

GUIDANCE

The managed movement of students to in-person teaching and learning in January

Guidance for universities on students returning for the new term.

Part of: [Higher education: coronavirus](#)

First published: 7 December 2020

Last updated: 7 December 2020

Contents

[Overview](#)

[Staggered start](#)

[Asymptomatic testing](#)

[Lay low](#)

[Student travel and responsible behaviour](#)

Overview

The following actions are to be taken by Welsh Government and universities to mitigate the risks created for coronavirus transmission by the movement of higher education students between their home and term-time address at the start of next term.

Welsh Government is relying on the following three strands of activity to mitigate any risks of increased virus transmission caused by student travel:

- coordination of a staggered start between and within universities
- asymptomatic testing pilot at all universities
- communications and messaging regarding personal responsibility and risk management

Staggered start

The next term in Wales has a natural staggered start with universities having different start dates across the sector, across different courses and year groups.

However, a greater degree of staggering will enable lateral flow testing capacity to manage demand and to support contact tracing, as numbers of students with confirmed positive lateral flow tests or PCR tests can be managed over a period of 4 weeks.

We are asking students not to travel to their term time address until 11 January, unless absolutely necessary. The Welsh Government will prepare appropriate messages and communications.

We are asking universities not to start the majority of in-person learning until after 11 January. We recognise that it will be necessary for some courses to start back earlier especially where courses involve clinical placements or access to laboratories.

This is not a delay to the start of term, universities should plan to resume as planned using online learning and universities should communicate plans to resume in-person learning to their students. Due to needing to plan around testing, in-person learning may resume later than previously anticipated.

Universities should determine the priority dates for resuming in-person learning based on the needs of learners. This may mean that students on placements, on allied health care courses as well as course which require access to on-site facilities and with practical elements should return first.

Universities with large cohorts of commuting students should consider the needs of their students in planning dates to resume in-person learning. It may not be appropriate to stagger the start for these students in the same way as those who travelled for the holiday period.

In addition the needs of students who remained in term-time accommodation over the holiday period should be considered, including the provision of pastoral care and support services.

In making decisions, universities should also consider the needs of students who may need to return to term time accommodation earlier for other reasons, for example, students who do not have access to appropriate alternative accommodation or study space, those who need to return to work, or those needing to return for health reasons.

On campus facilities may remain open in a COVID-secure way to allow for necessary access to educational services such as libraries, study spaces or laboratories for example.

Universities should use formal impact assessment processes to ensure the priority for phasing resumption of blended learning does not disadvantage those with protected characteristics. Effective impact assessment should provide assurance that students' learning and living needs are appropriately considered and, in turn, inform decisions on moving forward with blended learning delivery of courses.

Universities must ensure that they continue to follow guidance on COVID-secure campuses.

Asymptomatic testing

We are asking universities to continue to offer mass asymptomatic testing to support the return of students at the start of term.

Universities should prepare to be able to offer testing to all students and staff.

However, universities may need to prioritise testing to manage flows of students and to support the courses they identify as needing to resume in-person activity first.

Every student moving to term time accommodation should be able to access tests as a priority. However, any student who remained at a term time address or who is a commuting student should also be able to access lateral flow testing.

Universities should offer 2 asymptomatic tests 3 days apart.

Lay low

Students participating in testing, should lay low for the three days between tests. A short voluntary period of laying low in between tests means taking extra care to minimise social contacts and only go out for essential purposes such as medical care or to exercise alone or with someone in your household outdoors.

Students who do not participate in testing, should be asked to complete a 14 day period of laying low. This means taking extra care to minimise social contacts and only go out for essential purposes such as medical care or to exercise alone or with someone in your household outdoors.

This is a behavioural element and we recognise this will require voluntary participation from students. We are asking universities to encourage students to participate in testing and laying low before they return to in-person teaching or access other in-person campus services.

The Welsh Government will support universities with campaign assets and messaging for universities to distribute within their universities and to share on their social media channels.

Testing capacity would need to be increased in the majority of institutions, for a short period, to enable this level of mass testing. The period of time needed to test the majority of students will depend on the volume of tests required and the number of students who move to a term-time address.

To facilitate this level of testing universities should stagger start dates for in-person teaching. We would expect a phased return to take place over a short period of time. This will depend on the number of students and the availability of tests. Universities should complete applications for supplies by 8 December to ensure deliveries in January. If the university intends to offer testing to students and staff then the order should reflect this.

Testing on return will help break the chains of transmission by identifying infectious individuals early before they can spread to close contacts as it is likely that there will be asymptomatic cases in student population as students return to term time accommodation after a period of mixing with family and friends over the holiday period. Longer term, testing on arrival will hopefully mitigate the risk of large numbers of students needing to self-isolate as a close contacts and will provide the necessary public assurance that HE students can return to university towns and cities safely.

A short period of laying low in-between tests is aimed at reducing mixing between student households at the start of term. Recommending a 14 day lay low period if not accessing a lateral flow asymptomatic test is hoped to incentivise testing.

Student travel and responsible behaviour

Student travel is not necessarily associated with in-person teaching resuming on campus, with many students living in the private rented sector having access to their accommodation outside term dates.

The Welsh Government is asking students not to travel to term-time accommodation until 11 January unless absolutely necessary and to align travel with the start of in-person teaching.

Return to term time accommodation may be necessary to resume work or study, to volunteer or because students need to resume placements.

Students should be asked not to return to term time accommodation until their course resumes in-person teaching.

Students who choose to return to term time accommodation should be encouraged to act responsibly and to observe the national measures in place to keep Wales safe. This includes staying out of each other's homes, except in very limited circumstances, trying to limit how many different people you meet, maintaining social distancing and washing hands regularly. Students should be made aware that New Year's Eve parties with people they do not live with are, sadly, not possible this year.

Universities are able to provide testing from 4 January if appropriate. This will support students who may return before that, students who remain on site over the holiday period, including international students and those who commute in on a daily basis.

On campus facilities may remain open and universities should ensure these are COVID-secure and follow the appropriate industry guidelines and any restrictions such as for gyms and catering outlets.

First published

7 December 2020

Part of

[Higher education:](#)

[coronavirus](#)

Last updated

7 December 2020

[Report anything wrong with this page](#)

[Share this page](#)

[Back to top](#)

[Contact us](#) [Accessibility](#) [Copyright statement](#) [Cookies](#) [Privacy](#) [Terms and conditions](#)

[Alternative languages](#)