

Virtual Meeting Guidance

Now that we are all working remotely and attending a number of meetings on a daily basis, it is important that we are mindful of how we organise and manage our participation in these meetings.

Working remotely has meant that we have temporarily lost the opportunity to have those useful quick corridor conversations and short impromptu face to face meetings which we have become accustomed to.

While virtually meeting with colleagues is enabling us to carry out our activities as best we can under these difficult circumstances, it is essential that virtual meetings are organised with careful consideration ensuring that we do not compromise our well-being.

Overarching Principles

To ensure the wellbeing of all in these difficult circumstances, the following principles have been developed to provide a clear protocol for us all to follow when scheduling virtual meetings:

- All staff should have a minimum of a 10 minute break between meetings. This can be achieved by all meetings starting at five past the hour and ending at five to the hour.
- If a meeting cannot reasonably be concluded within 50 minutes, this should be scheduled as a double meeting, with a 10 minute rest break between the first and second halves of the meeting.
- Meetings should only be as long as they need to be. If they end before the allocated time this is fine. The remaining time should not be filled up with non-scheduled business. This will enable staff to have a break or think/prepare before the next meeting or work activity.
- Prior to temporary remote working, many Schools / Institutes/Departments operated “core hours” with no meetings scheduled outside of the hours of **10:00 am to 16:00 pm**. This practice was adopted in accordance with the University’s commitment to Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) principles, and the Athena SWAN charter. It may be appropriate to follow this scheduling when organising meetings during this period of remote working, however, it is acknowledged that some employees may have personal commitments which may not always permit their attendance at meetings during the identified “core hours”. It is therefore suggested that, where possible, consideration is given to personal circumstances and temporary working patterns when arranging meetings. Where an employee is unable to attend a meeting, it is advised that updates on key discussion points at meetings be provided in a follow up Teams call or circulated by email.

- Since the introduction of working remotely staff have reported that they are in back-to-back meetings and have no time to execute any of the actions that they have committed to in those meetings. To overcome this, it is recommended that staff plan and block out time in their outlook calendar to prepare and undertake work during the day or on a specific day. This should be done in advance as far as possible. This will enable those scheduling meetings to see when one is not available. The University would suggest that in order to allow staff to stay on top of their competing commitments, to try to avoid scheduling any meetings for a Friday. (If this is a meeting free day, everyone should have at least 6 hours per week to catch up on emails without rushing between meetings or taking on new commitments.) Different areas within the University may decide to implement a variant to this suggestion to suit their business needs but it is advisable to apply the same principles.
- It has been reported that staff have been required to be in two or more meetings at the same time. Before scheduling a meeting, please check the availability of all participants and the scheduled times of pre-existing meetings / prior commitments to avoid dual demands on the same colleague.
- Individuals organising meetings should be mindful of scheduling meetings to avoid back to back meetings for all concerned or feel able to advise the meeting organiser that they/those they are organising the meeting for, will be joining meetings 5-10 minutes late in order to be able to have a break between meetings.
- As a general principle, the aim should be to have the same number of meetings, not more, than you would have, before you started working remotely. You can consider using other tools for ascertaining the information that you need, for example, using the IM feature within TEAMS or sending an email may be considered.

Using MS Teams efficiently

- Consideration should be given to using all features of MS Teams such as recording meetings so that any non-attendees can listen to the meeting later or read the transcript rather than trying to squeeze in meetings into busy diary schedules. Please note, **if meetings are recorded this should be agreed with the Chair and with the consent of all of those attending the meeting.**
- Use the presence indication in Teams to let others know when you are busy or available. This will help to manage expectations of your availability. For example if someone is available the expectation will be that if an IM is sent, a response will be received quicker than if the IM status is set to “away”.
- Always check others are free before engaging them in a non-scheduled TEAMS meeting. It is advisable to send them an IM first, to check that they are free before

calling them and at the same time checking verbally to see if the time of the meeting to be scheduled is compatible with their daily plans.