Department for Education

Guidance

Student movement and plans for the end of term

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Students returning home

The Government is committed to ensuring that students that have been living away from home are able to return home at the end of term. If they choose to do so. HE providers should support students to ensure that this is possible, including providing a period of isolation, whilst mitigating the risk of transmission of the virus. It is essential that measures are put in place to ensure that students can do this safely as possible for students, staff and the communities that they return to.

Movement during the period of national restriction (5 November to 2 December 2020)

Everyone should follow the national restrictions in place from 5 November until 2 December 2020, meaning that students must stay in their current accommodation, except for specified purposes. This includes travel for education, including lectures and placements. Guidance for students, staff and parents, Oct 4 November, we published higher education: new national restrictions guidance on how the national restrictions affect the HE sector.

Movement after 2 December 2020

The national restrictions are scheduled to finish on 2 December and the government is committed to this date. In order to ensure that students can be home at the end of the winter break we must reduce any movement of students. The Government is asking that students return home once the national restrictions have ended on 2 December and remain at their term time address for 2 December. This should be in line with plans that universities put in place to their HE provider.

This includes students who have tested positive or been notified by the NHS test and trace system (see section on self-isolation).

To support all students being able to be home in the winter break, face to face teaching should be ceased and replaced with online teaching for the remainder of the period. Those who do not return home by 2 December will be advised to undertake a further period of restricted contact either before or after returning home to minimise risk of transmission.

We expect providers to stagger the end of face to face provision between 3-9 December inclusive. A provider can end face to face provision before 3 December if they wish. We expect higher education providers to work with students and their local authorities to ensure that students are able to stagger return journeys to their address between these dates. This will also alleviate pressures on public transport. Of course, higher education providers can continue online learning after 9 December.

We have selected this date as the cut-off date for in-person learning to ensure that the last date students are required on campus allows enough time for students to complete self-isolation before Christmas, should they need to undertake it before returning home. Students should be encouraged to undertake this period of self-isolation, if they have not already done so, before they return home. **We expect every university to follow this timeline to ensure that the last date students (including students that commute from home) to study on campus or campus can allow for any isolation period that may follow.**

Under the current national restrictions students will have completed a 4 week period of national restriction by 2 December, limiting the risk of their movement and interaction with others. This will have helped to limit the spread of the virus and reduce the number of contacts they have had. It is also important that students comply with the measures for the duration of the period of national restrictions and remain at their term time address between 3 December and the point of travel.

Anyone who remains at university after 9 December will run the risk of having to undertake a period of isolation of up to 14 days at university. If they subsequently need to travel home for the Christmas period, they will be someone who has not and would therefore be at risk of not being able to travel home for the end of term break. We therefore ask higher education providers to help minimise this message so that students can make an informed choice.

Students who are unable to access online learning or continue their studies at home should be supported to do so in alternative ways (see section on support for students).

Following the end of the national restrictions on 2 December students should continue to follow all national and local public health guidance while they remain at university and when they return home. If they choose to do so, they to protect loved ones and their communities they should keep social contact to a minimum and try to minimise risk of contracting the virus.

Students staying in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland should follow the guidance for students returning home from their devolved nations. Students in England, they should follow England's guidance for their home nations. We recommend that all students who have not completed the 4 week period of national restriction in their term time address should do so. This will include students in Wales, Scotland or Northern Ireland. Undertaken in Northern Ireland, undertake a period of at least 14 days of restricted contact (similar to the measures in place during the national restrictions) before or after returning home to minimise the risk working closely with the Devolved Administrations and further advice for students will be provided shortly.

In deciding where they want to undertake these measures, students should take into account the risks of transmission to their household members, particularly if any of their household are more vulnerable.

Following the end of term break, our top priority for January will be the welfare of students, staff and the communities around higher education providers. We will continue to work closely with the sector to ensure that students can return safely as possible, and will provide further guidance in due course, considering future developments and the relevant scientific advice.

Testing availability and end of term arrangements

In order to support the return home of students in December, we will be utilising lateral flow tests (LFD). LFDs are clinically validated rapid tests that does not require a laboratory for processing and can turnaround rapid results within an hour of the test taken.

We are issuing separate communications to each university regarding the testing programme. We will target testing based on a range of factors including local prevalence rates, whether testing is available already and the percentage of higher education in each area.

Testing would have to be completed by the end of term - 9 December - allowing students to undertake a period of self-isolation at university before returning home for Christmas.

This will provide additional assurance that where tests are negative, there is a reduced risk in students travelling home, and a reduced risk of transmission to their family and home community. Students will be encouraged to undertake an of our targeted higher education testing.

If students test negative, they should return home as soon as possible after receiving their result. If they test negative but are identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive, they can return home but must continue self-isolation at home for a period of 14 days, using masks in public where possible. If they have no other option than to use public transport they should ensure they follow the guidance for travel, including using masks, washing hands thoroughly and regularly during the journey. If a student tests positive they must self-isolate at university for a period of 10 days.

Students must follow the rules on movement and self-isolation after a test:

- if a LFD student tests positive for coronavirus (COVID-19) they are required by law to self-isolate for a period of 10 days
- if a LFD student has been identified as a close contact of someone who has tested positive but can access testing as the mass testing programme they should seek a test. If they test negative, they must still self-isolate for 14 days, because there is a risk they could develop the virus at a later date, the risk of transmission to their family. Students should avoid using public transport if they have no other option. They should strictly follow safer travel guidance for passengers. When travelling home students should wear masks, self-isolate in their current accommodation and not return home
- if a student tests negative and is not a close contact of someone who has tested positive, they can return home by any mode of transport and do not have to undertake any further periods of self-isolation. If, after travel, they subsequently develop symptoms of Covid-19 or are asked by the NHS Test & Trace that they are a close contact of a case, they should immediately self-isolate at their current address and get tested.

Students who are unable to self-isolate safely and practically at home, whilst continuing their studies, should be supported to do so at university (see section on specific support for students).

The LFD tests we are designing have high specificity which means there is a very low chance of false positive test results occurring. The test does not rely on the interpretation of a lab technician, it is a simple test that anyone can basis - those who are most infectious. As the test is easy to administer and does not require a laboratory, repeat tests can be carried out. The benefit will be the ability to identify significant number of people without symptoms who are infectious who will then be asked to self-isolate thereby reducing the transmission of the virus.

LFD tests will not be available in all locations. Students that do not have access to a test should be encouraged to undertake a period of restricted contact at home, either in the "student travel window" between 24 December if not symptomatic, or after isolating if they have been advised to do so by NHS Test and Trace.

University plans for returning home

Universities should ensure they have plans for how they support students to return home safely, including providing a period of isolation before departure and moving teaching online early so students can finish their studies from home. They should also communicate safer travel guidance to students, ensuring they understand how to stay safe while travelling (see transport section).

Moving online

As part of this plan, HE providers should plan to have moved all teaching online by 9 December at the very latest. We expect providers to stagger the end of face to face provision between 3-9 December inclusive. We expect most universities in the same city region if possible). A provider can end face to face provision before 3 December if they wish. This should be undertaken by all providers, with exceptions only for healthcare students on placements (see outlined below.

HE providers should not restart any social and extra-curricular activities when the period of national restrictions ends on 2 December and should work with their students union to ensure that they are able to support students to socialise extensively prior to the winter break.

The government has powers under the Coronavirus Act 2020 to direct HE providers, including to have legal effect steps in connection with the provision of education if necessary and proportionate to do so, and will consider the appropriate use of these powers if it becomes necessary.

Healthcare students on placements

Healthcare students who are on placements are considered essential workers and should therefore remain in their placements until the end of term. They can then travel home for the holidays. Following the public health guidance and as essential workers they should be able to undertake their placements and students on placements will already have access to testing.

Health Education England will provide guidance separately on exactly what courses fall within this category are eligible for this exemption.

Transport

Universities should make plans to ensure that their students can cease safely to return home by public transport or private vehicle. These plans should include staggered end of term dates for courses or cohorts, ensuring students are able to travel safely by public transport, taxi and coordination with local universities in the area.

Universities should liaise with their local transport providers (train, bus and coach operating companies) to ensure they have sufficient visibility of the university's plans. Open consultation will help operators plan their timetables.

If students are travelling home, they should follow the Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers. Universities should encourage students travel guidance to all students, including how to help control coronavirus by:

- wearing a face covering unless exempt
- keeping their distance from people from other households when they travel, including on public transport
- washing or sanitising their hands regularly
- avoiding the busiest routes, as well as busy times (the rush hour)
- encouraging the NHS COVID app, before they travel, if possible, and checking in where they use official NHS COVID-19 QR code posters

Universities should remind students travelling home by public transport that, in line with the Coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers, they should book ahead wherever possible.

Universities should also remind students they should try to avoid car sharing with anyone outside their household or support bubble and follow the safer travel guidance for passengers to reduce the risk of transmission where this is not possible.

For students identified as close contacts and who have tested negative, and have chosen to return home before undertaking 14 days of self-isolation, universities should advise them that they should travel straight home to begin their period of self-isolation and should not stop to socialise with friends or visit any public transport facilities or other locations. This will minimise risk of adverse social distancing measures, wear a face covering and wash hands thoroughly and regularly during the journey. They should follow safer travel guidance for passengers.

Specific support for students

Providers should ensure that students are supported to self-isolate where they need, including in university accommodation if needed. This includes if students are self-isolating beyond the end of term. Universities UK have published a checklist to support students who are required to self-isolate.

Where students remain in their university accommodation over the winter break, HE providers should continue to make sure they are well looked after. This should include ensuring that students can still access welfare and support during this period, including counselling services, extended opening, and international students who will require access to welfare and mental health support and assistance over the winter holiday periods. This will be particularly difficult year especially for students and we ask that special plans are put in place to ensure they can enjoy a close or more or less normal Christmas.

For information and guidance on sponsor and care arrangements for higher education international students under the age of 18 in the UK, see the arrangements for children' section of Home Office sponsor guidance.

Higher education students considering overseas travel for non-education purposes during period of national restrictions

If a student wishes to leave their home/accommodation to travel overseas during the period of national restrictions, they should only do so if in accordance with the Government's coronavirus guidance. It is not recommended to leave home to travel in some circumstances, such as receiving medical or mental care. Examples of what constitutes a "reasonable excuse" for leaving home can be found in the consultation (requirement to stay at home). Exit.

Students planning to travel should adhere to Public Health England advice while England to ensure they are travelling safely. Students should not travel if they have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or are part of a household group which is self-isolating.

If students do travel overseas, they should consider the restrictions on entry to the country in question, such as whether they would need to undertake a period of self-isolation in that country, and whether they would need to self-isolate when they return.

Returning students travelling from countries not on the exemption travel corridor list will need to undertake a period of self-isolation in their accommodation for 14 days.

Students should be aware that travel advice may change while they are overseas. Students should regularly check relevant GOV.UK guidance pages for updates.

Students travelling to the EU should also consult relevant guidance regarding the UK and EU transition.

Higher education students considering overseas travel for the winter break

Students planning to return home at the end of the period of national restrictions (after 2 December) for the winter break should adhere to Public Health England advice while travelling to ensure they are travelling safely. Students should not travel if they have symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or are part of a household group which is self-isolating.

If students do travel overseas, they should consider the restrictions on entry to the country in question, such as whether they would need to undertake a period of self-isolation in that country, and whether they would need to self-isolate when they return.

International students should also consider their ability to access course materials overseas if they choose to travel home - for example, confirming arrangements for online learning with their higher education provider before they travel, if needed.

Students should be aware that travel advice may change while they are overseas, and are advised to regularly check all relevant GOV.UK guidance pages for updates.

Students travelling to the EU should also consult relevant guidance regarding the UK and EU transition.

Higher education students considering travelling to the UK from abroad during the period of national restrictions (5 November to 2 December 2020)

Our duties as a port to international students arriving in the UK in the period. Before travelling, international students are advised to contact their current or future university to find out how they are adapting their teaching in light of the current COVID-19 context.

All international arrivals will be required to complete a passenger locator form on arrival, and passengers travelling from a country not on the exemption travel corridor list will need to self-isolate in their accommodation for fourteen days.

Students required to self-isolate upon arrival should only use public transport if they have no other option, and should follow safer travel guidance for passengers.

In England, those self-isolating can only leave their accommodation in limited circumstances, and should follow Government self-isolation guidance.

We are working with the higher education sector to ensure that all students are welcomed to the UK and are supported on arrival by their university. Universities UK has developed a checklist for providers to support students to self-isolate, and Universities UK has published guidance for international students. Further guidance on these measures is available at Entering the UK.

International students considering study in the UK should be aware that visa concessions allow for the ongoing provision of online learning for the remainder of the academic year 20-21. Many higher education providers are starting courses online. If you have any questions about starting your course you should contact your Higher Education Provider.

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