

# The Future of Work at Kent

*Guidance and resources to support staff as we reshape our working environment*



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# 1.INTRODUCTION

## The Future of Work



Welcome to this resource pack for staff and managers as we return to life on campus and celebrate all that our campuses have to offer. The pack builds on our COPE Framework, developed in response to the first lockdown and recognising the complexities in our lives and the different pressures we've had to juggle and deal with since March 2020.

The pack also reflects feedback from our Future of Work Staff Survey. Thank you to all those who took part and shared insights about what was or had become important to you, based on your experiences of work over the past months.

This is a pack to dip in and out of, rather than try to absorb all at once. We suggest you take time to explore and identify the resources that are of interest and relevance to you and those you work with.

We encourage you to continue to refer to the COPE Framework in the [Staff Guide](#), which contains practical advice on **Collaborating** with colleagues, **Organising** your working day, **Preparing** for ongoing uncertainty and **Enabling** you to stay well whilst working in new and unexpected ways.

Many of the resources developed since March 2020 continue to be relevant as we collectively reshape the working environment post-pandemic. For example:

- In the [Staff Guide](#) you will find many useful resources. Under Coronavirus information, you'll find access to guides on health and wellbeing, the Roadmap for returning to campus, working from home and more;
- Do also take some time to explore the [resources for students](#), put together by colleagues in Student Support and Wellbeing. Many of these are just as relevant for staff, and include mental health support, advice on what you can do if you're anxious about lockdown easing, and how you can enhance your vitality through a range of exercises and activities;
- Under our new [Hybrid Working Scheme](#), professional services staff on UK employment contracts can request to work off-campus for up to two days a week. The scheme underlines the benefits of hybrid working for

both the University and our staff. We believe that giving you more choice and control over where you work helps build mutual trust, employee motivation and wellbeing, and can result in enhanced performance;

- Alongside the above support is the University's ongoing commitment to creating and supporting a diverse and inclusive community of staff and students. On our [Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity](#) web pages you will find a range of information and guidance for staff which you may find helpful when working with your team and when speaking with your manager about your working arrangements;
- For additional practical guidance, do have a look at our [Future of Work](#) e-learning modules on Staff Training Moodle. This is a menu of practical and bite-sized sessions to support managers and staff with how we work now and in the future. The modules include guidance for all staff on wellbeing and working remotely, and specific sessions for managers who lead remote teams;
- All staff have access to a confidential counselling service where you can speak with a trained BACP Counsellor on a completely confidential basis. The University has chosen to provide an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), through the external provider Care first / Sodexo. You will find full details of the programme and how to access it on the [Occupational Health](#) web pages.

If you are a line manager, this pack includes resources that you can use in relation to yourself, and to help you support your team. We encourage all line managers to look out for pressures that might affect individuals in their team differently, and consider how adjustments might need to be made. We ask managers to highlight ways in which their team can help and support each other. This may be as simple as reminding the team of what has worked well for people since March 2020, and building on that.

This resource pack has been designed to complement all of the support already available across the University as we continue to work through these uncertain times. We thank our contributors including colleagues from Occupational Health, IS, Estates and Kent Sport.

## 2. RESHAPING OUR WORKING ENVIRONMENT

Amongst the many visions of what the future of work might look like in practice, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) suggests that, for hybrid working to be successful, organisations and staff will need to focus on the six foundations shown in the circle below, with mutual trust at the heart of the organisational culture.

They emphasise that we (employers and employees) won't really know whether hybrid working is going to work until we try it. We will need to learn as we go. There are so few precedents. They encourage us to think about hybrid working as a choice, a "once in a lifetime opportunity to reset how we work".

For us at Kent, these themes reflect the feedback we received in response to our Future of Work Staff survey. For example, the feedback included:

- A strong call for line managers to have open, honest conversations with their staff and really listen to what's on their minds. Interestingly, the feedback was less about line managers having all the answers – often, there is no 'right' answer or straightforward solution – but more about taking time to explore and talk through all of the options before agreeing a way forward, in the context of the relevant Kent procedures;
- A preference for focusing on what's produced rather than (for example) the number of hours worked or feeling that you have to be constantly 'at your desk' (known as 'outcomes-based performance');
- The importance of taking an inclusive approach – finding out what works for individuals and team, and being prepared to adapt this in the light of experience (as we did by necessity in the early stages of the pandemic).



### 3. CONNECTING WITH LIFE ON CAMPUS: Empowering our line managers and staff to work together and support each other

We thank and appreciate the contribution of all staff who continued to work on campus throughout the pandemic to provide essential services to students and others.

We recognise (and feedback from the Future of Work Staff Survey confirmed this) that many staff have missed the campus experience and have been looking forward to returning and re-engaging with colleagues in person. Our Life on Campus initiative, a series of activities culminating in a Staff Conference in September 2021, enables us to celebrate all that our campuses have to offer and welcome back those staff who have been working mainly or partly from home since March 2020.

#### 3.1 ACKNOWLEDGING THAT SOME STAFF MAY BE ANXIOUS ABOUT RETURNING TO CAMPUS

The desire to promote greater choice and flexibility for staff must also be balanced with the needs of the University to deliver the high quality experience our students expect and deserve, part of which means ensuring we retain a vibrant campus atmosphere.

However we recognise that, for some staff, a return to campus may be something that generates feelings of apprehension or anxiety. Our absolute priority continues to be ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of the University's staff, students and visitors, whilst at the same time bearing in mind our commitment to our students and taking into account the current Government policy and guidance.

We encourage all staff to read the news and features on the [Staff Guide](#) and speak with their line managers about any queries or concerns they may have about returning to campus. No one should feel unsupported, alone or isolated.

There are many helpful resources freely available online to support you if you are feeling anxious about lockdown easing and returning to campus after the pandemic. We found those from the [NHS](#), [Mind](#) and [Health in Mind](#) particularly useful.

It's important to remember that everyone's situation is unique. However there are some general principles that will help us all as we engage or re-engage with our new working environment:

- **Know your own mind** – ask yourself what you're looking forward to about campus life. What seems more difficult? Recognise how your feelings and emotions are affected by circumstances and the restrictions we've all experienced. The [Mental Health Foundation](#) recommends keeping a daily note of things that have gone well and not so well – these can then be talked through with a trusted friend, family member or colleague;
- Take time to **talk and connect** with your colleagues and your line manager. This might not necessarily be about work, but quick check-ins will help us all adjust to our new ways of working. Many staff have told us over the past months that an insight into their colleagues' non-work lives has led to stronger working relationships;



- Although none of us can anticipate how our new arrangements will work in practice, it's worth thinking about how you can **plan and prepare** for a return to campus. Our Life on Campus events and the [Staff Conference](#) in September 2021 will be a good opportunity to meet your colleagues and get an idea of anything that's changed in the building or area of campus where you work;
- Be prepared for some ups and downs along the way and **take things one step at a time**. The way we work is likely to keep changing as we get used to new arrangements such as the Hybrid Working Scheme. Don't expect everything to return to how it was before March 2020. Staff have told us that one of the good things to emerge from lockdown was the opportunity to review and refresh how we do things. Many efficiencies have been identified as a result;
- Many of us have not been on campus or the area where we work for some time. As we all get used to new ways of working, tempers may fray and judgements be made too swiftly. It'll be important to **do our best to consider others** while we and they adjust;
- **Monitor and review how you are getting on** as the days and weeks progress. Have regular check-ins with yourself ('How am I coping?', 'Could I do more to stay mentally well?'), your colleagues and your line manager ('Is there anything we could do differently to work better together?'). Build in rewards and time to do the things you enjoy and which you know enhance your wellbeing;
- Remember that any change, even short-term change, can be exhausting. If you're starting commuting again, and being around people all day, it'll take some time to get used to. **Build in time to rest** and keep up the good habits (including diet and exercise) many staff have told us they've developed during lockdown.

Dr Jo Yarker Senior Lecturer in Organisational Psychology at Birkbeck, University of London, has some good advice when she reminds us that:

**'Everyone is finding their own path and things might not always go to plan. It is important to be kind to yourself and to be kind to others as we all find our way'.**

The Mental Health Foundation adds: 'Some colleagues may be very nervous about restrictions ending – and in some cases that may be because of personal experience, or because vaccination isn't an option for them or someone close to them. Respect the boundaries people set around things like handshaking, keeping a distance, or not coming along to social events or in person meetings. Set your own boundaries but remember to test your limits too. Try not to judge other people's behaviours too harshly – whether that is people's choices around mask wearing on public transport or the noise your colleague makes eating soup at their desk. Lift up your colleagues whenever you can. Listen. Be an ally'.

### 3.2 IF YOU ARE A LINE MANAGER

All of the above guidance applies just as much to line managers at Kent. An added responsibility of our line managers is of course to apply University policies and procedures in a fair and consistent way in the local context, whilst also being sympathetic to individual concerns and issues.

We're calling on all line managers to engage in honest and open conversations with members of their team on an individual basis. Feedback from the Future of Work Staff survey confirmed that such conversations with an interested line manager who took time to listen (even if they couldn't at that time offer complete solutions) made a huge difference to how supported staff felt during the pandemic.

As a line manager you may sometimes feel hesitant about entering into these meaningful conversations with team members because you anticipate being asked questions that you don't know the answer to. We suggest you take time to keep up to date with developments via the [Staff Guide](#) and refer to supporting policies and procedures on the [HR web pages](#) where you need to.

Starting off with some simple questions that demonstrate your interest in your team members and what's on their minds can be very effective. For example:

- How are you, and what are you doing to look after yourself?
- What can I do to make sure that this transition back to campus life is working for you?
- What's the best way that we can work together?

The most important thing is to generate discussion, which in turn promotes trust.

Do remember that one size will not fit all. We recognise that many staff will be facing particular challenges not only relating to the care of dependants, but perhaps also in relation to their own disabilities or chronic health issues. We encourage you to have a look at all of the additional guidance not only on the new Hybrid Working Scheme but on topics such as Flexible Working and Disability in Employment in the University's [Equality and Diversity Staff Policies](#).

Our [Future of Work](#) e-learning sessions on Staff Moodle contain practical tips and techniques for connecting with colleagues and managing teams whilst working remotely.

When people share their concerns — either openly or anonymously — make sure you allow for people to have mixed and complex feelings. It's tempting to be positive about the upcoming changes as a way to assuage worries, but you risk making people feel dismissed, or you might inadvertently pressure them to hide their negative feelings.

Much will depend on the local context, which is why the understanding and support of all of our line managers is especially important at this time.



## Be a consciously inclusive line manager



The University is a member of [Inclusive Employers](#) (with whom we work on Challenging Racism and promoting the key role of mental health allies). They offer the following helpful advice for managers and their teams about being 'consciously inclusive' as many of us return to the workplace:

### **1. Listen with curiosity**

Have open discussions with your team around reasonable adjustments and review the impact of hybrid working on your staff both individually and as a collective. By focusing on listening and understanding, we can create atmospheres where people feel they can be honest about their own situations, and can share without fear of judgement.

### **2. No assumptions**

Be aware that this is likely to be the first time back in the workplace after a long stint of working from home. Do not make any assumptions. Treat every staff member like a new employee who you are excited to get to know again, try to refrain from asking specific questions around personal life or remarks such as: "you're quiet today" or "you used to be really bubbly, what's wrong?" Many people have lost loved ones through this pandemic and may not have shared this with their employers or colleagues, so sensitivities have shifted, and we must approach conversations with empathy.

### **3. Consultation**

Conduct listening circles with your team to find out how they feel about returning to work and how procedures can be put in place to mitigate the concerns. You could also think about having mini-inductions or 'refresh' sessions to remind staff of your organisational culture and values, and rebuild the foundations.

### **4. Be a friend**

This is something we'd hope would be the norm in workplaces, but if you see someone feeling uncomfortable, in the workplace or in a virtual meeting, check in on them. Invite employees to do the same for each other. Supporting our colleagues as we return is how we will get through this adjustment together.



You may also find the following line manager resources helpful:

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) has developed an excellent [Line Manager Guide](#) on supporting hybrid working. It includes practical tips on managing a hybrid team. Do be aware that, as this is general guidance, some of the policies referred to might differ from our own at Kent.

The Guide contains the following practical advice for line managers:

**Managing a hybrid team is quite different from managing a team that is either mostly office-based, or mostly remote. It will require a range of new skills and approaches. Some of these tips and techniques can help you to manage in a hybrid environment:**

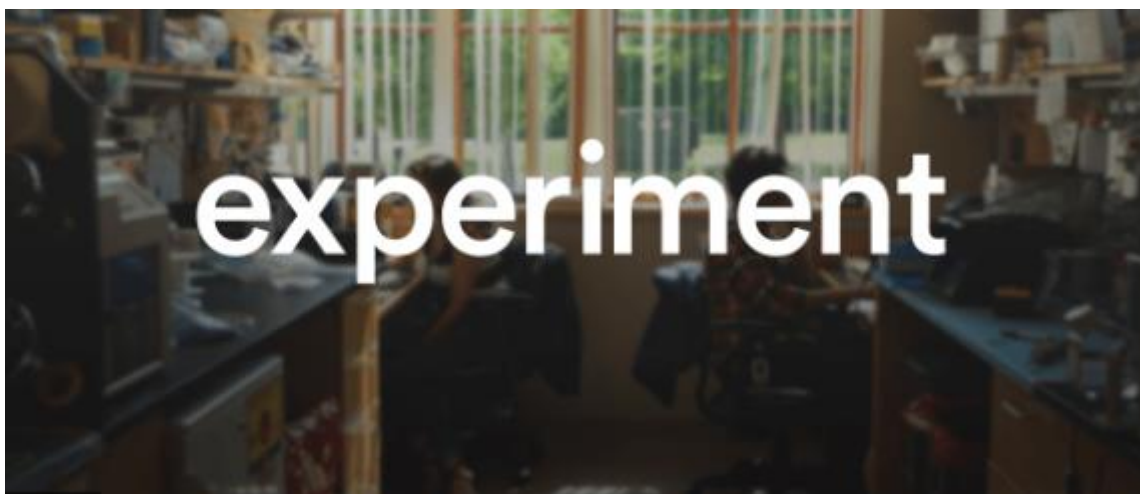
1. **Engage your team in establishing your new ways of working.** Agreeing these together will help people feel included and that they have an active voice. This should include how to communicate as a team and key principles that everyone can work to.
2. **Ensure that you have regular 1-2-1 time with your team.** This is good practice at any time, but when you may not be working in the same place or at the same time as your team, scheduling regular time to keep in touch becomes even more important. These meetings can be online or face to face.
3. **Talk about wellbeing with hybrid workers.** When people work from home, they may find it difficult to manage the boundaries between work and home, and some people have a tendency to work longer hours. Help people to meaningfully disconnect and manage their technology and work life balance. Act as a good role model with your own working practices.
4. **Be clear on objectives.** When people work remotely their performance may be less observable. You will need to be clear with your team how you will assess their performance, and you will need to focus on desired results and outcomes as your main measure for performance. It is always good practice to have well written objectives and provide regular feedback – this is one more area that becomes increasingly important in a hybrid environment.
5. **Build in time for social connection.** Although many employees do want to retain some element of working from home, most do want to return to their offices for some of the time too and have missed social connection with colleagues. This can include face-to-face meetings but also creating online social spaces for informal conversations and activities.

This thought-provoking [Harvard Business Review article](#) notes that leading with empathy will be a core skill for line managers in the future. It describes what leading with empathy means, why managers might initially be uncomfortable operating in this way, and how we can learn to lead with empathy and vulnerability whilst still achieving results.

Finally in this section, our Crucial Conversations programme is a 'must' for all line managers and others who want to feel more comfortable and confident engaging in open, honest and supportive conversations with their colleagues about topics where all of us are gradually finding our way and learning from experience (for example hybrid working and the Hybrid Working Scheme). Registration is via [Staff Connect](#).



### 3.3 MAKING THINGS WORK FOR YOU



As we adjust to our new ways of working and the opportunities offered by the Hybrid Working Scheme, we will be keen to hear about your experiences of making things work for you and your teams.

So we encourage you, together with your line manager and colleagues, to discuss how you can apply the relevant University procedures in your area. Managers and staff are empowered to think in practical yet creative terms about ways of ensuring all members of the team feel comfortable and supported for life on campus.

For example, if someone is concerned about returning to an open plan office, you might agree that – to start off with – they could swap desks with a less concerned colleague working in a smaller office, until they feel more comfortable.

Similarly, if there are lots of Hybrid Working Scheme requests in your area, you might wish to consider whether it's best to have everyone in on a certain day or it if would be better to stagger campus attendance so that your office is never at maximum capacity.

You could run mini pilot programmes in your area or by agreement let people experiment individually. The message should be 'let's try this out and see what we learn'. Then invite feedback along the way so that you can understand what's working and what isn't.

Of course, it will be important to engage with your own senior leaders throughout so that emerging best practice can be shared across the University.

**We're keen to learn about the hybrid working practices that you're finding work for you in your area. As these arise, please share these with us via email on [hws@kent.ac.uk](mailto:hws@kent.ac.uk).**

## 4. MANAGING MEETINGS IN A HYBRID ENVIRONMENT

As many teams across the University move towards a hybrid working model, on any given day some team members might be on campus and others working remotely. Careful planning will be required to ensure that these teams can still communicate effectively and don't lose the sense of connection that many colleagues tell us is important to them.

Many of us also routinely participate in meetings with colleagues outside our immediate team.

As we and others reshape the world of work, how we arrange and manage meetings has become something colleagues tell us they are keen to know more about.

Other organisations who are already working in this way are finding that meetings are most successful when held EITHER virtually (for us at Kent, via Teams) OR in person, but not a hybrid of the two. Where some attendees are there in person and others attending virtually, meetings tend to flow less smoothly. Those who join via Teams say it's a less inclusive experience. It's much easier for the 'in-room' participants to take up most of the talk time.

Staff feedback from the Future of Work survey and via other channels indicates that there are some concerns about participating in-person meetings (especially with large numbers of people present).

**As a result, the recommended approach to meetings at Kent for the remainder of the summer and throughout the autumn term is set out below:**

- A 'virtual first' approach should be adopted for all meetings. Meetings should be held via Teams unless there is a compelling reason for in-person attendance;
- The practice of hybrid meetings – with some attendees present in person and others connecting via Teams – should be avoided;
- The 'virtual first' approach includes both informal and more formal meetings (University committees and boards, and other regular meetings typically co-ordinated by a Chair or organiser).

Because of the diverse range of services and activities across the University, it's not possible to suggest one approach to managing meetings that will be suitable for all. However the default approach should be as outlined above.

If, in the context of a 'virtual first' approach, a meeting organiser still feels they have a compelling reason to hold in-person meetings, here are some considerations to help decide whether they really need to hold – and can safely hold – face-to-face meetings:

- Assuming that these meetings have been held via Teams since March 2020, has the virtual environment prevented you from achieving the meeting objectives?
- Is there a new and compelling reason why you should now set up or switch to in-person meetings? \*\*
- Is it going to be more convenient for participants to attend the meetings in person (time, location etc)?
- Are the meeting objectives more likely to be met in a face-to-face setting?

- Will it be a straightforward process to find meeting rooms that are well-ventilated and can safely accommodate the number of participants, allowing for appropriate distancing?

*\*\* For example, meetings amongst colleagues who have been working on campus throughout the pandemic and normally work together in person, or a team building event for a new team (bearing in mind that team building events can be just as effective in a virtual environment).*

**If the answer to most or all the above questions is 'no', then it's highly unlikely that holding the meetings in person will be necessary or recommended.**

If, after careful reflection and by exception, it's agreed that an in-person meeting should take place, this should of course only proceed in accordance with the University's Covid-19 Risk Assessment (available in the Coronavirus Information section of the [Staff Guide](#) and based on the Government's Working Safely guidance).

## Reviewing and updating this guidance on meetings

The remainder of the summer and the Autumn term are seen as a transition period. We will review and may update this guidance in the light of experience over the coming months. Further communications will follow if the guidance changes, together with additional resources and support. For example, work is underway in IS on a guide to making hybrid working a success.

If you're a manager, be mindful that it may take longer for some team members to get used to this way of working. Invite feedback from participants and be prepared to adapt your approach to meetings accordingly.

Each of us, whether team member, manager or chair, will need to take accountability for self-managing while working in this more dispersed way. If something's not working, say so, and offer your suggestions for how it can be improved.

Finally, for those looking for additional support with virtual meetings and conference calls, this [free online session](#) (approx. 30 minutes) from Learning Coach Hedda Bird will help you learn how to engage others, reach decisions and feel more comfortable in this virtual setting. Hedda is a trusted partner of the University and is currently supporting us with a number of key projects.





## 5. MICROSOFT TEAMS ETIQUETTE

Widespread use of MS Teams across the University since the Covid-19 pandemic began in March 2020 has revolutionised the way in which we communicate with each other. Staff feedback on its use has been very positive – offering a more consolidated way of working with other team members compared to working with separate tools like email, file shares and phones. It's clear that the University can continue to benefit from, and expand on, use of MS Teams as we move forward to new ways of working.

The increased use of virtual communication does, however, have some potential pitfalls. This guide covers some everyday etiquette for using MS Teams, to help avoid those pitfalls. Following these guidelines should ensure you and your colleagues have a better Teams experience by staying organised and being considerate of other team members.

MS Teams is generally used for internal communication, which means that a more informal tone is usual and expected. Informal doesn't mean unprofessional, though, so make sure that you know your audience. Stay on the more formal side if you're not sure – don't forget that this is a work environment, no matter how much it might look like personal social media.

### Meeting and calls

**Take the opportunity to refresh our meeting practice** Many of us have by necessity become used to participating in meetings via Teams. Rather than continue in the way we've worked since March 2020, the return to campus in the new academic year offers a good opportunity to pause, reflect and take stock of what's worked well in a virtual setting and where we can refresh our meeting practice further. For example:

- **First, acknowledge new needs for meetings.** In a virtual environment, meetings may actually be more relevant than usual in order to keep people connected, communicating and updated on key topics and decisions. While meetings may be less necessary when you're running into colleagues in the office anyway, they may be more necessary in cases where the connections aren't happening as automatically during the working day;
- Managers may wish to review their virtual team meetings and ask:
  - How often does the team need to meet and for what purpose?
  - What other ways are there to communicate apart from meetings?
- Remember that in virtual meetings, communication has to be more intentional and direct to keep everyone on the same page and ensure no one feels left out. It's better for managers to over- rather than under-communicate and ask team members what form of meeting approach works best for them by involving them in the planning process.

**Try to avoid "Teams fatigue"** Back-to-back virtual interaction via Microsoft Teams or similar software can prove to be very draining. To try and avoid this both for yourself and with consideration for those you are meeting with, it is recommended that you:

- Schedule meetings to build in natural breaks of at least 5 minutes. Therefore schedule a meeting for 55 minutes rather than an hour, 25 minutes rather than 30; or if it is a lengthy meeting of two hours or more, build in a 5-10 minute break during the meeting;
- Block out time in your diary for a lunch break – ideally this should be some time between 12 noon and 2.30pm;

- If organising a meeting, consider whether everyone on the invitation list really needs to be there. Whilst one of the benefits of Teams is the opportunity for wider reach, there is a danger that this can sometimes be over-played, leading to individuals being inundated with meeting requests. Circulating a clear meeting agenda or objectives when the meeting is arranged will help invitees determine whether their attendance will be beneficial.

**Join promptly** Always try to 'Join' MS Team meetings a couple of minutes before the meeting start, so that the meeting can start promptly. If you are likely to be delayed, it is good idea to send a message via the chat function to the other participant(s)/meeting organiser.

**Avoid "cold calling" with video** When interacting with colleagues via MS Teams, it is helpful to remember that they may be working from home and an un-announced video call to their home environment can feel quite intrusive, particularly if the other person does not know you well. It is always a good idea to send a quick message via the 'Chat' function to check whether a video call is convenient.

**Cameras on or off?** The benefits of video calls via MS Teams include making it easier to gauge reactions, to ensure that you have been understood and potentially to build rapport. It can be difficult to chair a meeting when participants can't be seen and therefore don't appear to be participating or engaging in the meeting. However, there is a delicate balance to be struck. There is increasing commentary about how draining it can be to have your camera on for longer meetings (e.g. two hours or more) and it is also important to be mindful that some people may not feel comfortable about joining in and participating in video calls, particularly if a meeting is being recorded. This may be for a good reason that is not immediately obvious to you.

In striking the balance, the key is to try to ensure that your meetings will be an inclusive experience for those attending. Typically, this would include encouraging a 'cameras on' approach so that everyone's face can be seen, giving each participant allocated time to contribute their ideas and flagging that people may turn their cameras off for short periods if they need to do something.

As a courtesy, it's preferable to switch your camera on when you're speaking or asking a question. Without proper context or non-verbal cues like body language and tone, remember that communication in remote meetings can easily be misinterpreted or misunderstood.

**Using chat during meetings** The chat facility provides a great method of raising questions or providing comments/additional information during a meeting or presentation. However, when using this, always consider the chair/presenter. Please keep messages concise and focussed on the topic. It can be very distracting for both the chair and other participants if messages are overly long or if the chat function is used for a side conversation with other participants.

**Sharing documents for a meeting** MS teams provides the facility to upload a meeting agenda, meeting notes and any related documents to the "files" tab in Teams that sits behind the calendar entry. This can be a really useful way of ensuring meeting participants can easily locate relevant documents both before the meeting and for reference afterwards, without having to search through emails!

**Recording Meetings** If you have been given access to record MS Team meetings, ensure that you have the approval of everybody on the call before recording meetings.

**Minimise disruptions to others** MS Teams meetings and calls provide a lot of potential visual stimuli and distractions (research shows that we tend to focus on people's backgrounds as well as their faces), so we should be careful to minimise unnecessary distractions on top of that. To do so:

- Avoid clicking pens, shuffling paper or eating whilst on a call.

- Stay on 'Mute' when you are not talking to reduce background noise in the meeting.
- Use the 'raise hand' option to ask questions to avoid talking over other participants. Alternatively, especially for large meetings, ask your questions in the chat window.
- Avoid working on other tasks, such as checking or typing emails during the video call.

## Using the private chat tool

### Use and pay attention to availability status in Teams

The availability status on Teams gives you a great idea of the best time to get in touch with colleagues - the coloured dot on their profile picture (or default initials) can show you if they're available (a green dot), in a call or busy (a red dot) or away from their computer (a yellow dot). Just because they're showing as 'available', though, don't expect an instant reply. In exactly the same way as being in the office, not being in a meeting doesn't mean that they're not busy. Make sure you're respecting office hours, too – just because someone's available outside of their typical working hours, it doesn't necessarily mean they're available for an immediate reply.

You can also help colleagues manage their expectations of how quickly you'll respond to them by keeping your own status up to date. Although meetings and calls are automatically reflected in your status, as well as being 'away' when you've been inactive for five minutes, you can also set your status to 'Do Not Disturb', 'Busy' or 'Be Right Back/Away' to protect your breaks or productive working time.

**Remain professional in private chat** Do not say anything in chat that you would not say to someone in person.

**Make your out-of-office response MS Teams-friendly** Your Outlook out-of-office response displays in MS Teams as well. Instead of saying "Thank you for your email" rephrase to "Thank you for your message."

## Use of Teams sites and channels within Teams

**Make the rules for using a Teams channel known.** When collaborating on a project or piece of work through a Teams channel, it's important that you get everyone on the same page. It's helpful to outline specific guidelines like file-naming conventions or inviting other participants into the channel during team-wide meetings or using the chat function. If, for example, it has been made clear that external guests are not invited to the channel without the rest of the team's consent, colleagues should not hesitate to speak up.

**Keep it relevant** Make sure you clearly understand the purpose of your MS Teams site. Stay on topic and avoid sharing irrelevant content as this may frustrate other members.

**Only post to appropriate members** All MS Teams channels and discussions are visible to all members of the particular Teams site. Private messaging is available to send direct messages to selected members.

**Reactions are meant for sentiment** The thumbs-up is good for acknowledging messages which can help keep work on task. Please be careful when using other emojis as they can be misinterpreted. If you are going to use emojis like love, laugh, wow, sad and anger, then please only use in private chat messages and not in public channels.

## 6. HEALTH AND WELLBEING

In the [Coronavirus Information](#) section of the Staff Guide you'll find a comprehensive set of resources to support your health and wellbeing. We encourage all staff to check in regularly with this section as it's updated and refreshed in line with internal and external developments. Here you'll find information on:

- The Covid-19 Risk Assessment (based on the Government's Working Safely Advice)
- Looking after your mental health and wellbeing
- The University's [Mental Health Support web pages](#): a range of resources available to support your mental health (also known as the Mental Health One Stop Shop), including access to the [Occupational Health wellbeing pages](#)
- The Employee Assistance Programme offered by the University (please see Page 20 of this pack for more information)

The University has introduced a new [Inclusion Passport](#) into its range of resources to support staff, particularly with reference to disability. This is designed to capture adjustments that can be made for employees and to document what helps them to work best, feel included and get the support they need. The Inclusion Passport considers and documents adjustments in relation to individual differences, personal circumstances and will also consider any disability (including long-term health conditions). This passport is individual to each colleague, and there is also an accompanying 'at a glance' guide for managers to help them use Inclusion Passports and make reasonable adjustments.

### Inclusion Passport Journey



As many of us return to places of work we may not have seen for over a year, there is some helpful online advice about 'proactive coping'. Generally, coping with a situation involves tolerating and reducing sources of stress, not addressing the specific stressors themselves. Proactive coping is more about preventing or modifying the sources of stress, looking into the future and trying to perceive demands and challenges as opportunities, rather than as threats or losses.

A recent article in the [Organizational Dynamics Journal](#) (there is a fee for articles, but you can usually see an overview) offers some practical suggestions for those looking to strengthen their skills in this area:

- Build your resources from different areas in advance of events or situations you find challenging. Think about not only the resources you already have, but those you're lacking. At the University, this may include reconnecting with work colleagues you haven't seen since March 2020;
- Take a measured approach to identifying situations you perceive as threats. Exercises such as breathwork, yoga and meditation may encourage a slower, more deliberate approach to processing information rather than jumping straight in or panicking. If you're anxious about returning to campus, we encourage you to go and have a look round (perhaps at the Staff Conference) before you return on more a regular basis;
- Control the controllables. This is a 'preliminary coping' approach which involves practising releasing control over the things you can't change. It's not about giving up or being naïve – it's more about letting go of things that are outside your control, focusing instead on the controllables;
- Gather feedback - and use it. Listen to suggestions and ideas from others about how they're coping and learn from their experiences. You may find it helpful to speak with colleagues who are already working on campus and can reassure you about the working environment.

**As we move into a hybrid working environment, bear in mind also that how we experience the standard University working day (09.00 – 18.00) will change.** Some of us will be on campus whilst others will be working from home – and not necessarily at the same time. Many of us will have found our own ways of managing the boundaries between working from home and simply being at home. Colleagues have told us they find the following practices helpful:

- Turning off push notifications on your emails when you are at home but not working;
- Avoiding sending or accessing emails after 18.00;
- Closing down and packing away your laptop when you've finished work rather than just leaving it running in the background (and making it more likely that you'll keep checking your emails and messages rather than 'finish' work;
- Adding a standard message to your emails. We recommend wording such as *'I am currently managing my working hours around my personal life. Therefore you may receive this email on a day or at a time when you are not working. There is no expectation for you to, and please do not, respond to this email until you are able to during your working hours'*.



## 6.1 EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMME

It is important that, if you feel overwhelmed and unable to cope, you have access to a confidential counselling service where you can speak with a trained BACP Counsellor on a completely confidential basis.

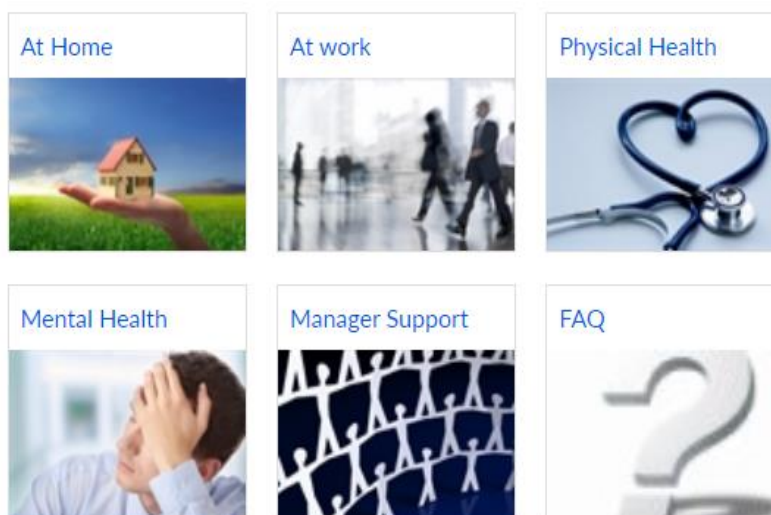
One of the ways the University shows its commitment to the health and wellbeing of its staff is by choosing to provide an Employee Assistance Programme (EAP), through the external provider Care first / Sodexo. You will find full details of the programme and how to access it on the [Occupational Health](#) web pages.

Employee Assistance Programme (EAP)
Employee Assistance Programme - Care First
EAP Frequently Asked Questions
EAP Call Answering Process
EAP Confidentiality
EAP Care first Information Services
EAP Your EAP Management Support
Information Posters

You will see on these pages that our colleagues in Occupational Health have set out full details of what the service offers, how to access it, the confidential nature of the service, and a range of Frequently Asked Questions.

You will need a password to access the Care first site, which you will find on the Occupational Health EAP home page by using the above link. There is a dedicated section on the Care first site for managers, with general advice on supporting their staff.

Through this service all staff can access confidential support on a wide range of issues under the following headings:



Under each grouping there is a range of information. For example, the At Home section includes information on caring responsibilities, relationships and managing finances. You may also call the service on their Counselling & Information line:

**0808 168 2143**



## 7. OTHER HELPFUL RESOURCES

Here are some additional resources that you might find useful:



Our Crucial Conversations programme is led by our in-house facilitators in a confidential setting and is highly relevant to the types of challenging conversations many of us are having as we reset the world of work. It provides practical support for those who'd like to:

- Better understand what makes a conversation 'crucial'
- Identify the conversations that you're not holding (or not holding well)
- Stay in productive dialogue when you're angry, scared or hurt
- Speak persuasively, not abrasively
- Be able to talk to almost anyone about almost anything
- Turn your crucial conversations into action and results

Registration is via Staff Connect. Please contact the Talent & Organisational Development team at [Ldev@kent.ac.uk](mailto:Ldev@kent.ac.uk) if you'd like to know more. Although the programme is open to all staff, many managers in particular have told us that the practical guidance has helped them hold more meaningful, supportive and productive discussions with their teams.

We've found that the [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development](#) (CIPD) has had some of the most helpful and practical tips for staff and managers throughout the pandemic and as many of us now have the opportunity to avail of hybrid working patterns. Much of the Coronavirus-related guidance can be accessed without being a CIPD member. Do be aware that, as this is general guidance, some of the policies they refer to might differ from our own at Kent.





Mind have also issued information about how you can take care of your mental health and wellbeing as we start 'working in the new normal'. Amongst their many [useful resources](#) you'll find guidance and advice on leading remote teams, working from home and managing the boundaries between work and home.

You may already know that the University is working towards incorporating the [Thriving at Work](#) standards. Thriving at Work is an independent review of mental health commissioned by Government. It sets out six mental health core standards for employers, drawn from best practice and the available evidence base. The report also outlines a series of more ambitious 'enhanced' standards for employers to consider, and the University has committed to working towards achieving these. Keep up to date with the Thriving at Work group's progress on the University's Mental Health Support [Sharepoint](#) site.



In 2021 we welcomed the contribution of internal and external facilitators for our Belong and Grow (BAG) Week. Rebekah Osborne of [Osborne Coaching](#) ran an excellent session on Balanced Breathing. Balanced breathing is simply the practice of breathing in for the same length of time as you breathe out. Balanced breathing physiologically balances your Autonomic Nervous System (ANS). This can interrupt stress hormones, reduce anxiety, lower your heart rate and blood pressure, increase focus and energy, develop new neural pathways which support positive thinking and produce feelings of inner calm, peace, and tranquillity. Rebekah has worked at the University and on her website you'll find a number of helpful (free) resources and details about her coaching practice.

**Rebekah Osborne****Life Coaching**

## 8. WHAT NEXT?



We hope you have found this Future of Work resource pack useful, and that you will find a combination of practical ideas for you to explore, and reassurance about the University's commitment to supporting your wellbeing as we connect and reconnect with the vibrancy of campus life at Kent.

Do take time to explore the [Staff Guide](#) as it is regularly updated with the latest information about the University's approach to post-pandemic working and contains many useful resources to support your health and wellbeing.

And don't forget to share with us by email on [hws@kent.ac.uk](mailto:hws@kent.ac.uk) what you're finding works for you in our new hybrid working environment, or anything you think would be helpful to include in future versions of this resource pack. If you require this document in another format to meet accessibility needs please contact [Ldev@kent.ac.uk](mailto:Ldev@kent.ac.uk).