



COVID-19 STAFF FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

(UPDATED 15 JANUARY 2021)

These FAQs take into account Government guidance and the University of Oxford's policy at this time. Our approach will continue to be reviewed and updated and the arrangements described in these FAQs will be subject to change. Please also see the St Edmund Hall coronavirus website for any additional information.

1. New National Lockdown – Implications for Hilary Term

On Wednesday, 30 December, the UK Government published new guidance about which students are allowed to return to universities in the New Year. This was updated on 4 January 2021 with the announcement of another national lockdown. This means that whilst the College remains open for on-site working, teaching and learning will need to take place online until at least mid-February apart from some courses outlined in [government guidance](#) where in-person teaching is permitted.

We will need to await further advice from the government and the University nearer the time about whether students will be able to return to College for the remainder of Hilary Term.

2. What arrangements are in place for staff who are required to work on site?

The latest government guidance is you may only leave your home for work if you cannot reasonably work from home. To maintain safe distancing the number of people that can be in our buildings at one time is limited. Staff should only work on site where it is essential for them to do so. Managers have already arranged appropriate distancing measures and working patterns in order to reduce the number of people in work spaces at any one time.

The Lodge is currently closed to all, save for Lodge personnel, until further notice. All mail can be handed over at the Lodge window.

3. I am concerned about working on site – can I continue to work from home?

We have taken a careful and measured approach to a return to working on site. Risk assessments have been completed and control measures are in place such as social distancing and limiting the number of people in work/communal areas and a one way system. Meetings are being held via video link where possible and you are discouraged

from moving between offices and buildings as much as possible. To be consistent with the latest national restrictions staff should only return to or continue on-site working where there are clear benefits to enabling staff and teams to work effectively and productively. We understand that staff may be worried and you are encouraged to ask questions and raise any concerns with your manager in the first instance.

The [COVID-vulnerability self-assessment tool](#) is available and all staff are encouraged to complete this. Please discuss the results with your manager or the HR Manager if you have any concerns.

4. I would like to work from home or change my hours permanently – how do I request this?

We are delighted with how successfully our staff have adapted to working from home during this pandemic; however, it is important that we maintain a complete College experience for our students and therefore the College will require staff to work from their offices again once it is completely safe to do so. As such, temporary arrangements and additional flexibility has been given in line with government advice and if a member of staff wishes to make a request for flexible working on a permanent basis, this request should be made to their manager via the Flexible Working Policy.

5. What wellbeing support is available?

This is a difficult period for all of us and particularly for colleagues with an existing mental ill-health condition. There are a number of support services available to you during this period:

- Care First Employee Assistance Programme, which can be used to access 24/7 telephone counselling or access to online services via the [Care First](#). To speak to a counsellor confidentially, please call **0800 174319** or to access the online service please log in using the details below:

Username: **stedmundhall**

Password: **employee**

- [TalkingSpace PLUS](#) is an Oxford based NHS mental health self-referral service, offering free therapy course, including how to manage worries around COVID-19, and how to connect with others if you are feeling alone as a result of having to isolate yourself.
- The University's Occupational Health Service's [mental health web pages](#) signpost a wide range of resources and sources of support.

- The University's Equality and Diversity Unit website has [resources for staff with pre-existing mental health conditions and for those in the neurodivergent community in light of COVID-19](#).
- The University subscribes to Togetherall (previously known as 'Big White Wall') which is an online peer-to-peer support community is offering discussions mediated by mental health professionals, as well as self-learning courses and resources. Anyone with a University email address can [register for free with togetherall](#) (select "I'm from a University or College").
- The Department of Experimental Psychology are running a series of online lectures titled "[Our Mental Wellness](#)". The series aims to inform, dispel myths and generate discussion on a range of mental health topics. This is a great opportunity for students, staff and alumni to hear world-leading researchers from the University of Oxford share their expertise about mental health conditions and effective evidence-based treatments. It is a chance to have your questions answered about how we can look after each other's mental wellness in our community. Talks will run twice termly and are open to all staff, students and alumni at the University.
- Staff are being offered a free three-month trial of an online fitness programme, to help support staff wellbeing during the pandemic. Active Anywhere provide access to over 500 fitness and wellness classes, catering for all ages and abilities. It's provided by Oxford University Sport, and the free access has been made possible by the Staff Wellbeing Programme Board. To join, staff will need to register using this [online form](#) and download the [Oxford University Sports app](#) on their smartphone.
- You can also discuss any concerns that you have with your line manager who can support you with adjustments to your work or speak to the HR Manager, who is a Mental Health First Aider, if further advice is needed. If you are experiencing significant anxiety, you should contact your GP for advice and treatment if required.

6. I am concerned about becoming unwell whilst at work

Please support yourself and your colleagues and our students by following the advice provided by [Public Health England](#) which is designed to minimize the spread of infection. Please remember that the advice is:

- Wash your hands regularly.
- Cover your mouth and nose when you sneeze or cough with a tissue or sleeve.
- Observe social distancing rules and safe workplace protocols and following the control measures that have been put in place in relation to your particular working environment.

If you are unsure or have concerns speak to your manager or the HR Manager in the first instance.

7. I have symptoms of COVID-19 – what should I do and how do I book a test?

If you have any of the primary symptoms of COVID-19 as follows:

- **a high temperature** – this means you feel hot to touch on your chest or back (you do not need to measure your temperature)
- **a new, continuous cough** – this means coughing a lot for more than an hour, or 3 or more coughing episodes in 24 hours (if you usually have a cough, it may be worse than usual)
- **a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste** – this means you've noticed you cannot smell or taste anything, or things smell or taste different to normal.

The booking system also has a new function and allows you to indicate if you have other symptoms other than those above.

You must stay at home or immediately return home, notify your manager or the HR Manager and do the following:

- **Isolate:** you must self-isolate immediately for 10 days from when your symptoms start.
- **Test:** get a free test at the [University of Oxford's Early Alert Testing Service](#). You will receive a result within 24 hours. For enquiries relating to booking a test please contact eas-enquiries@medsci.ox.ac.uk or telephone 01865 (6)19119 between 10am and 2pm, Monday to Friday. You must have a University Staff Card to book the test and a SSO (single sign on). Please contact your manager or the HR Manager if you require assistance. The central testing site is in the city centre, located in the Radcliffe Observatory Quarter and a second site at Old Road Campus, Headington.
- **Contact:** St Edmund Hall at easresults@seh.ox.ac.uk or call the lodge to report that you are self-isolating and contact your manager or the HR Manager. Confidentiality will be observed.
- **Results:** if your test is positive, you must complete a 10-day self-isolation period.
- **Negative:** You may return to your normal way of life as long as you are not self-isolating due to close contact or quarantine (in which case you must complete a self-isolation period of 14 days). Please inform your manager or the HR Manager that you are still self-isolating.

- **Contact Tracing:** if you test positive for coronavirus, the NHS Test and Trace service will send you a text or email alert or call you with instructions of how to share details of people with whom you have had close, recent contact and places you have visited. It is important that you respond as soon as possible so that they can give appropriate advice to those who need it. You will be told to do this online via a secure website or you will be called by one of the contract tracers.

8. Can you define what 'Close Contact' is?

You are likely to be considered a 'close contact' of someone who has tested positive (and therefore at risk of infection) if:

- You have been face to face with someone who is closer than 1 metre (3 feet) from you for **any length of time.**
- You have been within 1 to 2 metres (3-6 feet) of someone for **more than 15 minutes.**

AND

- The contact occurred any time from the two days before they experienced COVID-19 symptoms onwards.

9. What do I do if I'm told I may be a close contact?

If NHS Test and Trace contacts you, you must follow their instructions carefully.

If you are notified by an individual, who has tested positive, you should consider whether you have had close contact with that person and need to self-isolate. If you are in any doubt please contact your manager or myself for advice.

Remember, you should **only** get a test if you develop COVID-19 symptoms.

10. Will my colleagues be told if I have contracted COVID-19?

We have an obligation to do all we reasonably can to ensure the health and safety of our employees and students. Data protection legislation does not prevent us from informing staff that there are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 cases but it does prevent us from naming the individual and to only provide information that is absolutely necessary for the safety and health of our staff. In very small teams the identity of the individual may be implicit however the Information Commissioners Office have provided guidance that Data Protection does not prevent us keeping staff informed about cases in the College.

11. Will I be paid if I need to self-isolate?

If you are required to self-isolate and you can work from home, then you should do so. All employees will be paid 100% of their salary if they are required to self-isolate either because they are showing symptoms or as a precaution because they have received an instruction from NHS Test and Trace Services. You must provide evidence of the self-isolation instruction to your manager or the HR Manager. The information will be treated in the strictest confidence.

This does not apply to any member of staff who is self-isolating after travelling from a country which is not exempt from government travel restrictions. Under these circumstances, if you are unable to work from home you will need to take additional annual leave or unpaid leave to cover the mandatory 14 day period.

12. What flexibility is available to help manage my childcare responsibilities?

All primary and secondary schools closed from 5 January, 2021 and only vulnerable children or children of key workers will be allowed to attend for face-to-face learning. Early years settings will remain open.

The University is in discussions with Oxfordshire County Council over the issue of 'critical worker' places for children in schools during the lockdown. The Government recognises the crucial contribution of the Universities and has classed many HE staff as critical workers. However, whilst it is fully appreciated that home-schooling as working parents is causing profound difficulties for some staff we are also aware that schools are really struggling with three times more requests for places than were received during the first lockdown.

The Government has recognised these pressures and has updated its [guidance](#) advising parents and carers who are critical workers to keep their children at home if they can. Given the profound pressures on schools we would encourage staff to only take up a school place if absolutely necessary.

Those who will find it impossible to carry out their role whilst home-schooling may, of course, continue to apply for a critical worker place at their school. However, we are asking staff to exercise judgment, and unless you cannot carry out your role while home-schooling, and your job is absolutely critical to your role then we ask you not to apply for a school place as a critical worker.

The local education authority have agreed with this approach, and will be issuing guidance to schools to reflect these criteria. Schools will take them into account when making decisions on applications where they have insufficient space.

If you experience any childcare difficulties due to the impact of the pandemic on your child's school or nursery, please contact your manager or the HR Manager in the first instance to discuss.

If you wish to consider temporary alterations to your working hours to help manage caring responsibilities, please speak to your manager in the first instance.

13. I have an underlying condition. Should I stay at home?

No, not necessarily, unless you are clinically vulnerable. Staff with an underlying health condition should speak to their line Manager who will conduct a risk assessment based on your personal circumstances and your job. Most staff with underlying conditions will be able to work normally, while being particularly careful to follow social distancing measures.

14. I live with a clinically vulnerable person – what should I do?

Members of staff who live with clinically vulnerable people should discuss their individual circumstances with their line manager. The College will be as flexible as possible in accommodating adjustments to help these staff protect their household but if a member of staff feels unable to continue to fulfil their role due to their personal living circumstances they may opt to take a form of leave e.g., holiday or unpaid leave.

15. My holiday plans have been affected by COVID-19. Can I cancel my leave and can my manager make me take holidays?

If your travel plans have been disrupted as a result of COVID-19 and you would like to cancel your annual leave, you should discuss this with your manager. With your manager's approval, you can cancel your leave and reschedule, however, we recommend that you still take annual leave during the present time to allow appropriate rest from work and for your own health and wellbeing.

Line managers have the ability to direct staff to take their holidays especially during any furlough periods. They should discuss it with their staff first but they can then ask them to take holiday by giving them the appropriate statutory notice (twice the duration of the holiday period).

16. Do I still require a medical fit note if I have been off sick for 7 days?

Yes. GP's are now providing medical certificates again for absences of 7 days or more.

17. For BAME Colleagues

The [UK Government has stated](#) that there is clear evidence that COVID-19 does not affect all population groups equally. We understand this can cause increased concerns for our

BAME colleagues. The College is committed to ensuring that we do everything we can to protect our whole community and we recognise our duty of care to all colleagues and students regardless of background or ethnicity. We remain clear about the need for respect, kindness and compassion for all. If you experience or witness any inappropriate behaviour, harassment or violence, please report it to your line manager, the HR Manager or in serious cases the police immediately.

18. For pregnant colleagues

If you are pregnant, please follow the government advice on social distancing measures. Your line manager or the HR Manager will offer maternity risk assessments for any pregnant staff working at College or remotely.

19. What measures have been put in place to ensure staff are safe at work?

All staff returning to work on-site been provided with clear instructions on how to maintain a safe environment in the workplace.

The instructions included:

- use of designated entrances and exits;
- social distancing within College buildings – in offices, corridors, staircases, etc.;
- a one-way system around the College;
- use of communal facilities – kitchens, meeting rooms etc., as it may be necessary to stagger usage or to continue to hold remote meetings so as to maintain social distancing.
- any restrictions on the use of communal equipment such as printers and photocopiers;
- other health and safety instructions such as hygiene practices.

The instructions constitute a reasonable management request and all staff will be expected to follow them. If you commit a minor or inadvertent breach, your manager will remind you about the requirements and support you in observing them. If you repeat the breach, your manager may decide to send you home pending consideration of next steps. If you deliberately refuse to follow the instructions or commit a major breach, that would be a disciplinary offence and you risk being denied access to College premises and being suspended.

If you notice someone is not following the guidance please encourage them in a friendly and polite way and if someone reminds you please do not take offence – we need to work together as a community.

If you require a reminder of the instructions again please ask your manager in the first instance.

20. What other protective measures has the College implemented?

- Cleaning regimes have been significantly enhanced and extended to cover the hours of 06:30 to 18:00 with regular cleaning of contact points such as door handles, rails and toilets.
- Hand sanitizers will be available across College properties.
- All College spaces will be adapted to ensure social distancing and appropriate ventilation.
- Signage and markings will be available to enable all to safely enter and move around College premises.
- The College Library will operate social distancing through capacity limits with spacing of seats and enhanced cleaning measures.
- Where social distancing is more difficult, we will adopt further measures such as the use of Perspex screens or barriers.
- Encouraging video meetings in place of face-to-face meetings and for staff to limit movement between offices.

21. What PPE should I be using and who can provide this?

Use of PPE is a control measure determined by risk assessment and identifying risk mitigation measures in accordance with the usual hierarchy of controls. Social distancing is higher in this hierarchy than PPE, but for some workers PPE will be needed to control risk. The risk is highest for those working in a student or customer facing role as they are more exposed to COVID-19; for other staff, the government advice there is very little scientific evidence of widespread benefit from PPE. Your line manager is responsible for issuing any relevant PPE.

22. What is the guidance on wearing a face covering?

The Government has set out that people must wear a face covering whilst using public transport, in shops and supermarkets or when attending a hospital as a visitor or outpatient.

We are therefore recommending that all staff wear a face covering when inside College buildings. You do not need to wear a face covering if you are outside provided you are simply travelling from building to building or arriving or leaving for work. To support this, we have provided reusable College branded face masks. If you require a face mask please email bursary@seh.ox.ac.uk or telephone Lynne Morley-Johnson on Ext. 79007.

It is important to note that face coverings do not replace social distancing and that you need to use them properly i.e. wash your hands before putting them on and taking them off and ensure your mouth and nose are covered.

St Edmund Hall broadly follows the [University of Oxford's face covering policy](#).

23. What facilities are in place for rest breaks, College meals and refreshments?

Unfortunately, we are unable to provide a full lunch service for staff. However, for those staff who have to come to work due to the nature of their job, a takeaway packed lunch will be available each day (Monday to Friday) but you will need to book this in advance by contacting Sue McCarthy (E: susan.mccarthy@seh.ox.ac.uk or T: 01865 (2)79022).

All water fountains are in operation and additional drinking water is available from all marked taps.

Kitchen areas will remain open but due to size are likely to operate on a 'one in, one out' rule with staff being required to wash hands before and after handling any communal items.

Toilets are open but with physical distancing rules in place to allow safe navigation routes in and around the toilet and sink areas. Regular hand washing for 20 seconds and/or sanitising is the main way to clean any potential contamination from your hands and dry them with paper towels or hand dryers. The HSE have confirmed that hand dryers can be used, however, paper towels are also being made available in each location.

24. I am a member of the Senior Common Room – can I use it?

Yes, but the SCR will be closed for meals during Hilary Term. The Coffee Room will remain open but with reduced seating and this capacity will be advertised on the door and seating marked accordingly to allow distancing. We will operate a full-capacity system where, once full, no-one can enter until someone else has left this room. Staff will be cleaning the room at regular intervals throughout the day. Further information can be found by visiting the [St Edmund Hall website](#).

25. If you need to travel to work

The Government advice is to avoid public transport where possible. If you live close enough, please consider walking or cycling to work and try to pick less busy times and routes to take the pressure off the transport system. We understand the need to be flexible

in all our working arrangements, so please talk to your line manager about staggering your hours so that you can get to work in the safest way possible.

In addition, Thames Valley Police has confirmed that in the unlikely event of a police check, the production of the University ID card would be sufficient proof that the individual is a staff member and is traveling due to work commitments, meaning they would not be liable for enforcement action.

26. I am interested in buying a new bike – how do I do this through Cyclescheme?

The College has signed up to Cyclescheme, an employee benefit which saves you 25-39% on a bike and accessories (up to a maximum value of £1,000). You pay nothing upfront and the payments are taken tax efficiently from your salary. Further details can be found by visiting the [Cyclescheme website](#) and quoting the employer code **1e13b81**.

27. Can I park at one of the College properties?

Limited parking is available at Tamesis and the properties in Norham Gardens. Permits are available by emailing human.resources@seh.ox.ac.uk and these must be clearly displayed in your vehicle at all times. Spaces can be booked via the online booking system details of which can be provided once a pass has been allocated.

28. How is social distancing being implemented?

- use of a one-way system;
- encouraging the use of digital and remote transfers of material where possible rather than paper format;
- where it is possible to remain two metres apart, use floor markings to mark the distance, particularly in the most crowded areas (for example, where queues form);
- where it is not possible to remain two metres apart, staff should work side-by-side, or facing away from each other, rather than face-to-face if possible;
- where face-to-face contact is essential, this should be kept to a minimum where possible;
- as much as possible, keep teams of workers together (cohorting), and keep teams as small as possible.

29. What about social distancing in the event of an emergency or fire?

In an emergency or fire, staff do not have to comply with social distancing guidelines if it is unsafe to do so. However, social distancing should be maintained if possible. First Aiders

and those involved with providing assistance to others should pay particular attention to sanitation measures immediately afterwards, including washing hands.

30. Can I be asked to change my normal working practice?

Your contract of employment may specify your normal working hours and place of work. In the current, extremely unusual circumstances, your line manager may need to ask you to work different hours (although not excessive hours) and in a different location for a limited period.

For example:

- Some staff may need to be asked to work different patterns from their normal pattern, for example if they share offices, or to make sure that there are always essential staff on duty. This might involve some staff working mornings and others working afternoons or evenings; or staff attending on alternate days or alternate weeks and some involving split shifts.
- It may be necessary to balance shifts across a team to take into account caring responsibilities and personal needs.
- Some staff may need to be asked to work in a different building or in a different part of their usual building. If this happens to you, and you are working away from others in your team, your line manager will keep in regular contact with you.
- It may be necessary for some staff members to take on different tasks at a similar grade on a temporary basis to cover for colleagues who are unable to return to the workplace. However, you will not be expected to take on a cover role in addition to your normal role and your line manager will be responsible for ensuring that tasks are prioritised to cover key areas without overloading staff.

Your manager will discuss any proposed temporary changes to your normal working patterns and you will be informed of them in writing and asked to agree.

31. Will the College be using the Furlough Extended Scheme?

Yes. On 5 November, 2020, the Chancellor, Rishi Sunak, extended the Government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme from 31 October 2020 when it was due to end. The scheme will now run until 30 April 2021 and is open to new joiners as long as these staff were on our return to HMRC on 31 October 2020.

The College's normal operations have changed significantly since the coronavirus outbreak. There are a number of roles, all of which are extremely valuable during normal operations, which are difficult to carry out while the current restrictions are in place. The cancellation of our conference and events business has had a major impact on the College's finances and by accessing the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, we will be able to access much needed

financial support for the payment of staff salaries at a time when there is an impact on our ability to work.

Staff can be furloughed on a full or flexible (part-time) basis.

Some staff have already been moved onto temporary furlough (possibly for the second time) as a result of the UK Government restrictions over this period.

The College has decided once again to top up the 80% contribution offered by the Government and pay all our furloughed employees up to 100% of their basic pay.

Owner/Version Control
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Academic and Non-Academic Staff