Support for staff with anxieties about COVID and a return to work on campus

Someone experiencing anxiety about returning to work on Campus and the possibility of contracting COVID should be directed to the University’s COVID risk assessments in the first instance. Understanding the Health and Safety measures that are in place on campus could reassure them. The assessments demonstrate what we are doing to fulfil our duty of care to staff, apprentices, students, and visitors.

Anyone who remains anxious should contact the Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) for support: this can be done by telephone on 0808 168 2143 or they can access the website and have a webchat: USERNAME: uokent | PASSWORD: university. Concerns of this nature are not unique to the University at this time and the EAP call handlers and counsellors will have experience with people voicing similar concerns. The EAP has far more staff to deal with these concerns that the University’s small OH team. Staff will be able to speak with someone sooner by doing this, even if they have to have a call back from the EAP staff, than if they are waiting for an OH appointment.

Staff affected by anxiety should discuss their concerns with their manager who should be able to reassure them, being aware of the University’s Covid Risk Assessments and Ventilation Guidance. It is the manager who will be aware of the exact nature of the staff member working conditions in relation to proximity to others and capacity in offices or teaching space.

Staff members who are experiencing anxiety should not automatically be referred to OH. There is nothing that OH can do to recommend adjustments for health reasons for someone who has anxiety simply related to coronavirus risk and the return to campus. It would be a management decision as to whether they can implement adjustments for someone like this because it is not related to any underlying health condition.

If the staff member has chronic health conditions which they believe mean they are more at risk of working on Campus they should be directed to the ALAMA Covid age tool to assess their risk. It is important that if they do this, they realise that any resulting age can be reduced by 18 years if they are double vaccinated. Also, existing levels of coronavirus within the community affect the relative risk; if this is low, the likelihood of contracting the disease and consequent likelihood of developing serious disease is reduced.

There are only 2 APPROPRIATE reasons for referral of staff to OH related to coronavirus:

- If the manager and staff member agree that the individual has a health condition which means they are more at risk if they contract coronavirus then they should conduct a referral to OH. They will probably be seen by the OH Consultant who will assess their risk subjectively, using the Covid age tool and recommend accordingly on any need for adjusted working.
- If a staff member has a history of SIGNIFICANT underlying mental health problems in addition to and underpinning any anxiety about contracting Covid 19 and the return to campus, then a referral to OH may be appropriate. The referring manager
should ask for an assessment of disability relative to the applicability of the Equality Act as temporary adjustments may be appropriate in such circumstances.