



Department
for Education

Further education COVID-19 operational guidance

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Introduction

This guidance sets out what FE and skills providers need to know so that students of all ages can benefit from their education and training in full.

It explains the actions leaders should take to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their setting. This includes public health advice, endorsed by UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA). This guidance is for leaders and staff in:

- sixth form colleges
- general FE colleges
- independent training providers
- designated institutions
- adult community learning providers
- special post-16 institutions

It also covers expectations for students with education, health and care (EHC) plans in mainstream FE settings and special post-16 institutions. Special post-16 institutions should also read the guidance for [special schools and other specialist settings](#).

FE providers that have students undertaking other qualifications (such as HE qualifications) should follow FE guidance for these students, and the same prioritisation for attendance should be given to these students.

Apprenticeship providers should also read the current guidance on providing apprenticeships.

We use the terms “must” and “should” throughout the guidance. We use the term “must” when the person in question is legally required to do something and “should” when the advice set out should be followed unless there is good reason not to.

We will keep this guidance under review and update, as necessary.

Overview

The government continues to manage the risk of serious illness from the spread of the virus. The Prime Minister announced on 19 January that Plan B, is to end on 26 January. As a result, Plan B measures in the guidance for FE providers are being removed. This advice remains subject to change as the situation develops.

COVID-19 continues to be a virus that we learn to live with and the imperative to reduce the disruption to children and young people's education remains.

Our priority is for you to deliver face-to-face, high-quality education to all pupils. The evidence is clear that being out of education causes significant harm to educational attainment, life chances, mental and physical health.

We have worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and (UKHSA) to revise this guidance.

Changes to guidance since the last publication

- update to [face coverings section](#) to reflect removal of recommendation to wear face coverings in classrooms and communal areas
- update to [mandatory certification](#) section to reflect that this will no longer in place from 27 January
- update to [workforce section](#) to reflect that from 27 January government is no longer advising people to work from home if they can

Risk assessment

You must comply with health and safety law and put in place proportionate control measures. You must regularly review and update your risk assessments - treating them as 'living documents' - as the circumstances in your setting and the public health advice changes. This includes having active arrangements in place to monitor whether the controls are effective and working as planned. For more information on what is required of leaders in relation to health and safety risk assessments and managing risk, see [Annex A: health and safety risk assessment](#).

Mixing and 'bubbles'

We do not recommend that it is necessary to keep students in consistent groups ('bubbles').

You should make sure your outbreak management plans cover the possibility that it may become necessary to reintroduce 'bubbles' for a temporary period, to reduce mixing between groups.

Any decision to recommend the reintroduction of 'bubbles' would not be taken lightly and would need to take account of the detrimental impact they can have on the delivery of education.

Tracing close contacts and isolation

Close contacts will be identified via [NHS Test and Trace](#) and education settings are not expected to undertake contact tracing.

As with positive cases in any other setting, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case to identify close contacts. Contacts from a setting will only be traced by NHS Test and Trace where the positive case specifically identifies the individual as being a close contact. This is likely to be a small number of individuals who would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the close contact. You may be contacted in exceptional cases to help with identifying close contacts, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

From 14 December 2021, adults who are fully vaccinated and all children and young people aged between 5 and 18 years and 6 months identified as a contact of someone with COVID-19 are strongly advised to take a LFD test every day for 7 days and continue to attend their setting as normal, unless

they have a positive test result. Daily testing of close contacts applies to all contacts who are:

- fully vaccinated adults – people who have had 2 doses of an approved vaccine
- all children and young people aged 5 to 18 years and 6 months, regardless of their vaccination status
- people who can prove they are not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons
- people taking part, or have taken part, in an approved clinical trial for a COVID-19 vaccine

Students with SEND identified as close contacts should be supported by their setting and their families to agree the most appropriate route for testing including, where appropriate, additional support to assist swabbing. For further information please see [SEND guidance](#).

Further information is available in [NHS Test and Trace: what to do if you are contacted](#) and in the [stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#).

18-year-olds are treated in the same way as children until 6 months after their 18th birthday, to allow them the opportunity to get fully vaccinated. At this point, they will be subject to the same rules as adults and so if they choose not to get vaccinated, they will also need to self-isolate if identified as a close contact.

You will continue to have a role in working with health protection teams in the case of a local outbreak. If there is an outbreak in a setting or if central government offers the area an enhanced response package, a director of public health might advise a setting to temporarily reintroduce some additional control measures.

Face coverings

From 20 January face coverings are no longer advised for students, staff and visitors in classrooms and teaching environments. From 27 January, face coverings are no longer advised for students, staff and visitors in communal areas.

From 27 January, staff and students should follow [wider advice on face coverings](#) outside of their setting, including on transport to and from their setting.

In circumstances where face coverings are recommended

A director of public health might advise you that face coverings should temporarily be worn in communal areas or classrooms (by students, staff and visitors, unless exempt). You should make sure your contingency plans cover this possibility. (See the [stepping measures up and down](#) section).

In these circumstances, transparent face coverings, which may assist communication with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate, can also be worn. Transparent face coverings may be effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. However, the evidence to support this is currently very limited. Face coverings (whether transparent or cloth) should fit securely around the face to cover the nose and mouth and be made with a breathable material capable of filtering airborne particles.

The main benefit from a transparent face covering is that they can aid communication, for example enabling lip-reading or allowing for the full visibility of facial expressions, but this should be considered alongside the comfort and breathability of a face covering that contains plastic, which may mean that the face covering is less breathable than layers of cloth.

Face visors or shields can be worn by those exempt from wearing a face covering but they are not an equivalent alternative in terms of source control of virus transmission. They may protect the wearer against droplet spread in specific circumstances but are unlikely to be effective in preventing the escape of smaller respiratory particles when used without an additional face covering. They should only be used after carrying out a risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately.

The use of face coverings may have a particular impact on those who rely on visual signals for communication. Those who communicate with or provide support to those who do, are exempt from any recommendation to wear face coverings in education and childcare settings.

FE providers, as employers, have a duty to comply with the Equality Act 2010 which includes making reasonable adjustments for disabled staff. They also have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students, to support them to access education successfully. No student should be denied education on the grounds that they are not wearing a face covering.

Adults and young people aged 11 and above attending out of college learning settings (out of college learning settings includes community learning operating in community premises such as community centres, youth clubs, public libraries, and places of worship) should there be a mandatory requirement to wear a face covering should follow the policy for education settings when they are in a private activity room or private classroom, or where the premises has been hired out for the sole use of the provision.

Stepping measures up and down

You should have outbreak management plans outlining how you would operate if there were an outbreak in your setting or local area. Given the detrimental impact that restrictions on education can have on students, any measures in settings should only ever be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of settings or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible.

Central government may offer local areas of particular concern an enhanced response package to help limit increases in transmission.

For most settings it will make sense to think about taking extra action if the number of positive cases substantially increases. Information on what circumstances might lead you to consider taking additional action, and the steps you should work through, can be found in the [contingency framework](#).

You should call the dedicated advice service who will escalate the issue to your local health protection team where necessary and advise if any additional action is required, such as implementing elements of your outbreak management plan. You can reach them by calling the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 and selecting option 1 for advice on the action to take in response to a positive case.

The [contingency framework](#) describes the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings. Local authorities, directors of public health (DsPH) and UKHSA health protection teams (HPTs) can recommend measures described in the contingency framework in part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

Mandatory certification

From 27 January, mandatory certification is no longer in place and so venues and events are not required by law to use the NHS COVID Pass as a

condition of entry, but some may do so voluntarily. Further information on this is available: Using your [NHS COVID Pass for travel abroad and at venues and settings in England](#).

You should not use the NHS COVID Pass as a condition of entry for education or related activities such as exams, teaching, extra-curricular activities or any other day-to-day activities that are part of education or training.

Control measures

You should:

1. Ensure good hygiene for everyone.
2. Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes.
3. Keep occupied spaces well ventilated.
4. Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.

1. Ensure good hygiene for everyone

Hand hygiene

Frequent and thorough hand cleaning should now be regular practice. You should continue to ensure that students clean their hands regularly. This can be done with soap and water or hand sanitiser.

Respiratory hygiene

The 'catch it, bin it, kill it' approach continues to be very important.

The [e-Bug COVID-19 website](#) contains free resources for you, including materials to encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

Most staff in providers will not require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work.

The guidance on [safe working in education, childcare and children's social care](#) provides more information on the use of PPE for COVID-19.

2. Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes using standard products such as detergents

You should put in place and maintain an appropriate cleaning schedule. This could include regular cleaning of areas and equipment (for example twice per day), with a particular focus on frequently touched surfaces.

UKHSA has published guidance on the [cleaning of non-healthcare settings](#).

3. Keep occupied spaces well ventilated

When your setting is in operation, it is important to ensure it is well ventilated and that a comfortable teaching environment is maintained.

You should identify any poorly ventilated spaces as part of your risk assessment, and take steps to improve fresh air flow in these areas, giving particular consideration to holding events where visitors are on site.

Mechanical ventilation is a system that uses fans to draw fresh air into rooms and/or extract the room air. Where mechanical ventilation systems exist, you should ensure that they are maintained in accordance with the manufacturers' recommendations.

These should be adjusted to increase the ventilation rate wherever possible and checked to confirm that normal operation meets current guidance and that only fresh outside air is circulated.

If possible, systems should be adjusted to full fresh air or, if this is not possible, then systems should be operated as normal as long as they are within a single room and supplemented by an outdoor air supply.

Opening external windows can improve natural ventilation, and in addition, opening internal doors can also assist with creating a throughput of air. If necessary external opening doors may also be used (if they are not fire doors and where safe to do so).

You should balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature.

The [Health and Safety Executive guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak](#) and [CIBSE COVID-19 advice](#) provides more information.

CO2 monitors are being provided to state-funded education settings, so staff can quickly identify where ventilation needs to be improved.

4. Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19

When an individual develops COVID-19 symptoms or has a positive test

Students, staff and other adults should follow public health advice on [when to self isolate](#). They should not come into the setting if they have [symptoms](#) or other reasons requiring them to stay at home due to the risk of them passing on COVID-19 (for example, they are required to quarantine).

If anyone in your setting develops COVID-19 symptoms, however mild, you should send them home and they should follow public health advice.

If a student in a residential setting shows symptoms, they should initially self-isolate in their residential setting household, so that their usual support can continue, others may benefit from self-isolating in their family home.

For everyone with symptoms, they should avoid using public transport and, wherever possible, be collected by a member of their family or household.

In non-residential settings, if a student displays COVID-19 symptoms, or has a positive test, while at their setting they should avoid using public transport and, wherever possible, be collected by a member of their family or household.

Alternatively, if safe, they should walk, ride, cycle or drive wherever possible. If driving they should try to be the only person in the vehicle, but can share a car with their household if necessary. They should open windows, wear a face covering and sit far away from others if sharing a car. They should not use public transport or a taxi or private hire vehicle to return home.

In exceptional circumstances alternative arrangements may need to be organised by the setting. The local authority may be able to help source a suitable vehicle which would provide appropriate protection for the driver, who must be made aware that the individual has tested positive or is displaying symptoms.

If a student is awaiting collection they should be left in a room on their own if possible and safe to do so. A window should be opened for fresh air

ventilation if possible. Appropriate PPE should also be used if close contact is necessary. Further information on this can be found in [the use of PPE guidance](#). Any rooms they use should be cleaned after they have left.

The household (including any siblings) must follow UKHSA guidance - [Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection](#).

Students and staff should return to the setting as soon as isolation rules allow.

Asymptomatic testing

Testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within settings. That is why, whilst some measures are relaxed, others will remain, and if necessary, in response to the latest epidemiological data, we all need to be prepared to step measures up or down in future depending on local circumstances.

Staff and students should continue to test twice weekly at home, with lateral flow device (LFD) test kits, 3 to 4 days apart. Testing remains voluntary but is strongly encouraged.

FE providers, except ITPs/ACLPs, should also retain a small Asymptomatic Testing Site (ATS) on-site until further notice so they can offer testing to students who are unable to test themselves at home.

You should encourage parents and other visitors to take an LFD test at home before attending your setting.

Confirmatory polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests

You should follow the latest [government guidance on confirmatory PCR tests following a positive LFD test](#).

Other considerations

You should ensure that key contractors are aware of the setting's control measures and ways of working.

Those formerly considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable

Following expert clinical advice and the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, people previously considered to be particularly

vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), and high or higher-risk are not being advised to shield again. Young people who were previously identified as being in one of these groups, are advised to continue to follow the guidance contained in [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#).

Young people previously considered CEV should attend their setting and should follow the same [guidance](#) as the rest of the population. In some circumstances, young person may have received personal advice from their specialist or clinician on additional precautions to take and they should continue to follow that advice.

You should ensure that key contractors are aware of the setting's control measures and ways of working.

Welcoming students and staff back to the setting

In most cases, parents and carers will agree that a student with symptoms should not attend the setting, given the potential risk to others. If a parent or carer insists on a student attending your setting, you can take the decision to refuse the student if, in your reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other students and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Your decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

COVID-19 vaccination

More information on how to get a vaccine can be found on the [NHS website](#). Local areas may also work with partners to set up “pop up” temporary clinics at locations convenient for students to access. Students registered with a GP can book their appointment at a larger vaccination centre, a community pharmacy run site or at some GP run sites through the [National Booking Service](#) website if 18 or over or by phoning 119.

Individuals can request to book COVID-19 vaccination appointments as an unregistered patient through a local GP practice. You should encourage students to consult the [COVID-19 vaccination FAQs for students in Higher Education Institutions](#) and is also relevant for any student aged 18 and over. This has been published by NHS England and provides a range of important information.

Some employers are requiring staff to be vaccinated to work in their settings, and in some health and care settings this is a legal requirement. We therefore advise you to discuss this with employers to confirm what they will expect from placement students. Further information can be found on ACAS website [getting the COVID-19 vaccine for work and the COVID -19 vaccination guide for employers](#).

Site safety and estates

Site safety

Some FE courses, such as vocational training, healthcare-related courses and the performing arts may pose particular risks of aerosol, droplet and surface transmission and may therefore warrant increased consideration, for example, face coverings, ventilation or cleaning in accordance with guidance issued for the relevant [professional working arrangements](#).

Measures elsewhere

If your setting operates commercial training environments such as hairdressing, barbering and beauty salons, sports and fitness facilities or restaurants, external catering, they must comply with guidance in [working safely](#).

Where settings have kitchens on-site, they and any external catering contractors must comply with the [guidance in working safely](#).

Off-site provision and work placements

External work placements

It is important that you involve staff, students and the organisations who provide work placements to co-produce guidance, student charters or agreements, making clear the responsibilities for staying safe and protecting others. By involving others, the guidance is more likely to be adhered to. Where relevant, other outside bodies that may be affected (for example, suppliers, transport providers) may also be involved.

We are committed to ensuring that all young people undertaking a traineeship can spend time on a work placement with an employer. The work placement is fundamental to a traineeship, which is a work-focused route. We have given you further flexibilities to tailor traineeships during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes reducing the number of required work placement hours from 100 to 70 and extending the duration of the programme from 6 months to 12 months. The work placement can be delivered flexibly over the full programme duration.

Physical activity, sports and extra curricular activities

Activities for performing arts should be undertaken in line with the guidance on [working safely during COVID-19 in the performing arts](#).

You have the flexibility to decide how activities will be provided while following any control measures.

Refer to:

- [\(COVID-19\) Coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do](#) guidance on [grassroot sports for public and sport providers, safe provision and facilities](#), and guidance from [Sport England](#)
- advice from organisations such as the [Association for Physical Education](#) and the [Youth Sport Trust](#)
- guidance from Swim England on [returning to pools](#)

Education and training delivery

What we expect of FE providers

On-site delivery allows students of all ages to benefit from their education and training in full. This means we expect you to:

- fully deliver planned hours for students of all ages including those with SEND (with or without an EHC plan)
- ensure that students have the opportunity to spend a similar amount of time on-site every week as they did prior to COVID-19

Mode of delivery

During the COVID-19 pandemic, FE providers have made extensive use of remote and online learning to maintain delivery, and in doing so have significantly increased their capability to deliver online and utilise education technology and digital resources to support delivery.

While FE providers have been highly successful in delivering remote and online education during the pandemic, we know that it is not a full replacement for on-site education. Remote and online education, however well delivered, cannot replicate the building of relationships between students and teachers nor the close supervision and hands-on training vital to developing vocational competence. For these reasons we strongly expect on-site education to be the norm for the large majority of 16 to 19 study programme planned hours.

[Guidance on the use of remote and online learning with respect to study programme delivery in the 2021 to 2022 academic year](#) has been published.

Adult students have always been offered a wider variety of delivery models in comparison to 16 to 19 year olds. You should continue to judge the right balance between on-site and remote delivery for adult students in order to provide high-quality education and training.

Provision of remote learning to students unable to attend on-site for COVID-19 related reasons

For students unable to attend on-site for COVID-19 related reasons, for example, because they need to self-isolate, we expect you to provide remote education to minimise disruption to their learning.

While students are unable to attend on-site, you should use your best endeavours to deliver as much of students' planned hours as possible and meet the expectations set out below concerning participation, live teaching, feedback, assessment, attendance and engagement.

We recognise that for some students the full delivery of planned hours may not be possible, for example where a student is undertaking a course involving practical teaching and training which necessitates the use of specialist equipment and supervision or with respect to work experience and placements.

So that students (and parents of students aged 19 and below) know what to expect if they need to learn remotely, you should set out details of your remote education offer on your website.

Contingency planning

For individuals or groups of self-isolating students following local or national government guidance related to COVID-19, remote education plans should be in place.

You should continue to operate as normally as possible. In the event that restrictions in education are needed to help contain the spread of the virus, you may be asked to revise your delivery models for a short period of time. To help with this, we have published a [contingency framework](#), which outlines how you should operate in the event of any restrictions.

Any decision that there should be local restrictions in any education settings will be made by central government on a case-by-case basis.

Remote delivery expectations

In circumstances where you need to deliver remotely for COVID-19 related reasons, the following minimum expectations should be met.

Expectations on participation

Set clear expectations of students concerning their participation in the remote elements of their programme, so they know when and how they are expected to engage and demonstrate their learning.

Live teaching

As far as possible provide live online teaching. This is advised because Ofsted and many providers have found that learners generally prefer interactive 'live' online lessons and that it results in greater engagement. Alternatives to live lessons may include recorded lessons.

Feedback and assessment

Confirm with students the different ways in which they will receive individual assessment and feedback when learning remotely to support their progression. The nature and frequency of remote assessment and feedback should reflect the individual need and the courses they are enrolled on.

It should be at least:

- once every week for academic study programmes
- fortnightly if undertaking technical or applied general study programmes

Monitoring attendance

Have systems in place to:

- check, at least weekly, for persistent non-attendance or lack of engagement with remote education
- quickly agree ways in which attendance and participation can be improved

You should give particular consideration on how best to support vulnerable and disadvantaged students and students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We recognise that some students with SEND may not be

able to access remote education without support and expect FE providers to work with families to deliver an ambitious curriculum for their level of need.

You should have a named senior leader with overarching responsibility for the quality and delivery of remote education, who should ensure that provision meets the above expectations.

Support for students who are unable to access remote digital education

The [get help with technology](#) service is providing support with devices and connectivity for 16 to 19 year olds. This forms part of a £400 million investment to help children and young people continue their education at home and access online social care services. Connectivity grants will be available in the event of COVID-19 disruption to education. These will be to help young people in Further Education who do not otherwise have access to adequate internet connectivity at home.

Further detail on who is eligible and how to access support is available on the [get help with technology service](#).

You can also continue to use the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund to provide financial support to help students overcome specific financial barriers to participation so that they can remain in education. This may include the provision of devices and connectivity support. As set out in [16 to 19 Bursary Fund guide 2021 to 2022 academic year - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#), you should decide what support a student needs on the basis of individual assessment, in line with bursary fund rules.

For adults aged 19 and over we introduced a change to the [Adult Education Budget \(AEB\) funding rules](#) for the 2020 to 2021 academic year. This was to enable you to use learner support funds to purchase IT devices or internet access for disadvantaged students to help them meet technology costs, where these costs are a barrier to accessing or continuing in their training. This change has been continued in the 2021 to 2022 academic year. This flexibility is only for providers funded by ESFA. In areas where the AEB is devolved, please contact the relevant mayoral combined authority or the Greater London Authority concerning adult student support arrangements.

Support for high-quality remote and blended education

Get help with remote education service

[Get help with remote education](#) provides:

- guidance for teachers and leaders seeking help with delivering remote and blended education
- help to access technology to support remote education
- peer-to-peer training and guidance on how to use technology effectively
- links to practical tools, a good practice guide and provider-led webinars to support effective remote and blended delivery

EdTech demonstrator programme

You can [apply for support](#) from other schools and colleges who have shown they can use technology effectively and have the capacity to help other schools and colleges to do the same through the [national EdTech demonstrator programme](#).

Developing EdTech and online teaching skills

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) offers support for teachers to develop their online teaching skills.

For practitioners who are just starting out with the use of educational technology (EdTech) a good place to start is the [60-minute starter pack for EdTech training](#). It comprises of 12 free-to-access, bite-size training modules selected from the Enhance Digital Teaching Platform that will give an overview of the basics.

For the full suite of training modules, visit the [Enhance Digital Teaching Platform](#) to find materials on a wide range of topics including:

- motivating and engaging students in virtual learning environments
- adapting content quickly to deliver online
- different pedagogical approaches to online delivery

For teachers lacking confidence or skills in using the internet and devices, [ETF's essential digital skills professional development programme](#) can help teachers develop their digital skills. The online learning modules include topics on:

- using devices
- handling information
- staying safe online

ETF have also developed a guide for FE staff on [EdTech and essential digital skills training to support remote working](#). The guide identifies and provides links to EdTech and essential digital skills training modules on the Enhance Digital Teaching Platform as well as other useful resources which can contribute to developing the knowledge, skills and understanding required for teaching and learning online.

Supported by the college collaboration fund, colleges have worked together to produce resources to support the development of teachers' digital skills and confidence in delivering remote learning. These can be accessed via [resources: college collaboration fund](#).

The FutureLearn platform includes free courses to develop skills to effectively deliver remote learning. These include:

- [how to teach online](#)
- [blended learning essentials](#)
- [use of technology in evidence-based teaching](#)

Digital curriculum content and resources

[Jisc provides curriculum content](#) mapped against qualifications and national standards for 5 vocational subject areas:

- construction
- digital and IT
- education and childcare
- health and social care
- hairdressing

They also provide a wide range of [e-books for FE relating to vocational and academic subjects and qualifications](#).

The [Blended Learning Consortium](#) has FE-specific resources across a range of subjects and levels. There is a fee to access these resources.

WorldSkills UK has launched a [skills development hub](#) which provides free learning resources across a range of vocational areas for use with students and apprentices remotely and in the classroom.

Through the college collaboration fund, we have funded college partnerships to produce free, high-quality digital content and resources for the FE sector. These can be accessed via the get help with remote education service's [good teaching practice and resources](#): Further Education support and resources section.

Support from provider associations

Visit your provider association's website for resources and support on remote and blended learning:

- [Association of Colleges](#)
- [Sixth Form Colleges Association](#)
- [Association of Employment and Learning Providers](#)
- [Holex](#)
- [Natspec](#)

Transport

We encourage students and staff to continue to walk, cycle or drive wherever it is possible and safe to do so. Where students and staff use public transport, they should follow the [safer travel guidance for passengers](#).

Safe behaviour off-site

You should consider how to reinforce public health messaging to students and staff, particularly at the point where they are entering and leaving college and heading into the community each day.

People are more likely to follow guidance on how to behave if:

- they understand the reasons they are asked to take certain actions
- it is co-produced with the staff and students who will be affected by it

You should develop guidance to promote safe behaviour in the wider community with local community leaders as well as staff and students. You can encourage student organisations to lead in promoting COVID-19 safety.

International visits

International educational exchanges, study abroad or volunteering programmes

For students who may have plans for study or volunteering abroad that are organised by providers in England, for example placements receiving [Turing Scheme](#) funding from September, or those receiving Erasmus+ funding from projects successfully bid for under the 2014 to 2020 programme, you should refer to the guidance on [international travel](#) before booking and travelling.

You should not travel to countries or territories on the red list.

We expect that students and providers will comply with travel advice given by Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) that sets out COVID-19 and other risks from travel abroad.

Educational visits

We recommend that you consider carefully whether to go ahead with planned international educational visits at this time. This is because there is a risk of disruption to education resulting from the need to isolate and test on arrival back into the UK.

You should refer to the [Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office travel advice](#) and the [guidance on international travel](#) before booking and travelling.

Workforce

You are best placed to determine the workforce required to meet the needs of your students. The government is no longer advising people to work from home when they can.

Following expert clinical advice and the successful rollout of the COVID-19 vaccine programme, people previously considered to be particularly vulnerable, clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV), and high or higher-risk are not being advised to shield again. If staff were previously identified as being in one of these groups, they are advised to continue to follow the guidance contained in [Coronavirus: how to stay safe and help prevent the spread](#).

In some circumstances, staff may have received personal advice from their specialist or clinician on additional precautions to take and they should continue to follow that advice. Whilst individual risk assessments are not required, employers are expected to discuss any concerns that people previously considered CEV may have.

Employers will need to follow this specific [guidance for pregnant employees](#). [COVID-19 vaccination: a guide for women of childbearing age, pregnant or breastfeeding](#) contains further advice on vaccination. Your workplace risk assessment should consider any risks to female employees of childbearing age and, in particular, risks to new and expectant mothers. You should also consider the needs of pregnant students.

Employers should be able to explain the measures they have in place to keep staff safe at work. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published guidance on [protecting vulnerable workers](#), including advice for employers and employees on [how to talk about reducing risks in the workplace](#).

We welcome your support in encouraging vaccine take up and enabling staff who are eligible for a vaccination to attend booked vaccine appointments where possible even during term time.

Staff and students who are pregnant

You will need to follow the [specific guidance for pregnant employees](#).

Read more [guidance and advice on COVID-19 and pregnancy from the Royal College of Gynaecologists](#).

Supporting staff

All employers have a duty of care to their employees, and this extends to their mental health.

Because some staff may be particularly anxious about attending, you may need extra systems in place to support staff wellbeing. Read about the [extra mental health support for pupils and teachers](#).

Supporting vulnerable students

Vulnerable students are those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including students who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an EHC plan
- have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services) - this includes:
 - students on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services
 - adopted children
 - those at risk of becoming NEET
 - those living in temporary accommodation
 - those who are young carers
 - those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
 - care leavers
 - others at the provider and local authority's discretion, including students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health

In particular, young people with a social worker or EHC plans are expected to attend provision (subject to public health advice), because of their safeguarding and welfare needs.

If vulnerable students do not attend, you should:

- work together with the local authority and social worker (where applicable) to follow up with the parent or carer to explore the reason for absence and discuss their concerns
- work closely with other professionals, where appropriate, to support attendance
- notify the student's social worker, if they have one, particularly where the social worker (where applicable) agrees that the student's attendance would be appropriate

If the vulnerable student wishes to be absent from face-to-face education during local or national restrictions, they should let their setting know. The young person should not be included in the COVID-19 attendance monitoring

data as 'expected to attend'. Further guidance is available on [how to complete the educational setting status form](#).

Where you have had to close, you should inform the local authority to discuss alternative arrangements for vulnerable students and work towards reopening as soon as possible.

You should work collaboratively with other education providers and local partners to maximise opportunities for face-to-face provision for vulnerable students. This includes:

- the local authority
- social workers
- police
- youth services
- key workers

Transition in and out of FE

You should continue to work with schools and local authorities to support transitions. This includes sharing any relevant welfare and child protection information. [Keeping children safe in education](#) sets out responsibilities for sharing information.

Some young people might need additional mental health and wellbeing support. Use external support where necessary and possible. See the [mental health and wellbeing](#) section for more information.

You should assess where students are in their learning and agree on a plan to support catch up. This is supported through the [16 to 19 tuition fund](#). For looked-after children and care leavers, this may mean working with the virtual school head or personal adviser to review personal education and pathway plans.

Supporting students with SEND

Given the importance of therapists (for example speech and language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy) and other health professionals in supporting young people with SEND, all FE providers are reminded that specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for students with SEND should provide interventions as usual.

Many students will have found restrictions exceptionally difficult socially and emotionally. Speak to the student or their parents, to find out if any challenging behaviours or social or emotional challenges are a response to restrictions. If they are, you should offer additional support. Reasonable adjustments should be provided to support a disabled young person to access education successfully.

Where young people with EHC plans are not attending their education setting because they are following public health advice, multi-agency professionals should collaborate to agree how to deliver the provision set out in the EHC plan. This may include face-to-face visits to the home, or virtual support by means of video or telephone calls, or via email.

Safeguarding young people

Your staff should be particularly vigilant about new and additional safeguarding concerns. You should make staff and volunteers aware of what

they should do if they have any concerns about a student. It is important that they act immediately on any safeguarding concerns.

- check that the safeguarding and welfare information you hold on all students is accurate. Ask parents and carers to tell you about any changes in welfare, health and wellbeing. Continue to work with and support young people's social workers
- the local authority virtual school head for looked-after and previously looked-after children
- personal advisers for care leavers
- any other relevant safeguarding and welfare partners

You have a statutory duty with regards to 16 and 17 year olds to provide information to local authority services to enable them to track and maintain contact with these young people. This will help local authorities to identify those not participating so that they can provide those students with the support they need to reach their potential.

Continue following statutory guidance on inter-agency working, set out in [working together to safeguard children](#). You should also refer to [keeping children safe in education](#).

External resources that can support the safeguarding of young people include:

- [SafeCall](#), which offers support to victims of exploitation – young people can contact SafeCall directly or can be referred to SafeCall by professionals
- the [See, Hear, Respond service](#) provided by Barnardo's to help young people in England who are experiencing harm and increased adversity during lockdown
- a [protocol for teachers delivering live lessons online](#) and engaging in one to one activity with under 18s, developed by Kirklees College and the National Association for Managers of Student Services (NAMSS)

Mental health and wellbeing

Many students and staff members will be feeling uncertain and anxious at this time. It is important to support positive mental health and wellbeing, which is necessary for young people to engage in learning.

You should identify young people and members of staff who may need additional support and engage with them and their representatives to understand their needs and ensure they have appropriate mental health and wellbeing support in place. Vulnerable young people are particularly likely to need additional support with their mental health and wellbeing. The guidance on [mental health and behaviour in schools](#) might be helpful with this.

Work with local authorities and voluntary sector mental health organisations to ensure that support is in place. Contact your local authority to see if they have a list of services in your area that provide support for young people. In some cases support can be given over the phone for students self-isolating from specialist staff or support services.

NHS children and young people's mental health services may also be able to provide support remotely. Professionals involved with children and young people, including teachers, special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO) social workers, youth workers and educational psychologists should continue referring young people to their local NHS children and young people's mental health services where needed. Self-referral options are commonly available and many services offer single points of access. Young people or their parents or carers can also contact their GP or refer to NHS 111 online.

NHS trusts have also established 24-hour urgent mental health helplines in most parts of England for people of all ages. If you have urgent concerns about a young person, find your local helpline to discuss your concerns with a mental health professional. You should also ensure that students are aware of this service. Public Health England has published guidance on [supporting children and young people's mental health and wellbeing](#).

Wellbeing for Education Recovery is providing funding to local authorities so they can provide ongoing support and advice for schools and colleges that need it and helping them establish sustainable ways of working together and with longer term services. This builds on the [Wellbeing for Education Return](#) programme in 2020 to 2021, which provided free expert training, support and resources for staff. These resources remain available for education staff to supplement existing local offers. This includes a short, recorded webinar - [Every interaction matters](#).

Other resources include:

- [MindEd](#), which includes e-learning modules about young people's mental health
- the [Every Mind Matters](#) platform, which has specific advice for adults and young people on maintaining good mental wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic
- the Association of College's (AoC) [COVID-19 resource hub](#), which includes advice for students and staff
- the Education and Training Foundation's [mental health and emotional wellbeing advice](#) for FE staff
- Education Support's mental health and wellbeing support services for all education staff
- free apps available on the [NHS App Store](#) for mental health and wellbeing support
- the [Digital Wellbeing of Students guide from Jisc](#), which curates a number of resources and guides
- the [Samaritans' website](#) which provides guidance on how to prepare for and respond to a suspected suicide in FE colleges
- [resources to support student and staff mental health and wellbeing](#) produced by college partnerships funded through the college collaboration fund
- a new [college mental health self-evaluation tool \(C-MET\)](#) has been developed by Charlie Waller and the Association of Colleges (AoC)

Mental health is also covered in [keeping children safe in education](#) and these principles continue to apply.

Consider supporting students with their mental health and wellbeing through:

- remote one to one counselling
- encouraging young people to identify their own self-care strategies during this uncertain time, online resources can help with this
- completing welfare checks at the start of each lesson to ensure that all students are engaged and supported
- personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons focused on topics including mental health awareness, healthy living and online safety
- encouraging participation in sport, [AOC Sport](#) promotes and supports sports in further education

International students

If you have any international students, aged 18 or over, please follow the guidance [higher education providers: COVID-19](#). This applies to international students in FE too.

Unaccompanied minors travelling from a red list country

If you have any students who are under 18 and are travelling to study from a Red list country, please follow the guidance in [Quarantine arrangements for unaccompanied minors from red list countries joining a course of Higher Education in England](#). Having read through the guidance above and if you can offer arrangements of an equivalent standard for unaccompanied minors attending an FE setting, then contact your territorial lead to see if we can agree. If you can't or don't wish to deliver equivalent quarantine arrangements, your students should contact the managed quarantine services on +44 (0) 207 429 9732 to arrange to be taken there as there are rooms available for them with additional safeguarding.

Funding, assessment and accountability

We have issued the [16 to 19 funding regulations and funding rates and formula guidance](#) for 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022.

We provided extra funding for the academic year 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022 to:

- help mitigate the disruption to learning arising from COVID-19
- support students to catch up with missed learning

The funding is provided to support small group tuition for 16 to 19 students who have not achieved a grade 4 or 5 in English and/or maths or who have a grade 4 or above in English and/or maths, but are from an economically disadvantaged background and would need catch-up support. The small group tuition can be in English, maths, or other elements of technical or academic study programmes to help address gaps in knowledge required for 16 to 19 qualifications.

We have issued guidance on [how the funding should be used](#) and allocations. Carry over of unspent 2020 to 2021 funds into the 2021 to 2022 year is permitted subject to following [this guidance](#).

In addition to the previously announced extension of the 16 to 19 tuition fund for the 2021 to 2022 academic year, a further £222m is available to continue the 16 to 19 tuition fund for an additional two years from the 2022 to 2023 academic year, allowing access to one-to-one and small group catch up tuition. Young people will be able to catch up in subjects that will benefit them the most, including Maths, English and vocational courses. The 16 to 19 tuition fund continues to support students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and 19 to 24 year olds with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) through the provision of one to one and small group tuition. Providers may choose to use this funding to support eligible learners with SEND to catch up on vocational and academic skills, and skills and learning that are important for their preparation for adulthood, subject to them meeting the eligibility for the fund.

Providers of 16 to 19 education have the option of offering students in year 13 or equivalent the opportunity of repeating up to one more year if they have been particularly severely affected by the pandemic. Some students with education, health and care plans may meet the criteria to repeat a year. Students with EHCPs are already able to receive more time to complete and consolidate their learning where necessary and any decision to repeat a year

would have to be agreed by the local authority, as part of the EHCP review process.

Exam support service for the 2021 autumn exam series

The Department for Education (DfE) will provide an [exam support service](#) for the autumn exam series which will allow centres to claim for essential costs associated with running exams in the autumn, including additional venue space, invigilation, invigilator training and exam fees charged by awarding organisations. Centres supporting condition of funding students will be able to claim for costs relating to additional venue space and invigilation. Read the [DfE exam support service guidance](#).

Funding for 16 to 19 students

The [16 to 19 funding regulations](#) set out the principles that need to be met to count towards planned hours. 16 to 19 funding is allocated based on planned hours regardless of how those hours are delivered. If you are planning to combine time in the classroom or workshop with remote delivery, this will not affect the funding you receive.

T Levels

Allocations have been made to providers that will be delivering T Levels in the 2021 to 2022 academic year, based on planned T Level student numbers. We have published the approach for applying a tolerance if the number of students enrolled on T Levels is below the planned number.

Read more about the tolerance and [how T Levels are funded](#).

We will monitor this approach and communicate any revision for 2022 to 2023.

T Level industry placements

We are closely monitoring the situation regarding the continuing impact of COVID-19 on industry placements.

See the [industry placements delivery guidance](#) for information about delivering high-quality industry placements.

Free meals in further education

You should continue to support students who are eligible for free meals.

You should provide support even if students are studying remotely due to COVID-19.

Read further guidance on [free meals in further education funded institutions for 2021](#).

Funding claims and reconciliation

Information is available for education and skills training providers on [submitting funding claims](#) to ESFA.

Advanced learner loans

The Student Loans Company (SLC) will continue to make scheduled fee payments to all providers with an advanced learner loan facility.

Contact SLC if a student's circumstances change.

Adult education budget (AEB) funding (grant-funded providers)

Currently, approximately 60% of the [AEB is devolved](#) to 9 mayoral combined authorities (MCAs) and delegated to the Mayor of London.

These authorities are now responsible for:

- providing AEB-funded adult education for their residents
- allocating the AEB to providers
- considering any provider flexibilities in their areas

ESFA will continue to be responsible for the remaining AEB in non-devolved areas.

ITraineeships

As part of the [Plan for Jobs](#), the Chancellor announced a significant expansion of traineeships to help an increased number of young people to

prepare for and find work. The [traineeships framework for delivery](#) sets out these reforms.

Whilst these reforms enable providers to deliver a more flexible and tailored programme during the COVID-19 pandemic, training and assessment should happen remotely wherever possible during periods of local or national restrictions with work placements taking place in line with this guide.

Supported Internships and Access to Work

[Supported Internships](#) are structured study programmes for young people with an Education, Health and Care plan, based primarily at an employer. During periods of local or national restrictions, placements should happen remotely wherever possible. The young people can continue to attend COVID-secure settings for work placements where they, the learning provider and the employer all agree this is necessary.

[Access to Work](#) funds workplace support for young people who are completing a government-funded supported internship, where they need support or adaptations beyond the reasonable adjustments.

Contact the Access to Work helpline on 0800 121 7479 for more information.

Supported internships returners

Supported interns who were not able to meet the core aim of their internship in the 2020 to 2021 academic year may continue their internship into the 2021 to 2022 academic year.

Where necessary and appropriate, priority for accessing work placements in the 2021 to 2022 academic year should be given to supported interns who were enrolled on a supported internship in 2020 to 2021.

Recording returning supported internships in the school census and individualised learner record (ILR)

Record these supported internship students in the ILR or school census as completed at the end of the academic year 2020 to 2021. You must then set them up with a new programme covering the additional planned activity in the continuing year with start and planned end dates in the academic year 2021 to 2022. This will ensure that students continue to be funded in the unplanned

funding year. Students must be on their new programme for the minimum qualifying period to count as a funded student.

You must only use this recording flexibility for supported internships at the boundary of academic years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. Do not use it for any other students or academic years.

High needs funding

You should discuss any requirement for high needs funding with your local authority. Students who have high needs will occupy places funded at £6,000 per place (£10,000 per place in special schools) in the normal way. See the [high needs operational guide for 2021 to 2022](#), and the [high needs operational guide for 2022 to 2023](#) which is relevant for the current academic year as well as the forthcoming financial and academic years.

Awarding of vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) in 2021 to 2022

The approach for 2021 to 2022 builds on the framework and approach to assessment and awarding already in place.

The government's intention is that exams and assessments for vocational and technical qualifications, including T Levels and Functional Skills qualifications, will go ahead in 2021 to 2022.

Adaptations will continue to be permitted as in 2020 to 2021, where necessary and appropriate.

Provisions for teacher-assessed grades (TAGs) will be retained only to allow awarding organisations to manage students who are going through appeals where results are based on TAGs or who had been expecting a TAG that they have not received.

DfE and Ofqual ran a joint consultation on the [arrangements for assessing and awarding VTQs and other general qualifications in the academic year 2021 to 2022](#), the response was published on 6 August.

Awarding organisations will publish information on their websites detailing any adaptations for individual qualifications.

DfE and Ofqual have been working together on what the contingency arrangements should be for 2021 to 2022 should the public health situation

worsen leading to significant further disruption. Arrangements were published on 30 September. [Awarding qualifications in summer 2022 - GOV.UK](#).

Autumn series for VTQ students who received a teacher assessed grade (TAG) in 2020 to 2021

As many VTQs already have opportunities in the autumn and winter to take an assessment, these will be available to learners who want to use them to improve their grade.

If awarding organisations do not already offer assessment opportunities in the autumn or winter, they must decide whether or not to offer any additional assessment opportunities, based on an analysis of likely need and taking into account manageability for themselves and centres.

Awarding organisations will communicate their arrangements for individual qualifications on their websites.

Performance data

We will not publish results data based on exams and assessments from summer 2021 on school and college performance tables or publish qualification achievement rates.

See guidance on [school and college performance measures](#) and [qualification achievement rates](#) for more information.

Results from qualifications achieved in 2021 to 2022 will be published on school and college performance tables, using our normal suite of accountability measures, as far as that is possible. See guidance on [school and college accountability in 2021 to 2022](#) for more information.

Institution-level qualification achievement rates for post-16 providers will be published for Education and Training, Traineeships and Apprenticeships. These will be published through [Explore education statistics](#).

Inspection

Ofsted restarted its full programme of inspections at the start of September 2021 and will aim to inspect all providers within the timescales set out in the [Further education and skills inspection handbook](#).

Ofsted sets out in its handbook how it will reflect the COVID-19 context when making judgements.



Department
for Education

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