Coronavirus (COVID-19) | Guidance and support



Guidance

## Higher education: reopening buildings and campuses Updated 10 June 2020

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### the development of a vaccine.

Introduction

This document is designed to help providers of higher education in England to understand how to minimise risk during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak and provide services to students, keeping as many people as possible self-isolating and out of educational settings if they are symptomatic, practising good hand and respiratory hygiene and keeping 2 metres apart from those they do not live with. We hope it gives you freedom within a practical framework to think about what you need to do to

The higher education system in the United Kingdom has a world class reputation.

During the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak, and with great agility, it has adapted to

online teaching and learning, while universities have continued with some activities on

campus, especially in their contribution to the fight against coronavirus (COVID-19) and

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continue, or restart, operations during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. We understand how important it is that you can work as safely as possible and support the health and wellbeing of staff and students in the current public health emergency. We hope this guidance will help those in settings that are already operating as well as helping people think about how to prepare for the reopening or restarting of premises or activities. This will ensure that providers can demonstrate that campuses are once again 'open for business' for forthcoming academic years, while minimising the risk to staff and students. In the same way that you are making plans for academic year 2020/21, prospective and continuing students will be making important decisions about their academic future. In spite of ongoing uncertainty, it continues to be important that you provide students with the right information at the right time. This includes making prospective and current students aware of any potential for changes at the earliest opportunity. We expect providers to ensure continuing and prospective students receive the clear, accurate and timely information needed to make informed decisions. It is important that consumer protection law obligations continue to be met, including in relation to

information provision, terms and conditions, and complaint handling. We expect higher education providers to be open for academic year 2020/21, although there may be some differences from previous years, reflecting the measures that you are putting in place to ensure that you are minimising the risks to students and staff, in accordance with public health guidelines. This guidance may therefore be updated in future, depending on the scientific advice at that time. The Office for Students (OfS), the regulator in England, has committed to protecting the interests of students - both domestic and international - throughout the present crisis and has produced guidance on practical ways in which students can complete their studies whilst ensuring quality and standards are upheld. This **Guidance for** 

providers about quality and standards during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic is

clear that standards must be maintained. We are also working closely with the Quality

Assurance Agency for Higher Education to ensure that students continue to leave

university with qualifications that have real value, reflect their hard work and allow

The key message of the government to the public is clear: we all must stay alert in order to control the virus and save lives. Guidance on how to protect yourself and others can be found at Coronavirus (COVID 19). The government's strategy for recovering from coronavirus (COVID-19) is available at <u>The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy</u>. This strategy sets out a cautious roadmap to easing existing measures in a measured way that minimises the risk, subject to successfully controlling the virus and being able to monitor and react to its spread.

How to use this guidance Higher education providers are autonomous institutions and we expect you to make your own judgements about provision based on the latest public health guidance. This guidance is intended to help you make decisions about how you can make your facilities

and other provision available in a way that minimises risks to all students - both

domestic and international - and staff, in line with the government roadmap and

We set out below the range of advice and guidance we expect you to be taking into

buildings, as long as that can be done in line with public health advice at the time.

consideration when making decisions on when and how to reopen your campuses and

Each HE provider will need to translate this into the specific actions you need to take, depending on the nature of your business, including the size and type of business, and how it is organised and operated. We expect all providers to set out clearly what provisions you have made to ensure that

students and staff can return confident that steps have been taken to reduce the risks

decide which actions to take, you should carry out an appropriate coronavirus (COVID-

to their university experience, in accordance with government guidance. To help you

19) risk assessment, just as you would for other health and safety related hazards.

and campuses, we recognise that a great deal of work is currently being undertaken by providers on planning for reopening the higher education estate to staff and students. We encourage all institutions to share practice in order that there is a consistent approach to reopening that puts the health and safety of all students and staff at its heart and also recognises the importance of providing access to the high-quality provision that typifies our HE providers.

We expect that HE providers will take account of the need to avoid disadvantaging:

extremely vulnerable. For students in residential settings (halls of residence or

• international students who may have returned home: when reopening settings you

should pay particular attention to those international students who have returned

settings may be helpful

have nowhere to stay if needed on campus

• students or staff who may be shielding or are more likely to be at risk: there is general

guidance on shielding and protecting people defined on medical grounds as clinically

houses of multiple occupation), this guidance on isolation for residential educational

#### home and have been unable to return to the UK. They should not be disadvantaged when it comes to teaching provision, exams and other core elements of the learning experience • all students who may have been released from accommodation contracts and would

Higher education provision Reopening laboratories We are aware that universities are keen to resume research work quickly. We published

extremely vulnerable individuals. It points out that the Health and Safety Executive may

This guidance includes advice on carrying out a risk assessment to assess the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19) and the need to protect clinically vulnerable and clinically take action to improve control of workplace risks if needed, e.g. through the issue of enforcement notices to help secure improvements.

It would be for HE providers to assess the risk of opening other buildings and to

implement suitable precautions. It may be appropriate to consider reopening low-

density buildings first, for example computer laboratories, as a phased way of extending

access to the campus while safeguarding the needs of staff and students. Depending

on the nature of facilities, the guidance on Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-

Libraries are currently required by law to cease their business during the emergency

period (regulation 5(1) of the Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England)

#### Regulations 2020). However, they are allowed to provide services for orders made via website or on-line communications, telephones and text messaging, and post. You might therefore consider how to make library services available in line with those

19) provides examples appropriate to HE.

Reopening other buildings

In order to determine what level of attendance is appropriate in HE settings and in conducting open days, outreach activity, and the assessment of prospective students on campus, particularly in the forthcoming academic year, you should conduct risk assessments in order to understand: • the number of learners and staff likely to be included in a learning space and whether they can be accommodated as safely as possible

students will be eligible for testing if they develop symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19), as will members of their households if they become symptomatic. A negative test will enable staff and students to get back to their education. If they test positive, you will need to take measures to protect other students and members of staff. New workplace guidance on the test and trace programme will be relevant to providers.

We recognise that, for many courses, online teaching and learning is working effectively

and has a high degree of learner engagement (while it will also benefit those who are

not able to physically attend, for example those with family members who are

- training for elite sport will be of relevance. In considering allowing people back onto campus, you should take account of public health guidance on staying safe outside one's home and in public spaces. The public health guidance is to avoid crowds and maintain safe social distancing. Providers will find relevant guidance at: Staying safe outside your home Staying alert and safe (social distancing)
- the guidance for passengers and operators. The current advice is to avoid public transport where possible or to take precautions where social distancing is not possible: • Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers • Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer transport guidance for operators

International students and self-isolation

or visitors travelling to the UK, who will be required to self-isolate for 14 days and

they are safely travelling from their entry port to their accommodation (see further

advice on using transport safely above). While it is for institutions to decide how they

welcome them to the UK and your responsibilities should start as soon as a student

Similar to the advice provided for students - both domestic and international - who

isolated during the lockdown, you are responsible for ensuring students are safe and

well looked after during the 14 day self-isolation period. Existing guidance is available at

You should also consider the needs of students, including international students, who

In advance of the next academic year, you will want to prepare accommodation for

not able to go to family homes during lockdown. Where students have contracted

DfE has issued guidance for students and providers about how students may safely

need to be cleaned, following <u>guidance on cleaning non-healthcare settings</u>.

collect belongings left in student accommodation in a safe and managed way.

students. Some of this accommodation has been used for housing students who were

coronavirus (COVID-19) while in student accommodation, rooms and other facilities will

Guidance published on moving homes may also apply to students collecting belongings

to move to other accommodation and also students moving into accommodation in the

new academic year. The moving home guidance sets out specifically that "moving

home" is now a valid reason to leave home. Point 6 in this guidance "Moving your

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has published guidance on consumer

contracts, cancellation and refunds affected by coronavirus (COVID-19). This sets out

help businesses treat their customers fairly. Students may be entitled to refunds from

the CMA's view on how the law operates to help consumers understand their rights and

belongings" also sets out protocol for those moving home/ moving belongings.

support international students, we believe it is important that you make every effort to

complete a contact detail declaration from 8 June.

isolation for residential educational settings.

Institutions and students will need to have regard to guidance that relates to residents

Students will also need to have regard to pre-existing transport guidance to ensure that

campus. Providers may also arrange transport. You will therefore want to have regard to

may be suffering hardship or be without the ability to travel as a result of the outbreak.

# Staff and student wellbeing

by the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

health and wellbeing across HE.

student body. We have worked closely with the OfS to help clarify that providers can draw upon existing funding to provide hardship funds and support disadvantaged students impacted by coronavirus (COVID-19). You are able to use the funding, worth around £23

million per month for June and July, towards student hardship funds, including the

purchase of IT equipment, and mental health support, as well as to support your access

Legal responsibilities of providers in taking steps to reopen

<u>Is there anything wrong with this page?</u> Coronavirus (COVID-19) The UK has left the EU

people to progress.

guidance.

Principles for higher education provision Although some buildings and parts of campuses have physically closed in response to the outbreak, education has been ongoing. In considering action to reopen buildings

### guidance on Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19), including in laboratories and research facilities. The same considerations might apply to laboratory science teaching as well, if it can be done in a way that reduces risks to those using the facilities.

methods. Social distancing on campus

• the availability of staff, including contingency plans should individuals be shielding or self-isolating • supporting services required in increasing the number of individuals on-site (for example, catering) and how they can be provided as safely as possible • what measures in addition to those that have already been undertaken during the current lockdown will need to be in place to accommodate additional numbers

(including additional cleaning required of spaces and equipment following use)

Settings should implement a range of protective measures including increased

cleaning, reducing 'pinch points' (such as at the start and end of day), and utilising

outdoor space. You may find the <u>general guidance for safe workplaces</u>, particularly

managing entrance to, exit from and movement around buildings, as well as signage, a

useful resource. Any additional costs would be funded from existing budgets. Staff and

shielding). 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 more vulnerable learners, and enabling the provider as a whole to minimise transmission risk. Certain types of course, for example in the performing arts, have involved a degree of practical face-to-face teaching and assessment. Some providers have found alternative methods during the current period of lockdown. You might consider how to encourage new ways of delivering in-person teaching and assessment that adhere to guidelines on

social distancing, so that all students can receive a high-quality educational experience

Some providers will have programmes designed for "elite" athletes (for example, who

are on elite development pathways). In such cases, the guidance on returning to

in a way that protects both students and staff.

**Risk assessments** 

As part of the process of opening up buildings and campuses to staff and students, you should produce risk assessments for both working and communal environments, which will vary significantly based on the needs and circumstances of individual institutions. We encourage HE providers to share examples of best practice. **Transport** Transport will be important for students, and for many staff, who need to travel to the

# Accommodation

lands, if not before.

accommodation providers depending on the terms of their contract and their particular circumstances. If students need help, organisations such as Citizens Advice offer a free service, providing information and support.

We recognise that many students and staff are facing additional mental health

Student mental health and suicide prevention are priorities for this government.

Minister Donelan wrote to the OfS in March to highlight a need to focus on mental

students and providers during the outbreak. HE providers are autonomous bodies,

independent from government and have a responsibility to support students with

mental health conditions. It is for you to determine what welfare and counselling

We continue to work closely with the HE sector to promote good practice and support

services you need to provide to your students to offer that support. You are experts on

your own student population and, therefore, best placed to identify the needs of your

challenges due to the disruption to study and working practices and uncertainty caused

and participation plans. The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak will also put increased strain on the health and wellbeing of staff. The <u>guidance on safer workplaces</u> acknowledges the responsibilities that employers have for their staff. We welcome the agreement between trade unions

working in higher education and the Universities & Colleges Employers Association,

emerging from lockdown that will help ensure campuses are as safe as possible and

published as Appendix A to Universities UK's principles and considerations for

protect the health and wellbeing of staff, students and all visitors to campus.

for the public on mental health and wellbeing.

There may be a need for continuing support as campuses start to reopen and the

protective measures to keep people safe while away from home take on even greater

importance. There is guidance on mental health and wellbeing at <a href="COVID-19: guidance">COVID-19: guidance</a>

Providers already have duties of care towards staff and students, including under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and Equality Act 2010. Providers will need to continue to comply with those obligations.

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