

A GUIDE TO LEADING A REMOTE TEAM



Current circumstances have, for many of us, led to a sudden transition from office/lab-based work to working remotely from home.

This presents a series of new challenges for us all to navigate, at a time when we are all contending with the pressures of makeshift workspaces, unexpected caring responsibilities and anxiety about the current coronavirus outbreak.

It's critical at this time that staff continue to feel supported and valued, and that leaders instill confidence and reassurance in their teams. We've compiled the following advice as a guide to help you support your team and help them to stay happy, healthy and effective in these unprecedented times.

∞ SET THE TONE

Keep calm - emotions are infectious, even on phone and video calls, and your team is looking to you to set the emotional tone. It's OK to show your human side; times are difficult, and the situation is serious, and warmth and a smile can go a long way in providing your team with reassurance and security.

It's important that everyone is treated with respect and professionalism, as even the most resilient people are likely to be experiencing some level of anxiety or uncertainty.

∞ BE FLEXIBLE & SUPPORTIVE

During this time, many staff will have round the clock childcare or other caring responsibilities, be unwell themselves, or may need reasonable adjustments for long term health conditions or disabilities.

Consider each individual's needs and create an environment where everyone can raise their questions, concerns or issues – both during team discussions and in one-to-ones. Be aware that individuals may react in different ways to their worries. Talk frequently and openly to each of your team to find flexible, practical solutions that work for everyone - these conversations may need to happen once or several times over the weeks ahead.

Allow for the fact that very few of us will be able to work exactly as we would from campus, and this may affect the times people can work and the pace they can work at - what is key is that you support them to do the best they can in their individual circumstances.

Encourage your team to take their physical and mental welfare seriously. Visit [Wellbeing, Safety and Health's tailored page](#) for detailed advice on getting set up as safely as possible and ensure your staff do too. You and your staff can also visit [SPA's online resources](#) on keeping active and healthy at home and the [Supporting your Mental Wellbeing page](#) for more advice and FAQs.

∞ EMBRACE THE TECHNOLOGY THAT'S AVAILABLE TO YOU

Optimise the use of our IT systems (Microsoft Teams & Outlook; video calls; telephone contact) for team meetings, individual and group discussions and to support collaborative working.

Identify any support which individuals might need in order to participate. For those not yet confident in using MS Teams, point them in the direction of the [UoL IT Website](#) which links to other resources, such as free online [Microsoft Instructor-led training](#).

It can be challenging to hold a meeting online when kids and pets are in the background, interruptions can be inevitable. It's important that people know that it's not the end of the world when interruptions happen.

Ensure you're aware of any equipment your team members need to fulfill their roles from home, or, where necessary, consider alternative types of work they can do.

With prior approval from the Head of School/Service (or nominee), currently, the University may reimburse small scale expenditure (up to £40) for vital equipment such as IT cabling, wireless USB devices, and headsets for staff working from home. For further information, please see the [University of Leeds Coronavirus Microsite](#).

∞ REVIEW ANY REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

The University is committed to making reasonable adjustments for disabled staff. Be proactive in discussing how any adjustments currently in place may need to be reviewed in light of current circumstances.

The challenges that disabled team members experience could be exacerbated by the change to our ways of working, so discuss any alterations or additional adjustments that may be needed, including how adjustments might work with any caring responsibilities they may have.

You can find out more on our Equality and Inclusion webpages outlining [support for disabled staff](#).

∞ AGREE A COMMS STRATEGY WITH YOUR TEAM

You've got the technology in place to communicate with your team, but remote working is more effective when you agree the frequency and ideal timing of your communications. You might, for example, agree to have video calls via MS Teams twice a week, and use the chat function when something is urgent in the meantime.

Let your team know what you need from them for this arrangement to work well, and review this regularly. Build team updates into your week and provide as much clarity as possible on next steps and timeframes for working as a dispersed team.

∞ BE CLEAR ABOUT WHAT'S NEEDED

Be clear about what you expect to be done, and allow your team members as much flexibility as you can in how they deliver the task. Check in with them regularly to ensure they're clear and feel supported. If the work isn't right, take time to find out what's going on for your team members. Are there reasons you can't see?

Trust is important. You don't need to track the hours people are working, and you can't see what's being done remotely, but your team will deliver as long as you're clear about what's expected.

∞ SHARE WHAT INFORMATION YOU CAN

Now more than ever, your team will want to know what's happening and chances are you'll know more about what's going on within the organisation than your team. Be as transparent as you can and motivate people by explaining why their work is important and the difference it makes.

∞ MAKE TIME FOR SOCIAL INTERACTIONS

One of the best things you can do as a manager of a remote team is maintain a sense of belonging through team social interaction.

Even a 20-minute call can help raise spirits and highlight if people are struggling. Build separate social calls into your communications strategy, to guard against individuals feeling isolated and to develop a supportive environment in difficult times.

∞ USEFUL RESOURCES FOR MANAGERS

If you need support and guidance you can still contact your named HR Manager or Officer by email. If you don't get a response by the end of the following working day please contact the generic email hr@leeds.ac.uk or telephone 0113 343 4146.

Staff have been asked to advise us about any sickness absence or self-isolation absence relating to Coronavirus/Covid 19 by using the HR Self Service system (ESS). You can view our guidance on [submitting coronavirus sickness absence](#) which outlines what staff and managers need to do.

Absence not related to Covid-19 should continue to be reported in the normal way.

The University already has arrangements in place to help us support staff during this time, and these, along with the answers to some of the questions your staff might be asking, can be found on the [University of Leeds Coronavirus website](#).

Other links you might find useful include:

- [NHS Advice on Coronavirus](#)
- [Government information on Coronavirus](#)