

## Introduction

This toolkit has been created to support managers who are required to manage staff who are working remotely during the current Coronavirus pandemic. Remember these are temporary arrangements that are being put in place to manage the current situation and should not be considered as long term arrangements without further consultation.

Your HR Business Partner will be available to support you in managing your remote staff members and to assist with answering any queries you are unsure about.

- [Considering requests to work remotely](#)
- [What if a staff member requests to work remotely but due to the operational needs/nature of their work can't be approved?](#)
- [Monitoring leave and recording absences](#)
- [Supporting staff members working remotely](#)
- [Communicate, communicate, communicate](#)
- [Developing comradery among remote workers](#)
- [Tracking productivity and completion of tasks](#)
- [Things you need to be watching out for with staff working remotely](#)
- [Self-care and seeking support](#)
- [Types of leave available to staff](#)
- [How to apply for isolation leave?](#)

## Considering requests to work remotely

In the current environment all requests for working from home must be considered. Just because the person hasn't done it previously doesn't mean it can't be done, but the remote working request must still ensure that that operational needs of the University are being met.

Staff members who wish to be considered to work remotely will submit a form for your review via the ServiceNow platform ([request to work remotely](#)). This request will list their requirements.

Should larger pieces of furniture be required for longer-term isolation, the staff member should be asked to provide a plan of where requested furniture could be located in their home, and include room measurements and the availability of power outlets, to ensure OHS requirements are met.

In reviewing the request, consider:

- are these appropriate?
- is there anything else that is/is not needed?

Have a conversation with your staff member to understand their request and their needs if they are to work remotely. How do they see a remote working arrangement working?

Ensure you check that staff are only working during the appropriate span of hours allocated within the [Federation University Australia Union Enterprise Agreement 2019–2021](#). For most general/professional staff the span of hours is 8:00 am to 6:00 pm.

Staff members should be working their normal rostered working hours each week, where possible.

All normal leave reporting arrangements should remain, i.e. booking annual/personal leave.

After talking to your staff members, if you believe that the remote working arrangement is appropriate in the circumstances, discuss this with your Dean/Director for final approval.

## What if a staff member requests to work remotely but due to the operational needs/nature of their work can't be approved?

If the staff member's position cannot be undertaken remotely, you need to speak to them and advise why their request is not being approved. Staff can also access annual and long service leave as per normal operational practice. (See [Types of leave available to staff](#) for further information.)

## Monitoring leave and recording absences

Staff members who become unwell while working remotely are not expected to keep working and they would apply for personal leave in most circumstances.

If a remote staff member needs to self-isolate **and is not unwell**, they can still work remotely from home if it is possible to do so. Staff members would need to discuss this with you.

If a remote staff member is working at home while children/other family members may be at home due to self-isolation, work/school or children's centre closure as a result of COVID-19, staff are encouraged to work what hours they can within their normal span of hours.

If staff members cannot work due to requirements to care for sick children or family members, carer's/personal leave will be available as per normal process.

See [Types of leave available to staff](#) for further information.

Managers will be responsible for monitoring leave for staff.

## Supporting staff members working remotely

Working remotely can bring some challenges, and it is important to know how best to work with your staff in these circumstances. More self-directed workers may need less contact and direction, but others may need more attention and guidance. This is where good listening and communication skills really come in.

- Provide encouragement and emotional support.
- Ask regularly 'Are you OK?' Check in on what their frustrations might be with working remotely. Discuss what might be done to alleviate these.
- Ask how remote working is going for the staff member:
  - how is their workstation?
  - are they taking regular breaks?
  - are they taking their lunch break?
  - are they managing with the reduced social contact with their colleagues?
- Actively listen to your staff members and acknowledge challenges and stressors and listen to any anxieties or concerns. Discuss issues and identify possible solutions together.
- Encourage staff to continue to engage in healthy activities, ensuring they get enough rest and are eating well.
- Remind staff about the [Employee Assistance Program](#) should they require additional support. For more information, please visit '[Counselling and other support](#)' on the [Health and wellbeing web page](#).

## Communicate, communicate, communicate

Research shows that employees look to their employers and managers for cues on how to react to difficult situations or sudden changes in the workplace.

As a manager, communicating effectively with your staff is important to ensure they are able to continue working as normal as possible.

Acknowledge the situation we are dealing with and utilise confident messages such as 'I know this will be challenging but we can do this as a team' or 'let's work together to meet the current challenges'.

[top](#)

Managing a productive team remotely begins with a strategy for communication. In consultation with remote staff members, develop plans on how you will communicate with each of them. An understanding of what is urgent will further mitigate inefficiency, allowing ultimate productivity.

- Establish daily check-in's
- Schedule regular meetings with staff, both individual and team meetings;
- Get used to having video-meetings – staff need to have face-to-face contact. Being able to see facial expressions adds invaluable context, so it's something that should occur as regularly as possible.
- When running team meetings, work out how to avoid staff multi-tasking during remote meetings. Video conferences instead of phone conferences work well to have people concentrate on the matter at hand. Agree on remote meeting rules with the whole team at your first meeting.
- Use different options to communicate and establish norms for use – i.e. we will video conference in meetings; individual telephone call every day at a set time; use of text messages/instant messaging. The information being delivered will determine the mode of delivery, i.e. video/telephone call vs. text message or email.
- Communicate clearly about priorities, tasks and deadlines and foster ongoing collaboration between team members.
- Determine how urgent matters will be dealt with. Remember you're only one person – you can't answer multiple urgent phone calls at the same time. Consider escalation points where possible to mitigate everything flowing to you.
- When you need to deliver a message to a remote staff member, ask yourself if the news you're delivering would be better received in person?

If yes is the answer, then do the next best thing and call versus emailing or texting. This is especially true if you're delivering feedback about conduct or performance or discussing a problem. It is easy to misconstrue someone's tone in electronic communication.

- Encourage remote staff to practice good communication as well. Pick up the phone and talk to team members rather than sending an email. Email trails with extensive 'reply all' can get frustrating and distracting for other team members.

## Developing comradery among remote workers

Create a remote workforce atmosphere of engagement and genuine connection.

- Building trust among your team. Provide regular updates and be as transparent as you can be on the COVID-19 situation and University actions and decisions. Ensure that you keep the flow of information coming through to staff and that you answer their questions.
- Provide regular opportunities for remote social interactions for the whole team – set aside times to have 'remote morning teas' or other small events where staff can have a social conversation with team mates rather than focus on work. Celebrate special days (e.g. birthdays) and milestones (e.g. new starters or years of service) and celebrate team achievements and successes.
- Allocate a few minutes at the start of meeting to allow staff to just have a chat and catch up with each other or share news with the wider team.
- Where appropriate empathise and appreciate each other by discussing shared interests, family commonalities etc.
- Establish clear expectations. Make each team meeting count with purpose and opportunities to engage and contribute in a variety of ways.
- Show you are supportive of their success by using inquiry to help them achieve their goals rather than check on their progress and numbers, i.e. how are you progressing with X? Is there anything you need from me? How can I support you further?

[top](#)

### Tracking productivity and completion of tasks

- Don't micro-manage – trust that your staff are working as hard as they do in the office but remember too little contact can also be disconcerting for a remote worker.
- Everyone has a different idea of what doing something 'quickly' or 'well' means. Whether showing examples of what you expect to be done, calendar sharing, etc., make sure you have clear expectations from those you work with online.
- Treat your remote people like they are local and treat your local people like they are remote. Give remote people as much access to you as possible. Remember, your local people see you in the halls, eat with you at lunch, stop by your office, etc. The remote people don't have that access and can feel distant. Respond to them as quickly as possible. Make your local people set appointments.
- Consider assigning remote staff with a local point of contact where communication and connection are valued.
- Focus on goals not activity. It is important to manage expectations and stay focused on goals when embracing a remote workforce. Don't worry as much about what is being done. Instead, concentrate on what is being **accomplished**. If staff are meeting the agreed goals and outputs then they are achieving a productive outcome for the University.

If a discussion about performance is required, then plan the conversation carefully and speak to the staff member. Your HR Business Partner can always assist you with this.

### Things you need to be watching out for with staff working remotely

Staff who are working remotely may find the situation challenging as a result you may notice a degree of disengagement or decline in job performance. Some of this may be due to social isolation from colleagues or disorientation from having their normal work routine disrupted.

A few points to remember:

- Not everyone is lucky enough to have a home life they enjoy. For some people, work is a refuge. While the current remote working requests are voluntary, some staff may be obliged to work remotely due to requirements to self-isolate due to potential exposure or to manage a health condition. If a staff member does express a lack of enthusiasm for remote working try to discuss this with them as much as they feel comfortable.
- Remote workers can often be forgotten from regular office interactions, so over communication is critical.
- Some staff members may feel uncomfortable working from home, feeling like they have to work twice as hard to prove they are working. This may lead to feeling of guilt and a reduction in job satisfaction and absenteeism. Staff in this situation may implement different strategies to overcome these feelings including:

Strategy to overcome guilt	Actual effect
Putting in longer hours and working twice as hard to prove you aren't being lazy	Burnout
Making sure you're 'always on' – so instantly responding to every digital communication	Reduced productivity because you're constantly being distracted and not doing deep work
Treating your home like your workplace between 9-5 – purposefully making the environment alien – not using your TV, stereo, kitchen, etc	Cabin fever

The risk with staff who feel guilty is that they are not physically visible so their guilt reduction strategies may not be noticed. Further, because nobody notices the staff member may increase their efforts which makes the negative impacts worse.

- **Cabin fever** may also occur when staff are both living and working in the same environment. Have a discussion with your staff member if they express a feeling of cabin fever. Some ideas to overcome this may be:
  - to partition off an area for work so they can ‘leave’ at the end of a working day;
  - have rituals, little activities that reset the mind as they enter and exit the work-focused headspace.

Whatever the activity, it must in and of itself change the state of mind of the staff member. Our commute to and from work not only puts physical distance between ourselves and work, it also puts a mental distance that cannot be achieved by walking a few steps from your desk to a lounge chair after work.

- **Hermit brain** can also occur when a staff member is comfortable working remotely. The signs may become visible when they start interacting with others. These may include:
  - being too casual on professional calls
  - talking in a frenzied sort of way (because they haven’t been talking to anyone and it feels amazing to unload)
  - finding it difficult to express themselves because you haven’t been talking to anyone (and it feels weird to try)
  - if you’re in regular communication with your staff members this should hopefully alleviate some of the ‘hermit brain’ issues.

## Self-care and seeking support

It is also important that you care for yourself during this time and know where to seek support while working in these unique conditions.

- Engage in healthy activities that you enjoy and find relaxing.
- Keep regular sleep routines and eat healthy foods.
- Try to maintain physical activity.

Remember that you can contact your HR Business Partners for support and guidance during this process.

You can also access the [Manager Assist](#) service through our EAP – a free, confidential coaching service that provides expert support across key areas for managers. They can be contacted by calling 1300 687 327.

### Leave types available to staff

Staff cohort	Leave type	Reasons you may wish to access this leave	Period of time
Continuing/ Fixed-term  TAFE teachers	<b>Personal leave/ Carer's leave</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>You may access up to 10 working days of your personal leave with the approval of your Dean or Director, to assist with home learning</li> <li>normal rules to access your personal leave still apply, and include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>children are unwell</li> <li>staff member unwell and unable to undertake normal duties</li> <li>care of immediate family (including elderly parents) as primary carer</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<p>Up to 10 working days (pro-rata for part-time staff) of your personal leave balance is available with the approval of your Dean or Director until Stage 3 and 4 restrictions are lifted</p> <p>Academic and General staff, please refer to Clause 50 in the Enterprise Agreement 2019–2021</p> <p>TAFE teachers, please refer to Clause 36 of the TAFE Teaching Staff Agreement 2019</p>
	<b>Pupil/student-free day</b> (Academic and General staff)	An employee may be granted up to three days paid leave in any calendar year to care for their child due to an officially designated student or pupil free day	Documented evidence will be required from the relevant primary or secondary school and must be provided with the lodgement of the leave request from the employee. This leave must not be used to substitute for childcare or dependent care arrangements, including care requirements on gazetted public holidays or during normal school holiday periods.
	<b>Annual leave</b>	As normal	As per normal process, requested through <a href="#">Employee Self-Service (ESS)</a>
	<b>Long service leave</b>	Accessible for a minimum of one working day	<p>The University has waived the required notice period associated with long service leave applications in line with Stage 3 and 4 isolation requirements</p> <p>As per normal process via <a href="#">Employee Leave Form (docx, 104kb)</a></p>
	<b>Isolation leave - medical</b>	Isolation after being medically diagnosed with COVID-19	<p>For the duration of required isolation, as advised by medical practitioner</p> <p>Requested through <a href="#">Employee Self-Service (ESS)</a> – see next page</p>

[top](#)

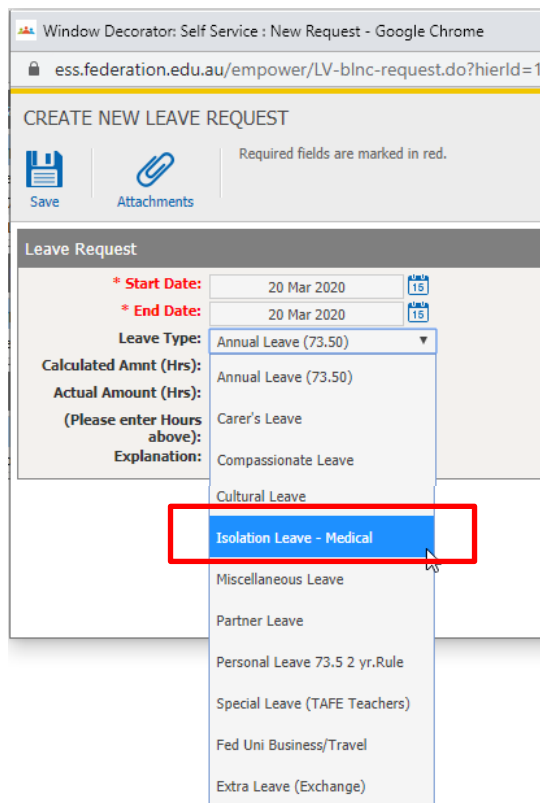
### How do I apply for isolation leave?

#### Continuing/Fixed-term staff and TAFE teachers

A staff member can access **isolation leave** should they be diagnosed by a **medical** practitioner and required to remain in isolation. This leave will be granted on full pay for the required period and no deduction will be made from personal leave credits.

#### How to apply

When submitting a leave request in ESS, select the leave type 'Isolation leave - medical'



Window Decorator: Self Service : New Request - Google Chrome  
 ess.federation.edu.au/empower/LV-blnc-request.do?hierId=1

**CREATE NEW LEAVE REQUEST**

Save Attachments Required fields are marked in red.

**Leave Request**

\* **Start Date:** 20 Mar 2020  
 \* **End Date:** 20 Mar 2020

**Leave Type:** Annual Leave (73.50) ▼

**Calculated Amnt (Hrs):** Annual Leave (73.50)  
**Actual Amount (Hrs):** Carer's Leave  
 (Please enter Hours above):  
**Explanation:** Compassionate Leave  
 Cultural Leave  
**Isolation Leave - Medical**  
 Miscellaneous Leave  
 Partner Leave  
 Personal Leave 73.5 2 yr.Rule  
 Special Leave (TAFE Teachers)  
 Fed Uni Business/Travel  
 Extra Leave (Exchange)