for others at home. You may need to reallocate work, give them easier things to deliver and understand they may have to work more flexibly.

- Setting expectations - Your team needs to understand what they are responsible for (goals) and when it needs to be done (deadlines). You aren't able to ask for work updates at a desk or water cooler, so consider what check-in's you need to ensure the team are on top of their work. You can also consider managing check-in's in other ways, such as shared project documents.

- Supporting anxious staff - Stay calm and listen. Create an online environment where individuals can share openly everything from their mental health to family issues. This will give you a chance to get to know your team on a more personal level than you might have done before. Make sure there are regular wellbeing check-ins. If required, free and confidential support is available via the Employee Assistance Programme (internal).

- Stay in touch - Suggest a daily Microsoft Teams meeting to stay in touch. Consider setting up a Teams site which may become more significant and be used for more important comms during periods of home working. Use video communication wherever possible.

- Be explicit about everything you say - In a written environment, your tone of voice and body language are no longer available to you to communicate key messages, so choose your words and punctuation carefully. Every adjective, full stop and exclamation mark matters.

- Encourage personal communication - Loneliness is one of the most common reported challenges of remote working. Include as much face-to-face interaction online as possible, using video calls and regular manager check-ins.

Working Flexibly

King's produced the following guidance on remote working on an ad hoc basis to supplement King's College e-Working Policy (internal).

General

- Working hours: consider maintaining regular hours, with adjustments for established flexible working arrangements.

- Contacting colleagues: people should be available during their working hours by either phone, Teams or Skype. You should make it clear how you can be contacted through your Outlook calendar.

- Contact details: individuals can consider sharing their contact details with their line manager.

Digital skills

- King's laptop check: is it in good working order and can you access what you need from home? If you don't have a laptop, discuss with your line manager.

- Do you have the relevant accessories, eg charger, laptop bag, headset?

- Do you need a headset? Order a headset [select 'Dell & Non-Standard Equipment Order Form] (internal).

- Do you need a carry case for your laptop? Equipment Order Form (internal).

- Consider moving meetings to Microsoft Teams. See guidance about using Teams (internal).

- OneDrive can be used to transfer access and shared personal files. Alternatively, SharePoint can be used for sharing files with diverse groups, through the creation of a dedicated site.

- Find out how to get started with using OneDrive and SharePoint if you haven't used them before (internal).

- Keep your Outlook calendar up to date: this should be open and shared with your team.

Comfort and health

- Working environment: make sure your home environment is safe and suitable.

- Follow relevant DSE good practice (internal). Speak to manager if you have concerns.

- Take breaks: We encourage you to take breaks from your workstation. Make time for proper meals, drink water regularly and leave your desk for lunch.

- Distinguish between work and home mode: consider what you will do in your usual commute time, eg breakfast, exercise.

- Routine: Try and establish a regular routine, it helps maintain focus.

- Set boundaries to the working day. For example, you could take a 20-minute coffee break in the morning and exercise right after work to close the day.

- Manage your mental health: focus on what you can control and follow trusted sources only.

Communications and staying in touch

- Consider regular check-in meetings using Microsoft Teams.

- Consider setting up a Teams site to use for more important comms during periods of home working.

- Be sociable: loneliness is one of the most common reported challenges of remote working. Try to keep in touch with people by regular face-to-face interaction online through video calls, regular manager check-ins.

- Avoid isolation: consider having work-from-home buddies for a regular daily chat.

- Be explicit: in a written environment, your tone of voice and body language are no longer available to you to communicate key messages, so choose your words and punctuation carefully. Every adjective, full stop and exclamation mark matters.

- Written comms: keep all written correspondence short and concise, leaving no space for misinterpretation.

- Daily coffee break: experiment with a daily 15-minute coffee break for all staff on teams.

Setting goals and expectations

- Set goals as individuals and/or team: what do you want to achieve with remote working? What are your goals?

- Consider a structure to your time. For example, working in 45-60 minute chunks of focused work followed by a short break.

- Consider what will you be missing as a team by not seeing each other face to face?

Inappropriate online behaviour

Anyone with concerns about poor behavior including, but not limited to, unreasonable expectations, bullying or harassment should view our addressing bullying and harassment toolkit which includes information about who to speak to, how to report inappropriate behaviour and the support available to staff and students.