

## Settling into Alert Level 4 remote working – further tips and resources for managers

Leading and managing staff working remotely from home during Alert Level 4 means drawing on existing experience to evolve new ways of working. As you and your staff draw breath after the first week, it is time to **take stock** of how everyone is settling in. What is working well? What lessons have been learned and what still needs to be sorted?

Here are seven tips with further resources on [remote working](#) which build on the earlier *Tips for managing teams remotely in the first few weeks during the Alert Level 4 lockdown* in the Archive and the [Coronavirus COVID-19 information](#) page on the University of Otago website. A reflective stock take tool accompanies this tip sheet.

1. **Continue to start with yourself.** You need to have energy and perspective to listen to people, provide reassurance, communicate information and make decisions. Take stock of how you have been [looking after](#) yourself in recent weeks. What do you need to begin changing in order to [sustain yourself](#) in this role in the new few weeks and months?
2. **Thank people.** The rapid shift to Alert Level 4 meant that people went to extraordinary lengths to make arrangements for family and work. Take time to notice and [thank](#) people for the small and large things they are doing that help keep the team doing their work. Whilst everyone is in their bubble, appreciation helps people to feel connected and productive.
3. **Take stock** of individuals and their environment. As we experience the reality of remote working plus isolation in our bubbles, people are going to respond differently according to their personality and home environment. Some will miss the contact with colleagues and others may find they are more productive in a quiet space. What [impact](#) is this starting to have on their ability to work? What challenges are they facing? It might be physical set-up such as screen position, losing a work routine with clearly designated tasks or having young children at home.

Talk with individuals and the team about realistic expectations of workflow and work hours as people adjust to shared home workspaces, isolation and using new technology. It might be necessary to scale back expectations. As part of developing a shared sense of how the team will work remotely, share some of the ups and downs of your experience adjusting to working at home. Make sure everyone is familiar with the resources regularly updated from [ITS](#), [Health and Safety](#) and [HR](#).

4. **Clarify communication.** Take stock: how are people currently communicating (e.g. a combination of email, text, phone, Zoom, and Microsoft Teams (or similar)? Is it [effective](#)? Where possible use platforms with which staff are already familiar and minimise the challenge of getting to grips with multiple new apps. Do people know when to contact each other (and you) and the best methods to discuss ongoing work or urgent decisions? How is work being saved, stored and version control maintained? How is social connection evolving such as virtual morning teas/chat? What feedback have you had from the team about information they want you to communicate with them? Focus on keeping [virtual meetings](#) brief, and share and discuss resources about how everyone can make the meetings meaningful and effective.
5. **Stay focused and productive.** With the disruption and uncertainty caused by Alert Level 4, many people are experiencing difficulty concentrating. At the same time they want to complete tasks and feel productive. Talk with people and [share strategies](#) to maintain periods of focus. Ideas might include ending the day with a list of key priorities for the next day, scheduling time at the start of the day for a significant task, allocating set times to check emails and turning off the alerts and, where possible, allocating complex and important activities to the time of day when they have the most energy and focus. Trial the [Pomodoro](#) Technique (read more about this [here](#) or watch [here](#)). You could talk as a team about having some shared Pomodoro time – where everyone focuses on their work and no-one emails or phones during that time.
6. **Lead change.** The abrupt transition to Alert Level 4 has brought unprecedented changes and disruption to many aspects of people's lives. Ask and listen to how people are feeling. Keep encouraging people to focus on their [well-being](#). Humans are wired to focus on risks and what is [not working](#), so notice and talk about the things that have not changed/are working well. People look to leaders for direction and stability so, where possible, talk about the priority and purpose of the team for the next few weeks: "We are all in this together to provide... We have an important job to do which is..."
7. **Professional development.** Take stock for yourself and your team. Are there ways in which professional development relevant to work role can be interspersed with remote work? People are wired to learn, so [there are benefits](#) to both the team and individual. Learning can help individuals to counterbalance feelings of monotony or isolation in their bubble. Could you and your team members plan to access short learning bites and share key points with each other from resources through the University such as [LinkedIn Learning](#), [Learning and Development](#) and [IT online training](#) or through professional and [global organisations](#)?

*Learning is experience. Everything else is information. Albert Einstein*

*Thank you to leaders and managers for contributing some of their lessons learned to this tip sheet*