

Last updated 5pm on 23rd March 2020

(further same-day update to point 16)

Student FAQs: Teaching and Learning during the Coronavirus outbreak

Iron Mill College is committed to minimising coronavirus disruption as much as possible, and providing some continuity of learning, while protecting staff and student safety and wellbeing. Therefore teaching will carry on as scheduled unless you are notified otherwise – however, to accommodate the many challenges coronavirus will present both staff and students, we will all need to work together and be as flexible as possible in how this is achieved at this time, and we will all need to accept that some level of change or disruption to our learning and our lives is inevitable in the coming weeks and months.

Please note the current Policy:

As the numbers of coronavirus cases continue to rapidly increase, we are introducing further measures to keep you all as safe as possible under the circumstances. We are therefore in the final stages of reducing numbers of people attending the college by maximising participation and work from home. This is in line with the most recent government advice regarding the need for [Social Distancing](#) and with decisions that are being taken by colleges and universities around the country. It will help to minimise risk and keep everyone as safe as possible, while keeping the college open to maintain flexible/ remote teaching, student support and college administration. BACP, UKATA and NCS are all fully supportive of the need for remote and flexible teaching methods at this time. Groups will now work remotely from home for this temporary period using Microsoft Teams and SharePoint. ***Tutors will provide details relevant to their particular group, and if you have any queries about attendance you should contact your tutor in the first instance.***

Office staff will also be working from home on a rota for part of their week with a view to closing the college buildings in due course and facilitating all office work to take place remotely. We have put systems in place to ensure all staff remain contactable via phone/ email/ Teams at all times during their normal work hours. Please contact by email unless your enquiry is urgent.

Updated FAQs:

- 1. What if the College is closed for a ‘deep clean’ on my teaching day?**
For your own safety, the College buildings are now closed to students unless otherwise agreed in advice. Your tutor will aim to offer teaching via alternative methods, for example setting up a remote classroom via Microsoft Teams, setting up guided learning projects, audio-recording of lectures etc. Sometimes the teaching will need to be rescheduled. Your tutor will advise you of the arrangements, which will be made in discussion with the Programmes Lead.
- 2. Can't we use Skype, as I am more familiar with it?** Microsoft Teams is the only system authorised for IMC remote teaching or tutorials, as we know it fully meets our data security requirements. It is just as easy to use as Skype,

and very similar in operation, with the added benefit that you can also access your tutor's teaching videos and materials direct from your virtual classroom. You should therefore aim to use Microsoft Teams and SharePoint for **all** IMC teaching. Please be aware that the only system approved for use on Iron Mill Courses for remote teaching is the **IMC Microsoft 365 Teams and IMC SharePoint** - these systems fully meet the IMC GDPR data security requirements, and your data and materials are protected. While IMC respect the right of their professional adult learners and their tutors to decide to engage with one another on other platforms, such as Zoom or Skype, it is important to understand that if you do so, your shared material (video, audio or written) may potentially not be fully secure or protected. Tutors and the College do not have the capacity or expertise to assess the security of other platforms/systems. Therefore if you choose to engage on another platform other than the approved IMC Microsoft Teams and SharePoint, this would of course be your choice, and at your own discretion and your own risk - IMC cannot take any responsibility for any data security issues that might occur as a result of engaging on other alternative systems.

3. **What if I need to self-isolate?** Providing you are well, you should arrange to join the teaching via Microsoft Teams. If you participate via Teams while self-isolating, you will be considered 'present' rather than being marked absent (unless advised otherwise by the Course Lead due to individual course accreditation regulations)
4. **What if my tutor is self-isolating?** Providing your tutor is well, they will aim to teach from home using Teams, and you can join your Teams Teach from your home. A small proportion of tutors might not have internet access at home, in which case they will advise you of their plans, which may include, for example, their audio-recording of the lecture along with their slides.
5. **Will any teaching be cancelled?** Yes. All tutors are fully committed to avoiding cancellation of teaching wherever possible, and alternative methods of flexible learning are in place now for the vast majority of groups – however, during the coronavirus outbreak it is important to understand that cancellations will be unavoidable. The majority of courses already have Reserve Days to cover any missed teaching, and further additional days will be scheduled where needed to ensure all material is delivered as per the course requirements.
6. **What if I am unwell?** If you are very unwell, you will not be able to attend or participate in a Teams teaching session. The usual process applies: contact your tutor and the College as usual.
7. **What if I just have a cold but feel OK – can I still attend College?** No. Most teaching is now online, so this query is less relevant, but if you are at all unwell, you should stay at home and follow all social distancing guidelines.

8. **What if another student in my group says they have a cold but are still OK to attend college?** As above: if you are at all unwell, you should stay at home and follow all social distancing guidelines.
9. **But Teams can't be used for triads/ skills practice – how will you manage this?** Across the country, everyone is planning to do their best in a bad situation. Use of virtual classrooms (Teams) is the best possible response to the unavoidable disruption caused by coronavirus. Similar online resources are being employed in many schools and universities across the UK in an effort to allow some continuity of learning. If using Teams, it is accepted that some experiential and skills-based teaching will need to be made up by adding extra teaching time at a later date. If you have any suggestions about how some well-boundaried skills work might be possible via Teams, we would welcome your thoughts!
10. **Will this affect my award/ certificate in any way?** No. There may be some delay in making up missed experiential teaching or skills sessions once we are past the worst of coronavirus, but your actual award will not be impacted by the changed modes of teaching for a temporary period. It is clear that in this exceptional situation we all have to be flexible. The BACP, UKATA and NCS have all confirmed that in this highly unusual situation, the methods of teaching will need to be flexible. They have confirmed they will be fully accepting of the College's decisions in managing teaching differently during this period of time, including remote teaching, providing that all listed subject areas are covered by the end of the course. They have confirmed that such necessary changes to the teaching timetables and methods of teaching will not affect the accredited status of the course or your award.
11. **What if I have little or no broadband at home and can't use Teams, but cannot come in due to self-isolation?** If you can stream films, and use the internet, you should have enough speed for Teams. However, if you have a very intermittent/ slow internet access at home, it potentially might cause difficulties. We are unable to help with lack on internet speed in student's homes, but please be assured that all teaching materials will be saved and made accessible to you (once you can access the internet again) via SharePoint or Teams.
12. **What if the College is closed and I need to contact the Admin team?**
During a college closure, the IMC phone lines will divert to the Admin Team remotely. All admin staff will work their normal hours from home providing they are well. Please note that due to the limits that working from home will place on the Admin Team, your requests or communications may take a little longer to respond to. Email remains the best way to make contact unless it is urgent.
13. **What is the current advice for students re attending college safely?**
Very few students are now attending college, and only for very specific reasons where agreed in advance by the College – by the end of this



weekend, learning will be occurring online. Anyone attending the college must continue to follow Government advice:

- **You should follow [Government Advice on Social Distancing](#)**
- **if you feel at all unwell you should stay at home**
- **if anyone in your immediate household is displaying symptoms, you should all stay at home for 14 days.**
- washing your hands often - with soap and water, or use alcohol sanitiser if handwashing facilities are not available. This is particularly important after taking public transport. Please do so immediately you arrive, and then frequently throughout the day.
- covering your cough or sneeze with a tissue, then throwing the tissue in a bin. See [Catch it, Bin it, Kill it](#)
- use an alcohol-based hand sanitiser that contains at least 60% alcohol if soap and water are not available – we have provided these throughout the college for everyone's safety and convenience. *Please do not take them home* – there is not an unlimited supply.
- avoid touching your eyes, nose, and mouth with unwashed hands
- avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- if you are worried about your symptoms or those of someone else, please call NHS 111. Do not go directly to your GP or other healthcare environment
- see further information on the [Public Health England Blog](#) and the [NHS UK website](#).

The situation clearly remains fluid and therefore any advice given at this stage may well change in the coming weeks. Ultimately, we remain committed to responding in a proportionate and appropriate manner to safeguard all who use the College.

14. **Personal Therapy: My personal therapist works for an organisation that is closing due to coronavirus, but I would like to continue with my personal therapy sessions. Can we continue at another venue, or do phone or video-call sessions?** Due to the current government advice on Social Distancing, we do **not** recommend you meet in person with your counsellor at this stage of the pandemic, and recommend you either suspend the work temporarily, or consider working by phone or video-call together (see below). However, as professional adults you might choose otherwise, in full knowledge of the risks, and if so your counsellor needs to gain permission from their service manager to continue this work with you elsewhere, and provide you with confirmation that you as a client continue to be protected by the same contracts and insurance as if you were on the premises. **Re video-call and phone for personal therapy** – you may do this as a temporary measure under the circumstances, and we will accept those hours while the coronavirus outbreak is at its peak. We strongly suggest however that you first check with your counsellor whether they have training in video-call /phone counselling and review your therapy contract with your counsellor before starting, particularly in regard to their management of your confidentiality, the security of the chosen technology, and data protection. Please consult your Tutor or Course Lead with any queries.

It is also perfectly acceptable under the circumstances to temporarily pause your personal therapy if you wish, in discussion with your therapist.

15. **Should I continue in my Placement?** Many placements have closed or are in the process of closing. We currently advise, for your safety and your client's safety, **that you now plan for a period of withdrawal from placement, which should be managed professionally in discussion with your placement manager and supervisor.** Your placement should have already issued guidance on client and counsellor safety, and procedures for reducing or closing the service if needs be. Please follow the well published [Government guidance](#) and also read the [BACP Guidance and FAQs on Coronavirus](#). Consult your Placement Manager and Supervisor with any dilemmas raised in relation to temporarily withdrawing your services as a student counsellor. You also have your Tutor, Course Lead and Placement Coordinator here to support you.

16. **In placement, can I hold my client therapy sessions on video-call or phone?**

- a. For those of you on **Counselling Courses**, the BACP's Course Accreditation Officer has notified us of their formal position: "...unless students have been trained in telephone/online counselling and deemed to be competent to do so, they will **not** be able to work in this way...Under criterion B4.2, you (accredited courses) should already have a procedure in place for students to extend the training period in order to complete the required practice hours....Placements should not put trainees under pressure and it may be worth reminding students of their right to decide not to continue seeing clients face-face (in relation to self-care and fitness to practice)." The IMC position for our counselling courses (below) complies with the BACP's requirements.

IMC position: Some placements are very well set up with offering the necessary contracts, training and facilities for phone counselling; equally, some students will have their own training and experience in providing phone counselling. If you believe that it is within your competence to offer phone counselling, and wish to do so, you **must** gain the formal and explicit approval of your placement and supervisor to do so, and you must talk through data protection, confidentiality and contracts with your supervisor before you start to offer any phone counselling. Please keep us informed by emailing the Placement Coordinator. Jan Cavill, IMC Programmes Lead, is available for discussion and further guidance – please email Jan.Cavill@ironmill.co.uk.

- b. **What is considered 'competence' for phone and video-call counselling?** The BACP have published a set of competencies which they consider necessary for phone and e-counselling: [Competencies for Phone and E-counselling](#). They also have an indicative training curriculum which gives you some clarity on the level and depth of training they deem necessary: [Telephone and E-counselling Training](#)



Curriculum. It is recognised that in this current crisis there is not the time to engage with this depth of training; however practitioners and students still need to be mindful of the importance of being competent in the work they offer.

c. **How can I gain basic competencies in training for phone/ video-call working in this crisis situation?** According to information gained today, the BACP is suggesting that basic competencies in training online/phone working can be done in a number of ways e.g. a combination of

- BACP web resources
- other online resources and placement input
- web resources/online CPD courses.

They have given some examples such as:

- <https://www.onlineevents.co.uk/events/>
- <https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/memberarticles/keep-calm-online-counselling-is-at-your-hand>
- <https://www.clivigercounselling.co.uk/covid-19-a-guide-to-providing-online-therapy-in-private-practice/>
- <https://www.pesi.co.uk/Blog/2020/March/How-to-Go-Online-Counselling-During-the-Coronoviru>
 - o Association for Counselling & Therapy Online <https://acto.org.uk/online-training-providers/>

The BACP is clear that they are unable to recommend these CPD resources but, the above online resources may assist in the transition from face to face therapy to phone / video-call working for the student's **existing** ongoing client work.

d. **Who will assess the competencies of my training for phone/ video-call work?** Students are asked to clarify with their supervisors the competencies they have met within their basic online training. To ensure that any work undertaken is as safe as possible it is considered professionally appropriate for your supervisor to engage in regularly monitoring and assessing your competences in this area.

e. **Can I take accept further client work via phone/ video-call?** The BACP tell us that suitably competent students can continue to 'hold' their present clients so as not to increase any risk to clients from abruptly halting their counselling and **may not** take on any new phone/ online clients (BACP requirement)



- f. **Will I still need to attend supervision if my placement is shut?** The BACP state that students may, in discussion with their supervisor, suspend their supervision during the time they are no longer able to see clients due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus. See Point 18 below.
- g. **Can I do written e-counselling with my clients (e.g. email or 1:1 written 'chat' platforms).** The BACP has not clarified its position on this for unqualified students as yet, so until that time, you should stay with phone/ video-call sessions, which are – in terms of skills and competencies – more in line with your usual face-to-face sessions.
- h. **Will Telephone Counselling hours 'count'?** We asked the BACP for their written confirmation that they will allow students to 'count' those telephone counselling hours as part of the course placement criteria. They have confirmed that yes, they will allow **some** of your phone counselling hours to be counted, providing it is part of your contracted placement, approved by your placement manager and supervisor, and that you are deemed by IMC to be competent and trained to deliver phone counselling. ***The amount of hours allowed is to be announced by the BACP within the next week or two, and we will let you know once this decision is communicated to us.***
- **Psychotherapy students** should follow the direct advice of their Course Lead, who has already issued information regarding phone counselling.
 - **Students who are qualified counsellors or psychotherapists** may make their own decision, in consultation with their supervisor, on their competency to deliver sessions in this way.
17. **If I am able to continue placement but my supervisor needs to self-isolate, can I have a video-call session or do the normal rules of needing face-to-face supervision every 2 weeks still apply?** Different courses will have different professional body regulations on this. However, **for the counselling courses** (ADC, FdA, BA), you may make suitable arrangements in direct agreement with your Supervisor if either they, or you, need to self-isolate. You do not need to inform us, but both parties (supervisor and student) must be in agreement that the arrangement adequately and safely meets your professional needs as a practicing student counsellor. We will permit phone or video-call supervision under those circumstances. Please log all contact as usual. **For psychotherapy and other post-qualifying courses**, please seek the guidance of your Course Lead.
18. **I have just heard from my placement they are closing for several weeks until they feel safe to reopen. Therefore I will have no clients. I want to check what happens about supervision while I have no clients?** Supervision immediately after the closure of a placement can be useful for processing the impact of suspending the work with your clients unexpectedly, assessing client safety, exploring the possible impact upon the therapeutic

relationship, assessing your wellbeing, processing the inevitable ethical dilemmas caused by this situation, and reflecting upon your practice and professional development in general. With regard to the further continuation of supervision during a placement closure, please consult with your supervisor and be guided by their decision on this matter – the supervisor will know you and your practice well and is best placed to discuss it with you. We would expect that after a discussion, a pause in supervision – while you have no clients – is very likely to be agreed. The BACP have contacted us today with their agreement that suspension of supervision would be a reasonable decision. You will need to document that, so that the pause is explained in your log/ records. Providing it is mutually agreed and recorded in your log, a temporary suspension will not cause you any problems in meeting your course criteria.

19. What about assessments?

With IMC courses, we will continue to expect all assignments to be submitted as usual, on time, unless otherwise instructed by your tutor. However, where necessary the Course Lead may choose to make general exceptions and extensions, and if this is the case they will contact you.

With University courses, we will aim to continue as planned with all assessments; however where an assessment requires attendance, we are liaising with the university to suggest alternative assessment types. The Course Lead will be in touch with specific groups where this applies.

20. If I used my ‘free’ CPD allowance on a workshop that has been cancelled due to coronavirus, can I carry it over? Yes – email Fred (enquiries@ironmill.co.uk) and he will keep a record.

21. I am on the ADC and my placement is closing. When can I start working in private practice – I’d like to offer this option to my placement clients? ADC and FdA students may not work in private practice until you have passed your course in full and are qualified (MBACP status). See the IMC Position Statement on [Working in Private Practice for ADC and FdA students](#), also on SharePoint and see your course handbook.

If you have any questions, please let us know – we will continue to update this list as questions arrive, and you can continue to find the most up to date FAQ documents on the noticeboard on the IMC website. Thank you for your support.