

**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:
 - 1.6.1 If displaying symptoms, you must self-isolate and inform your line manager/Technical Services Manager. The period of self-isolation should follow the government guidelines <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>
 - 1.6.2 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.
 - 1.6.3 Clinically vulnerable individuals who cannot work from home, should be offered the option of the safest available on-site roles, enabling them to maintain social distancing guidelines. Those living with vulnerable members of their household should be supported in working from home.

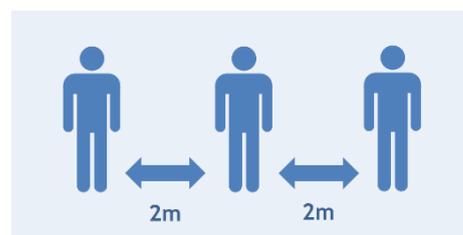
- 1.6.4 Where workers can work from home this should still be strongly encouraged – and line managers should be flexible about helping workers to fulfil their caring responsibilities if they would normally be required to work on site.
- 1.6.5 Wash hands regularly with soap and water for a minimum of 20 seconds.
- 1.6.6 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.
- 1.6.7 Workers must maintain social distancing when greeting others, this includes avoiding of shaking hands.
- 1.6.8 Anyone who has travelled from overseas must abide by Government self-isolation requirements before coming into campus buildings <https://www.gov.uk/uk-border-control>.

2. Reoccupation of Buildings/Research Laboratories

- 2.1 A phased return to work is being designed to facilitate research which requires presence on site or at external field sites to continue. This will allow the gradual resumption of research activities, in a managed and approved process, whilst the lockdown from Covid-19 begins to ease.
- 2.2 Identified buildings containing research facilities can only be reoccupied on completion of work by Sussex Estates & Facilities (SEF) to ensure that services and infrastructure are safe to occupy following a protracted period of closure. The University uses a combination of natural and mechanical ventilation systems. The mechanical ventilation systems on site are maintained as part of the planned preventative maintenance schedule.
- 2.3 Prior to reoccupation, a full risk assessment by relevant School(s) will take place based on proposed numbers of staff on site within buildings, and the activity/ duration of required works on site.
- 2.4 Schools will look to devise plans to ensure staff invited to return to work in research facilities on campus, spend the minimum time required on site to carry out agreed research activities within laboratory accommodation. All other computer/desk based work aligned to laboratory activities should continue to take place at home.
- 2.5 If decisions are made to prioritise certain buildings and/or laboratories within buildings for opening and resumption of work, these decisions will be based on ability to meet logistical requirements at any given time, and any aligned H&S reasons, as well as School research priorities.
- 2.6 Areas where ongoing research in to Covid-19 continues may be designated as a priority by the relevant Head of School.

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.



2 METRES

Please maintain social
distancing at all times

Figure 1 – Typical suggested signage to be used at entrances to buildings

The official NHS technique illustration is provided below (see Figure 2):

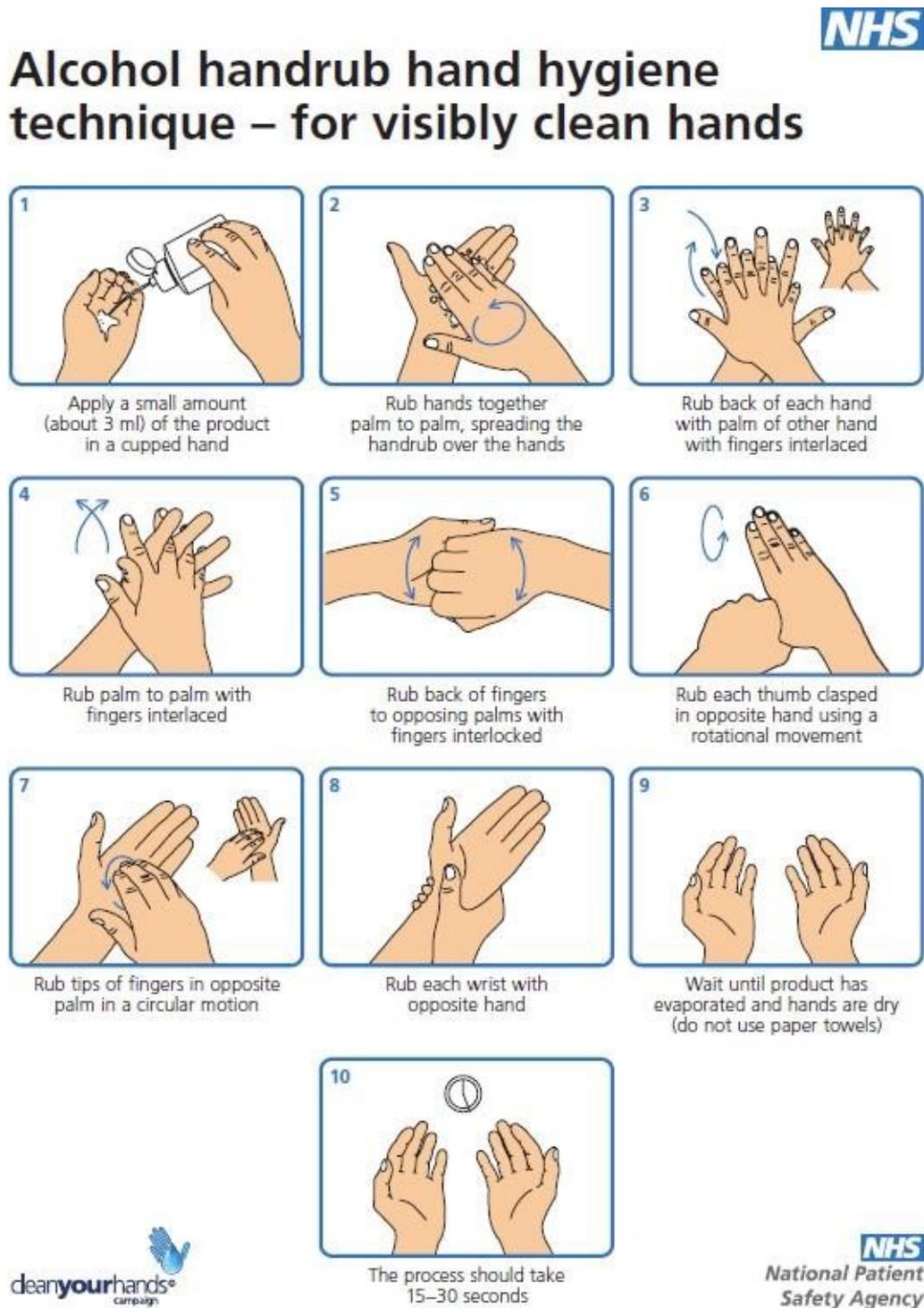


Figure 2 – NHS alcohol handrub hand hygiene technique – for visibly clean hands

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 has been updated to mandate the use of face coverings on public transport, and shops from the 24th July 2020 (there are a limited number of exemptions),
- 5.2 The University, where required by Government changes to guidance or by risk assessment, may mandate the use of face coverings, particularly where it is not viable to maintain 2m social distancing. This will be indicated by the use of either clear signage or a specific risk assessment that face coverings are required.
- 5.3 An example of the type of signage that may be used is shown below.

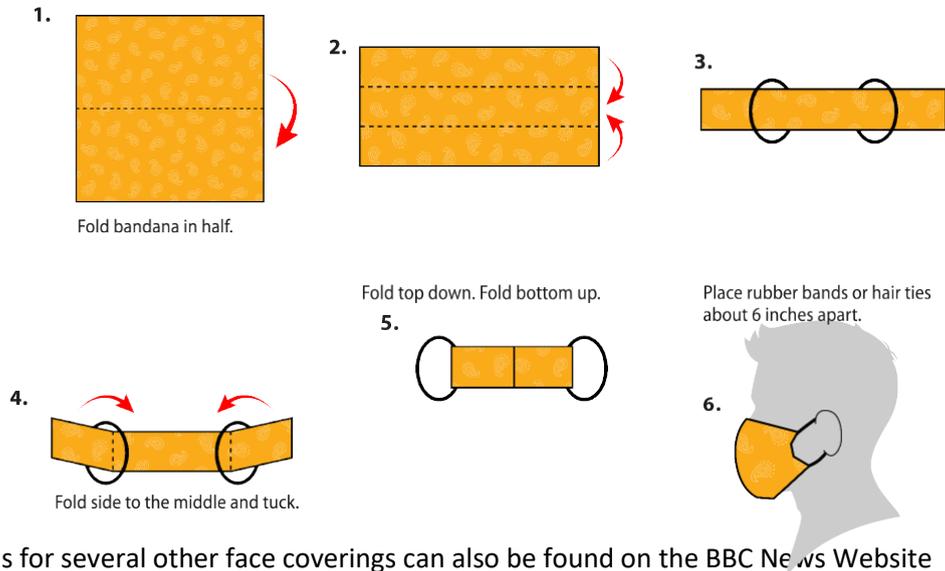


- 5.4 A cloth face covering should cover your mouth and nose while allowing you to breathe comfortably. It can be as simple as a scarf or bandana that ties behind the head.
- 5.5 The UK Government has published guidance on how to make your own face coverings (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering/how-to-wear-and-make-a-cloth-face-covering>).
- 5.6 It is recommended that face coverings are made from multiple layers of fabric. An alternative face

covering with multiple layers can be made simply using a no-sew method. Diagrammatic instructions for making this covering are shown below and the CDC has published an instructional video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPx1yqvJgf4>).

5.7 Materials Needed:

- Bandana (or square cotton cloth approximately 50cm x 50cm)
- Rubber bands (or hair ties)
- Scissors (if you are cutting your own cloth)



Instructions for several other face coverings can also be found on the BBC News Website (<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-52609777>).

6 Primary Laboratory Accommodation

- 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.

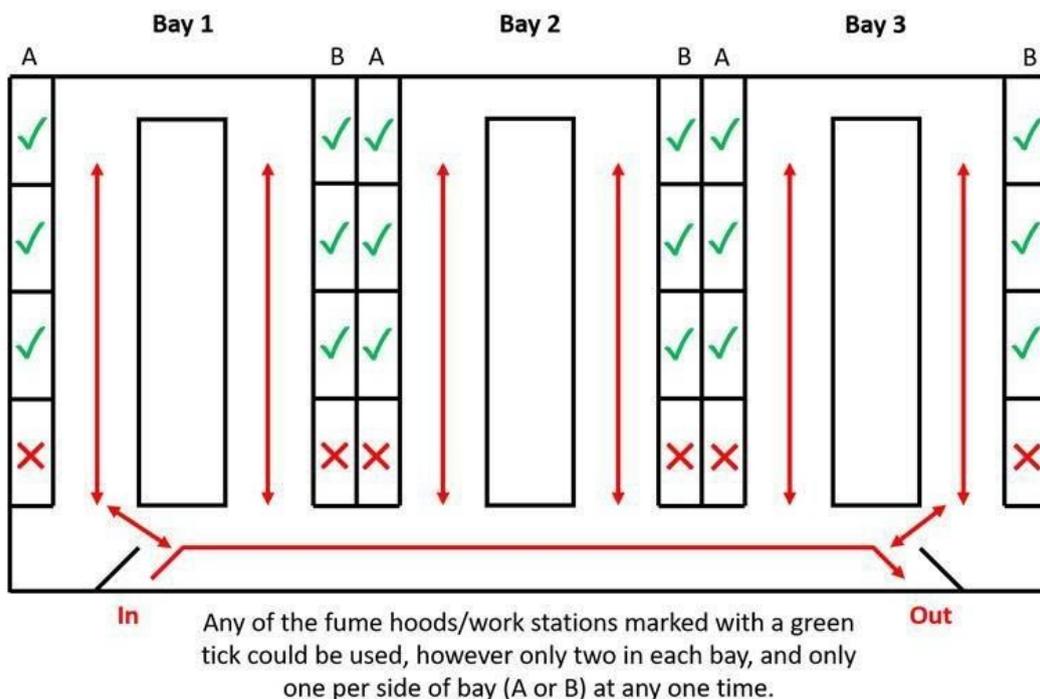


Figure 3 - Suggested one-way systems for open plan laboratories

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).

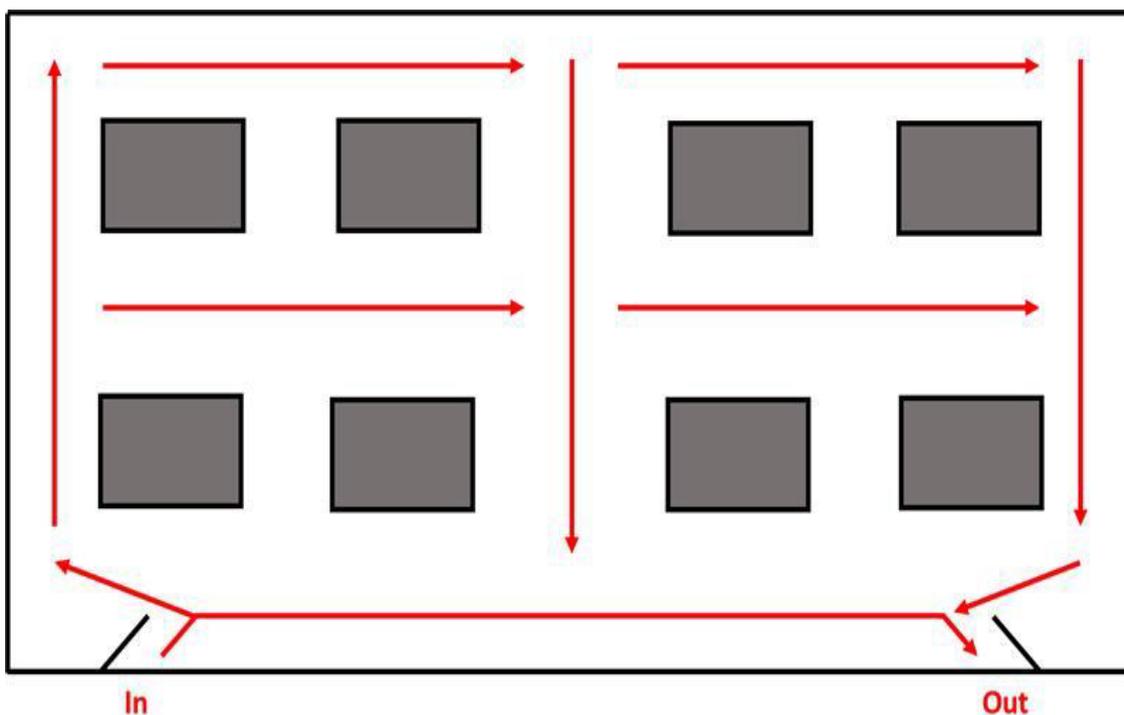


Figure 4 – Suggested one-way systems for open plan workshops

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.

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

8 Laboratory Area Decontamination

- 8.1 All laboratory staff will follow their normal routines associated with decontamination of their work area before and after use. Care should be taken to effectively clean communal equipment at the end of their shift in a laboratory.

9 Secondary and Tertiary Work Areas

- 9.1 Schools are required to produce a plan to safely manage the access to, and use of, spaces where multiuser items of specialised equipment are based. For example, maintaining the 2m social distance requirements in freezer rooms, centrifugation rooms and single hood tissue culture rooms. This may well require limiting access to such facilities to single person use at any one time. In order to avoid unexpected encounters with staff using such spaces, Schools will be required to implement a process as detailed in the signage below;



10 Corridors, Stairwells and Lifts

- 10.1 EFM will plan how to utilise buildings safely will be done on a building by building basis. Maintaining social distancing in the corridors of buildings will involve several factors. Where possible, corridors which are sufficiently wide (i.e. exceeding 2m in width) should have a marking made down the centre to provide two 'lanes' where staff can always keep left, as illustrated in Figure 5. If a corridor is less than 2m wide a one-way system should be designed in the building for high traffic areas to create a series of loops that persons should follow when moving around buildings (Figure 6). For areas of low traffic, or for reasons specified in building risk assessment, an alternative system of allowing people to pass by each other and maintain a 2m distance is acceptable.
- 10.2 Signage should be placed at regular intervals along corridors, reminding persons to maintain a distance of at least 2m from others. In sections of corridors where queues are likely to form (e.g. outside kitchen areas, toilets etc.), corridors should be marked at 2m intervals to ensure social distancing is maintained whilst queueing. Schools should work with SEF Building Managers to collate signage and floor markings.
- 10.3 The use of lifts in buildings should be avoided at all times where possible and used only by disabled persons, or for the transport of large/heavy/hazardous materials where transport on stairways would not be possible or safe. It is likely that in most research buildings there is more than one stairway connecting floors. If lifts must be used, then they should be single occupancy to avoid aerosol transmission in a confined space and to maintain 2m separation.
- 10.4 If at all feasible, stairways should be designated as an 'up route' or a 'down route' to prevent face-to-face interaction of persons, and to ensure 2m distancing is maintained. These should be adequately signed to assist with the smooth movement of staff between floors as/when required.
- 10.5 Where only one stairwell to a floor is present, and the width of the stairwell is in excess of 2m it is acceptable to create an up and down side to the stairwell (clearly demarcated and with appropriate signage) to ensure staff may pass each other safely. If, as in a number of our buildings, the staircases are narrow and passing would result in close proximity (or if using a one-way stair system increases risk, such as when transporting hazardous materials), a verbal alert procedure (i.e. shouting "Is anyone using this stairwell?") should be put in place before using a stairwell to ensure there is not another person already using it.

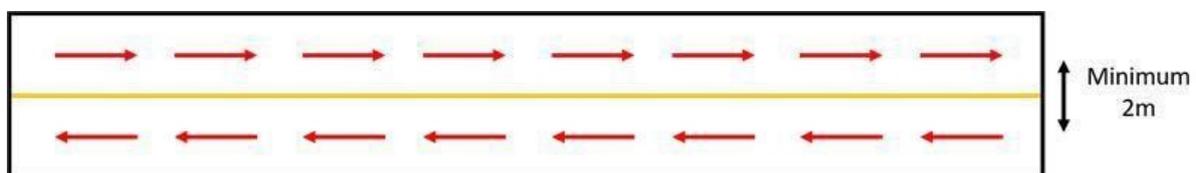


Figure 5 – Suggested two-way system to be implemented for wider corridors of more than 2m width



Figure 6 – Suggested one-way system to be implemented for corridors of less than 2m width

11 Open Plan Office/Write-Up Spaces

- 11.1 Many staff work in open offices which will make social distancing guidelines difficult to implement under normal practice. The use of office and write-up space in support of laboratory activities should be kept to a minimum, and the default position should be that write-up of laboratory work, data analysis etc. should be completed at home.
- 11.2 It is recognised that some laboratory methodologies have inherent periods of time when procedures need to run without intervention by the researcher. During such periods it would be acceptable for research staff to make use of a write-up space and/or shared office. However, this will be permitted only when it is possible to achieve the 2m separation and such measures do not involve face to face working. The use of such facilities will be at the discretion of Heads of Schools to ensure a safe working environment is established and identify the maximum number of staff that can use the facility at any one time, whilst remaining compliant with the social distancing requirement.
- 11.3 To reiterate, if workers can work from home this should still be strongly encouraged, to promote social distancing on campus.
- 11.4 Figure 8 shows a typical four worker station. It would be most appropriate to limit areas such as these to one person to ensure compliance with social distancing. In these cases, the above suggestions should help your team arrange how this can be facilitated.

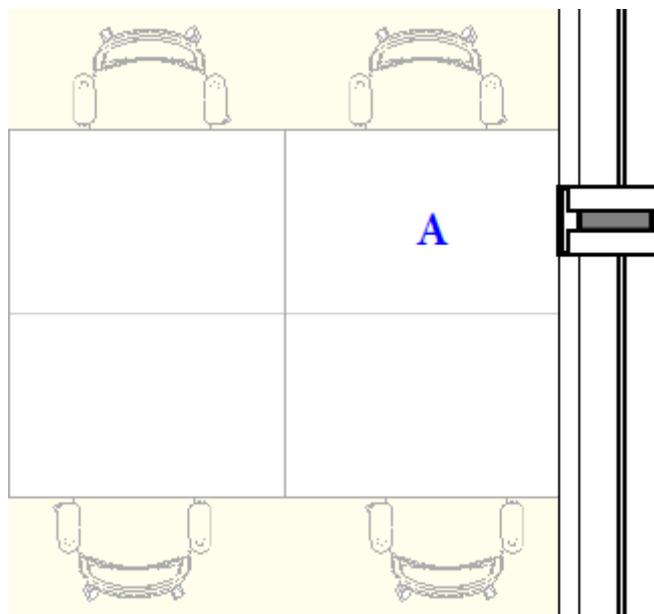


Figure 8 – Typical four worker station layout at reduced capacity

Government guidelines specifically state

- **Where face-to-face contact is essential, this should be kept to 15 minutes or less wherever possible.**
- **As much as possible, keep teams of workers together, and keep teams as small as possible.**

11.5 Where larger desk areas are in place, workers should be staggered as illustrated in Figure 6. Where maintaining the recommended 2m separation during passing is not possible, the addition of a screen between desks and the removal of seats (red crosses in Figure 9) will allow for social distancing to be observed.

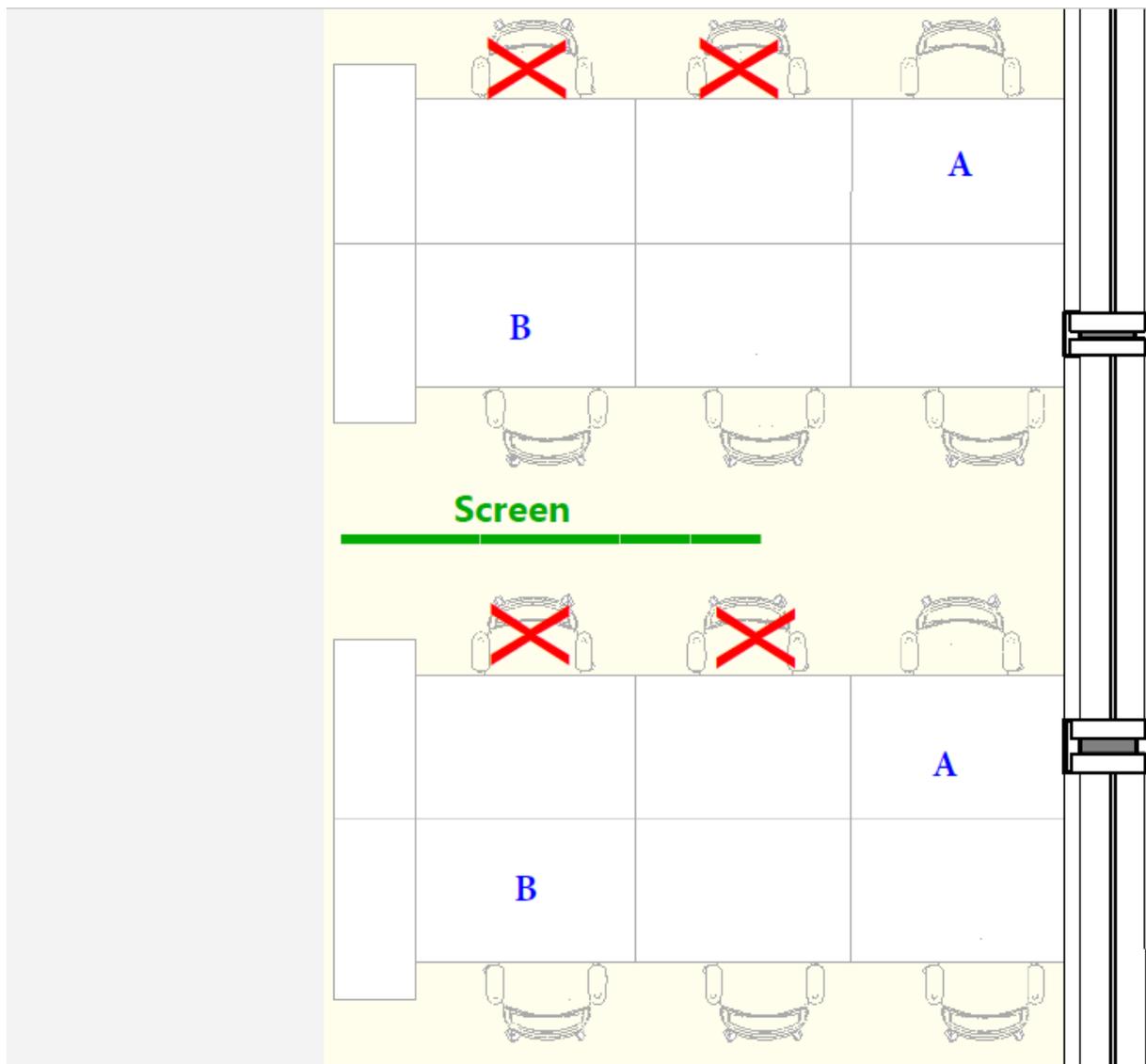


Figure 9 – Suggested staggered working position arrangement where chairs are removed to allow person A to access desk behind screen

12 Communal Kitchens

- 12.1 Many buildings on campus have small, communal kitchen areas for use by members of staff and research students. To ensure social distancing measures are adhered to, communal kitchens should employ a 'one out, one in' procedure (Figure 10), with no more than one person being in the area at any time.

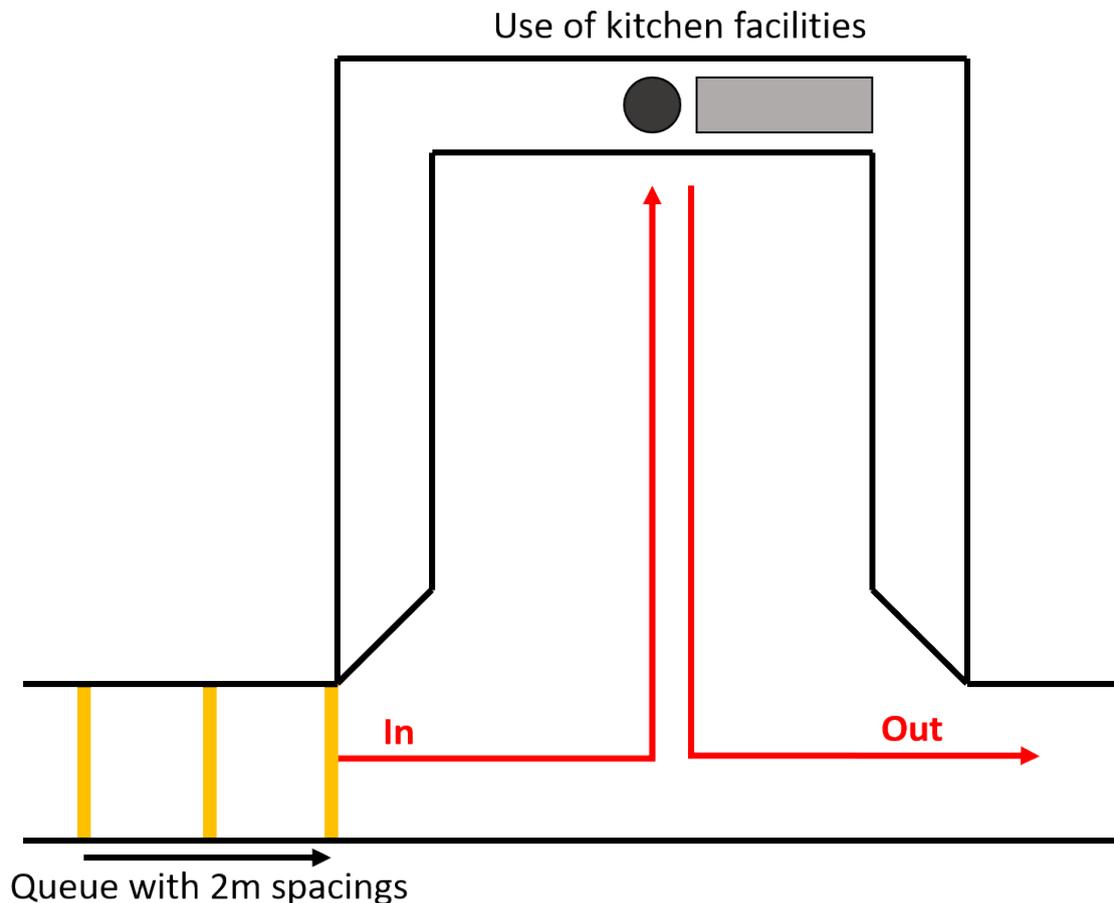


Figure 10 – Suggested 'one out, one in' procedure for smaller kitchens

- 12.2 In the case of much larger kitchens (plentiful, accessible, uninterrupted floor space) floor markings at 2m intervals may be employed to allow for a well-spaced queue within the kitchen area (Figure 11). Schools should work with SEF Building Managers to employ these markings. Any persons who would fall outside the maximum occupancy of a kitchen area should form a queue in the adjoining corridor (see Figure 10), with the start of the queue being set 2m away from the entrance to the kitchen area to allow persons to exit the area whilst maintaining a 2m distance from persons queueing.

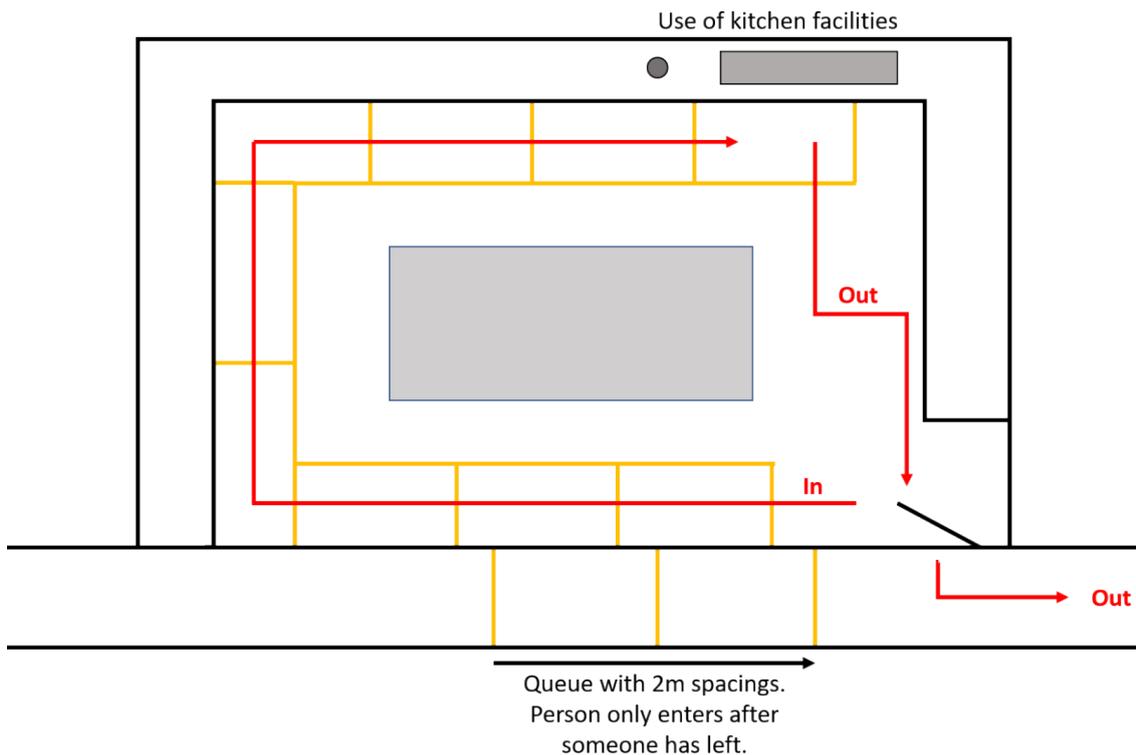


Figure11 – Suggested one-way systems for larger kitchens

- 12.3 All persons should wash their hands for at least 20 seconds, in accordance with government guidance, prior to the handling of communal items in the kitchen, such as kettles and cutlery. It is recommended that communal cutlery/mugs etc. should not be used, and personal ones be taken home to be washed. Where this is not possible, communal cutlery/mugs etc. should be washed thoroughly using soap and warm water, dried using a paper towel or towel designated for this purpose (not a hand towel), and put away immediately to reduce the risk of transfer of contamination to other persons. It is recommended that you should wash your hands again after leaving kitchen facilities.
- 12.4 In addition, any area identified as a place for staff to eat lunch etc. must be carefully managed to ensure required social distancing is maintained. Use of outdoor areas for lunch / rest breaks are recommended, however adherence with the 2m social distancing requirements must be adhered to.
- 12.5 If possible, a rota system with times of use for each team should be drawn up to avoid overcrowding and a smooth flow of users.

13 Toilets

- 13.1 Toilet facilities within research buildings differ greatly, ranging from single, lockable WCs to larger communal facilities.
- 13.2 In all cases, please respect good hygiene, making a conscious effort to wash your hands effectively. Please see the advice in the Loughborough University video:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pm94ChOPw50>

- 13.3 The official NHS technique illustration is provided below (see Figure 12):

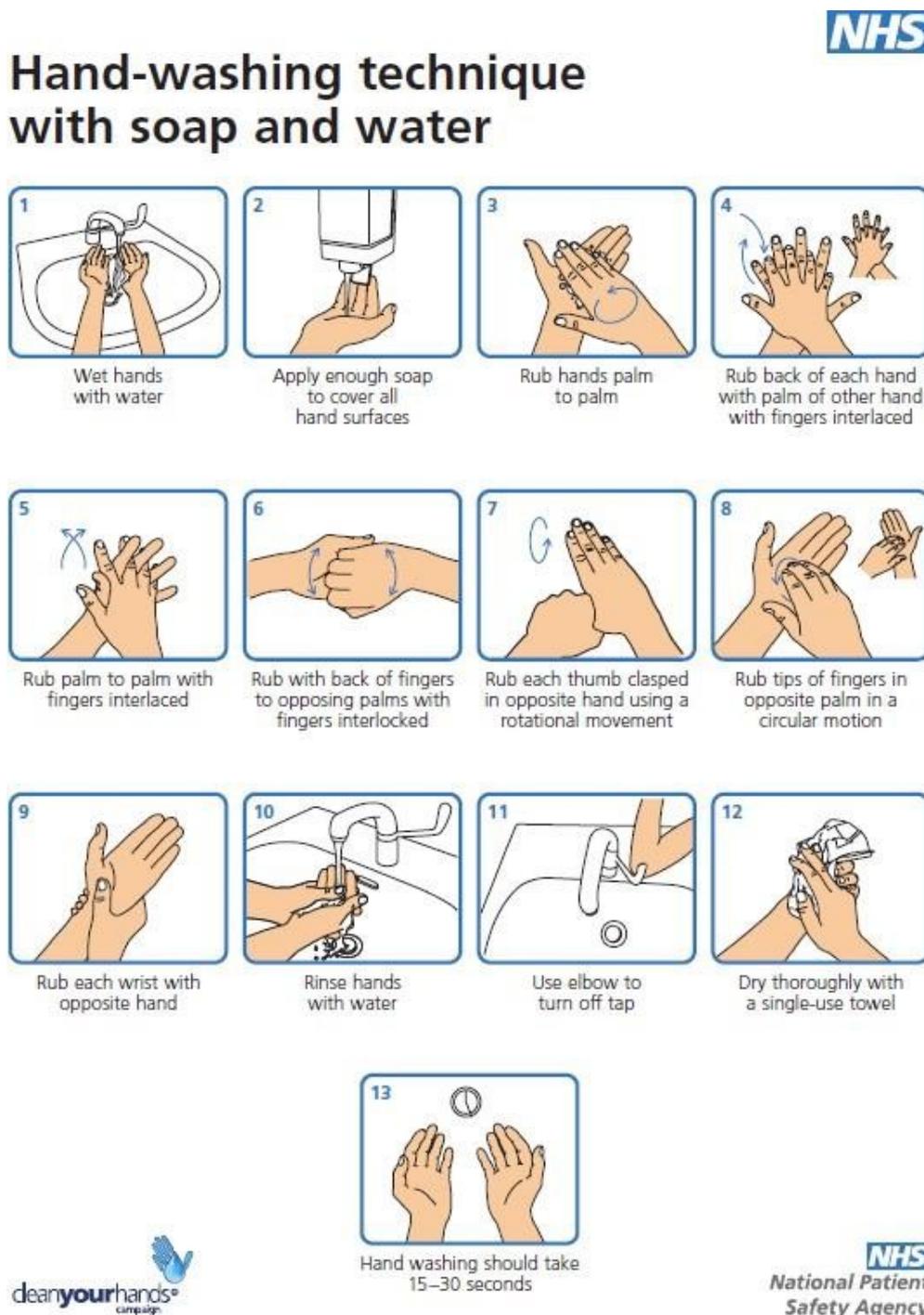


Figure 12 – NHS hand-washing technique with soap and water

13.4 Single/accessible facilities

13.4.1 In the case of single, lockable facilities, please leave the facility in a respectable condition. If waiting to use such a facility, ensure you stand at least 2m from the door to allow the previous occupant the appropriate space to leave without breaking social distance guidelines.

13.5 Communal/multi-occupancy facilities

13.5.1 For the majority of communal toilets, it is envisaged that maintaining social distancing will be extremely difficult. Consequently, all communal toilets will need to change to a 'one out, one in' system with no more than one person being in the room at any time, and where users are asked to use a 'knock and call' system.

13.5.2 In addition, a sign on the inside of the door should be coordinated with the SEF Building Manager, reminding persons of good hand washing practice given this will be a higher risk area with contact on the doors by all users.

13.5.3 Where it is believed social distancing can be maintained, and there is a justifiable need for multiple occupancy, the University Health and Safety Service must be contacted to authorise this.

14 Signage

14.1 SEF Building Manager of the area, in liaison with line managers in case of any specific requirement, should collate the signage requirements. A list of signage that the School would want to employ is below;

- Single use rooms/labs – max number of occupants for multiple user rooms
- Along corridors
- Entrances and exits – both social distancing and hand washing
- Lifts
- Staircases
- Outside Kitchens
- Outside Toilets

14.2 Note: The majority of figures, and some sections of text within this document are courtesy of the excellent guidance document produced by H&S colleagues from the University of Loughborough.

15 Process for Applying to Reopen Buildings

Below is a checklist and final declaration form each School(s) should complete in order to apply for a building to be reopened. Where buildings contain multiple schools, Heads of Schools will need to work together to produce an integrated plan:

1. Create a Risk Assessment for each building for mitigating the risks of CV-19 to members of staff

2. Develop a rough floor plan for that building which includes the following information:

- Rooms/areas where work will begin again
- Number of people who will work in each area/room and the duration for work in there.
- Routes in and around the building to ensure social distancing.
- Areas which will need specific works/actions for social distancing totake place (e.g. kitchens).

3. A list of workers and a schedule if staggered working between teams

4. Complete the following declaration of being Covid-Secure:

We confirm we have complied with the government’s guidance on managing the risk of COVID-19

- We have carried out a COVID-19 risk assessment and shared the results with the people who work here
- We have cleaning, handwashing and hygiene procedures in linewith guidance
- We have taken all reasonable steps to help people work from home
- We have taken all reasonable steps to maintain a 2m distance inthe workplace
- Where people cannot be 2m apart, we have done everything practicalto manage transmission risk

Head of School / Division.....

Date.....

Please send this completed form alongside all other documents to healthsafety@sussex.ac.uk

Please note: Once an application to reopen has been made, there will be a lag time between approval and the SEF and Technical teams facilitating the opening of buildings of 5 days minimum.

Version Control

Version	Date	Reason for change	Notes
V1.0	19 May 2020	New document	
V 2.0	24 August 2020	Update in line with guide for low hazard areas.	Changes reflect changes to Government guidance.
V 3.0	28 August 2020	Update to reflect change in HR Policy	