**Changes to methods and locations of working and learning as part of ‘Enhanced Protection’ measures in response to COVID-19 pandemic**

Requiring staff and students to work in different ways and from a location that is different to their usual place of work/study presents both opportunities and challenges. It introduces a level of increased flexibility for both staff and students but requires adopting a different approach to working and studying.

Consideration has been given to both the potential positive and negative impacts of these changes from an equality perspective. The following specific aspects of these changes, a combination of which affect all staff and students to a greater or lesser degree, have been considered:

* Using electronic devices from home
* Delivering teaching remotely
* Accessing teaching remotely
* Learning to use new software/needing to develop new skills
* Undertaking work outside job descriptions
* Developing/undertaking different forms of assessment
* Adjusting to working and learning in new/different ways and to dealing with an uncertain external environment that restricts travel and contact

A wealth of information and guidance to support staff and students during this time has been published. This assessment does not repeat that, but seeks to identify additional mitigating actions to address identified negative impacts. In line with our aspiration to go beyond legislation wherever possible, and to obtain a holistic overview as possible, a broader range of protected characteristics than those contained within the Equality Act 2010[[1]](#footnote-1) have been considered. In addition, when considering the impact on disabled staff and students, thought has been given to the following:

* Physical impairments
* Mental health conditions
* Those who may not have disclosed a disability
* Those who do not have a diagnosis of a disability but are living with a significant health condition or impairment

Whilst we are aware that significant numbers of staff have not disclosed information such as whether they consider themselves to have a disability, the current situation provides an opportunity for reporting managers to encourage staff to do this, for example through the ‘risk assessment for computer-based work from home’ process.

**Table 1: Equality Impact Assessment: home-working and online teaching/assessment by protected characteristic - staff**

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| **Protected characteristic** | **Potential positive impacts**  | **Potential negative impacts** | **Mitigating actions to address identified negative impacts** | **Person(s)/service responsible** |
| Age | The ‘pivot’ or ‘sandwich’ generation (over 50’s with caring responsibilities for both children and parents) may find it easier to balance work with caring responsibilities | Setting up a work station at home can be hard for those who live with their parents or in cramped shared accommodation (primarily young people)Early-years childcare commitments (primarily younger people) can make home working difficult Staff aged over 70, who are classed as vulnerable, may feel particularly anxious  | Working from home risk assessment carried out and appropriate adjustments facilitatedFlexible approach to fulfilling requirements of role and focus on outputs rather than time spent on tasks Ensure no staff aged over 70 working in a role that may require them to be present on site e.g. in a food outlet or shop, security staff, cleaning staff are asked to come into work | Reporting managersOccupational HealthCERDirector of People and CultureAge Inclusion Champion |
| Disability - physical | Reduced frequency of travel on to campus may be a benefit for some disabled staffWorking in home surroundings may be a benefit for some disabled staff | A lack of suitable home-working equipment may lead to pain/discomfortRestrictions on ability to move around freely outside the home may exacerbate existing health conditions Being required to self-isolate for a long period of time due to being in a vulnerable group could lead to a deterioration in mental healthStaff with a long-term health condition, who are classed as vulnerable, may feel particularly anxious | Working from home risk assessment carried out, adjustments made as necessary, risk assessment revisited periodically to ensure it remains fit for purpose Opportunities offered to staff with a health condition or impairment to discuss changes to the working environment and what it might mean for them and adjustments made as necessary. Frequent contact maintainedEnsure no staff with a health condition that puts them in the ‘vulnerable’ category, working in a role that may require them to be present on site e.g. in a food outlet or shop, security staff, cleaning staff are asked to come into work | Reporting managersOccupational Health |
| Disability – mental illness (includes anxiety, stress, depression, bipolar, eating disorders, OCD, PTSD) and neuro-diversity (includes dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Autistic Spectrum) | Increased flexibility in deciding when work is carried out may be a benefit for some neuro-diverse staff  | Potential challenges for staff with mental health problems or disorders include:(i) heightened levels of anxiety(ii) an increased risk of condition worsening (iii) a reduced level of support from external health professionals e.g. counsellors(iv) reduced ability to focus on work (v) increased tensions in home environment caused by reduced ability to control condition Potential causes of anxiety/stress for neuro-diverse staff include:(i) a change of structure and routine, including working pattern and methods of communication/feedback (ii) reprioritisation of work(iii) being asked to undertake different work(iv) a change to normal place of work(v) working in close proximity of other people in the household – impact of noise and possible lack of dedicated workspace(vi) Reduced opportunity for informal conversations and lack of confidence in reaching out to colleagues for interaction or support (vii) IT literacy – staff with learning difficulties may find it difficult to stay in touch  | Staff with a mental health condition to be given an opportunity to discuss any proposed changes to their duties before any changes are imposed. Reasonable adjustments put in place, where possible, in response to any identified negative impact  Regular contact, using an agreed method e.g. via Zoom or by phone, to keep track of workload, establish goals and respond to potential challenges Include reference to the specific support available to staff with health conditions or impairments in relevant University-wide communications | Reporting managersOccupational HealthMental Health First AidersHealth ChampionsDisability Inclusion Champion |
| Gender[[2]](#footnote-2) | Staff going through transition may find being less visible to others easierStaff subjected to inappropriate behaviour or comments from others (both within and outside the University) based on their gender identity or presentation may find being required to stay at home a temporary reprieve  | Potential causes of anxiety/stress for trans staff include:(i) staff undergoing transition who need to live in their acquired gender for at least 2 years in order to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate may have their transition delayed due to social distancing/lock down measures (ii) planned operations as part of transitioning may be delayed or cancelled (iii) the physical appearance of trans staff may change significantly during the period of home-working and if little face-to-face interaction takes place, trans staff may be anxious about returning to the workplace Some trans or non-binary staff may be in isolation with unsupportive family, and/or they may not be out to their family. This can cause emotional distress, depression etcStaff in abusive home situations, including emotional abuse and harmful traditional practices such as honour violence (predominantly women) may use campus as a refuge and either cannot work from home because of limitations imposed by an abusive partner/family member or are further exposed to an abusive situation | Trans staff to be given particular opportunities to discuss the impact of changes to the working, and wider, environment on their transition Trans staff to be given every opportunity to participate in virtual meetings Include reference to the support available to trans staff, including staff networks and the ‘Supporting trans and non-binary staff’ document, in relevant University-wide communicationsCheck-in regularly with staff to ensure they remain connected with workRaise safeguarding concerns if there are signs that something might be wrong e.g. meeting requests continually being declined, non-attendance at meetings that had been accepted citing technical problems, emails not answered or always answered at a particular/irregular time, obvious increase in levels of anxiety Maintain communications around availability of Report and Support Raise awareness of potential issue and available support in ongoing all-staff communications | Reporting managersNamed People and Culture contactsCERDirector of People and CultureTrans Inclusion ChampionLGBT+ ForumEssex LGBT AllianceReporting ManagersAll staffSafeguarding OfficersCERDirector of People and CultureGender Inclusion Champion |
| Marriage and civil partnership (including those who are single) |  | Staff who are single and live alone may rely on work for their social interaction and the absence of this may cause anxiety/stress/loneliness Single parents may find it particularly difficult to balance work and caring responsibilitiesStaff going through divorce or relationship breakdown may be particularly vulnerable to poor mental health  | Particular attention paid to the wellbeing of staff who live alone or who are going through a relationship breakdownMaintain communications around availability of Report and Support  | Reporting managersCERDirector of People and culture |
| Pregnancy and maternity | Pregnant staff may find it helpful to work from home if it becomes uncomfortable or difficult to travelBeing on maternity leave while colleagues are all working from home may make staff feel less disconnected from work than they may otherwise have felt  | Reduced contact with a pregnant member of staff might result in less frequent monitoring of pregnancy risk assessment to ensure it remains fit for purpose Reduced opportunity to interact with others during pregnancy and following the birth of a baby could cause anxiety/stressStaff who are pregnant and classed as vulnerable, may feel particularly anxiousBeing out of the workplace on maternity leave during this period may lead to increased feelings of isolation and being disconnected from work  | Reporting managers with a member of staff in their team who is pregnant to regularly revisit pregnancy risk assessment, adapting it as necessary Ensure no pregnant member of staff working in a role that may require them to be present on site e.g. in a food outlet or shop, security staff, cleaning staff is asked to come into work | Reporting managersOccupational Health |
| Race | Staff subjected to inappropriate behaviour or comments from others (both within and outside the University) based on their ethnic background may find being required to stay at home a temporary reprieve  | Black academic staff who are already being subjected to micro aggressions as a way of undermining them, may find themselves increasingly oppressed and marginalised during this timeStaff subjected to harmful traditional practices such as honour violence (predominantly black, Asian and minority ethnic women and children) may be particularly vulnerable during the lockdown period  | Raise awareness of potential and available support, including staff networks, through ongoing work associated with applying for a Bronze Race Equality Charter Award and in ongoing all-staff communications | CERDirector of People and CultureRace Inclusion Champion Global Forum |
| Religion or belief | Increased flexibility due to home-working may make it easier for some staff to observe their religion or belief  | On campus facilities may not be available which may limit the opportunity to observe some faith practices  | Include reference to the availability of the Faith Centre and possible alternative ways to worship e.g. live-streamed religious services, in communications to staff | Faith Centre ManagerCERDirector of People and CultureReligion or Belief Inclusion ChampionInclusion Champion for Jewish staff and students |
| Sexual orientation | Staff subjected to inappropriate behaviour or comments from others (both within and outside the University) based on their sexual orientation may find being required to stay at home a temporary reprieve  | Some LGBTQ staff may be in isolation with unsupportive family, and/or they may not be out to their family. This can cause emotional distress, depression etcMembers of the LGBT+ community also more frequently experience isolation and loneliness, and so it's likely that LGBT+ people living alone or in self-isolation will experience increased feelings of loneliness beyond what their cis/straight /colleagues experience. Queer people with HIV (especially those of colour) may be particularly anxious during this time due to being immunosuppressed and therefore more vulnerable to serious infection  | Include reference to internal and external support networks e.g. the LGBT+ Forum, the Essex LGBT Alliance and Outhouse East in communications to staffPromote the ‘Supporting trans and non-binary staff’ document in communications to staff  | CERDirector of People and CultureSexual Orientation Inclusion ChampionLGBT+ Staff Forums |
| Caring responsibilities | Increased opportunity to spend time with children | Potential causes of anxiety/stress for staff with caring responsibilities include:(i) trying to balance working from home and caring responsibilities, including home-educating children and keeping young children occupied within the confines of one house (ii) taking on additional responsibilities in relation to caring for older or vulnerable family members (iii) needing to devote additional time to caring for older or vulnerable family members, meaning less time for relaxation and taking care of own wellbeing  | Ensure staff are kept informed of the University’s approach to supporting staff with caring responsibilities and available networks for supportEnsure maximum flexibility in terms of working patternsConsider additional flexible options to support staff such as allowing staff to buy additional annual leave/exchanging salary for additional annual leave or offering flexible bank holidays– rather than requiring staff to take these days as paid leave, allow staff to work on a bank holiday if they wish and take the days off at another time of their choosing to better fulfil/share caring responsibilities  | CERDirector of People and CultureReporting managersParent’s Support Network |
| Socio-economic background  |  | Uncertainty over job stability could be particularly worrying for staff from low socio-economic backgrounds  | Recognition of this to be reflected in University-wide communications | CERDirector of People and Culture |
| Being estranged |  | Lack of family support network, at a time when others may be spending more time with, or connecting with, their families could cause increased feelings of loneliness and isolation  | Frequent contact maintained with staffKnown community support groups highlighted in relevant University-wide communications  | Reporting managersCER |

**Table 2: Equality Impact Assessment: home-working and online teaching/assessment by protected characteristic – students**

If a student has any concerns during normal office hours they can contact SWIS via the 'drop in ' service which is continuing to operate a remote support service by telephone, live chat or email via the Student Service Hub (<https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/mental-and-emotional-health/mental-and-emotional-health-support>). The Assessors who operate this service are able to offer direct support or signpost to more specialist services.

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| **Protected characteristic** | **Potential positive impact**  | **Potential negative impact** | **Mitigating actions to address identified negative impacts** | **Person(s)/service responsible** |
| Age | Reduced frequency of travel on to campus may be a benefit for some mature students  | Setting up a work station at home can be hard for those who live with their parents or in cramped shared accommodationEarly-years childcare commitments (primarily mature students) can make studying from home difficult which may result in students achieving a worse than expected outcomeStudents aged over 70, who are classed as vulnerable, may feel particularly anxious  | Information provided to students includes advice/guidance on studying at home and balancing study and childcare commitment and how the University will take this into account as part of assessment processes Extenuating circumstances forms/guidance include explicit reference to how having caring responsibilities will be taken into account in assessment processes  | Academic SectionCER |
| Disability - physical | Reduced frequency of travel on to campus may be a benefit for some students with a physical disability Working in home surroundings may be a benefit for some disabled students | A lack of suitable home-working equipment may lead to pain/discomfortRestrictions on ability to move around freely outside the home may exacerbate existing health conditions Being required to self-isolate due to being in a vulnerable group could lead to a deterioration in mental health | Reasonable adjustments to remain in place to support students and to be clearly communicated within departments and to academic staffLiaison between SWIS and DDEs regarding awareness of reasonable adjustments for remote studies and examsInformation provided to students includes advice/guidance on keeping safe and well with specific reference to health conditions or impairments | DDEsDDLOsSWISCERDisability Inclusion Champion |
| Disability – mental illness (includes anxiety, stress, depression, bipolar, eating disorders, OCD, PTSD) and neuro-diversity (includes dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Autistic Spectrum) | Reduced frequency of travel on to campus may be a benefit for some students with poor mental healthStudents who find it difficult to contribute in a group setting might find it easier to participate electronically | Potential challenges for students with mental health problems or disorders include:(i) heightened levels of anxiety(ii) an increased risk of condition worsening (iii) a reduced level of support from external health professionals e.g. counsellors(iv) reduced ability to focus on work study(v) increased tensions in home environment caused by reduced ability to control condition (vi) Reduced opportunity for informal conversations and lack of confidence in reaching out to colleagues for interaction or support Potential causes of anxiety/stress for neuro-diverse students include:(i) a change of structure and routine, including study pattern and methods of communication/feedback (ii) a change to normal place of study(iii) working in close proximity of other people in the household – impact of noise and possible lack of dedicated workspace(vi) Reduced opportunity for informal conversations and lack of confidence in reaching out to peers/staff for interaction or support  | Reasonable adjustments to remain in place to support students and to be clearly communicated within departments and to academic staffLiaison between SWIS and DDEs regarding awareness of reasonable adjustments for remote studies and examsLines of communication between Personal Tutors and students to remain open  | DDEsDDLOsSWISPersonal Tutors |
| Gender identity | If students are not visible, it could limit any bias based on physical characteristics from both teaching staff and fellow studentsStudents subjected to inappropriate behaviour or comments from others (both within and outside the University) based on their gender identity or presentation may find being required to stay at home a temporary reprieve  | If students are not visible, assumptions could be made about students’ gender from their names, potentially leading to some students being misgenderedPotential causes of anxiety/stress for trans students include:(i) students undergoing transition who need to live in their acquired gender for at least 2 years in order to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate may have their transition delayed due to social distancing/lock down measures (ii) planned operations as part of transitioning may be delayed or cancelled (iii) the physical appearance of trans students may change significantly during the period of virtual learning and if little face-to-face interaction takes place, trans students may be anxious about returning to campus/seeing people face-to-face again | Reinforce importance of using gender neutral language in guidance provided to teaching about delivering learning onlineInclude reference to the support available to trans students in relevant University-wide communications e.g. relevant student societies | Organisational DevelopmentCERTrans Inclusion Champion |
| Marriage and civil partnership (including those who are single) |  | Students who are single and live alone may rely on the social interaction they get through being a student and the absence of this may cause anxiety/stress/loneliness and reduce their sense of belongingStudents who are single parents may find it particularly difficult to balance study and caring for a child/childrenStudents going through a divorce or relationship breakdown may be particularly vulnerable to poor mental health | Include reference to relevant information/support available to students in relevant University-wide communications e.g. relevant student societies, Students’ Union servicesMaintain communications around availability of Report and Support | SWIS |
| Pregnancy and maternity | Pregnant students may find it helpful to work from home if it becomes uncomfortable or difficult to travel | Reduced contact with ‘first point of contact’ might result in less frequent monitoring of pregnancy risk assessment to ensure it remains fit for purpose Reduced opportunity to interact with others during pregnancy and following the birth of a baby could cause anxiety/stressStudents who are pregnant and classed as vulnerable may feel particularly anxious  | Staff assigned as the ‘first point of contact’ for a pregnant student to maintain regular contact and revisit pregnancy risk assessment, making changes as appropriate  | Staff assigned as ‘first point of contact’ for pregnant studentsSWIS  |
| Race | If students are not visible, it could limit any bias based on physical characteristics from both teaching staff and fellow studentsStaff subjected to inappropriate behaviour or comments from others (both within and outside the University) based on their ethnic background may find being required to stay at home a temporary reprieve  | If students are not visible, assumptions could be made about students’ race/ethnicity from their names, potentially leading to biasStudents subjected to harmful traditional practices such as honour violence (predominantly black, Asian and minority ethnic women and children) may be particularly vulnerable during the lockdown period | Include consideration of bias in guidance provided to teaching about delivering learning online Unconscious Bias online resource updated to include a section on ‘Education’  | Organisational Development |
| Religion or belief | Increased flexibility due to home-working may make it easier for some students to observe their religion or belief | On campus facilities may not be available which may limit the opportunity to observe some faith practices  | Include reference to the availability of the Faith Centre and possible alternative ways to worship e.g. live-streamed religious services in communications to students  | CERReligion of belief Inclusion ChampionInclusion champion for Jewish staff and students |
| Sex |  | Students in abusive home situations including emotional abuse and harmful traditional practices such as honour violence (predominantly women) may use campus as a refuge and either cannot study from home because of limitations imposed by an abusive partner/family member or are further exposed to an abusive situation | Maintain communications around availability of Report and SupportContact to be maintained with students who are known to be vulnerable in this way Raise safeguarding concerns if there are signs that something is wrong e.g. obvious increase in levels of anxiety, marked difference in engagement in learning  | CERGender Inclusion ChampionSWIS Departmental staff |
| Sexual orientation | Staff subjected to inappropriate behaviour or comments from others (both within and outside the University) based on their sexual orientation may find being required to stay at home a temporary reprieve  | Some LGBTQ students may be in isolation with unsupportive family, and/or they may not be out to their family. This can cause emotional distress, depression etcMembers of the LGBT+ community also more frequently experience isolation and loneliness, and so it's likely that LGBT+ people in quarantine alone will be experiencing increased feelings of loneliness beyond what their cis/straight friends/peers are experiencing. Queer people with HIV (especially those of colour) may be particularly anxious during this time due to being immunosuppressed and therefore more vulnerable to serious infection  | Include reference to internal and external support networks e.g. LGBT+ student societies and Outhouse East in communications to students | CERStudents’ Union societies |
| Caring responsibilities | Increased opportunity to spend time with children | Potential causes of anxiety/stress for students with caring responsibilities include:(i) trying to balance studying from home and caring responsibilities, including home-educating children and keeping young children occupied within the confines of one house (ii) taking on additional responsibilities in relation to caring for older or vulnerable family members (iii) needing to devote additional time to caring for older or vulnerable family members, meaning less time for relaxation and taking care of own wellbeing  | Information provided to students includes advice/guidance on balancing study and childcare commitment and how the University will take this into account as part of assessment processes Extenuating circumstances forms/guidance include explicit reference to how having caring responsibilities will be taken into account in assessment processes   | CERAcademic Section |
| Socio-economic background |  | Students, particularly from low socio-economic backgrounds, who need to work to support their studies may have lost their jobs, leading to increased anxiety | Messages around accessing the Student Hardship Fund and other potential financial support to continue  | CER |
| Being estranged |  | Lack of family support network, at a time when others may be spending more time with, or connecting with, their families could cause increased feelings of loneliness and isolation  | Known community support groups/mechanisms highlighted in relevant University-wide communications Proactive contact from SWIS | CERSWIS |
| Care leavers |  | Lack of family support network, at a time when others may be spending more time with, or connecting with, their families could cause increased feelings of loneliness and isolation  | Known community support groups/mechanisms highlighted in relevant University-wide communications Proactive contact from SWIS | CERSWIS |

1. In line with the University’s aspiration to go beyond legislation wherever possible and to obtain a holistic overview and understanding of the impact that University activities have upon equality and inclusion, a broader range of characteristics than those contained within the Equality Act 2010 have been considered. The protected characteristics contained with the Equality Act 2010 are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Consideration of the impact upon gender should be inclusive of all genders across the gender spectrum including (but not limited to): trans, non-binary, pangender, cisgender\* women, cisgender\* men, and individuals undertaking gender reassignment. The Equality Act 2010 identifies ‘gender reassignment’ as a protected characteristic, which is the process of transitioning from one gender to another. The University’s policies go beyond the requirements of legislation and protect a broader group of people than those covered by the term ‘gender reassignment’ and include all trans and non-binary people.
\* Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)