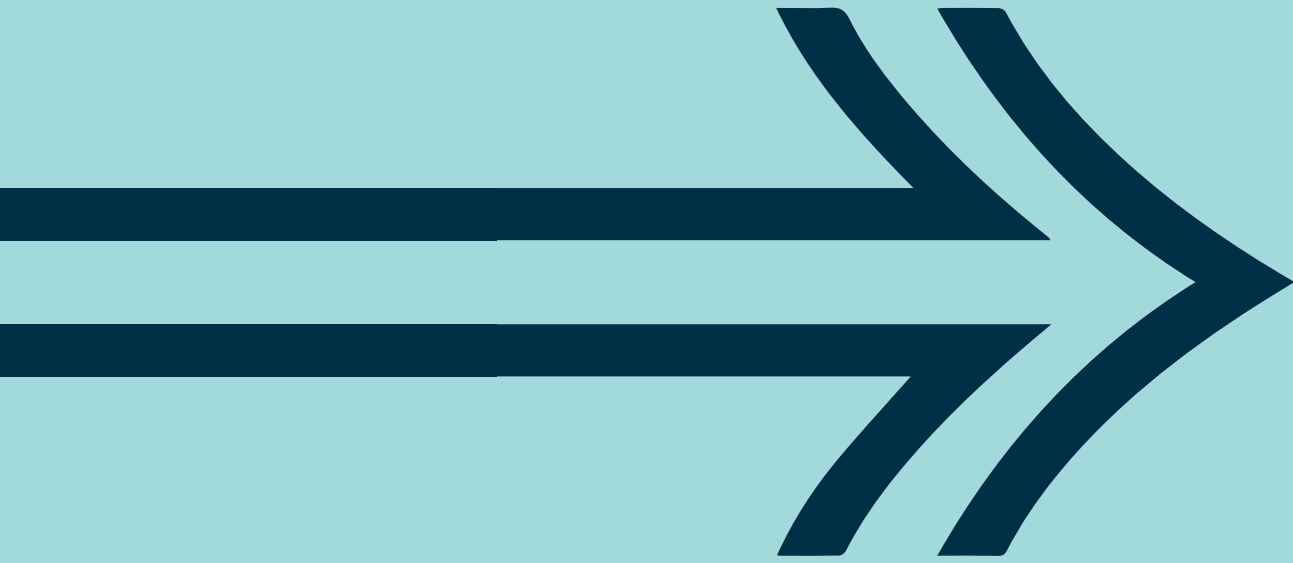




# PREPARING FOR THE NEW NORM



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As lockdown restrictions are slowly lifted we are all wondering what 'normal' is going to look like and how are lives have changed.

What we do know is that for many people, a return to the outside world is a source of anxiety. We've become quite comfortable in our nests, so what's the smoothest way to navigate the transition ahead?

The anxiety we're feeling around the return to society is called 'reverse culture shock' and it's a real thing, say psychologists.

We're all familiar with the concept of culture shock – which psychologists tell us happens in a U-curve: we arrive in a foreign country, things initially seem new and exciting, then different and destabilizing as culture shock sets in. Then, as we adapt to the new culture, our emotions and thinking stabilize.

The same U-curve can be applied to our experience in isolation. Initially being cooped up at home was novel and kind of fun: we cooked, we decorated, we reconnected with distant friends and family via video call. Then the novelty wore off and we fell into the culture shock trough – except we were at home, where everything was maybe TOO familiar. And the final part of that U-curve has seen many of us climb out of the trough, accepting this new way of being and working as the new norm.

Unfortunately, reverse culture shock is more of a rollercoaster – it follows a W-curve. So while we've made it out of the trough and to the top of the other side of the U, we can see the shock (or downward slide) that re-entry into our old culture is going to bring.

**“YOU DON'T JUST COME BACK, SNAP YOUR FINGERS AND PICK UP WHERE YOU LEFT.”**

## So how can we prepare for reverse culture shock?

This period will look different for everybody, as we return to the outside world in phases. However, there are tactics we can all use to lessen the impact of any shock.

### 1. Pace yourself

You don't have to reconnect with every single friend on day one or eat in every single restaurant the first week they reopen. Don't

put too much pressure on yourself or others to be social. Take your time to slowly rebuild your old relationships and return to old habits. You might have the option to return to the office or continue working from home for a period – weigh up what you feel comfortable with. You may find a split between office and home for a few weeks helps you ease back in.

### 2. Be understanding

Everyone experiences the reverse culture shock W-curve at different rates, so be mindful of that. Just because you're raring to get back into the swing of things doesn't mean everyone else in your orbit is. Make allowances for others to adjust and give them the time and space they need.

**“JUST BECAUSE YOU'RE RARING TO GET BACK INTO THE SWING OF THINGS DOESN'T MEAN EVERYONE ELSE IN YOUR ORBIT IS.”**

### 3. Hold on to your lockdown positives

If there were parts of isolation that you actually loved – perhaps it was exercising or reading more, cooking at home more often, being more involved in your kids' schoolwork – there is no reason you can't bring these positives back into the 'real world' with you. Look at your daily schedule and carve out time where you can make these activities a priority. By continuing with the things that played a positive part in your lockdown lifestyle, you will also soften the culture shock of your return to a more normal life.

### 4. Talk about your experiences

Boy oh boy, there is going to be a lot of lockdown talk on that first day back at the coalface with your work buddies! But don't let the conversation end there. Be open and honest with your colleagues, friends, and family about where you're at on the W-curve. Discussing your ups and downs will help to normalize the experience – and reassure you that you're not the only one going through it.

## 5. There is light at the end of the tunnel

Remember, a W-curve ends with you on a high point and a rollercoaster ride eventually deposits you back on steady ground. Research tells us that, like diplomats returning from work in foreign countries or scientists returning from a stint in the Antarctic, we WILL readjust to 'normal' life (however different to our old lives it may be) – it will just take some time. Take it easy on yourself until you feel the ground beneath your feet start to even out.

### How to motivate yourself

You had lockdown life locked down... but now that it's time to reverse engineer that process and emerge from isolation, your tank is empty.

Don't be shocked if you find yourself feeling a little flat or blunted after the past few months – all that adjusting asked a lot of you. You just need to reignite your spark, but how? Whether it's your fitness, your work or other pursuits on the line, follow these tips to find your motivation.

#### 1. Manage your expectations

After such unusual circumstances, don't expect yourself to necessarily be as motivated or productive as you normally would. No one is asking you to burst out of the blocks like Usain Bolt. Ease yourself back into the commitments that were put on hold a few months ago, and don't be hard on yourself if things seem hard – negative self-talk will only slow the process down.

#### 2. Start small

You don't have to be fast and you don't have to go big, either. Big things can feel overwhelming, so take micro-actions to get your momentum rolling again – small, but positive steps that you won't give a second thought, but will keep you moving forward.

#### 3. Call in the cavalry

If you need a push you may need to call for backup. Call your friends and/or family for support or identify a reward you will give yourself when you achieve a certain goal or action.

## 4. Be more Batman

You've spent the last few months just doing your best to make it through, and your priorities may have shifted. So ask yourself, what would Batman do?

WWBD? Batman knows his 'why' – do you know yours?

The answer: find your 'why'. Knowing exactly why you're doing it and what you want to get out of it will give you a reason to get up day after day and make it happen. "I have one power. I never give up." The Dark Knight.

Become your own superhero and find what is important to you.

## 6. Start the clock!

If you're struggling to motivate yourself for something that's a little harder to get excited about, a deadline could be just what's needed to spur you into action. If you don't have external deadlines being imposed on you, create them for yourself – set a date, and stick to it. If time management isn't your strong suit, choose a task, set a timer (for say 25 minutes) and focus fully on that task until the timer goes off – the short time frame makes it feel more manageable to stay focused, and the progress you make will give you positive reinforcement to continue.



# GET IN TOUCH



**If the prospect of returning to everyday life is making you particularly anxious, please contact the Student Welfare team on:**

**Phone:** 0207 656 8420

**Email:** [qahe.welfare@qa.com](mailto:qahe.welfare@qa.com)

**Degree Apprenticeships:**

[welfare.DA@qa.com](mailto:welfare.DA@qa.com)

**For any additional support needs:**

[qahe.learningsupport@qa.com](mailto:qahe.learningsupport@qa.com)