This guidance could be read alongside students returning to, and starting higher education in autumn term 2021.

Guidance on Higher education coronavirus (COVID-19) operational guidance

Updated 2 March 2021

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Introduction

This guidance applies to England, but you should follow any wider restrictions if they apply in your area.

This guidance is designed to help higher education (HE) providers in England minimise risk during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and to provide students with an enjoyable experience, while staying safe as possible.

We expect you to remain open while following any wider restrictions and public health guidance, including those in your local area and those in tier 4 areas.

Other guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) relevant to the higher education sector is available from the Office for Students (OfS), the HE regulator in England.

The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has a series of resources to support providers.

Providers should make sure that continuing and prospective students receive clear, accurate and timely information to make informed decisions about their academic offer, student life and the measures implemented to manage the impact of coronavirus (COVID-19) on their institution, terms and conditions, and complaints handling.

How to use this guidance

As HE providers, you will make your own judgements about your premises, while following the government's guidance. You will also need to work closely with your local authorities and other agencies to put appropriate plans in place to protect and manage any local outbreaks.

We expect you to take the specific actions you will take, depending on the demographic profile of your staff and student bodies, the nature of your institution, including the size and type of your estate, and the local coronavirus (COVID-19) situation.

Your plans should set out what steps you have taken to ensure you do keep your students and staff in their working or student environment, in accordance with government guidance.

To help you decide which actions to take, you should carry out a risk assessment, taking into account the Public Health England (PHE) guidance for managing COVID-19 public related hazards. The Health and Safety Executive has a helpful risk assessment template and examples.

Outreach plans

You should have a plan in place to respond to an increase in the number of cases, or an outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19) cases, which may also have to adapt standard crisis provision at very short notice.

Plans should cover scenarios including:

- increased provision of online teaching that requires interventions in the whole community, including students and staff
- a partial closure of your institution, with some of the activities of the university
- a localised outbreak in student accommodation
- a localised outbreak involving a particular student or staff member, faculty or department

You should work with the Director of Public Health in your local authority to control and manage outbreaks in your institution, in line with the Public Health England (PHE) guidance for Health and Wellbeing Boards.

Unless local otherwise, in the event of national restrictions during the term, students should continue to be able to attend their place of study, and to live in their halls of HE accommodation. They should be out of their private rented accommodation, or other exceptional circumstances as outlined in students returning to, and starting, higher education in autumn term 2021.

Higher education tiers of restriction

In certain instances, decision-making may be referred to the national level, and an area may be designated as an area of intervention. The government's Local Action Committee (LAC) will be convened to discuss the proposed local response, with the premise in such cases, to work in consultation, restrictions will be implemented in a phased manner with the key aim to return face-to-face provision where it is safe to do so.

Regardless of the tier of restriction, all providers, students and staff should comply with guidance issued in wider restrictions. The National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) will work closely with local authorities and local public health teams to support students moving between wider restrictions.

Unless local otherwise, in the event of national restrictions during the term, students should continue to be able to attend their place of study, and to live in their halls of HE accommodation. They should be out of their private rented accommodation, or other exceptional circumstances as outlined in students returning to, and starting, higher education in autumn term 2021.

Explanation of the HE tiers

HE tier 1 (default position)

HE providers should confirm blended learning with face-to-face action while following the wider tier 1 restrictions and public health guidance (for example, the Government's rule of five gathering).

HE tier 2 (Medium position)

HE providers should prepare for an increased level of online learning where possible. You should prioritise the continuation of face-to-face provision based on your own risk assessment, and in line with the government's guidance. This may include, for example, where it is most beneficial for people, clinical or practical learning or exams.

HE tier 3 (Serious winter measures we would recommend)

HE providers should increase the level of online learning and only when face-to-face provision for priority courses (for example, clinical and medical courses), and in so limited a number of students as possible.

Students should follow government guidance published as part of any national lockdown. HE providers should continue to support students who are required to attend their laying home or other clinical placement accommodation. This is to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus through travel. In these circumstances, you should support students who are isolating, providing services for students who are self-isolating, in line with the wider restrictions.

HE tier 4 (Last resort)

We expect the majority of provision to be online, with buildings open only for essential workers and students who are required to attend because in person teaching is essential. This should include the continuation of essential research.

In the event of a possible outbreak on site, you should refer to the relevant Education Action Level Plan review to recommend possible outbreak in education settings.

Principles for higher education provision

Although some buildings and parts of campuses have physically closed in response to the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19), the provision of HE has continued and should continue. We recognise that you have done, and continue to do, a great deal of work to reopen your buildings and campuses as safely as possible.

As HE providers are autonomous institutions, you should identify and put in place measures to manage your own risks, in line with your risk assessments and this guidance, based on your individual circumstances. We encourage all providers to take best practice so that there is a consistent approach to reopening that puts the health and safety of students and staff first. We also encourage providers to be transparent in providing access to high quality provision.

We expect you to give particular consideration to your legal responsibilities when reopening premises, including those under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Equality Act 2010, and to comply with those obligations.

Minimising coronavirus (COVID-19) risks

Risk assessment

You should have in place a legal responsibility to protect workers and others from risk to their health and safety, including from the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19). You should complete a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) to students, staff and others affected by your activities, including those Employers have a duty to consult with their employees on health and safety matters. You should continually check, review and update your risk assessments, especially when there is new advice or guidance.

Hygiene

You should ensure that you have in place measures to manage hygiene, including:

- the number of students and staff likely to be within a learning space and how they can be kept safe and healthy while there
- the availability of staff, including contingency plans if individuals are self-isolating
- supporting service recipients to increase the number of individuals on site (for example, catering) and how they can be provided a safe and hygienic environment. This may include, for example, providing hand sanitising facilities, or adapting the premises, such as to place a contactless additional cleaning of spaces and equipment following use)

Segmentation

Segmentation (such as the creation of small, sub-networks of students and staff to a specified area of your premises, and limiting their contact with others) may be a part of the work of a case or outbreak.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has advised that the benefits of segmentation could be:

- reduction in the risk of transmission (smaller number of people to infect)
- easier to trace contacts of infectious individuals
- less disruption (small number of people to quarantine or test)

Effective segmentation could reduce the potential size of outbreaks. Segmentation of student or staff populations (for example, by course, year group, accommodation block and so on, and in teaching and accommodation situations) would support easier contact tracing if a case of coronavirus (COVID-19) is identified and would limit the number of students who need to be tested or quarantined if a case is identified, thereby ensuring quarantined limited of wider groups, minimising wider disruption.

However, SAGE recognises that there is no one model of segmentation that would apply equally across all providers. The SAGE report on principles for maintaining the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) has further examples.

Face coverings

Where social distancing is difficult to maintain or good ventilation is difficult to provide, including in workshops, laboratories, offices, libraries, teaching rooms and other halls, we recommend that providers should adopt the use of face coverings as part of their risk assessment, to minimise the risk of transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) across. This does not apply in situations where wearing a face covering would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity. Face coverings do not need to be worn in classrooms or lecture theatres. More information is in the Public Health England guidance.

Transparent face coverings, which may assist communication with someone who relies on lip reading, facial expressions or mouth movements to understand speech, are also a helpful alternative. Public Health England is currently gathering evidence regarding the effectiveness or safety of transparent face coverings, but they may be effective in reducing the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19).

Those who rely on visual signs for communication, or communicate with or provide services to such individuals, are currently exempt from any requirement to wear face coverings.

Face visors or shields should not be worn as an alternative to face coverings. They may protect against droplet spread in specific circumstances (such as in a workshop or laboratory setting), but they do not prevent droplets being released into the air. Face visors or shields should only be used after carrying out a risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately.

Exemptions

Some individuals are exempt from wearing face coverings. This applies to those who:

- carried out, or were or were a face covering because of a physical impairment or disability, which makes it difficult to do so
- speak to or provide help to someone who relies on lip reading, clear speech or facial expression to communicate

The same exemptions will apply in education settings and you should be sensitive to those needs, noting that some people are less able to wear face coverings and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others.

Safe wearing and removal of face coverings

You should have a process for when face coverings are worn on your premises and how they should be removed. You should communicate this process clearly to students and staff and visitors. Safe wearing of face coverings includes:

- cleaning your hands before you put on your face covering, including to remove or put them on in a place with a high footfall, such as in a classroom or lecture theatre

Where a face covering becomes damp, it should not be worn, and the face covering should be replaced (using). Staff and students may consider bringing a spare face covering to wear if their face covering becomes damp during the day.

Cleaning

To minimise the risk of transmission you should introduce enhanced cleaning measures, including the cleaning of touch points such as door handles, handrails, toilets and common groups, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces, using standard cleaning products such as detergents. See guidance on the cleaning of non-healthcare settings.

Keeping occupied spaces well ventilated

Good ventilation reduces the concentration of the virus in the air, which reduces the risk from airborne transmission. This happens when people breathe in small particles (aerosols) carrying the virus between with the virus has occupied an enclosed area.

Ventilation is a key part of your risk assessment, particularly ensuring it is well ventilated and a comfortable temperature is maintained.

These can be achieved by a variety of measures.

Mechanical ventilation systems

These should be adjusted to increase the ventilation rate wherever possible and checked to confirm that normal operation meets current guidance and that the risk is suitably set in a proportate. If possible, systems should be adjusted to fresh air or, if not, should be run in recirculating mode for as long as they are within a single room and supplemented by an outdoor air supply.

Natural ventilation

This includes:

- opening windows (in cooler weather windows should be opened just enough to provide a comfortable ventilation, and opened more fully during breaks to purge the air in the space)
- opening internal doors can also assist with creating a throughout of air
- opening external doors (as long as they are not fire doors and secured to be so)

Find out more from the Health and Safety Executive guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak and CIBSE coronavirus guidance.

To balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature, consider:

- opening high level windows in colder weather in preference to low level to reduce cold drafts
- increasing the ventilation while spaces are unoccupied
- rearranging furniture where possible to avoid direct draughts

Heating should be used as necessary to ensure comfort levels are maintained, particularly in occupied spaces.

Additional protective measures

You should identify and implement the complete range of protective measures required to manage the risks to students and staff in your premises. Based on an assessment of the risks and requirements of each environment.

This should include (but is not limited to):

- enhanced cleaning measures, especially for frequently used areas, surface, touchpoints and washrooms
- ensuring appropriate ventilation, maintaining and hand sanitisation facilities where hand washing facilities are not readily available
- reducing congestion (such as at the start and end of the day), including through considering measures such as staggered timetables to stagger student and staff arrival and departure times and so on
- utilising outdoor space
- managing entrances, exit from and movement around buildings, as well as signage with such measures as one way entrances, exits and staircases - avoid the use of lifts where possible

Some HE courses, such as undertaking medicine, healthcare related courses, and the performing arts, may pose particular risks of aerosol, droplet and surface transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) because of the nature of the activity. Additional risk assessing in accordance with guidance issued for the relevant professional working arrangements.

Any additional costs would be funded from existing budgets.

Staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable

Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) staff are advised not to attend the workplace whilst they are advised to shield. Staff who are CEV will previously have received a letter from the NHS advising them of this. Staff who are CEV may also be eligible for guidance for everyone in this group, of certain ethnic backgrounds and other individuals in this group can take.

Employers should talk to their staff about how they will be supported. Including to work from home.

You should continue to pay CEV staff on their usual terms.

Those living with someone who is CEV can still attend work where home working is not feasible. Government has recently published guidance on protection for the workplace and home settings.

The shielding guidance is reviewed regularly. CEV individuals will be informed in advance of any changes to the state of the guidance.

CEV individuals (over 18) have been prioritised for vaccination in phase 1 before the general population. Information on this is available in the guidance on the COVID-19 vaccination and immunisation.

Current Department of Health and Social Care guidance, informed by Public Health England, currently advises that CEV individuals should continue to shield even after they have been vaccinated.

Pregnancy

Pregnant staff are advised to follow the specific guidance for pregnant employees, including pregnant students and those who are recent parents. Most of the general pregnant women may also have other health conditions that mean they are clinically CEV, where the advice for clinically extremely vulnerable staff will apply. COVID-19 is not known to be transmitted from mother to baby during pregnancy or childbirth vaccination advice.

Your workplace risk assessment should already consider any risks to female employees of childbearing age, including those who are pregnant. If a female member of staff has notified her or employer, in writing, that she is breastfeeding, or has given birth within the last months, you should check the workplace risk assessment to see if any new risks have been identified and take appropriate action. Maternity leave and pay will be available in the usual way.

Any risks identified at that point, or when during the pregnancy, in the first 6 months after birth, or while the employee is still breastfeeding, must be recorded and acted as part of the general workplace risk assessment. You must take appropriate sensible measures to keep your employee safe.

The start of your risk assessment, you should consider whether there are any other risks or facilitating home working may be appropriate to mitigate risks.

You should be aware that pregnancy women from the 28 weeks gestation, or with underlying health conditions of any point of gestation, may be at greater risk of severe illness from coronavirus (COVID-19). Pregnant women are also more likely to be admitted to hospital with underlying health conditions that result in greater risk of complications from catch coronavirus (COVID-19).

Find out more about coronavirus (COVID-19) and pregnancy from the Royal College of Gynaecologists.

Staff who may otherwise be at increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19)

Current evidence shows that a range of factors mean that some people may be at comparatively increased risk from coronavirus (COVID-19). These are complex factors. You find a range of underlying health conditions should review how been included in the list of those who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

Employers who feel they may be at increased risk, where it is not suitable to work from home, these staff can attend the workplace as long as the principles for home working are followed. Employers should discuss with their staff who are in this group, or who have raised concerns regarding risk to their management for your workplace. Employers should be sensitive to what these baseline factors are and the increased risks they pose.

Find out more on who is at higher risk from coronavirus (COVID-19). Staff who live with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable should continue to work from home, if attend the workplace where it is not possible to work from home.

Employers' health and safety obligations

Employers have a legal obligation to protect their employees, and others, including children, from harm. Employers should consider risk to students and assess public health and safety risks, and put in place measures to manage those risks.

Following the principles for higher education provision will help you:

- mitigate the risks of coronavirus (COVID-19) to pupils and staff
- meet your legal duties to protect employees and others from harm

The Health and Safety Executive have guidance on first aid during coronavirus (COVID-19) which:

- supports local risk assessments
- provides guidance for first aiders

Social contacts

To prevent the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19), there are legal limits on the number of people that someone can spend time with, in a group at any one time.

These limits do not apply to:

- gatherings for educational or work purposes when reasonably necessary
- meetings of a single household group
- meeting your support bubble or childcare bubble where necessary, but only if you are in one support bubble or childcare bubble

See the Social contact guidance for the full list.

The government has introduced a new £200 fine for those attending house parties, including in halls of residence, which will double for every offence up to a maximum level of £6, 400. These fines will apply to those who attend illegal gatherings of more than 30 people, including those who organise or fail to disperse from such gatherings. Students aware of their disciplinary "handbook", particularly if they live within large scale student accommodation.

New and returning students travelling from overseas

Guidance is available for new and returning students travelling from overseas to students returning to, and starting, higher education in spring term 2021.

Travel guidance for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps exchanges

UK based students on Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps can continue activities that were agreed ahead of the end of the transition period. You should ensure participants are fully aware of the consequences and seekers of the guidance for UK students in the EU considering their studies.

You should:

- be flexible
- be ready to make quick changes to projects and travel, and consider delaying plans if necessary, in line with the latest guidance
- follow the relevant Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) travel advice for the destination country and the English regulations
- ensure participants are fully aware of the consequences of travel, including the need to pay funding to the host of your activity, while ensuring participants remain safe and secure
- be aware of the implications for travel and visas, which are different for those in the transition period (UK, EEA). These fees will apply to those who attend illegal gatherings of more than 30 people, including those who organise or fail to disperse from such gatherings. Students aware of their disciplinary "handbook", particularly if they live within large scale student accommodation.

New and returning students travelling from overseas

Guidance is available for new and returning students travelling from overseas to students returning to, and starting, higher education in spring term 2021.

Travel and transport for students and staff

Students returning to, and starting, higher education in autumn term 2021.

FCDO guidance on travel from the UK is available.

Travel insurance

The Association of British Insurers has produced information on travel insurance implications following the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. If you have any further questions about your cover, contact your travel insurance provider.

More information

Information is available for educational settings in:

- England
- Scotland
- Wales
- Ireland

Guidance is also available for:

- individuals affected by travel restrictions
- EU students studying in the UK
- UK students continuing their studies in the EU

Travel and transport for students arriving from within the UK

Guidance for students arriving at university from within the UK is available.

Students travelling to university should follow the coronavirus (COVID-19) safer travel guidance for passengers.

Accommodation

Where students have contracted coronavirus (COVID-19) while in student accommodation, rooms and other facilities will need to be cleaned, following guidance on cleaning non-healthcare settings. Accommodation that has been vacant for over 72 hours will need standard, but thorough, household cleaning.

Forming new households

There is no prohibition on moving house where necessary, and anyone in England who wishes to move house can do so. This includes forming new households and moving into shared student accommodation and houses in multiple occupation (HMO). Guidance for landlords and tenants on renting and coronavirus (COVID-19) is available.

However, repeat or frequent temporary changes in household unit will increase the risk of disease transmission and staying within the same household unit will facilitate test and trace activities in the event of coronavirus (COVID-19). Those forming new households should take account of the guidance on meeting people from outside your household for advice on household interactions.

Everyone involved in the moving process must follow the latest guidance on staying alert and safe (social distancing) to minimise the spread of the virus. Letting agents, HE providers and accommodation providers should also consider how best to conduct tenancy checks for new tenancies agreed where physical processes remain in place, taking care to follow government advice on social distancing.

Within student accommodation, you should seek to identify 'households', within which routine contact can be managed safely. These households will also form the units by which you will manage any response to a suspected or confirmed positive case. Your approach to deciding what constitutes a household will depend on the physical layout of the accommodation, taking into account who shares a kitchen or bathroom. A household could be a group of normally consolidated to be those students living on the same floor, who share a kitchen or bathroom, rather than an entire block. Accommodation providers should make clear which kitchen(s) or bathroom(s) are intended for each household's use.

If a household within student accommodation is not obvious, providers may need to identify students as belonging to households (these households may be greater than 6 people). There should be an easily accessible record of who is in each of these provider defined households, and students should understand what constitutes their household for the purposes of guidance on interactions within and between households.

Students living in halls of residence, or houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), who develop symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) should self-isolate in their current accommodation. Students should contact the NHS, their HE provider, and will the manager of their halls if they are privately owned, or the landlord of their HMO.

If a resident has coronavirus symptoms, all residents in that household must isolate for 10 days, following guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection.

Compliance with guidance

You are responsible for ensuring that you, as an institution, as well as staff and students, are aware of the measures and guidance in place, and take action to promote the importance of complying with these:

This could include:

- regular communication to staff and students
- signs and posters to reiterate the rules
- a clear statement of expectations of student behaviour, for example, a behaviour agreement

You should consider incentives for compliance, and disincentives for non-compliance including, in serious cases, the use of disciplinary measures.

Communications about compliance

You should have communications strategies for students and staff, which will include principles such as:

- do not assume that everyone understands the official guidelines
- ensure the rationale for behaviours and protective measures is understood
- make COVID-secure behaviours the norm
- encourage an atmosphere within your institution that supports following COVID-secure behaviours
- involve staff and students when creating communications
- maintain consistent messaging and guidance
- consider the range of cultural backgrounds when developing communications and plans

Teaching and learning environments

For many HE courses, online teaching and learning works effectively and has a high degree of learner engagement (while it will also benefit those who are not able to physically attend). You should identify the appropriate mix of online and face-to-face content for each subject, reflecting what will maximise learning, as well as supporting staff if students who cannot attend campus, and enabling the provider as a whole to minimise transmission risk.

Guidance on working safely during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is relevant to the HE estate. This guidance points out that the Health and Safety Executive may take action to improve control of workplace risks if needed, for example through the issue of enforcement notices to help secure improvements.

Laboratories

Find information about working safely during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in the guidance on laboratories and research facilities. The same considerations should be applied to laboratory science teaching as well.

University libraries

We expect university libraries to remain open to provide library services, including study places in a COVID-secure way.

You should follow the NHS Test and Trace guidance, which applies to university libraries as well as public libraries.

Libraries Connected has drawn up guidance for public libraries to support reopening which may also be relevant for university libraries.

Sports training and teaching

Some providers will have programmes designed for 'elite' athletes (for example, athletes on elite development pathways). In such cases, the guidance on returning to training for elite sport will be relevant.

In addition, many providers will have their own gym and leisure facilities and the guidance for providers of grassroots sport and gym or leisure facilities may be relevant.

Performing arts

Activities can be undertaken in line with guidance on working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) in the performing arts which applies to both professionals and non-professionals.

Performing arts courses, in normal circumstances, may involve a considerable amount of practical face-to-face teaching and assessment. Some providers have found alternative methods during the outbreak. You should consider new ways of delivering in person teaching and assessment that adhere to guidelines on social distancing so that you can continue to provide a high-quality academic experience in a way that protects both students and staff.

If face-to-face teaching or group sessions are required, try to maintain social distancing (2 metres, or 1 metre where this is not possible, provided steps are taken to otherwise mitigate the potential for transmission).

Performing arts teaching sessions

Tutors and staff should design sessions and rehearsals to avoid situations where students are unable to socially distance and, if this is not possible, reduce any time that students are not able to maintain social distancing.

Smaller teaching group sizes should be used where it is not possible to maintain social distancing. For example, you might consider reducing the size of casts in acting, the size of orchestras, or the number of students involved in movement sessions. Where this is not possible, you should take mitigating actions to reduce the risk of transmission between staff and students, such as holding the session in a larger and well-ventilated room.

Where social distancing cannot be adhered to, consider using technology to reduce interactions. This could be for one-to-one tutorials, rehearsals and practice and, if possible, for assignments. You might consider using booths, barriers or screens between individuals who are not part of a teaching group, between teaching groups and others, and between performers and any staff or students not participating at that moment.

You should make sure that no one is taking part in in-person sessions if they have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or when advised to self-isolate.

Singing and playing wind and brass instruments

Students and staff can engage in singing and playing wind and brass instruments in line with this guidance and working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) in the performing arts but routine (2 metres) social distancing should be maintained.

Managing social and informal interactions for performing arts students

You should consider students' desire to interact socially and creatively with other students as part of their educational experience. If possible, designate specific areas ('creative spaces') for students to socially and creatively interact beyond the usual teaching environment. These areas could include markings to allow for social distancing or the use of screens.

You should provide students with advice as to where these sorts of interactions would be appropriate, and how to do them as safely as possible.

If tutors are not present, students should take responsibility for these sessions, and for protecting themselves and others. This might include social distancing or cleaning instruments before use.

Performing arts equipment

Equipment, including instruments and props, is integral to many performing arts courses. Measures should be taken for handling equipment.

These include:

- students and staff should avoid sharing equipment if possible
- if the equipment has to be shared, you should ensure there is increased handwashing before and after handling equipment
- ensuring regular and meticulous cleaning of all equipment, including shared instruments, desks, sound and lighting equipment, mics and battery packs
- handling of paperwork, including music scores, scripts and learning materials

Audiences for performing arts

Refer to the working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) in the performing arts guidance for advice about audiences.

Where it is essential to have an audience, for assessment and teaching purposes, they should be seated in accordance with social distancing. Staff and other students can watch rehearsals and performances, but they should avoid cheering or shouting. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission, particularly from aerosol and droplet transmission. You might consider mitigating actions, such as the use of screens to protect audience members where necessary or the use of face coverings.

Students should be prepared for the difficulties of performing without an audience, or with a reduced audience, especially if the production is particularly interactive.

Testing

Providers should set a clear expectation that all students should access coronavirus (COVID-19) testing. Find guidance on testing arrangements for the spring term in students returning to, and staying, higher education in the spring term 2021.

Staff and student wellbeing

You have a duty of care to students including the provision of pastoral support, and taking steps to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of students. This includes the responsibility to support students with mental health issues. You should determine what welfare and counselling services are needed for students.

Some students and staff will have additional mental health needs which cannot be met within the HE setting. HE providers should work in partnership with local NHS and care services to address any additional needs arising from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

We have worked with the Office for Students to clarify that you are able to use existing funds, worth around £256 million, for the academic year 2020 to 2021, towards hardship support. We are also making available an additional £50 million of hardship funding this financial year, taking the total funding made available for student hardship to £70 million this financial year. You will have flexibility in how they distribute the funding to students, in a way that will best prioritise those in greatest need. Support might include help for students facing additional costs arising from having to maintain accommodation in more than one location. This funding can be distributed to a wide population of students, including postgraduates (whether taught or research) and international students. We will continue to monitor the situation to look at what impact this funding is having.

The Student Space platform is designed to work alongside existing mental health services offered by providers.

The guidance on safer workplaces acknowledges the responsibilities that employers have for their staff. The agreement between trade unions working in HE and the Universities and Colleges Employers Association, published as appendix A to Universities UK's principles and considerations for engagement post-lockdown, will help ensure campuses are as safe as possible and protect the health and wellbeing of staff, students and visitors to campus.

Find out more about mental health and wellbeing from guidance for the public on mental health and wellbeing.

First aid

Emergency treatment, for example, the provision of first aid, should be prioritised and given promptly in the event of an emergency. This means that people do not have to stay 2 metres apart if emergency assistance is required. People involved in the provision of the assistance of others should pay particular attention to hygiene measures immediately afterwards, including washing hands.

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