Guidance for Returning to work in Research Laboratory Facilities; Social Distancing SARS-CoV-2 (Covid-19)
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1. Introduction

1.1 In the face of the Covid-19 pandemic, this guidance outlines the University’s high level policy for enabling research staff to return to work within laboratory facilities. This document complements existing Government guidelines on maintaining social distancing measures, to minimise the spread of the novel coronavirus on campus.

1.2 This policy pertains to the immediate measures being put in place to ensure employees can return to work within the specified laboratory facilities, as designated in the relevant School risk assessments. It will also cover how these processes can be implemented in the long term to ensure compliance for the foreseeable future.

1.3 This guidance exists in addition to all law, current policies and guidance for safe working within such facilities. In these challenging and unprecedented times, the temptation from a person’s health and safety perspective may be to solely focus on the risks aligned to the spread of Covid-19. It must not be forgotten that all current health and safety policies and guidelines for safe working within a laboratory and aligned supports spaces must still be followed.

1.4 Stakeholders, including Heads of Schools, Senior Research staff, Trade Union representatives, Senior Technical Staff, University H&S team and members of the University H&S Committee have had the opportunity to review and comment on earlier iterations of this document. It is important to acknowledge / recognise that whilst staff will be invited to return to work in designated research laboratories in line with the relevant School risk assessment. It is important to acknowledge and recognise that essential staff have now been asked to return to work in line with the relevant School or Division risk assessment following discussions with their line managers who will explain the safety measure that have been put in place. The University recognises there are a number of external factors which may influence any decision made by a member of staff, e.g. caring responsibilities or the need to shield vulnerable members of their household from increased risk of infection etc. Further Equality, Diversity & Inclusion considerations are covered in the COVID 19 - Business Resumption and Recovery Plan.

1.5 Where workers are not identified as being in an essential role and can work from home this should continue – and line managers should be flexible about helping workers to fulfil their caring responsibilities if they would normally be required to work on site.

1.5 Many staff work in open plan offices which will make social distancing guidelines difficult to implement under normal practice. The use of office space should be kept to a minimum, and the default position should be that where people are not in an essential role they possible, people should continue to work at home.

1.6 To reiterate, if non-essential workers can work from home this should continue, to promote social distancing on campus.

1.7 This specific guidance for return to work within research laboratories has been aligned with the core principles outlined in the COVID 19 - Business Resumption and Recovery Plan.

1.8 General advice to minimise risk associated with Covid-19 is as follows:

1.9 If you or a member of your household are displaying symptoms, you must self-isolate and inform your line manager and complete the UoS Covid reporting form. The period of self-isolation should follow the government guidelines. Additional guidance on self isoaltions can be found here.

1.6.1 Social distancing of 2m should be the minimum standard and School plans should be developed to achieve this. Wherever this is not achievable a risk assessment and proposed mitigating actions should be proposed.

1.6.2 Social distancing of 1m can be considered with additional controls, this includes facecoverings and or screens.
1.6.3 Where workers can work from home this should still be strongly encouraged – and line managers should be flexible about helping workers to fulfil their caring responsibilities if they would normally be required to work on site.

1.6.4 Wash hands regularly with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds.

1.6.5 Coughs and sneezes should be covered with a tissue and disposed of immediately (into your elbow if no tissue) followed by the washing of hands.

1.6.6 Workers must maintain social distancing when greeting others, this includes avoiding of shaking hands.

1.6.7 Anyone who has travelled from overseas must abide by Government self-isolation requirements before coming into campus buildings, including test to release programs.

1.6.8 Clinically vulnerable individuals, or those living with clinically vulnerable members of their household are advised at this time to continue working remotely. Please refer to the online guidance for further details of the self-assessment tool. Those who cannot work remotely should be offered the option of the safest available on-site roles, enabling them to maintain social distancing guidelines.

2. Testing

2.1 All staff and students attending campus should take an LFD (lateral flow device) test at least once a week. Ideally 2 tests would be taken weekly 3 days apart. Where this is not practical 1 test is acceptable.

2.2 Tests can be booked at the on site testing centre. Walk ins are also accepted at this centre but booking is recommended, it is advisable to check the opening times prior to arrival as this may change in line with demand.

2.3 Alternatively home test kits can be order from UK Gov here. Either home testing or on campus testing are acceptable means of testing.

2.4 LFD tests should be performed regardless of if an individual has been vaccinated. The only group that should note perform regular LFD tests are individuals that have had a confirmed case of covid within 90 days of the test.

2.5 PCR (polymerase chain reaction,) testing should be performed by individuals with symptoms or individuals that have requested a PCR test as a result of a positive LFD. In this case an individual should self isolate unless they have a negative PCR test after the initial LFD test. PCR tests can be ordered here.
3 Safe Access to and Egress from Buildings

3.1 Where safe to do so, the creation of a one way system within buildings using just one door for entry, and one door for egress to help control the flow of persons in and out of building should be adopted. However, individual building design and circumstances should be taken into account. For example, in some areas it may be appropriate to use one door for access and one (or multiple if deemed more appropriate) for egress at a single point whereas other buildings may use a doorway to the side of, or back of a building. This planning will be carried out on a building by building basis by EFM.

3.2 Final exit doors on fire escape routes should all remain operational as per normal (pre Covid-19) circumstances. Where required they can be used as part of one way routes in some buildings.

3.3 EFM will install signs should be in place to remind persons of the social distancing that is expected to be adhered to (see Figure 1) at all entrance points to buildings.

3.4 EFM will install hand sanitiser dispensers at all approved entrance and exit doors to provide staff with the opportunity to sanitise their hands on entering and leaving a building, in order to reduce potential contamination risks.

3.5 For buildings occupied by more than one School, it is expected that a joint building risk assessment and plan will be produced to ensure the maximum proposed occupancy levels can be safely managed.

3.6 Staff are encouraged to use hand sanitisers which have been made available at access points within buildings.

Figure 1 – Typical suggested signage to be used at entrances to buildings
4 Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

4.1 The use of PPE within a laboratory environment is specified within the relevant risk assessments linked to the methodologies required to carry out the particular work.

4.2 Staff should continue to wear protective clothing, eye protection and gloves as determined by the relevant risk assessment as a minimum. These should not be shared with another person and procedures for the continued safe use of these items should be included in the local School plans, and risk assessment. The use of face masks within Containment Level 2 laboratories is not recommended unless the protocol risk assessment dictates that these should be worn. If this is the case then the appropriate face mask with required filters should be worn.

4.3 Home-made face masks and other personal items such as laptops should not be worn or used in Containment Level 2 labs to avoid cross contamination between the laboratory environment and external areas such as home and public transport etc.

4.4 Gloves should be worn in the laboratory as per relevant risk assessment, but should not be worn in communal areas such as corridors etc.

5 Face Coverings

5.1 Government guidance states that use of face coverings is still required in Libraries, Shops, Taxis and other areas. If in doubt check the list via the link above.

5.2 In University buildings that are not accessible by students and do not contain facilities on the government mandated list of services that require face coverings, occupants can choose to make face coverings optional in these areas based on the risk being low due to the small number of occupants and adequate ability to maintain social distancing. This must be clearly communicated to all users of the building and updated if this changes as a result of increased occupancy.

5.3 An example of the type of signage that may be used is shown below.

5.4 A cloth face covering should cover your mouth and nose while allowing you to breathe comfortably. It can be as simple as a scarf or bandana that ties behind the head.

5.5 In circumstances where the introduction of a face covering may introduce an additional hazard or make an existing hazard worse they can be omitted (for instance when working with an open flame)

5.6 When working with a face covering and safety glasses fogging can be reduced by applying a tape to the bridge of the nose and diverting airflow away from the safety glasses.
6 Primary Laboratory Controls

6.1 The principal control method in relation to Covid-19, for ensuring a safe working environment with laboratories is the recommended 2m social distancing space. This should be the primary factor when assessing the number of staff that can safely work within a laboratory space and aligned support areas. Introducing this level of control is likely to mean that research laboratories will only be able to function at a reduced capacity. These assessments will be supported by Health and Safety, and Estates and Facilities.

6.2 This guidance is in addition to existing non COVID Health and Safety guidance. Of course, we are all responsible for safeguarding our own health and safety by taking sensible precautions, whether undertaking work in laboratories or workshops, or elsewhere.

Working with social distancing alongside laboratory-based risks

If a toxic chemical spillage in a lab resulted in the blockage of a designated exit route of a one-way system outlined in this guidance, persons should not attempt to cross the spill to evacuate the area. The use of another, non-designated route would be permissible as the risk associated with the spill would likely be higher than that of using a non-designated route. An attempt should still be made however, to ensure a 2m distance between persons evacuating by the new route.

6.3 Schools should work with SEF Building Managers to ensure floors are marked at 2m intervals to ensure persons are maintaining adequate distance from one another in laboratory and workshop environments. Where bay systems are in place, there should be no more than one person per bay. Care should be taken to ensure the distance between workers between bays is greater than 2m, as most divisions between bays are not enclosed. Where multiple points of access and egress to the laboratory or workshop are present, a one-way system should be implemented, with certain doors being designated for entry only and others for exit only (Figure 3). Where this is not possible, a communication approach should be maintained between all persons in a workspace, so movement of one individual can occur in either direction whilst other persons remain within the bays and maintain the 2m minimum distancing. All workers in bay-system laboratories or workshops should work at least 2m from any primary footways, and work facing away from the central reservation of a bay where possible to minimise any face-to-face contact between persons.

6.4 Every reasonable effort will be made to comply with the social distancing guidelines set out by the government (2m, or 1m with risk mitigation where 2m is not viable). Where the need to consider risk mitigation where 2m is not viable, it will require a specific risk assessment and may include measures such as desk moves to avoid face to face positioning, use of protective screens, activity planning to minimize contact time, face coverings.
6.5 In open plan laboratories and workshops, floor markings at 2m intervals should be made and a one-way system implemented around the room with spurs as necessary to pieces of equipment that cannot reasonably be moved, provided a 2m distance can be maintained. Where multiple points of access and egress to the laboratory or workshop are present, one-way systems should be implemented, with certain doors being designated for entry only and others for exit only (Figure 4).

Figure 3 - Suggested one-way systems for open plan laboratories

Figure 4 – Suggested one-way systems for open plan workshops
7  Shift Working

7.1 Work should be carried out in shifts, to allow the maximum number of workers to access a space, whilst maintaining a minimum number of persons working at any given time. Working space should be vacated upon completion of work, or where any significant period of delay is expected.

Please consider how to safely manage periods of time away from the laboratory bench between experiments/practical work during the working day

For Example: If a 3-hour experiment is running, and no other laboratory work can be completed during this time the use of an office or write up space should be considered and must be included in the risk assessment, to ensure recommended social distancing can be achieved. During shorter periods of delay (e.g. a 30-minute experiment is running, and no other laboratory work can be completed during this time) the area should be vacated at the discretion of the worker, however this must also adhere to the recommended social distancing requirements and take in to account other users of such spaces.

Table 1. An example spreadsheet to determine a shift schedule either for two shifts in a day, or when designating a day for each team.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Number/ID</th>
<th>Days of Attendance</th>
<th>Shift Hours (if used)</th>
<th>Estimated number of workers per team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Team A/B</td>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Shift A Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team A/B</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Shift B Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team A/B</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team A/B</td>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team A/B</td>
<td>Friday</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Est. number of staff in shift</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8  Secondary and Tertiary Work Areas

8.1 For guidance on general areas please see the guidance document for office and low hazard spaces guidance

9  Open Plan Office/Write-Up Spaces

9.1 For guidance on meeting rooms and office areas please see the guidance document for office and low hazard spaces guidance