Remote Working during Coronavirus COVID-19 Outbreak

Policy owner: UCD HR   Approval date and body: 31.03.2020 UMT

1.   Purpose

The purpose of the policy is to provide guidance and support to faculty and staff working remotely during the COVID-19 outbreak.

2.   Definitions

For the purpose of this policy, remote working will mean the carrying out the day to day functions associated with your role, or other tasks as assigned by your Head of School/Unit/line manager, away from the University Campus.

3.   Scope

This is an emergency policy developed to provide guidance and support during the Covid-19 outbreak. These emergency measures came into effect at 6pm on 12th of March and will be in place until further notice from the UMT.

4.   Principles

The COVID-19 Pandemic is unprecedented in modern times and it is normal that people will feel worried and anxious during this period. We are very appreciative of the hard work of all colleagues to ensure that the University is continuing to operate as normally as possible. Contingency plans have already been developed; however, it is recognised that this transition to remote working brings its own challenges.

Some of our employees may already be accustomed to remote working, however for many, this will be a first. Our priority is the health and wellbeing of our UCD community, and our Head of School/Unit/Line Managers are being asked to show strong leadership during this time by keeping in regular contact with their teams, providing clear communication and encouraging teamwork. It is important that everyone works together and even more so during this difficult time.

The information below is designed to support line managers and employees during the COVID-19 outbreak, however if you have a specific concern in relation to your own situation or in relation to working from home, you should speak to your Head of School/Unit/Line manager in the first instance.

4.1 Working hours

Flexibility to working hours

When working from home, it is expected that you will continue to work your contractual hours as far as practicable. If anyone has any difficulty working their current hours of work from home, they should discuss this with their Head of School/Unit/Line manager.

The extent of the flexibility in relation to the schedule of hours or staggered hours should be discussed and agreed with the relevant Head of School/Unit/Line manager. The Head of School/Unit/Line manager will take into consideration your current situation along with the operational demands of the role.

As much flexibility as possible during this time should be given. There is increased pressure with the closure of schools and childcare facilities along with caring responsibilities for the elderly and people who fall into the vulnerable group. Therefore, it is important that Heads of School/Unit/Line managers take this into consideration and show discretion when reviewing working hours with colleagues.

Rest breaks

Regular breaks are important and when working from home, there can be a tendency to not take regular breaks, so it is important that everyone takes a regular rest break. While working from home, it is likely that individuals will have more screen time than normal, and it is recommended that you take regular breaks away from the screen and your desk. It is good practice to get up and move around for a few minutes.

4.2 Managing absences related to COVID-19

If you inform your Head of School/Unit/Line manager that you are awaiting to be tested for COVID-19, this will be kept confidential, except in circumstances where the Head of School/Unit/Line manager is informed or is already aware that you have been in close contact with a colleague or student who falls into a vulnerable group. That employee or student will be advised of their possible direct contact with a potential case and they will be advised to follow HSE advice. (see **https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html** for details of vulnerable groups).

If you inform your Head of School/Unit/Line manager that you have tested positive for COVID-19, this will be kept confidential and the HSE will begin a contact tracing exercise. However, if your Head of School/Unit/line manager suspects or is aware that you have had contact with a colleague or student who falls into a vulnerable group, then they will contact that colleague or student and advise them of their possible direct contact with a known case and advise them to adhere to HSE advice. (see **https://www2.hse.ie/conditions/coronavirus/at-risk-groups.html** for details of vulnerable groups).

Any contact made by a Head of School/Unit/Line manager will be done a strictly anonymised basis. The name of the person being tested should never be made known to any other parties.

Heads of School/Unit/Line managers are required to ensure that colleagues submit the appropriate medical confirmation retrospectively once there is a positive confirmation of COVID-19. This absence should then be recorded as special leave with pay on the employee's attendance records.

All policies and policy related documents and forms are subject to amendment. Please refer to the UCD Governance Document Library website for the official, most recent version.

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Further information on testing and diagnosis for student and employees can be found in the Employee FAQs.

The current medical advice is that the individual who is being tested should self-isolate at home until the outcome of the test result.

If you are already working from home and subsequently fall ill with COVID-19, then special leave with pay will be recorded rather than sick leave. Special leave with pay should continue to be recorded, however the rules of sick leave will apply (i.e. your Head of School/Unit/Line manager should be informed of your absence from work).

If you have any queries about this, you should seek further advice from HR - please contact **HRhelpdesk@ucd.ie**

For all other absences due to ill health or injury that are unrelation to COVID-19, you should follow the Managing Attendance & Sick Leave Policy.

4.3 Mental Health and Wellbeing

Looking after your mental health during this time is of paramount importance, to support you through this, a number of guides have been developed.

Equality Diversity and Inclusion have developed a webpage which outlines the supports available during this time, **Minding Your Mental Wellbeing During the COVID-19 Crisis .**

SIRC have also developed guidelines for keeping mentally well during this period while working from home, **Safety Advice on Home Working During COVID-19 .**

Where you are experiencing difficulties, our **Employee Assistance Service (EAS),** operated by Inspire Workplaces, is a completely free, confidential service for UCD employees and their immediate families (those living at home with them who are 18 years of age and older). You can avail of emotional support and counselling services where required by calling free and in confidence **24/7, 365 days a year – 1800 817 435.** The Employee Assistance Service also offer a wide range of supports via their online hub.

4.4 Keeping in regular contact

Although we have all been advised to keep our social distance from people outside of our home, it is still important to keep in contact with our Heads of School/Unit/Line managers, work colleagues, friends and family. You should utilise Face time, Skype, Zoom and Google Hangouts or equivalent alternatives to keep in regular contact during this time.

People and Organisation Development have created online learning resources and tips for working remotely. These resources are beneficial for all faculty and staff to use during this time. These resources can be found on the **Online course catalogue.**

Culture and Engagement have an **Off- Campus Engagement** webpage which is aimed to keep you on track physically and mentally.

4.5 Keep up healthy routines

While some of us may not be able to keep up our normal routines, it is important to maintain a balance between working life and your own personal time.

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The HSE advises on the following to try and keep a healthy routine,

- exercise regularly, especially walking - you can do this even if you need to self-quarantine
- keep regular sleep routines
- maintain a healthy, balanced diet
- avoid excess alcohol
- practice relaxation techniques such as breathing exercises
- read a book.

Healthy UCD and UCD Sport & Fitness have **online classes and workouts** in Yoga, body pump and mindfulness available free of charge to UCD employees.

These online workouts are designed to help keep our UCD Employee Community motivated to maintain their physical and mental health in a safe, fun and effective manner. Les Mills is internationally recognised, providing fitness programmes to over 20,000 gyms & partners throughout 100 countries. UCD Sports & Fitness instructors are trained under the Les Mills methodology.

4.6 Productivity Tips

For many, working from home will be a new concept. It is important to keep structures and routines in place so that you can stay motivated and productive.

- Find a comfortable dedicated workspace, if possible, a space where you can close the door to avoid distractions
- Have a workplan by making a list at the end of each day of the tasks that you need to focus on for the following day
- Think about how you are going to communicate. There are various face to face channels that you can use, such Zoom, Google Meet and Skype. More traditional channels such as email and telephone will also work well depending on the level on engagement that is required
- Stay in contact with your colleagues, as working from home can be isolating. Arrange daily check-ins with your team and colleagues.

4.7 Data Security

Tips for personal data processing at off-site / remote locations

When working remotely, it is even more important and special attention is required to keep **data security, integrity and confidentiality** in mind when processing personal data. This includes the following:

- Making sure not to work on personal or confidential information in an environment where others can see or gain access to these data
- Not using wireless Internet connections like open, unsecured Wi-Fi in public places. If people do not have access to a secure Internet connection they need to follow the **UCD IT Services Advice for Faculty and Staff - Working from Home**
- Only using a device that is equipped with all security features like firewall, anti-virus software and more. Find out more at UCD **IT Security**
- Avoiding downloading information from UCD systems to portable devices, especially unencrypted ones
- Not printing off personal or sensitive information and letting it lay around the house or other places where other people can gain access to it

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- Keeping hard copy documents which contain UCD personal data secure when working at home, i.e. locking paper files away when not in use
- Always using a shredder when disposing of paper University documents. If you do not have a shredder at home, you should store the documentation in a safe place until you can return to campus to use the onsite shredding facilities.
- Switching off any smart devices that could record personal data e.g. in audio format
- Being extra careful to keep UCD credentials confidential, so that access to UCD systems does not get compromised
- If using UCD provided VPN, log out of it when not actively using it.
- Activate a password protected screen saver if stepping away from your work area.
- Being vigilant that in non-standard situations and crisis the risks of scams and fraudulent emails increases.

Additional information can be found in the DPC website **Protecting Personal Data When Working Remotely .**

4.8 Health and Safety

A number of risk assessments for office type work can be found on the **UCD SIRC Office Website** along with a **Guidance Handbook on Office Safety.**

If anyone suffers any accident when working from home, they should contact **sirc@ucd.ie.**

SIRC have developed guidelines for keeping physically safe while working from home, which everyone should read **Safety Advice on Home Working During COVID-19.**

4.9 Existing policies and procedures

Existing policies and procedures continue to apply during this period.

5.   Roles and Responsibilities

Head of School/Unit/Line manager Responsibilities

- Maintain regular check-ins with your team and not just on work activities. Its important to ask how team members are coping.
- Provide support when requested by a team member
- Provide regular updates from senior management on the progressing situation
- Ensure even distribution of workloads across the team
- Maintain confidentiality if a team member reports symptoms or tests positive for COVID -19. Exceptions to this would be where another colleague needs to be informed for the purposes of contact tracing
- Encourage employees to utilise online resources that have been developed to support them during this time
- Keep up to date with HSE guidelines and **HR FAQ's for Employees**
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect.

Employee Responsibilities

- Keep in regular contact with your line manager and colleagues
- Provide support to colleagues and line manager as required

- Be flexible in your approach to working, this may require taking on tasks which may not form part of your normal day to day duties but will fall within your skill set or level of expertise
- Be transparent about workloads. If you need support, you should speak to your Head of School/Unit/line manager. Similarly, if you feel you can help elsewhere, you should offer your support
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect.

Human Resources Responsibilities

- Provide policy and general advice and guidance to line managers' and employees'
- Communicate directives from the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in relation to COVID – 19
- Make referrals to Occupational Health Providers where necessary
- Provide support and information on the Employee Assistance Service.
- As far as is possible deliver all our ongoing services remotely

6.   Related information on COVID-19

- **COVID-19 Employee FAQs**
- **COVID-19 Special Arrangements**
- **UCD HR - COVID-19**
- **Employee Information on Leave Associated with COVID-19**
- **People and Organisation Development - online learning**

7.   Version history

Version 1

31 March 2020