



## Effective Remote Support - Guidance Notes and Top Tips

### Work Environment and Working Hours

- **Look after yourself:** Ensure that you have completed a workstation assessment at home in line with the Health and Safety Executive advice. This is especially important if mentors and study skills specialists are working full-time.
- **Body Language:** Sitting directly in front of a screen with just the head and shoulders to look at can be intimidating to some students. So move your chair back from the screen so they see more body and adjust your chair position so you are sideways on looking at the screen. This gives the viewer a feeling of space and is less challenging. Research has shown that body language is difficult to read on the screen, so perhaps be more animated with your body language.
- **Minimise distractions:** Consider using a noise cancelling headset and microphone for better clarity of sound. During the session, turn off notifications from social media and/or email and switch off your mobile phone or turn to silent. Encourage the use of Apps that block social media feeds, or browser add-ons that limited computer use to 'work only'. It is also useful to check with the student if there is anyone else in the room such as friends or family and to ask for the session to be exclusively 1-2-1.
- **Study Area:** Both you and your student should try to create a separate study area – separate from the social and living space. This creates a sense of discipline and work focus.
- **Structure:** Simple but effective – try to be structured with your working times.
- **Work Patterns:** If it suits, perhaps you could change to a 5 day 9 - 5 working week. If workload allows a part time working pattern, then set up what days and times to work and only offer appointments during these times.
- **Flexible Support:** Consider not offering appointments in the evening and weekend or outside your chosen working week hours. But consider those on work placement i.e. Nursing who may request support at more flexible times.



- **Take Breaks:** Plan working days with consistent breaks i.e. 15 minutes morning and afternoon with either 30 minutes or an hour for lunch - And stick to it!
- **Communication Boundaries:** Do not engage with students outside of the working week if this is what you have agreed. Ensure this is communicated with your students.
- **Holiday!** Take time off - Book time off for holiday breaks ahead, taking at least one week every 3 months.
- **Non-Medical Help:** Remind students that our support is non-medical, ensuring that a process is given to them for when they feel unsafe. Always discuss with Amano if safety concerns emerge.

## Effective Remote Support

1. **Prepare Ahead:** Encourage your students to share assignment briefs or other pertinent information prior to commencement of a support session. This approach adds efficiency to a session.
2. **Routine:** Perhaps develop a routine of how a session is likely to unfold. You could start off with 'how are you? What's going on for you right now?' This leads to relationship building, gaining a time frame over the months and years. But always (unless crisis ensuing) bring it back to the academics, how is this being affected? What are you working on right now? What can be done? Who can be spoken to for more information to guide you?
3. **Little and Often:** Break student support sessions to shorter times with greater regularity. Many students simply cannot focus on the screen for an hour, this is especially true when working with students who have an autistic spectrum condition. There are clear advantages for the students when this is put in place. It supports the student to set up structure and routine. With the isolation brought about by Covid it gives the student an opportunity to engage with someone, rather than continued isolation.

4. **Benefits:** Communicate to the student the benefits of working online - versatility, greater flexibility, more comfortable for them in their own space, less background activity (i.e. being in the library or study area).
5. **Learning Needs:** Take more time to openly discuss their learning needs and how to best support them as they acclimatise to the new challenges and opportunities that online learning offers.
6. **Communication with Uni:** Encourage them to communicate with their university lecturers by giving them written email plans to ask for clarity and pointers for success, as many students are reluctant to engage with university tutors who they might perceive to be scary and inaccessible.
7. **Collaborate** using mind-maps etc. and remind the student of previous academic writing support tips by using over-learning for strategies that worked during the face-to-face sessions.
8. **Motivate:** Don't forget some students will need extra motivation as they are not attending physical lectures, so will be missing peer support to complete assignments on time.
9. **Monitor Progress:** Some students will be easily distracted at home and not get a lot of academic reading or work done, so a regular review cycle and work diary will monitor progress and highlight if the student is falling behind in their studies. Each support session can then begin with an update to the work diary and check list, documenting what has been achieved and what is left to complete since the last session. Use the Individual Support Plan to record agreed actions, review, and outcomes.

## Student Wellbeing

1. **Empathy:** We are all having to deal with Covid-19 and whilst ordinarily personal boundaries about our own feelings are not shared, you may find it useful to share your own generic fears and anxieties of Covid-19 with students. This may help them to relax more as they know they are not on their own.
2. **Positivity:** Always be positive. During the Covid outbreak, students, especially those with MH challenges, became especially anxious and stressed. Some mentors have decided to meet these feelings of isolation and disconnection from reality with a pastoral approach through recognition and compassion, continually reassuring them, talking openly about their academic anxieties, and coming up with solutions collaboratively to empower them.
3. **Observation:** Look for changes in levels of engagement and changes in behaviour of your student. Are they falling behind with their academic progress or missing support sessions? There may be signs of a decline in wellbeing.
4. **Safety:** If you have concerns for the safety of a student, then you must signpost to the appropriate services and discuss with Amano and Uni / College support services.

## Online Platform and Security

1. **Choice:** Discuss how your student would like you to engage with them online; FaceTime, Zoom, What's App, Skype, Google Hangouts, Teams etc. Everyone will be different. Be open and prepared to try new ways and new online opportunities with the student.
2. **University Online Platform:** Check with your student which platform is used by their Uni or college, it's useful that you are familiar with the system that your student is using for their Uni online learning.
3. **Tools and Features:** Make use of all the in-built features such as: screen sharing, recording, chat, breakout rooms.



4. **Security:** Use the platform's security features such as passwords, email registration or waiting rooms. As both you and your student are likely to be using your own personal devices, ensure that all of the security systems are up to date; anti-virus, anti-malware etc. Always be very cautious about opening suspicious emails or messages and sending on emails with embedded links.
  
5. **Privacy:** Be mindful of privacy issues - check with the student if there is anyone else in the room such as friends or family and to ask for the session to be exclusively 1-2-1.

**Thank you to the Amano Support Consultants who have contributed to these helpful top tips and the slide set "Effective Remote Learning Support":**  
**(<https://www.amanosupport.com/dsa-nmh-resources-information> )**