Safety Note

23 March 2010

Social distancing – the latest Government requirement to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 [one person per 4 square metres]

What is the latest Government requirement to assist in reducing the transmission of COVID-19?

1. On Friday 20 March 2020, the Prime Minister announced that for indoor gatherings of less than 100, there will be a requirement to observe that there is 4 square metres provided per person in an enclosed space.

2. The Prime Minister stated that this is in addition to the practice of maintain a healthy distance between individuals i.e. around at least 1.5 metres wherever possible.

3. The rule banning non-essential indoor gatherings of 100 or more people remains in place.

4. While universities are technically exempt from these requirements, UQ will implement these wherever possible in order to reduce health risks to the UQ community.

In explaining the rationale for the new 4 square metre (sqm) guideline, Dr Brendan Murphy, the Commonwealth Chief Health Officer, stated that “there is no point having a gathering of 20 people if it’s in a tiny room and you’re all together”. These measures are related to the number of people in an indoor space, in addition to the previous person-to-person distancing advice previously offered.

How do we implement the one person every four square metres at UQ?

Implementing this new requirement will require local management to understand the new social distancing guideline, be able to source the size of the work area footprint, understand the usual use and occupancy of the space and implement local arrangements to meet the requirements of these new guidelines. The process is outlined below and a number of scenarios attempt to provide guidance on how the new guidelines may be implemented.

Process-

1. Local management should determine the size of the footprint of the workspace in question. There is no need to be absolutely precise, however we recommend that the relevant floor plans are consulted. These can be easily accessed at https://campuses.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/maps/floor-plans. Alternatively, step out the length and breadth of the space (one large pace = approximately one metre).

2. Local management determines the usual number of occupants in the space. If there are a greater number of occupants than the new requirement allows, local management will need to determine the feasible options to introduce to meet the new social distancing requirement.

For example, for professional staff workspaces, options may include:

(i) Finding other work areas that fall well under the one person per 4sqm rule and temporarily placing staff there; or
Negotiating working from home arrangements that are approved by your supervisor, meet the needs of your area, and ensure your team can continue to be productive and support the University’s operations. These working from home arrangements may also “dove tail” with business continuity arrangements of your work area i.e. the splitting/rotating of teams, separating critical staff/staff responsible for essential services.

For work and study spaces where there are moving and transient populations e.g. libraries, customer service areas/counters, refectories, local management will need to implement strategies that adhere to current social distancing requirements i.e. no more than 100 people indoors; no more than one person per 4sqm; and individuals being at least 1.5m apart. Options may include:

(i) Ongoing monitoring of the numbers of people entering and exiting the space and if required, limiting the number of people entering the space;

(ii) Providing clear information on social distancing (visual and/or perhaps, announcements where practicable);

(iii) Encouraging the movement of people to underutilised areas in the same vicinity (e.g. to move between floors of a library, to move to other library or study spaces, move to external eating areas rather than internal areas etc.).

**Scenario One** - The Prime Minister’s examples:

In his announcement, the Prime Minister gave the following examples of how this new guideline should be interpreted: “if your indoor space is 100 square metres, for example 10 metres by 10 metres, you can only have 25 people in it. If your space is 400 square metres, you can have 100 people in it.”

**Scenario Two**

The main workspace in the UQ Health, Safety and Wellness Division at St Lucia is just over 88sqm. According to the new requirement, up to 22 people could work in this space at the one time and in this case there are 18 workstations in this space. Therefore, at full occupancy, this work area meets the latest social distancing requirements. In addition to this, local management will need to ensure that local adjustments are put in place to ensure that wherever practicable, there is at least 1.5m between individuals.

**Scenario Three**

The main workspace of the XYZ Division has a footprint of about 120sqm and there are 40 workstations in this area. According to local management the maximum occupancy of the area, given planned and unplanned leave patterns and current vacancies, there is never more than 35 staff working in this area. This is still over the threshold for meeting the new requirements, which would be a maximum of 30 staff. Local management consults with staff and puts in place arrangements where a number of staff are included into a rotational working from home arrangement. This will bring them into compliance with the social distancing guidelines, plus assist with their business continuity actions.

**Scenario Four**

Room 220 in the Michie Building is used by a number of Schools in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Science as a room for tutorials and has a footprint of 42sqm. Therefore, according to the new social requirements, a maximum of 10 people would be allowed in this space. The person in control of the
class/local management would need to put in place arrangements to ensure that only 10 people worked in this area at any one time. Local arrangements may include limiting numbers to 10 for this space and repeating tutorials if necessary or relocating to a larger space. The person in control of the class would need to ensure the 1.5m guide is also implemented.

Scenario Five

The High Frequency Use Room in Duhig North building is an open plan study space of 309.5sqm. This space can accommodate 77 students according to the new social distancing requirements, and there is current seating for 74 students. However, because study carrels are concentrated on one side of the room and shelving is concentrated on the other, the Library has also opted to remove every second chair from the study carrels area to ensure there is 1.5m between students.

For further information, contact your local Work Health and Safety Manager/Coordinator or the UQ HSW Division, phone: +61 7 336-52365 or email hsw@uq.edu.au.