



# Workload Guidance for Employees

## Purpose

Workload has been a continual key area of focus highlighted in staff surveys and it is also recognised that there will continue to be peak times throughout the year where workload may be slightly higher than normal.

There is no 'one size fits all' solution for managing workload, this guidance has been designed to help us build on the excellent practices already in place and to think about the way in which we work, with some practical suggestions that can be considered alongside areas such as your current home situation and the type of role that you undertake.

Your wellbeing – physically, emotionally and mentally is key right now and if not looked after, you may see negative impacts in both your home and work life. Having time away from work is more important than ever with competing priorities at home and at work, so please book in your annual leave and take regular breaks from work.

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## Having regular conversations

Many of us have been working remotely for some time; some have changed their working pattern; and others have participated in full or flexible furlough arrangements. Everyone has their own set of personal circumstances that may be impacting how and when they are able to undertake work – there is no ‘right way’ when it comes to how roles should be carried out at the moment. Whilst a move to greater remote working has seen many benefits, it has also meant a blurring of the lines between home and work for some of us and has created new challenges for others.

Having regular conversations with your manager has never been more important so that clear boundaries can be set which align with your personal circumstances. You are encouraged to raise any concerns with your manager so that they can help you to focus on your next steps and ensure that additional flexibility and reasonable adjustments to your workload are considered. Regularly checking in with each other will provide you with an opportunity to keep your manager updated about any changes to your circumstances so that you can be supported appropriately.

## Reprioritising activity

You are encouraged to take some time to determine your real priorities and time sensitive work that must continue – are there any non-critical activities that can be paused, slowed down, scaled back, done more efficiently or stopped altogether? This would allow you to reduce your overall workload until more time becomes available again. You should discuss this with your manager and expect to have regular check-ins to discuss progress, address any changes to work priorities and focus on next steps.

## Agreeing realistic outcomes

The My Contribution process is designed to facilitate a structured and supportive approach to agreeing what is realistically achievable, and by when. You are encouraged to be open with your manager about this so that you can agree clear and realistic objectives – the important part is what can be delivered, how and by when, rather than the focus being on when you will complete the work. Focus on achievements, rather than activity. You know if you are on task and being productive – keep yourself in check.

It may be possible to support requests from part-time employees to increase their working hours on a temporary basis, or to allow people in some roles to work overtime to create more capacity during peak periods. If you are interested in this, you should discuss it with your manager.



## Communications Tools

### Email practices

Many of us are experiencing an increase in email traffic and some people may feel under pressure to respond to emails quickly to show that they are working. Also, due to different working arrangements and working with international students, some people are sending emails outside normal working hours. Responding immediately to emails is not a sign of productivity and there is no expectation for people to do this.

There are simple practices that can be adopted to help reduce workload and remove some perceived pressure in this area:

- ✔ Include the purpose in the subject line of an email so it is clear to people which ones require **Action** and which ones are **for information only**. Consider who needs to receive the email and only copy in others when it is appropriate to do so.
- ✔ When sending an email use as few words as possible. If you need to include a lot of detail, ensure that you add a few bullet points at the start to highlight the key elements that you need to be actioned or understood to save the recipient time.
- ✔ Consider if sending an email is the best communication method and whether it would be more effective to have a quick telephone or video call to discuss the matter, or if you require a quick short response, a message sent via Microsoft Teams may be more efficient.
- ✔ Due to flexible working arrangements and supporting partners and students internationally, people are sending emails outside of what some may deem normal working hours. If this applies to you, you should make it clear to people that there is no expectation for an immediate response. Including a standard phrase such as **'I am working flexibly so there is no expectation to respond to this email outside of your own working hours'** within your signature may help to remove pressure for people who may feel they need to respond at all times of the day.
- ✔ You can also delay the sending of emails (Options/Delay Delivery) when you send an email so that they send during normal working hours.
- ✔ For some people, email notifications can be distracting. If this applies to you, you may find it helpful to deactivate the notification message for incoming emails. You can do this via email view in Outlook, then File, Options, Mail in the left pane and uncheck the alert options in the Message arrival section.
- ✔ It may also be helpful to block out time at set times of the day to deal with emails, as opposed to dipping in and out throughout the day.

## Microsoft Teams

Microsoft Team can provide a different way to communicate remotely with people it can help you to stay connected with people throughout the day through group chat, online virtual meetings and audio calls. It integrates directly with all Office 365 applications allowing you to work collaboratively on pieces of work. Information Services have compiled extensive [MS Teams Guidance](#) comprising key guides and tips to help staff effectively use MS Teams.

## Meeting practices

If you are able to reprioritise any activities, this may provide an opportunity to postpone or cancel some meetings to free up time. Wherever possible try and avoid scheduling meetings between 12pm -1pm to help ensure people have an opportunity to take a proper lunch break, go for a walk, have some uninterrupted working time or tend to family/home matters.

Lots of meetings can become a blocker to effectively managing workload. These are some suggested meeting practices which may help to free up some time:

- ✔ Try to block out slots in your diary to give yourself regular breaks; dedicated time to focus on tasks; and to stop your diary getting too filled up with meetings.
- ✔ Consider whether or not all of your meetings are actually needed and decide if you could you shorten, or postpone any. Reprioritising your activities may provide an opportunity for this.
- ✔ Review meeting attendees – could fewer people attend and collate wider views in advance and report back to others? Smaller cohorts in meetings supports quicker decision making and progress.
- ✔ Try to keep your meetings as short as possible with a set agenda to ensure that everyone in the meeting gets what they need from the meeting.
- ✔ Wherever possible try to avoid scheduling meetings during the hours of 12-1pm. This will help ensure people have an opportunity to take a proper lunch break, go for a walk, have some uninterrupted working time or time to support family/home schooling activities.
- ✔ It can be helpful to people if you schedule your meetings to finish a few minutes early to give people a short break between meetings. You can do this via calendar view in Outlook, then File, Options, Calendar and enable 'End Appointment and Meetings Early'. It is suggested that the default should be 10 minutes shorter for meetings lasting an hour or longer and 5 minutes shorter for meetings under an hour.
- ✔ Consider if any of your calls/meetings could be conducted whilst walking to facilitate exercise and time away from the screen.



## Taking a break from work

While it may sound strange promoting taking a break to help you with your workload, our current way of working has shown that some people find it hard to switch off, especially if you are at home where your laptop or mobile device may always be connected.

Taking a break from work not only has positive impacts for your own wellbeing, it also has positive impacts on your productivity.

- ✔ Ensure you take regular breaks away from your laptop/mobile device throughout the day.
- ✔ Try to get outside for some fresh air during the day to recharge your batteries.
- ✔ Ensure you maintain as much of a routine as possible based on your personal circumstances, turning the laptop/mobile device off at the end of each day.
- ✔ Ensure you book annual leave to get a good break away from work.

## Resources

- ✔ [Homeworking Guidance for Employees](#) - guidance to help colleagues work remotely effectively.
- ✔ Information about the current online workshops that the L&D team are running can be found [here](#)
- ✔ The University's [Health and Wellbeing](#) pages contain a range of information, advice and support.
- ✔ The University provides staff with free access to [Workplace Options](#) and [togetherall](#) - independent and confidential support services to help employees balance their work, family and personal lives.
- ✔ [My Contribution](#) intranet pages.