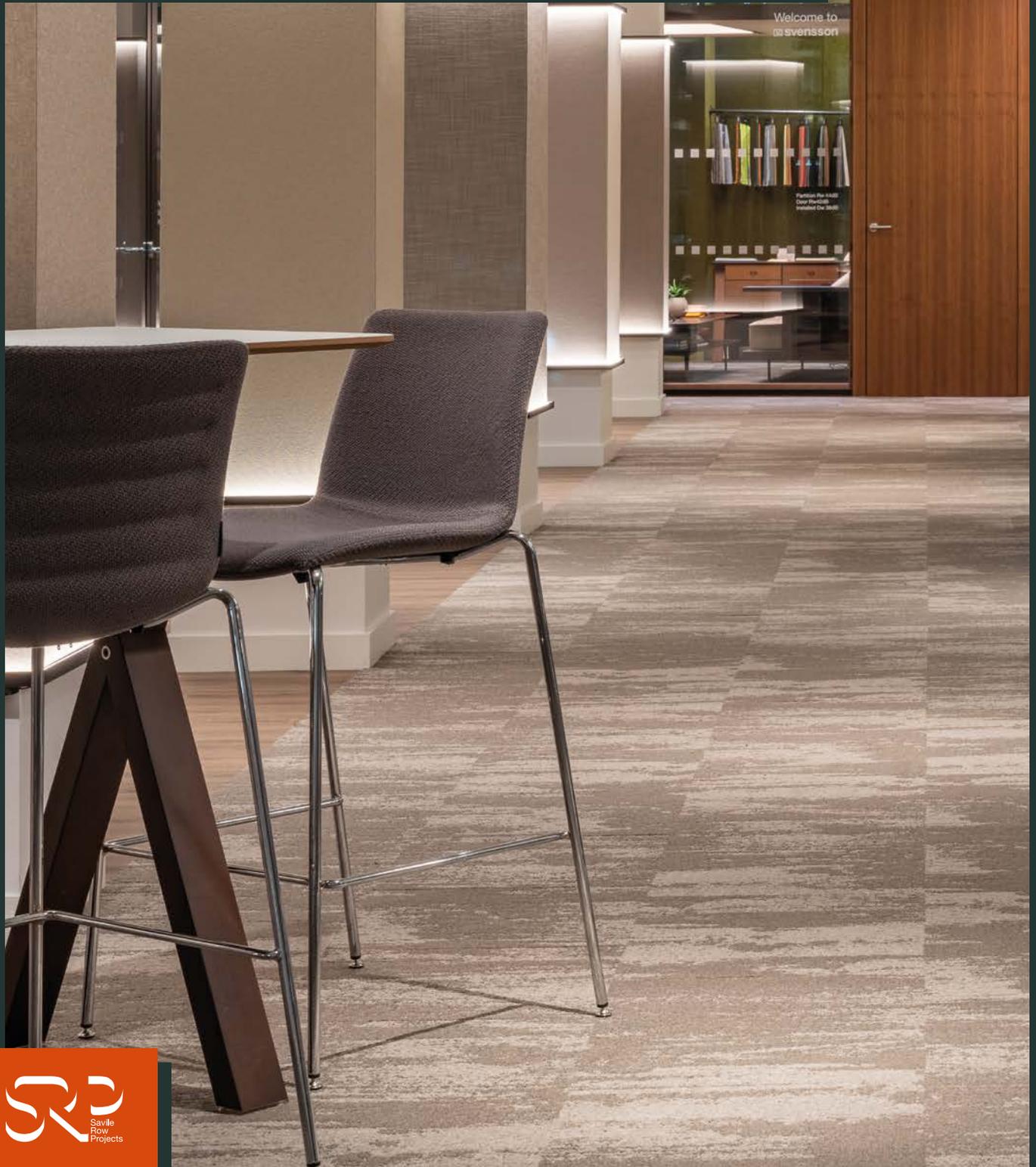


# THE PURPOSE AND FUTURE OF THE OFFICE



Commissioned by Savile Row Projects, the Purpose and Future of the Office Report is the first of its kind where leading academics and industry figures have combined forces to examine the global scientific evidence surrounding COVID-19 to create a blueprint for business owners to make informed decisions on how to safely return to the office and, longer-term, examine the future prospects for the role of the office in society.

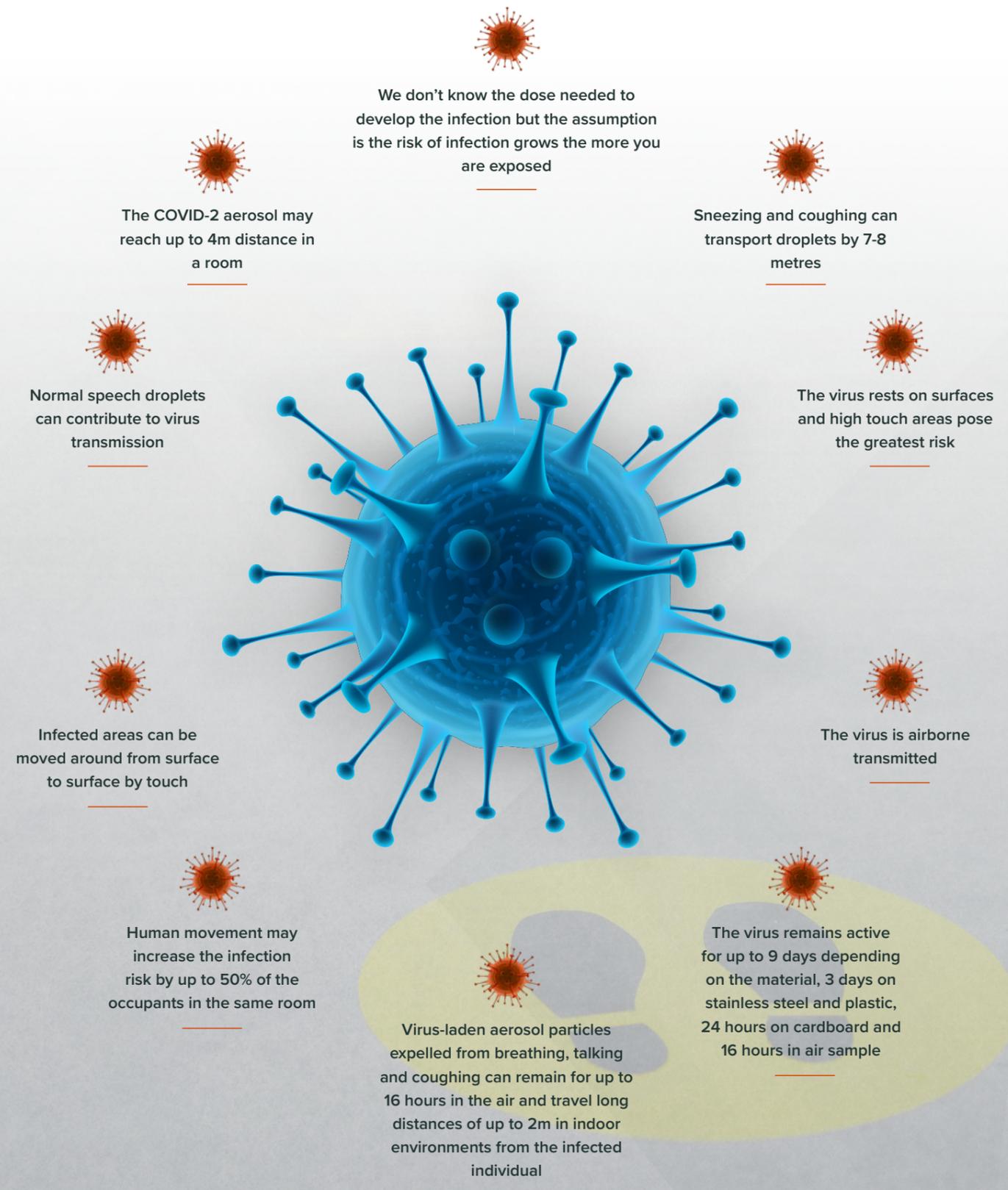
This summary is the result of an 82 page research document authored by professors with expertise in molecular biology, mechanical engineering, office space planning, hospital design, interiors, mental health and medical planning, and behavioural science from the University College London (UCL). They embarked on a literature review, examining the available global data on COVID-19, with input from leading industry experts in office interiors, commercial property, office planning and acoustics.

There are still many unknowns surrounding COVID-19 and new evidence is emerging weekly. However, without a pharmaceutical intervention clinicians are agreed that the virus could still be active until 2022, even as far as 2025. There is also the likelihood that epidemics and pandemics could increase with the rise of globalisation and urbanisation.

Today, most offices are designed and fitted out for high occupancy however, this configuration inadvertently provides a breeding ground for the transmission of a virus.

The office needs to work smarter

“  
As buildings reopen, a new challenge is to ensure that journeys to work are worthwhile, that opportunities for teams and colleagues easily to connect are maximised, and that the workplace is the environment of choice for efficient, effective and pleasurable work.  
”



# THE PURPOSE OF THE OFFICE

COVID-19 has, for many people, taken away the pleasure derived from their work-environment, removing the opportunity to interact with colleagues or enjoy workplace amenities.

Environments that until recently would have been considered safe need to be assessed. At the same time the economic pressure as a result of the various lockdowns makes these modifications a significant burden for employers and landlords. On top of this employee mental health may have been affected negatively during the lockdown and the responsibility of supporting the health, safety and wellbeing of employees also needs to be re-evaluated.

Lockdown can be viewed as a social experiment testing home and remote working on a grand scale. For office workers with remote tools and good internet at home, plus space and time to concentrate, lockdown has reinforced the possibilities and benefits of home working, including time saved by not commuting. But the experiment has also clarified what is lost without face-to-face contact with colleagues and working from home may be an option for some, but not for everybody, nor for every job.

As buildings reopen, a new challenge is to ensure that journeys to work are worthwhile, that opportunities for teams and colleagues easily to connect are maximised, and that the workplace is the environment of choice for efficient, effective and pleasurable work.



# THE IMMEDIATE RETURN

With politicians urging people to start going back to work and get the economy moving, it is vital employers do everything they can to make sure their office environment is as safe as possible and give workers the confidence to leave the security of their dining tables and spare bedrooms and go back to a new kind of working life. Recent outbreaks in the food manufacturing sector in Germany and in West Yorkshire have fuelled fears of workplace transmission and it is essential that employees feel their health is of the highest importance to the businesses they work for. Workers who are extremely anxious about risk of infection may suffer poor mental health which will ultimately impact on their ability to handle their workload.

After extensive research UCL identified four key areas which have to be considered first to ensure employees are properly protected: cleaning, mechanical airflow, clear signage and policy. Additional measures, which require greater investment, are also considered.



# KEEP IT CLEAN

Unsurprisingly cleaning protocols are top of the agenda for all kinds of business, as contaminated surfaces pose a transmission risk. SARS-CoV-2, the virus causing COVID-19, has been shown to survive and remain infective on surfaces for three days with high-touch surfaces such as bathrooms and kitchens posing the highest risk. To minimise the risk of transmission spread via surfaces, it is vital that these are cleaned thoroughly and more frequently – with experts suggesting xxx. SARS-CoV-2 does not however require specialist cleaning products as it is easy to deactivate with detergents, disinfectants, bleach and alcohols.

UCL recommends a deep cleaning and disinfection of premises before workers return and an evaluation of all surfaces to ensure that they are easily cleanable such as smooth, no-porous surfaces. Difficult to clean soft furnishings like sofas are recommended to be removed and replaced by furniture made of glass, steel or hard plastic.

Transmission of the virus starts from the moment someone enters the building and to minimise infection, touch-free hand sanitisers should be situated in reception and throughout the building – especially in common areas

such as kitchens and bathrooms. Work booths used by multiple occupants should be avoided but if essential, should have wipe dispensers.

During the pandemic, it is crucial that building occupants, facilities managers and cleaning staff work together to address the risk that surfaces might pose. As well as a more thorough cleaning regime, it is important that all staff understand SARS-CoV-2 transmission pathways so that they can adopt behaviours which will minimise risk.

Hand hygiene is key with research suggesting washing hands 10 times daily can prevent the virus spread. Employers should consider conducting training sessions on the correct handwashing EN1500 technique.

Research has shown that shoe soles are potentially contaminated objects and might transport the infection between different areas – disinfection has been recommended. Employees should also be encouraged to remove waste and belongings at the end of each shift, spare running shoes and changes of clothes can't be left under the desk and they should avoid placing bags and personal objects on the floor.



# CLEAR THE AIR

Whilst the available guidance from Public Health England (PHE) states that COVID-19 is assumed to be primarily transmitted through respiratory droplets or via contaminated surfaces, airborne transmission is also a route, particularly in poorly ventilated spaces.

Viral particles are too small to be blocked by MERV air filters used in most buildings, but ventilation strategies can still play a role in reducing disease transmission. Increasing the amount of air flowing in from outside and the rate of air exchange can dilute virus particles indoors.

It is recommended to improve the ventilation rate by keeping manually operated windows open and to override the settings of automated vents to enhance ventilation where applicable. The ventilation schedule should be extended to provide purge ventilation at least two hours before and after occupancy each day.



# POLICY MATTERS

While working from home may be an option for some, it is not for everybody and researchers recommend that a clear COVID-19 policy is drawn up for those returning to a bricks and mortar office. Employers, building owners and managers need to provide clear communication so that new policies are understood and followed. The research recommends employers:

- Engage with workers and representatives to explain and agree any working arrangements and make sure they are kept up to date with safety measures.
- Communicate to staff the steps that are going to be taken to protect them, as well as behavioural changes needed to keep everybody safe.
- Offer flexible working hours to avoid rush-hour gatherings at bottle-necks such as lifts and access control points should be encouraged.
- Return people to work gradually, so that there is time available if needed to adjust space and protocols after first workers' initial return.
- Develop and agree a response plan in case someone at the office becomes ill with symptoms of COVID-19. It is recommended that the plan at least includes an identified room where someone who is feeling unwell can be safely isolated and a way that person can be safely transferred from the office to a health facility. A response should be planned in case a staff member or visitor is tested positive for COVID-19.
- Establish a track and trace policy for workers and visitors with COVID-19.
- Revise Fire Safety Procedures to ensure social distancing measures are introduced in any drills.

## SIGN OF THE TIMES

Signage has never been more important and is key to the success of ensuring a building remains COVID free and should be a top priority, with signs installed providing guidance on hygiene and social distancing. Elevators and lobbies should have clear signage to emphasise which direction to go and signs on the floor should guide where to stand and wait.

# THE CHANGING FACE OF THE OFFICE

With no tried and tested vaccine as of yet, COVID-19 may remain a threat for a number of years. With a growing share of the global population now residing in cities and mega cities where residents may be exposed to viral spread there is no guarantee that it will not be followed by another. To safeguard the workplace, significant changes to the way we work may need to be introduced according to the UCL study. From the way we enter the office building to how we conduct meetings, the office will have to continue to evolve with safety and wellbeing at its heart. Here's how the new working day might look.



## ARRIVAL AT WORK

- Employees temperatures to be captured via infra-red cameras.
- Entry doors will remain open to minimise touchable spaces.
- Garages will have proximity readers at entrances and bike racks will be installed to encourage people to cycle to work.
- The concierge will work behind a screen and lobby furniture will be re-arranged or removed to facilitate social distancing.
- Deliveries will only be allowed to the lobby and not to offices floors and will be signed for electronically. Personal deliveries will be restricted – no more Amazon orders or Deliveroo lunches.



## AT YOUR DESK

- Workstations should be the recommended 2m apart, where that is not possible screens will be installed to separate people from each other. Tall divider screens should be erected between people when seating in a row.
- A 60cm high surface screen should be added to the base panel of desks to act as a cough/sneeze barrier and allow privacy, ideally in a cleanable material such as laminate or glass.
- No more hot desking – each desk should be assigned to an individual and not be shared. If this is not possible, it should be shared by the smallest number of people.
- Employees should also avoid sharing offices and equipment where possible – no borrowing colleagues' pens or staplers.
- All shared storage should be removed and replaced with a tall laminate gallery panel at the end of each row of furniture that is open with no pulls, or tall lockers assigned to individuals.
- The addition of a drawer to place keyboard and mouse when the station is not in use is suggested.



## COFFEE BREAKS AND LUNCH

- Pantries and coffee islands should have touch-free soap dispensers along with hygiene guidelines at the sink. Single-use cups and cutlery are recommended and seating should be modified to reduce capacity and heavy foot traffic.
- Canteens will have reconfigure seating and tables to meet with social distancing requirements. Packaged meals should be provided where possible to avoid fully opening staff canteens.
- Vending machines should promote touchless payment if possible.
- Workers should be encouraged to bring their own food.
- Access to a food outlet in a high-rise multiple occupancy building could be one option to reduce the need for people to go outside.



## MEETINGS AND CALLS



Undoubtedly one of the biggest changes in how we work as a result of COVID-19 is the use of Zoom which saw daily users spike to 200 million in March, up from 10 million in December, Microsoft Teams and other video technology link ups. Now widely used, companies are experiencing major cost savings from workers, and less non-essential meetings are likely to take place face-to-face in the years ahead.

State of the art video conference space for multiple in person attendees will be standard, saving travelling time to meetings and giving employees the chance to complete more tasks or obtain a better lifestyle balance.

Offices will feature phone booths where workers can take calls away from their offices, reducing exposure to loud talk and airborne transmission of droplets potentially containing the virus.

Where it is not possible to conduct meetings by video call, conference rooms should have capacity guidelines at entrances clearly stating the maximum capacity per room.



## WELLBEING



The wellbeing of employees will be of paramount importance in the office of the future which will provide an environment designed to reduce psychological distress and improve wellbeing.



## IDENTIFYING NEW CHAMPIONS



Employees should be encouraged to be actively involved in efforts to safeguard both physical and mental health in workplace, with staff steering committees, regular communications and questionnaires helping shape policy. Promotion of positive health programmes such as walking challenges and yoga classes at lunchtime will play a crucial role in protecting staff from the effects of stress.



## NATURE



Increasing the visibility of green and blue spaces has a positive effect on reducing psychological distress. Viewing of nature scenes, whether through windows or via simulations such as smart digital windows showing scenes of forests and natural landscapes, and real stimuli within buildings such as indoor green plants and wood materials all have a positive influence on physiological response according to research.



## AIR QUALITY



Research shows a high level of influence between physical comfort related to air quality and the occupant behaviour and productivity in office environments. In fact, office environments having ventilation airflow rates 50% higher than standard and monitoring systems for CO2 have been associated with behavioural changes among employees leading to an increased productivity and decreased absenteeism compared with those working in offices without fresh air ventilation component and CO2 monitoring.



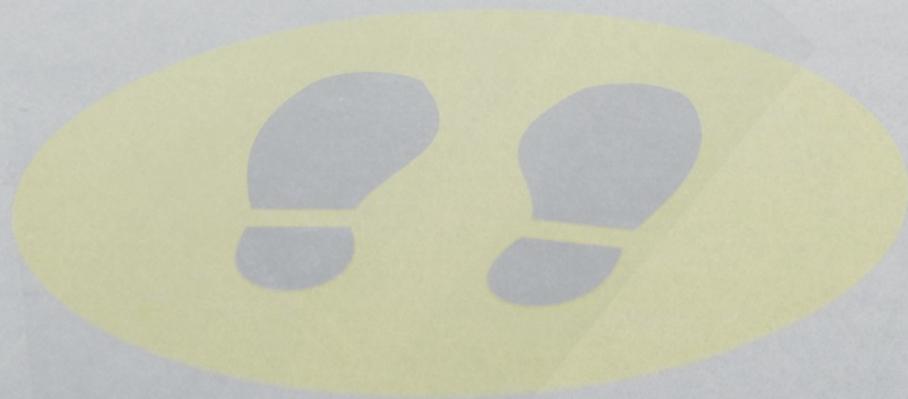
## LIGHT



Light also has an important role to play in helping improve the mood of people working indoors, reducing stress levels and increasing productivity. Where possible offices should be re-configured to allow more daylight and better views, and companies should consider using blue-enriched white lights which have been shown to improve motivation and reaction time, compared with standard white light.

# CONCLUSION

SEAN'S DRAWING  
TO BE ADDED



# MEET THE AUTHORS

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Associate Professor in Project Management, Programme Director - MSc in Project and Enterprise Management - The Bartlett Faculty of the Built Environment - School of Construction and Project Management

Simon has had a varied career: working for VSO in West Africa for 4 years, for the UN in Yugoslavia and most recently at Transport for London (TfL). In this time, he became a member of the Association for Project Management and a certificated project manager. In 2013, he won the APM's Project Professional of the Year award.



## Dr Esfandiar Burman

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Esfand was the lead field investigator for building performance evaluations of several educational buildings funded by the Innovate UK (formerly Technology Strategy Board) and the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council (EPSRC). The projects entailed detailed and long term energy performance analysis, monitoring and analysis of the indoor environmental quality, operational vs. designed performance review, and Building Use Studies (BUS). Esfand also contributed to other Innovate UK projects funded under the Building Performance Evaluation programme including post-occupancy evaluations of Pool and Tremough innovation centres, Centenary Quay development, and CarbonBuzz metadata analysis. Esfand joined IEDE as a Research Associate in complex built environment systems in December 2014.



## Dr Lena Ciric

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Lena's research expertise lies in the application of molecular biology techniques to the profiling of microbial communities in various environments, from diesel degrading consortia, the healthy and diseased human microbiome, to the communities present in the air and on high touch surfaces in public spaces. She also studies bacterial antibiotic resistance mechanisms and their modes of transfer among different communities. Furthermore, she is interested in the discovery of novel antimicrobial strategies. Lena leads the Healthy Infrastructure Research Group at UCL CEGE ([www.cege.ucl.ac.uk/HIRG](http://www.cege.ucl.ac.uk/HIRG)). The group carries out research investigating engineering solutions that reduce the spread of infectious disease and improve environmental health.



## Dr Evangelia Chrysiou

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Evangelia's research on mental health, architecture for Health and Welfare, medical planning and accessibility, ageing, welfare and wellness facilities, autism, healthcare, medical architecture innovation, medical tourism planning and design of tourism facilities spans in several countries of the world (UK, France, Belgium, Greece, Middle East, Japan, New Zealand etc.).

Her work on therapeutic environments has received prestigious international awards (Singapore 2009, Kuala Lumpur 2012, Brisbane 2013, Birmingham 2014, London 2014, Vienna 2017, London 2019).

She is the author of the new National Guidelines for mental health facilities in the community.



## Professor Alexi Marmot

**Professor of Facility and Environment Management and Director Bartlett Global Centre**

Bartlett Real Estate Institute, Faculty of the Built Environment

Alexi Marmot has been responsible for developing innovative methodologies to solve practical problems that face all organisations in using space efficiently and effectively to fulfil their mission. Her research-led approach to professional consultancy specialises in 'evidence-based design', development of methods, data gathering, analysis and interpretation of results for application to real-world problems. The WorkWare methodologies she has developed and refined over twenty years, gather quantitative and qualitative data on space utilisation, audit, attitudes and behaviour. Results are interpreted to assist strategic decisions by clients, evidence-based design, and change management for building users.

Alexi has co-authored the definitive book on office space planning in the USA, and another in the UK: Office space planning: Designing for tomorrow's workplace (McGraw-Hill, 2000) and Understanding offices: What every manager needs to know about office buildings (Penguin, 1995).



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