



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

GUIDANCE

Guidance for safe operation of post-16 learning (version 3.0)

A guidance document setting out the arrangements for the safe delivery of learning in the further education, work-based learning and adult learning sectors.

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Introduction

This guidance sets out requirements for face-to-face learning in further education institutions and work-based learning centres, for the period from 22 February 2021. It outlines the groups of learners who can attend, and control measures that must be in place to help control the transmission of COVID-19. It supersedes earlier safe operation guidance for the post-16 sector for the autumn term 2020 to 2021.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with all **other Welsh Government guidance in relation to the current alert level that is in place for Wales**.

In this guidance the term 'phase 1' is used to denote the limited return to face-to-face learning for some vocational learners, from 22 February 2021. In addition, arrangements for safe attendance of vulnerable learners and those taking assessments or examinations are included; these groups of learners have been eligible to attend their college or learning centre throughout **level 4 restrictions**.

Work is ongoing, in consultation with post-16 learning providers and the Joint Trade Unions, to plan for the return of other groups of learners when infection

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rates drop sufficiently, subject to public health advice. Further iterations of this guidance will be issued as these arrangements are agreed.

Scope of face-to-face learning during phase 1 from 22 February 2021

The following groups of learners are permitted to attend colleges or learning centres during phase 1.

Vulnerable learners (already permitted to attend before half term)

It is the responsibility of the provider to identify which learners should attend due to their vulnerability, and to make the necessary arrangements for those learners to attend provider premises. In identifying vulnerable learners, the provider should take account of the following principle:

- all children and young people must be safe, seen, heard, nurtured and developing

The decision of identifying vulnerable learners should:

- consider the impact of any restrictions on the learner's emotional, mental and physical health, and educational development
- consider how risks of not attending face-to-face learning could be mitigated through the most appropriate support for the learner
- consider those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
- take account of the views of the learner, so their needs can be understood and delivered through the most appropriate support
- learners should be prioritised for support according to decisions about their risks and benefits, and these risks should be regularly reviewed and monitored on a multi-agency basis

Learning providers should ensure that they have arrangements in place to

monitor attendance by vulnerable learners, and that teaching and support staff know who is allowed to attend for this reason (with appropriate consideration for the learner's privacy). Attendance can be for learning support or wellbeing check-ins as well as formal learning delivery.

Learners undertaking assessments or examinations (already permitted to attend before half term)

Wherever possible, assessments or examinations should be rescheduled or undertaken remotely. Where this is not possible, and where the learner is unable to progress in their course without the assessment, they can attend their college or learning centre to do so. This includes:

- Learners taking examinations that could be completed remotely, but who have caring responsibilities or other home circumstances which mean that they need to attend their college or learning centre in order to have the right conditions to perform well.
- Work-based learning practitioners visiting workplaces to undertake assessments which cannot be completed remotely.
- Health and safety tests in designated centres, and other similar examinations or tests which cannot be completed remotely and which are essential for work.

Learners who are already scheduled to attend their college or learning centre for an assessment may undertake learning activities during the same day, in order to prepare them or refresh knowledge or skills prior to their assessment. This learning must be delivered in a socially distanced way, following the guidance set out in this document. Learning providers must put arrangements in place to ensure that learners comply with social distancing requirements, and maintain social distancing and wearing face coverings where applicable during breaks or in communal areas.

Vocational learners, including apprentices, undertaking 'licence to practice' or other qualifications that cannot be delivered online

In all cases where it is possible for learners to continue their learning online, at this stage they should do so. Where this is not possible, because learners need access to specialist facilities and equipment in order to develop practical skills, learners can return to their college or learning centre in phase 1. Learning must be delivered on a socially distanced basis and with face coverings in indoor public areas and where two metre distancing cannot be maintained, and providers should manage their facilities and timetables to control numbers on-site to facilitate distancing.

In phase 1, providers must not:

- deliver face-to-face learning for any groups other than those defined above
- open facilities such as training restaurants or salons to the public
- arrange work experience or new work placements for learners
- deliver face-to-face extracurricular activities

PGCE and teaching qualification students who are undertaking teaching practice may attend college to do so, subject to the requirements set out in this guidance around clinical vulnerability.

Planning for face-to-face learning

In preparing for the return of additional learners, providers must:

- Undertake and publish a full risk assessment and implement arrangements to manage health and safety risks, in order to **ensure that workplaces are COVID-secure** before learners and staff are asked to return (see guidance below on risk assessments) and refer to the **Health & Safety Executive's guidance**).
- Consult with staff, unions and stakeholders.
- Develop communication plans for staff, learners, parents/carers and

employers, including clear ways for them to ask questions and raise concerns.

- Consider how learning spaces can be organised to ensure social distancing of two metres between all learners and staff.
- Consider the requirement for wearing **face coverings** in indoor public areas and other areas where two metre distancing cannot be maintained.
- Consider the provision of hand sanitisers.
- Consider how learning areas can be further ventilated to ensure adequate ventilation.
- Clearly communicate expected behaviours to learners including **social distancing requirements**; face covering requirements, hygiene requirements such as regular and thorough hand-washing; what to do if they feel unwell; what to do if they have concerns or anxiety; and what would happen if they do not comply with requirements.
- Consider how social distancing and handwashing and respiratory hygiene requirements should be reflected in disciplinary policies and ensure that learners are made aware of any consequences of non-compliance with social distancing requirements.
- Consider travel to and from learning centres, referring to the Welsh Government's **guidance on travel** and **guidance on face coverings on public transport**; and **guidance on public use of face coverings**. Providers should consider whether additional buses or taxis should be provided to help minimise contact between learners while travelling.
- Determine cleaning and disinfection requirements and issues such as reconnection of water supplies prior to and after reopening, referring to the UK Government's **guidance on decontamination in non-healthcare settings** and the **Health & Safety Executive's guidance on legionella risks**.
- Consider requirements to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to learners and/or staff in line with the provider's risk assessments.
- Consider timetabling, including staggered opening hours and break times, including how social distancing will be maintained during break times.

Clinically vulnerable learners and staff

The Welsh Government's [workforce risk assessment tool](#) can be used by staff to undertake a self-assessment. There are also a number of models which can be used to support managers during discussions with their teams about an individual's personal risk factors when returning to, or remaining in, the workplace. The aim is to help enable good quality conversations between managers and colleagues about any personal circumstances which may increase their risk from coronavirus, and to agree any actions which need to be carried out. '[Talking with your workers about working safely during the coronavirus pandemic](#)' is guidance from the Health and Safety Executive on how employers may approach this conversation with staff.

If in doubt about whether an individual's health condition means they should not be attending their workplace or learning provider, staff, learners, parents and carers should take advice from their GP or hospital doctor. They may wish to discuss the risks of attending with their doctor and their provider before making a decision.

Extremely vulnerable or previously 'shielding' learners and staff

People who are extremely vulnerable to COVID-19, because they have particular existing health conditions, will have [received a letter from the Chief Medical Officer for Wales](#), advising them that they should no longer attend work or learning outside the home. This is particularly the case for those whose work requires them to be in regular or sustained contact with other people, or where individuals share a poorly ventilated workspace for long periods. Please refer to the '[Guidance on protecting people defined on medical grounds as clinically extremely vulnerable](#)'.

In phase 1, under no circumstances should either staff or learners in the "extremely clinically vulnerable" category attend their college or learning centre.

Living with an extremely vulnerable (formerly shielding)

person

If a learner or staff member lives in a household with someone who was previously shielding, they should closely adhere to the social distancing measures when they attend their college or learning centre, and the learner should be able to understand and follow those instructions. This may not be possible for learners without the capacity to adhere to the instructions on social distancing. In those instances, we do not expect those learners to attend and they should be supported to learn at home. This should, however, be considered in the light of [the most current advice around shielding](#).

Protective measures

Minimise contact between individuals wherever possible

In phase 1, face-to-face learning and assessments must be delivered on a socially distanced basis. That is, all learners and staff must stay two metres apart throughout the day, in workshops and classrooms as well as in communal areas in the college or learning centre. Mandating face coverings in indoor communal areas should be considered in addition to social distancing. The control measure of using contact groups for full time learners is not to be used during phase 1.

We recognise that there will be circumstances in which this is not possible; for example, when supporting learners with additional learning needs, showing a learner a practical technique, or where a member of staff needs to intervene for safety reasons. At these times, learners and staff must ensure that the time they spend within two metres of another person is as brief as possible, to minimise the risk of transmission and face coverings must be worn if people are required for these reasons to come within two metres of each other.

Risk assessments should consider how the use of any communal areas can be managed to help ensure adherence to control measures (for example, by organising rooms, offices, refectories and workspaces to help maintain social distancing, by mandating face coverings in communal areas). Areas which are

likely to encourage more informal or social mixing of learners and staff, such as common rooms and staff rooms, should not be used if they cannot be organised in this way.

Examinations

Arrival and departure of candidates

As candidates arrive before the scheduled start time of exams, you will need to ensure this is managed alongside the arrival of other students at the college or learning centre, in order to keep exam candidates separate from other students.

You should also ensure social distancing measures are followed for any candidates who arrive late for the exam.

You will need to ensure that there is a plan to manage candidates entering and leaving the examination room and site, particularly as exams may finish at different times. As part of this, you will need to take account any candidates who require additional time in exams.

Setup of the exam room

All candidates should be seated two metres apart from each other. These candidates can be seated in the same room but two metres distance should be maintained between candidates. Provided candidates remain two metres apart at all times, then this should not count as a contact for the purposes of test and trace.

There is no overall limit on the number of candidates who can sit in a room, provided desks are correctly spaced. The upper limit to the number of candidates who can take an exam in a room together is dictated by the desk spacing requirements.

As detailed elsewhere in this guidance, it is important to ensure good ventilation and maximise this wherever possible.

Invigilators may walk up and down aisles between desks, but there must also be points in the room where an invigilator can stand at least 2 metres from the nearest desks and can see all the candidates in the room. If an invigilator passes close to a desk but spends the majority of time elsewhere, for example at the front or outskirts of a room, that does not make them a contact.

Invigilators

Invigilators can move between different schools, colleges and learning centres. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain social distancing from other staff, and follow all other protocols for visitors including face coverings.

Invigilators should be fully briefed ahead of the exams about what the expectations are for them to minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff.

There is no requirement for invigilators to wear gloves when collecting exam scripts from candidates but they should wash their hands thoroughly and more frequently than usual and particularly after handling exam papers.

Maintaining distance between staff and candidates

Invigilators and other staff should stand alongside candidates when interacting with them rather than face to face. For prolonged encounters of over 15 minutes, for example when scribes, readers or other individuals are providing support to candidates, staff should maintain a two metre distance where possible, for example using separate rooms from other candidates to accommodate this. Where this is not possible, they should avoid close face to face contact and minimise any time spent within one metre of others.

These arrangements may not be possible when working with some candidates who have complex needs, in which case these candidates' educational support should be provided as normal during exams. For additional information, refer to the [guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners](#).

Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have COVID-19 symptoms, or who have someone in their household or extended household who does, do not attend their college, learning centre or work setting

Under no circumstances should learners or staff attend their college, learning centre or workplace if they:

- feel unwell and have any of the identified **COVID-19 symptoms**. If this is the case, they must **self-isolate** immediately and book a COVID-19 **test**
- have tested positive to COVID-19
- live in a household with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19, or has tested positive for COVID-19 (in which case they should be aware of the need to self-isolate immediately)
- have been **asked to self-isolate by the NHS Wales Test, Trace, Protect** service

Providers play an important role in supporting contact tracers to undertake their role in determining the contacts of a positive case. The overall aim is to safely minimise the number of contacts resulting from a positive case. It will not be a one size fits all approach and settings will need to determine how they can most effectively implement the guidance to reflect their local context and circumstances.

Providers should have a clear escalation policy and procedures in place if learners or staff begin to show symptoms of COVID-19 while at their college or centre. These need to be fully understood by staff, learners (where able) and parents and carers.

Surfaces that learners or staff with symptoms have come into contact with **should be carefully and thoroughly cleaned according to this guidance**.

Anyone displaying symptoms of COVID-19 should stay at home and self-isolate while also making arrangements to be tested. The Welsh Government's **self-isolation guidance** sets out the actions to be followed and the periods of

isolation required for those with possible or confirmed cases of COVID-19, and their household/extended household members, and this should be read carefully and adhered to.

Ensure adequate levels of ventilation

Providers should ensure adequate levels of ventilation. Where centralised or local mechanical ventilation is present, re-circulatory systems should be adjusted to full fresh air. If this is not possible systems should be operated as normal. Ventilation should commence ahead of the start of the day and continue after classes have finished. Where ventilation units have filters present enhanced precautions should be taken when changing filters. Ventilation systems should be checked or adjusted to ensure they do not automatically adjust ventilation levels due to differing occupancy levels. Providers can consult [HSE guidance on ventilation systems](#).

Where providers rely on natural ventilation including opening windows and doors to provide a supply of fresh air, this practice should continue to improve ventilation. It is however recognised that there will be a need to optimise the amount of fresh air entering a workshop or classroom whilst balancing this with thermal comfort (maintaining a reasonable temperature) and the risks associated with open windows. The Fire Safety Risk Assessment should always be reviewed before any internal doors are held open.

Windows and doors do not have to remain fully open to obtain the levels of fresh air required to provide good ventilation, they can be partially opened. Staff may need to be advised how to achieve the most appropriate ventilation in any setting. Additional ventilation can be achieved by ventilating classrooms more fully between classes and uses.

Whilst improving ventilation is a key control providers should continue to ensure that the wider controls of social distancing, hygiene and enhanced cleaning are implemented and maintained.

Ventilation in winter

Evidence indicates that the virus is spread primarily through larger droplets and smaller aerosols, which are expelled when we cough, sneeze, laugh, talk or breathe. Indoor transmission is therefore more common than outdoor transmission, as a result of increased exposure and decreased dispersion rates for droplets and aerosols.

Opening windows in the morning before people come into work or before classes start for at least five minutes and in the evening when everyone has gone home will allow air to circulate. If at all possible, open all windows for a few minutes in the working/college day to allow for cross ventilation – that is for stale air to flow out and fresh air to come in.

Air conditioning

Most air conditioning systems do not need adjustment, however where systems serve multiple buildings, or you are unsure, advice should be sought from your heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers.

For fully mechanical centralised air-conditioning systems, which both deliver and extract air from multiple rooms it is best practice to avoid recirculation of air. All centralised mechanical ventilation systems should have the facility to turn off recirculation and use only a fresh air supply.

For mechanical systems in individual classrooms, where recirculation modes enable higher rates of supply of fresh air to be provided to a space, for example by the prevention of cold draughts, then these devices should be allowed to operate.

Fans would recirculate the current air, so are not advised.

Ensure good hand and respiratory hygiene

Washing hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and running water or hand

sanitiser is an effective way of minimising the risk of contracting COVID-19. Providers should, via messages, signage and notices, remind all learners of the need to clean their hands regularly, including when they arrive, when they return from breaks, when they change rooms and before and after eating. More [information on correct handwashing procedure is included in the social distancing guidance](#). Regular and thorough hand cleaning is going to be needed for the foreseeable future. Points to consider and implement include:

- whether the site has enough hand washing or hand sanitiser 'stations' available so that all learners and staff can clean their hands regularly
- supervision of the use of hand sanitiser given the risks around ingestion. Learners with complex needs should continue to be helped to clean their hands properly
- building these routines into the organisational culture, supported by behaviour expectations and helping ensure everyone understands the need to follow them

The 'catch it, bin it, kill it, wash your hands' approach continues to be very important, so providers must ensure that they have enough tissues and bins available to support learners and staff to follow this routine. As with hand cleaning, providers must ensure that learners with complex needs are helped to get this right, and all learners understand that this is now part of how your provider operates.

Some learners with complex needs may find it difficult to maintain good respiratory hygiene effectively. This should be considered in risk assessments in order to support these learners and the staff working with them, and is not, on its own, a reason to deny these learners face-to-face education.

Continue enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach

Providers should follow the latest [cleaning guidance](#) for non-healthcare settings. Points to consider and implement include:

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- putting in place a cleaning schedule that ensures cleaning is generally enhanced and includes:
 - more frequent cleaning of rooms/shared areas after they have been used by different groups
 - frequently touched surfaces being cleaned more often than normal
 - consideration of providing cleaning products and encouraging learners to clean their own desks before and after use
- using hand sanitiser before entering toilets and ensuring toilets are cleaned regularly. Learners must be encouraged to clean their hands thoroughly after using the toilet

Wear face coverings and/or, where necessary, appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)

It is important to remember that social/physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene (catching a cough or sneeze in a tissue or covering the mouth and nose with an elbow or sleeve then washing your hands) remain strongly evidenced to be the most effective ways to prevent the spread of coronavirus. There is therefore no need to use PPE when undertaking routine educational activities in colleges or centres. Exceptions are set out below.

Face coverings

Face coverings must be worn in all situations where two metre distancing cannot be consistently maintained (except when eating and drinking). As a minimum, these should be three-layer face coverings, as recommended by the World Health Organisation. Guidance on types of face covering, and how to use, wash and dispose of them safely as appropriate to their type is included in the [face coverings guidance](#).

Providers should be aware of and sensitive to legitimate exemptions, such as people who have disabilities or other complex needs which means that they cannot correctly use a face covering, or those who are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who is deaf or has any level of hearing loss. Providers should put systems in place, such as the [sunflower lanyard](#), to ensure that

exemptions can be signalled and staff know when and how to challenge those not using face coverings.

Suspected cases of COVID-19

- Gloves, aprons and a fluid-resistant surgical mask should be worn if someone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 and needs direct personal care.
- Eye protection should also be worn if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of splashing to the eyes such as from coughing, spitting, or vomiting.
- Gloves and aprons should be used when cleaning the areas where a person suspected of having COVID-19 has been.

Intimate care

- Gloves and aprons should continue to be used when providing intimate care to a learner. This can include personal, hands-on care such as washing, toileting, or first aid and certain clinical procedures such as assisted feeding.
- Fluid-resistant surgical masks and eye protection should also be worn if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of splashing to the eyes such as from coughing, spitting, or vomiting.
- Gloves, fluid repellent gowns, FFP3 masks and eye protection are indicated when undertaking aerosol generating care procedures such as suction.
- Gloves and aprons should be used when cleaning equipment or surfaces that might be contaminated with body fluids such as saliva or respiratory secretions.

Vocational learning

As set out above, providers should carry out risk assessments for vocational and work-based delivery and should use appropriate industry-standard PPE to help reduce the risk of infection. This will be necessary for “close contact” industries in particular, and for employed learners such as apprentices. Learners and staff must have training on the safe use of PPE as appropriate for their industry.

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Where learners are based in any workplace and if work-based learning practitioners visit, they must adhere to the rules on wearing face coverings in indoor public places as appropriate to the workplace.

The use of PPE by staff within providers should be based on a clear assessment of risk, taking into account needs of the individual learner. Following any risk assessment, where the need for PPE has been identified, it should be readily available and provided. Further information has been provided by the **Health and Safety Executive**. All staff should understand how to put on or remove PPE in the right order, safely dispose of the waste and use correct hand hygiene steps to reduce the risk of onward transmission of infection. In any case, hand washing should always be practiced before putting on and after removing PPE.

Comply with the Welsh Government's and NHS' Test, Trace, Protect strategy and under GDPR rules staff and parents, carers, guardians will need to be informed of the learning providers' obligations under the TTP strategy

Test, Trace, Protect works by:

- Testing those people who have coronavirus symptoms, asking them to isolate from family, friends and from their community, or requiring that they, their household and extended household self-isolate while they take a test and wait for the result. People with symptoms can apply for a test for themselves, or someone in their household with symptoms can apply for a test. This includes adults and children including the under 5s. Information and guidance for staff and how to apply for a test can be found **the Welsh Government website**.
- Tracing those people who have been in close contact with people that have tested positive for the virus, requiring them to take precautions through **self-isolation**. Further information on contact tracing and how it operates can be found **on the Welsh Government website**.
- Ensuring that if the symptoms are not due to coronavirus, individuals and

their contacts can get back to their normal routines as soon as possible.

- Providing advice and guidance, particularly if the person who has symptoms or their contacts are in the 'shielding group' or the **increased risk** group.

By reducing transmission in our communities, and quickly identifying and isolating those at risk of developing COVID-19 following their close contact with a positive individual (e.g. a known contact or family member) we will support the wider opening of schools, colleges and early years settings.

Providers should reinforce these messages and in particular, remind all those who show any of the virus symptoms to self-isolate immediately and book a test. Those living with someone showing symptoms should also self-isolate.

In the event of a positive test, a contact tracer will contact the person tested to help identify potential contacts. A second contact tracer will then get in touch with those contacts and advise them to self-isolate. These people will only be required to take a test if they develop symptoms.

Where staff have maintained social/physical distancing rules and adhered to hand washing and respiratory hygiene measures during work and where required have used personal protective equipment (PPE) or worked behind an appropriate screen or partition, it is unlikely that they would be regarded as part of a contact tracing exercise for these purposes. It is important, however, to remember that even where a provider has all of the appropriate controls in place, employees may not always remember incidences where they have failed to follow these controls.

A positive test on site does not require closure of that site. The process of testing and contact tracing is part of the 'new normal' and where providers follow these guidelines carefully, there is no cause for alarm. The latest information on contact tracing and testing in educational settings can be found on the **Welsh Government website** and should be read in conjunction with this section.

Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice

Building upon the Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales (2020), Public Health Wales has provided **specific advice** regarding the investigation and management of clusters and outbreaks of COVID-19 in educational settings. The advice outlines what steps should be taken to protect individuals and communities where outbreaks are occurring, as well as reducing spread to other communities.

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