Wellbeing When Returning to Campus

When lockdown was imposed in March, there were many implications for PGR wellbeing. From the potential financial implications as a result of research-related activities being put on hold, to the impact of changes to the nature of work activities (e.g. carrying out undergraduate teaching online), to general anxiety regarding isolation and risk of illness.

Now that restrictions are easing and we are beginning to move back to a kind of ‘normal’, there is a new wave of anxieties and factors affecting wellbeing. This is a short guide to some of what you might be experiencing, and how to manage it.

Health Anxiety & Managing Grief

- As society opens up again, you may feel fearful or anxious about engaging in ‘normal’ activities again, especially if that experience will be somewhat different now.
- These fears can be managed by acknowledging that they are rational and are to be expected.
- If you are feeling anxious, build up your tolerance to return to normality by taking things one step at a time; do not feel obliged to rush back to ‘normal’.
- You may have also experienced the loss of a loved one due to coronavirus, made doubly hard by the fact that attendance at funerals was restricted.
- As it is possible to see people again now, you can hopefully seek comfort in seeing friends and family, albeit with social distancing.
- If you have experienced grief, your supervisory team or support staff in School are always there to listen and offer information on more specialist support services.

Settling Back Onto Campus

- It is understandable that returning to campus might feel difficult, particularly if you are a PGR in the early part of your journey.
- The lockdown may have meant you have had to pause all activity, or even restart elements of your research altogether.
- Things will feel different back on campus and you may worry about whether you will feel safe and how you will adapt to new ways of working within the lab or office.
- Information on what measures have been taken to keep all staff and students safe can be found here.
- Your department or School will have information on anything you may need to know regarding changes to your way of working or conducting your research while on campus.

Managing Change & Uncertainty

- Periods of change and some degree of uncertainty are undoubtedly going to feature in all of our lives for a while to come yet, which can be an uncomfortable feeling.
- It can be helpful to look back upon some of the ways that you have already adapted to extreme change throughout the year so far, not only to remind yourself of what helped you cope then, but to congratulate yourself on what you have already come through.
- Also key to coping with change and uncertainty is recognising that some things will be inevitably outside of your control, meaning that you can only control your own reaction to them.
- It is also worth remembering that change is not necessarily always bad; you may have found that you developed some new and improved ways of working and living since March.

Making Connections Remotely

- A big part of returning to campus and normality is making or revisiting social connections for the first time since March. Many of us will only have seen friends and colleagues through video chatting, and even with restrictions eased you are likely to be socialising less often now.
- It is still OK to want to maintain physical distance from others right now. The important things is to only do the socialising you are comfortable with doing.
- Be prepared to state any boundaries you have with your friends or colleagues, e.g. skipping after-work drinks if you don’t feel ready to go to the pub yet.
- Campus interactions will be safe and allow for making new connections safely. Apps such as Slack are useful for staying in touch with work colleagues outside of work-related chat.
- Facilitated Zoom sessions are taking place, and social events such as PositiviTEA - your PGR support team will have more information.