Joint Union Recommendations to City, University of London

Based on the Joint Union Homeworking Survey and Report

City UCU, Unison and Unite

21st April 2020

Problem 1: Recognising and addressing the general reduction in capacity

This is the main identified problem.

Multiple overlapping circumstances reduce staff capacity to work at a 'normal' workload.

A) **Many of these circumstances <u>cannot be resolved by the University and are ongoing.</u> These include:**
- Inadequate or uncomfortable space in the home
- The presence of other household members and consequent lack of quiet/privacy
- Daily care (and educational) responsibilities for children
- The coordination of support for an elder or otherwise vulnerable adult
- The added time needed to complete chores (like shopping) under lockdown
- Isolation or loneliness
- Worry or stress about loved ones, finances or wider issues
- Concerns about worsening mental health as the lockdown continues

B) **In addition, there are circumstances that <u>City could remedy</u> that impact productivity. These include:**
- Inadequate IT equipment for the tasks required
- Lack of office furniture
- Inadequate wifi (where this is based on a cheap or not-comprehensive plan)

C) **There are also circumstances that are now <u>more likely to occur</u> and will affect productivity <u>over specific periods</u>, These include:**
- Personal illness
- The illness or death of a loved one

We recommend that City addresses the widespread impacts of A in the development of current workload expectations. This might include:

1) Reduced hours of expected work. We believe that a maximum of 5 hours per day is reasonable given the manifold complexities of homeworking as charted above (and in the Report).
2) City should advise managers that members of staff be able to schedule 'breaks' during the week to allow essential activities to occur. For instance, that everyone has one designated morning or afternoon per week to do chores for themselves or others. During these breaks staff would not be expected to do any work, attend meetings or be contactable by colleagues.
3) City should provide regular University-wide Rest Days should the current conditions continue. Initially we recommend two days in May, to reflect best practice in other HEIs

(many of which provided 2 days over Easter). This would provide recognition to staff of the stress endured and goodwill expended.

4) If Academic staff prioritise education they may have insufficient time to produce research at the desired quantity and standard. To recognise this City should extend the ARQM qualifying period to five years for any year that includes 2020. This would mean that no individual's academic career would be negatively affected by lower-research outputs this calendar year. This would be a way of highlighting that it is not 'business as usual' and providing the reassurance needed for academic staff to focus on Education as will be needed while the University enters a very difficult period. [See brief note at the end of this document which shows how this would work in practice].

5) All managers should be required to confirm with colleagues what constraints are produced by their current childcare and/or adult-care responsibilities and where these mean that expected workload must be radically reduced, managers should identify priorities and specify what work is non-priority. Managers are likely to require support in achieving this where there are insufficient other staff to pick up non-priority work or otherwise provide cover.

6) City should provide guidance about how to manage within those Departments or Groups where multiple staff have high care-loads and radically reduced work-availability. This may involve loosening the hiring freeze or may involve selective reductions in collective Departmental/Group workload, including loosening of internal deadlines/requirements.

We recommend that City provide resources to resolve the issues within B. This might include items relating to physical and mental health, goods, services and financial support.

7) Physical and mental health, goods and services
   a. When reasonably practicable, City should arrange couriers/taxis to pick up necessary DSE equipment that staff do not have at home (ergonomic desks, chairs, monitors, etc). Lack of this equipment can cause or exacerbate a pre-existing health condition. Action on this should be done proactively, especially where staff have existing OH assessments which include workspace modifications. Note: This would have to be coordinated with PAF and security, and anybody required to go to campus to assist should be a volunteer and on overtime rates.

   b. Suitable work devices should be provided by the University for everyone who requests these. These machines should come in with the security required by our data protection policies. Working on personal devices may increase wear and tear and remove access to a computer for dependants. They may also be impossible to make secure.

   c. Much remedial equipment can be purchased relatively cheaply (e.g. laptop raisers, headsets, keyboards, ergonomic mice, wrist supports, secure flash drives, etc.). Where small value purchases need to be made, City should provide automatic approval of expenses reimbursements (e.g up to £50). This process could be set up in a way that encourages staff to improve their workstations, but does not provide a large additional workload for managers.

   d. Some staff have no internet at home, or a weak or unreliable connection. If this is needed to work then City should agree to reimburse the costs of a change in provider, upgraded package or installation fees to ensure that staff are not

financially disadvantaged by working from home and that they have bandwidth sufficient for meetings, filesharing, use of VPN etc.

    e.   City should identify any staff who have an OH recommendation or whose work requires that they have a larger (or second) screen and this should be included within the next wave of IT purchases or, if this is not possible, screens transported from City to staff homes.

    f.   City should increase mental health assistance. We understand that it is intended to engage an external EAP to provide additional support, however as a first priority City should seek to expand its experienced and trusted internal staff counselling team capacity. With a pre-Covid waiting list of 6 weeks this was already required and is now a priority. In addition to the 'Working from home' guidance there should be available basic CBT techniques that deal with isolation, depression, anxiety, burnout, substance abuse, etc. There are various remote or online sources that University could subscribe to, like [Big White Wall](#), which provide mental health assistance. Time taken to manage mental health should be available within working hours.

8) Financial support

    f.   City should issue a monthly overheads allowance for all staff to cover additional time spent at home and increased utility and wear-and-tear costs. This should be an automatic process, without staff having to request this. We recommend following Government [guidance](#) that 'From 6 April 2020 your employer can pay you up to £6 a week (£26 a month) to cover your additional costs if you have to work from home.'

    g.   City should agree to suspend any deductions from wages for items such as annual TFL tickets or any other repayments back to the University. In this very difficult time this could alleviate an additional set of financial worries.

    h.   City should cancel or reduce strike deductions in recognition of the level of work on Covid-19 mitigation that staff were required to do in the immediate period of return and the goodwill shown by UCU members in ending their ASOS and working additional hours in order to complete this work.

    i.   Staff with fixed term/temporary/hourly-paid contracts should be contacted about their job security and, whenever possible, their contracts extended or rolled over to ensure their financial stability.

    j.   Ongoing commitments should be made to support the regular team of outsourced staff in catering and cleaning services.

We recommend that City prepares for the unpredictable impacts of C. This might include:

9) City should provide clear guidance on how to adjust should any Department or Group experience severe understaffing as a product of other colleagues having periods of sickness.

10) City should establish of a way to fast-track cover within a context of recruitment freezes.

11) City should provide additional counselling provision and guidance for managers on how to manage overlapping periods of illness/care-absence and staff bereavement.

Problem 2: Recognition, Planning and Inclusion

In a variety of ways staff identified problems of recognition, planning and the need to be included in decision making. These included:

- That the effort staff are putting in is not recognised.
- That there is insufficient recognition of how difficult the current circumstances are – emotionally as well as in terms of workload.
- That staff are bearing the burden and emotional toll of supporting highly stressed students without sufficient support.
- That City, especially Senior Mangers, are continuing with a 'business as usual' model with the effect of exerting pressure downwards on workload.
- That planning is not sufficiently inclusive of the voices of those involved (e.g. in teaching) nor clearly communicated.
- That competing pressures are being exerted.
- That new ways of working, e.g. reliance on MS Teams, may be especially time-consuming.
- That there is insufficient concern with the medium/longer-term sustainability of working patterns that were established to manage an emergency.
- That worries about job security are increasing and this is introducing additional stresses.

We recommend the following to address some of these concerns:

12) City would benefit from having a wider contribution of expertise and scrutiny to its process of recovery. Therefore, we suggest that City reinstate as many suspended forms of collective/delegated governance, active before lock down, as possible and provide the opportunity for staff involvement in decision-making on new processes needed to adapt. These contributions are crucial and will require an allocation of workload for those involved.

13) That educators and students are put at the heart of decision making about the future of our educational provision.

14) That the three unions be included within forward planning for next academic year at the earliest opportunity.

15) That any plan for altering the delivery of education involves the range of support necessary to support academics and professional service staff with varied experience of online or non-traditional delivery.

16) That additional and extensive support is provided to staff involved in education delivery with different level of tutorial for those less technically savvy, to ensure equitable capacity to provide online teaching and student support.

17) That planning is done now to delimit timelines for the summer, so that staff do not feel like they are in a constant state of panicked activity, something that is adding to stress.

18) That expectations around meeting attendance are relaxed if the homeworking period becomes very extended.

19) That planning is focused on identifying tasks that are non-essential, including forms of reporting that may be redundant in the current circumstances.

20) That communication to staff be sensitive to the need to provide recognition of the workload demands currently in place and the emotional strain of the pandemic and lockdown.

21) That Job Security is made an explicit objective for any contingency planning. And that this is communicated clearly to all staff.

Note on ARQM Proposal:

For every year in which 2020 would be included within the ARQM the period assessed moves to 5, rather than 4 years.

This enables staff who are under extreme strain now, because of care responsibilities, ill health or other, not to be penalised for lower research outputs this year.

It also means that staff who are asked to align with City's prioritisation of education, rather than research in the upcoming period, will feel able to do this without risk to their academic career. The following details the years that would be included in each year's ARQM. Note that the 2019 ARQM is the one currently underway. The 2020 ARQM (the first affected) would be done next Spring.

2019 ARQM	2020 ARQM	2021 ARQM	2022 ARQM	2023 ARQM	2024 ARQM
2016	2016	2017	2018	2019	2021
2017	2017	2018	2019	2020	2022
2018	2018	2019	2020	2021	2023
2019	2019	2020	2021	2022	2024
	2020	2021	2022	2023	