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Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus

Department for Education

Guidance

Higher education: operational guidance

Updated 11 February 2021

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For guidance on the plans for the return of students for the spring term, read Students returning to higher education for spring term.

Introduction

This guidance builds on the previous guidance for reopening higher education (HE) campuses, and will be updated further in line with developing scientific evidence.

> This guidance applies nationally to England, but you should follow local public health guidance if restrictions are in place in your area, or national restrictions.

The higher education (HE) 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 HE providers have continued with some activities on campus, especially in their contribution to the fight against coronavirus (COVID-19) and the development of a vaccine.

This guidance is designed to help HE providers in England to understand how to minimise risk during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and to provide services to students to ensure they can have an enjoyable experience, while staying as safe as possible. We recognise that providers have been working to ensure their facilities are COVID-secure to allow teaching and learning to be carried out as safely as possible.

We hope this guidance gives you freedom within a practical framework to think about what you need to do to continue, or restart, operations during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. We understand how important it is that you can work as safely as possible and support the health and wellbeing of staff, students and the wider community in the current pandemic.

In the same way that you have made, and continue to make plans for academic year 2020 to 2021, 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 that continuing and prospective students receive the clear, accurate and timely information needed to make informed decisions. It is important that obligations under consumer protection law continue to be met, including in relation to information provision, terms and conditions, and complaints handling.

We expect HE providers to remain open for academic year 2020 to 2021, although there are 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.

The Office for Students (OfS), the HE regulator in England, has committed to protecting the interests of students - both domestic and international - throughout the present crisis, while ensuring quality and standards are upheld. The OfS has produced a series of guides to support the sector in planning for the 2021 to 2022 academic year. The Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) has also produced guidance to support the sector in planning for the 2020 to 2021 academic year and will develop additional resources to support students to make positive transitions into higher education. We will continue to work closely with the QAA to ensure that students continue to leave university with qualifications that have real value, reflect their hard work and allow people to progress.

How to use this guidance

As HE providers, you will make your own judgements about your provision, while following the latest public health guidance. However, providers should also work alongside local authorities and other agencies to ensure that you have the right plans in place to control and manage any local outbreaks. 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 government guidance.

We set out below the range of advice and guidance we expect you to be taking into consideration when making decisions on when and how to reopen your campuses and buildings, as long as that can be done in line with public health advice applicable at the time.

Each HE provider will need to translate this into the specific actions you need to take, depending on the demographic profile of your staff and student bodies, the nature of your institution, including the size and type of institution, and how the institution is organised and operated.

We expect all providers to set out clearly what steps you have taken to ensure that staff and students can return, with confidence that these have been taken to reduce risks in their working or student environment, in accordance with government guidance.

To help you decide which actions to take, you should carry out an appropriate coronavirus (COVID-19) risk assessment, just as you would for other health and safety related hazards. The Health and Safety Executive provides a helpful risk assessment template and examples. This will inform the risk mitigations to make all sites and sections of your institution COVID secure.

Outbreak plans

HE providers should have a plan in place that assumes there is likely to be an increase in the number of cases, or an outbreak associated with their setting, and they may have to adapt elements of their provision at very short notice.

Plans should cover a number of scenarios including:

- increased prevalence of infection locally that requires interventions on the whole community, including students and staff
- a large-scale outbreak that may impact on the activities of the university
- a localised outbreak in student accommodation
- a localised outbreak involving a particular student or staff member, faculty or department

Providers should work with the Director of Public Health in their local authority in order to control or manage any outbreak in an integrated fashion. HE providers should agree outbreak plans with their Directors of Public Health and share the plan with DfE.

If a provider is experiencing a rise in infection rates, or there is an increase in infection rates in the local community, a provider should work with their local Health Protection Teams and the Director of Public Health to determine the most effective measures that will help reduce transmission.

Higher education tiers of restriction

In certain instances, decision-making will be referred to the national level, and an area will be designated an area of intervention. The government's Local Action Committee command structure may recommend some level of restriction to HE provision in such areas. In such a situation, restrictions will be implemented in a phased manner - the key aim being to retain face-to-face provision where it is possible to do so safely.

These 'tiers of HE restriction' relating to teaching provision are outlined below.

Regardless of the tier of HE restriction currently in place for teaching provision, HE providers, students and staff should comply with guidance issued on wider local restrictions. National Institute for Health Protection (NIHP) will issue and regularly update guidance on how any additional restrictions imposed will apply to students moving between university and home.

Unless told otherwise, in the event of additional restrictions being imposed locally during term, students should remain in their current accommodation and not return to the family home, which would increase the risk of transmitting the infection.

Explanation of the HE tiers

HE tier 1 (default position)
HE providers are expected to provide blended learning with face-to-face tuition while following the provisions of this, and public health guidance (for example, the appropriate use of face coverings).

HE tier 2 (fallback position)
HE providers should move to an increased level of online learning where possible. Providers should prioritise the continuation of face-to-face provision based on their own risk assessment. We expect that, in the majority of cases, this will be for those courses where it is most beneficial (for example, clinical or practical learning and research).

HE tier 3 (where stricter measures are needed)
HE providers should increase the level of online learning to retain face-to-face provision for priority courses (for example, clinical and medical courses), and in as limited a number of situations as possible.

Students should follow government guidance published as part of any local restriction tiers, including where this says that students should remain in their current accommodation and not return to their family home or other residential accommodation to reduce the risk of transmitting the virus through travel. In these circumstances, providers should support students to do so by keeping services for students, such as university libraries and catering facilities, open.

HE tier 4 (last resort)
We expect the majority of provision to be online, with buildings open only for essential workers and students who are required to attend because in-person teaching is essential. This should include the continuation of essential research.

In the event of a possible outbreak on site, you should refer to the relevant Education Action Card that relates to managing possible outbreaks in education settings.

Principles for higher education provision

Although some buildings and parts of campuses have physically closed in response to the outbreak of coronavirus (COVID-19), the provision of HE continued. In considering action to reopen buildings and campuses, we recognise that a great deal of work has been, and continues to be, undertaken by providers on planning for reopening the HE estate to staff and students.

We encourage all providers to share best 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.

It is for an HE provider, as an autonomous institution, to identify and put in place appropriate plans, in line with this guidance and any other relevant government guidance, based on the individual circumstances of that provider.

In doing so, we expect that HE providers will give particular consideration to the legal responsibilities of providers in taking steps to reopen: providers already have duties of care towards staff, students and visitors, including under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 and the Equality Act 2010. Providers will need to continue to comply with those obligations.

Minimising the risk to students

As with other population groups, students are at greater risk of contracting the coronavirus (COVID-19) when mixing outside their regular controlled academic and social circles. While HE providers should communicate to students the importance of adopting safe behaviours generally, HE providers should also, where possible, support their students to socialise in COVID-secure environments (for example campus bars, Student Unions) and should identify safer social activities for students. You might do this in collaboration with your Student Union. We are aware of the planning already underway for Freshers' events to ensure that you provide COVID-secure entertainment activities in ways that comply with public health guidance.

Shielding and protecting people who are clinically extremely vulnerable from COVID-19

During the period of national lockdown, individuals who are clinically extremely vulnerable are advised to work from home and where this is not possible, they are advised not to go into work. Individuals in this group will have been identified through a letter from the NHS or from their GP and may have been advised to shield in the past. Staff should talk to their employers about how they will be supported, including to work from home where possible. You should continue to pay clinically extremely vulnerable staff on their usual terms. Those living with someone who is clinically extremely vulnerable can still attend work where home-working is not possible.

Staff who are pregnant

Pregnant women are considered 'clinically vulnerable' or in some cases 'clinically extremely vulnerable' to coronavirus (COVID-19) and therefore require special consideration as contained in government guides for different industries.

Employers should carry out a risk assessment to follow the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 (MHSW). This may involve obtaining advice from the occupational health department. See the workplace risk assessment guidance for healthcare workers and for vulnerable people working in other industries. Information contained in the RCOG/RCM guidance on coronavirus (COVID-19) in pregnancy should be used as the basis for a risk assessment.

Pregnant women of any gestation should not be required to continue working if this is not supported by the risk assessment.

Women who are 28 weeks pregnant and beyond, or are pregnant and have an underlying health condition that puts them at a greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19 at any gestation, should take a more precautionary approach. Employers should ensure pregnant women are able to adhere to any active national guidance on social distancing and/or advice for pregnant women considered to be clinically extremely vulnerable (this group may previously have been advised to shield).

Find out more from advice for pregnant employees.

Risk assessments

As an employer, you have a legal responsibility to protect workers and others from risk to their health and safety, including from the risks of COVID-19. You should complete a suitable and sufficient assessment of the risks of COVID-19 in the workplace and identify control measures to manage that risk. Employers have a duty to consult their employees on health and safety matters.

Reopening buildings and campuses

You should read Students returning to higher education for spring term for guidance on which students should be allowed to return to campus.

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 reduce social contact, maintain social distance, adopt good hand and respiratory hygiene measures, and self-isolate and get tested if you have symptoms. Current evidence suggests that these measures continue to be the right measures to take even with the new variants.

Providers will find relevant guidance at:

- staying safe outside your home
- staying alert and safe (social distancing)

It is the responsibility of HE providers to assess the risk of opening other buildings and to implement suitable precautions. Depending on the nature of facilities, the guidance on working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19) provides examples relevant to the HE sector.

Cleaning

You should introduce enhanced cleaning measures, including more frequent cleaning of rooms and shared areas that are used by different groups, and cleaning frequently touched surfaces, using standard cleaning products such as detergents. See the COVID-19: cleaning of non-healthcare settings guidance.

Ventilation

You should ensure that all indoor and covered areas have good ventilation in addition to other methods of risk reduction. This can help reduce the risk of spreading coronavirus (COVID-19) by aerosol transmission, so focus should be given to improving general ventilation. Poorly ventilated buildings are particularly conducive to virus spread. Where possible, poorly ventilated spaces should be adapted to improve ventilation or, if that is not possible, they should not be used as a teaching/learning location.

You should consider ways to maintain and increase the supply of fresh air, for example, by opening windows and doors (excluding fire doors). You may need to consider making provision for winter in those spaces which rely on the opening windows for ventilation. Also consider if you can improve the circulation of outdoor air and prevent pockets of stagnant air in occupied spaces. You can do this by using ceiling fans or desk fans for example, provided good and external ventilation is maintained. Air conditioning systems should rely on fresh rather than recycled air. You might consider whether some tuition in certain subjects can be conducted outside. Advice on this can be found in Health and Safety Executive guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak.

Social distancing on campus

You should consider how to reduce social contact and maintain social distance. This means keeping people 2 metres apart from those they do not live with, where possible. Where 2 metres is not viable, reducing the distance down to a minimum of 1 metre can be used but only if appropriate mitigation is in place. You should consider and set out the mitigations you will introduce in response to your risk assessment.

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 students and staff likely to be included in a learning space and how they can be accommodated as safely as possible
- the availability of staff, including contingency plans should individuals be 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 put in place during the pandemic, will need to be in place to accommodate additional numbers (including additional cleaning required of spaces and equipment following use)

Segmentation

Segmentation (such as the creation of small, sub-networks of students and staff) is one of the suite of possible measures to manage and mitigate risks, and to make it easier to identify and limit those who need to take action in the event of a case or outbreak.

Providers should understand the potential benefits of segmentation.

The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) has advised that the benefits of segmentation could be:

- reduction in the risk of transmission (smaller number of people to infect)
- easier to control (smaller number of known contacts)
- less disruptive (small number of people to quarantine or test)

Effective segmentation could reduce the potential size of outbreaks. Segmentation of student/staff populations (for example, by course, year group, accommodation, site and so on, and in teaching and accommodation situations) would support easier detection of linked cases and, if necessary, enable more targeted closure or quarantine. Use of segments may also mean that certain classes or student households could be quarantined instead of wider groups, minimising wider disruption.

However, SAGE recognises that there is no one model of segmentation that would apply equally across all providers. The SAGE report on principles for managing the transmission of coronavirus (COVID-19) has further examples.

Additional protective measures

Providers should identify and implement the range of protective measures required to comply with government guidance for safe workplaces, based on an assessment of the risks and requirements of each environment.

This should include (but is not limited to):

- enhanced cleaning measures, especially for frequently used areas, surfaces, touchpoints and washrooms
- increased availability of handwashing and hand sanitisation facilities where handwashing facilities are less readily available
- reducing congestion (such as at the start and end of day), including through considering measures such as changes to timetables to stagger arrival or departure times or reduce attendance on site
- utilising outdoor space
- managing entrance to, exit from and movement around buildings, as well as signage with such measures as one way entrances, exits and staircases - avoid use of lifts where possible

Some HE 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.

Any additional costs would be funded from existing budgets.

Face coverings

Face coverings should be worn as an additional risk mitigation measure by students, staff and visitors, where social distancing is difficult to maintain outside of teaching situations, such as in corridors and communal areas.

Face coverings should be worn by audiences for presentations, drama or musical performances, in line with government guidance for audiences of the performing arts.

Within teaching environments, HE providers should comply with the guidance on social distancing set out above. Where practical work requires close contact (for example, medicine, dentistry, nursing), use of face coverings or other protection should be in line with the relevant professional environment.

Where social distancing is difficult to maintain or good ventilation is difficult to provide, including workshops, laboratories, offices, libraries and teaching rooms, providers can adopt the use of face coverings as part of their wider COVID-secure measures, in addition to hand hygiene facilities and reduced access, provided the use of a face covering does not interfere with teaching and learning.

Face coverings are likely to be appropriate in many social settings, including any events hosted by student clubs and societies; their use should be in line with other relevant government guidance for similar settings.

Although it is recognised that transparent face coverings may assist communication in someone who relies on lip reading or facial expression to communicate, there is no clear evidence of their effectiveness in preventing aerosol transmission. Face visors and shields are not good alternatives to face coverings – they are designed as additional protection to prevent droplet transmission and not as a single barrier to aerosols.

Safe wearing of face coverings requires washing hands before and after touching them - including to remove or put them on - and the safe storage of them in individual, sealable plastic bags between use. Where a face covering becomes damp, it should not be worn and should be replaced carefully.

There may be further use of face coverings required within providers as part of agreed additional restrictions in response to an increase in risk levels locally.

Exemptions

In settings where face coverings are required in England there are some circumstances where people may not be able to wear a face covering. Universities and other HE providers should be mindful and respectful of such circumstances, noting that some people are less, or not, able to wear face coverings, and that the reasons for this may not be visible to others.

Individuals do not need to wear a face covering if they have a legitimate reason not to.

This includes:

- if someone has a physical or mental illness or impairment, or a disability, that means they cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering
- if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering would cause someone severe distress

Some students and staff may need to be able to lip-read, or see people's faces, in order to communicate (there are companies now making lip-reading friendly face coverings).

There is further advice on exemptions contained in the face coverings guidance.

Social contacts

To prevent the spread of the virus, there are legal limits on the number of people that someone can spend time with in a group at any one time.

These limits do not apply to:

- gatherings for educational or work purposes when reasonably necessary
- meetings of a single household group
- meeting your support bubble or childcare bubble where necessary, but only if you are legally permitted to form one

Find out more about National lockdown: Stay at home guidance.

The government has introduced a new £800 fine for those attending house parties, including in halls of residence, which will double for each repeat offence to a maximum level of £6,400. These fines will apply to those who attend illegal gatherings of more than 15 people from outside their household. Providers should ensure that students are aware of their designated 'household', particularly if they live within large scale student accommodation.

International students and self-isolation

Providers and students will need to have regard to guidance on travelling to the UK. To keep the rate of transmission in the UK as low as possible, all international arrivals (both international as well as domestic students) will be required to complete a passenger locator form on arrival in the UK. Students travelling from countries not on our exemption list will need to self-isolate in their accommodation for 10 days. During this time there will need to be systematic arrangements for the provision of food and drink to avoid the necessity of them leaving their room or accommodation.

Students will need to have regard to transport guidance to ensure that they are safely travelling from their entry port to their accommodation (see Transport' for further advice on using transport safely). While it is for HE providers to decide how they should support their international students, we believe it is important that you make every effort to welcome them to the UK, and your responsibilities start as soon as a student arrives in the country, if not before.

HE providers are responsible for ensuring their students are safe and well looked after during their self-isolation period. Existing guidance is available at isolation for residential educational settings.

Universities UK have also produced bespoke guidance for HE providers on how to prepare for and care for students who are required to self-isolate on arrival in the UK. We encourage providers to review this guidance when considering how best to support their international and other students arriving from overseas.

You should also consider the needs of students, including international students, who may be suffering hardship, or are limited in their ability to travel, as a result of the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.

Specific guidance for international students and Student route sponsors affected by changes to UK immigration and borders due to the coronavirus can be found atCoronavirus (COVID-19): Student sponsors, migrants and short-term students.

Information is available for international students studying in areas affected by Coronavirus Tier 4 restrictions.

International students and their sponsors can email the government's Coronavirus (COVID-19) immigration help centre at CIH@homeoffice.gov.uk if they have any further questions about their visas.

Travel Guidance for Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps

This section of the guidance is for participants (students, staff and children) and organisers of Erasmus+ and European Solidarity Corps (ESC) exchanges planning to travel in the UK or overseas, and for those who are already overseas. As part of the Withdrawal Agreement legacy, activity involving UK-based students on Erasmus+ and the European Solidarity Corps agreed ahead of the end of the Transition Period will continue.

Before starting a placement, participants should consult with their provider to confirm details and check the Living in guide and travel advice for the country they will be visiting, being conscious that their placement may not be able to continue as originally planned. There may be opportunities for it to start at a later date if the situation changes and this is feasible.

Participants should be ready to comply with local isolation, testing or quarantine requirements, and will need to rely on the local health system.

If participants need to return early from their placement, they should contact their provider to let them know of their plans. We suggest anyone whose international educational mobility is affected discuss their placement with their provider, being conscious that their placement may not be able to continue as originally planned, but there may be opportunities for it to start at a later date if the situation changes and this is feasible.

UK participants who need emergency help from the UK government while overseas as the country they are in will not allow them to travel back to the UK, or there are no commercial travel options available, can contact the nearest British embassy, consulate or high commission or the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) in London on 0207 008 1500 for help or advice 24/7.

For UK beneficiaries managing Erasmus+ mobilities, you should utilise any Erasmus+ funding to the best of your ability, while ensuring participants remain as safe as possible. We expect all universities, colleges, schools and other organisers managing international educational mobilities to follow the relevant FCDO travel advice for the destination country and highlight this to their participants, being aware the situation can change rapidly.

We expect all providers to explore alternative options for mobilities and study, whether blended or fully virtual, if appropriate. They should be flexible in their approach and conscious of the potentially rapidly changing situation on a country by country basis. Providers should be ready to make quick changes to projects and mobilities, consider delaying mobilities and amending start and end dates if feasible, as restrictions may change over time.

The FCDO provides information and advice to help British nationals make their own informed decisions about foreign travel.

Travel insurance

The Association of British Insurers (ABI) has produced information on travel insurance implications following the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. If you have any further questions about your cover or would like further reassurance, you should contact your travel insurance provider.

Find out about:

- updates on coronavirus (COVID-19)
- guidance for educational settings
- immigration guidance for individuals affected by travel restrictions associated with coronavirus (COVID-19)
- advice for educational settings: Scotland
- advice for educational settings: Wales
- advice: for educational settings: Ireland

Travel and transport

Transport will be important for students, and for many staff, who need to travel to the campus or other university buildings. Providers may also arrange transport. You will therefore want to have regard to the guidance for passengers and operators. Students and staff can help control coronavirus (COVID-19), and travel safely, by walking and cycling if they can. Where this is not possible, they could use public transport (avoiding the busiest routes and times where possible) or drive.

If you are travelling to university, make sure you follow the safer travel guidance:

- coronavirus (COVID-19): safer travel guidance for passengers
- coronavirus (COVID-19): safer transport guidance for operators

International students should work with their HE provider to plan their onward journey from the airport in advance. Where it is safe and practical, arrangements should be made to welcome new students at their point of arrival (see international students and self-isolation for further advice on supporting international students).

Information for students and staff planning to travel in the UK or overseas, and for those who are already overseas, is also available at travel guidance for educational settings.

Accommodation

Where students have contracted coronavirus (COVID-19) while in student accommodation, rooms and other facilities will need to be cleaned, following guidance on cleaning non-healthcare settings. Accommodation that has been vacant for over 72 hours will need standard, but thorough, household cleaning.

Forming new households

There is no prohibition on moving house where necessary, and anyone in England who wishes to move house can do so. This includes forming new households and moving into shared student accommodation and houses in multiple occupation (HMOs). Guidance for landlords and tenants on renting and coronavirus (COVID-19) is available.

However, repeat or frequent temporary changes in household unit will increase the risk of disease transmission and staying within the same household unit will facilitate test and trace activities in the event of coronavirus (COVID-19). It will be important to apply those public health measures necessary to protect the wellbeing of students living together and those staff assisting them. The position on households may be subject to change and students should check local and national guidance. Those forming new households should take account of the guidance on meeting people from outside your household for advice on household interactions.

Everyone involved in the moving process must follow the latest guidance on staying alert and safe (social distancing) to minimise the spread of the virus. Letting agents, HE providers and accommodation providers should also consider how best to conduct tenancy check-ins for new tenancies agreed while broader measures remain in place, taking care to follow government advice on social distancing.

Within student accommodation, you should seek to identify 'households', within which routine contact can be managed. These households will also form the units by which you will manage any response to a suspected or confirmed positive case. Your approach to deciding what constitutes a household will depend on the physical layout of the accommodation, taking into account of who shares a kitchen/bathroom. A household in halls of residence is normally considered to be those students living in the same flat, or on the same floor, who share a kitchen and/or bathroom, rather than an entire block. Accommodation providers should make clear which kitchen(s) and/or bathroom(s) are intended for each household's use.

If a household within student accommodation is not obvious, providers may need to identify students as belonging to households (these households may be greater than 6 people). There should be an easily accessible record of who is in each of these provider-defined households, and students should understand what constitutes their household for the purposes of guidance on interactions within and between households.

Students living in halls of residence, or HMOs, who develop symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) should self-isolate in their current accommodation. Students should discuss this with their HE provider, and with the manager of their halls if they are privately owned, or the landlord of their HMO.

If a resident has coronavirus symptoms, all residents in that household must isolate for 10 days, following coronavirus (COVID-19): guidance for households with possible coronavirus infection. Or read guidance on isolating in residential educational settings.

Compliance with guidance

HE providers are responsible for ensuring that they, as an institution, are following government guidance to ensure appropriate COVID-secure measures are in place.

Providers are also responsible for ensuring that staff and students are aware of the measures and guidance in place, and take action to promote the importance of complying with these.

This could include:

- regular communication to staff and students
- signs and posters to reiterate the rules
- a clear statement of expectations of student behaviour, for example a behaviour agreement
- compliance with guidance

Providers should consider incentives for compliance, and disincentives for non-compliance including, in serious cases, the use of disciplinary measures.

Communications about compliance

All universities should have communications strategies for students and staff, which will include principles such as:

- do not assume that everyone understands the official guidelines
- ensure the rationale for behaviours and protective measures is understood
- make COVID-secure behaviours the norm
- encourage an atmosphere within your institution that supports following COVID-secure behaviours
- involve staff and students when creating communications
- maintain consistent messaging and guidance
- consider the range of cultural backgrounds when developing communications and plans

Teaching and learning environments

We recognise that, for many HE courses, online teaching and learning works effectively and has a high degree of learner engagement (while it will also benefit those who are not able to physically attend). 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 staff or students who cannot attend campus, and enabling the provider as a whole to minimise transmission risk.

We have published guidance on working safely during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak which will be relevant to the HE estate. This guidance includes advice on carrying out a risk assessment to assess the risk of coronavirus (COVID-19), and the need to protect people who are at a higher risk. It points out that the Health and Safety Executive may take action to improve control of workplace risks if needed, for example through the issue of enforcement notices to help secure improvements.

Laboratories

There is guidance on working safely during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in the guidance on laboratories and research facilities. The same considerations should be applied to laboratory science teaching as well, if it can be done in a way that reduces risks to those using the facilities.

University libraries

We expect university libraries to remain open to provide library services, including study places in a COVID-secure way.

You should follow NHS Test and Trace guidance, which applies to university libraries as well as public libraries.

Libraries Connected has drawn up guidance for public libraries to support reopening which may also be relevant for university libraries.

Sports training and teaching

Some providers will have programmes designed for 'elite' athletes (for example, athletes on elite development pathways). In such cases, the guidance on returning to training for elite sport will be relevant.

In addition, many providers will have their own gym and leisure facilities and the guidance for providers of grassroots sport and gym or leisure facilities may be relevant.

Performing arts

This section of the guidance is designed to help HE providers in England understand how to minimise risk during the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak for Performing Arts provision in universities and specialist providers. Providers should also take account of the guidance contained in the document Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19): performing arts, which is applicable to both professionals and non-professionals.

We recognise that providers are already doing a lot of work to ensure that performing arts provision can be carried out safely, and restart as much as possible, in the new academic year.

Activities can be undertaken in line with this and other guidance, in particular Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) guidance for professionals and non-professionals on Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19): performing arts. DCMS commissioned further scientific studies to develop the scientific evidence on these activities, which has allowed for the reconsideration of these additional mitigations. However, these studies have also indicated that it is the cumulative aerosol transmission from both those performing and in attending events is likely to create risk. DCMS is continuing to develop a more detailed understanding of how to mitigate this potential aggregate risk, but in that context, organisations should follow the guidance set out here.

Performing arts courses, in normal circumstances, may involve a considerable amount of practical face-to-face teaching and assessment. Some providers have found alternative methods during the outbreak. You should consider 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 academic experience in a way that protects both students and staff.

If face-to-face teaching or group sessions are required, particular effort should be made to maintain social distancing (2 metres, or 1 metre where this is not possible, provided steps are taken to otherwise mitigate the potential for transmission).

Teaching sessions

Tutors and staff should design sessions and rehearsals to avoid situations where students are unable to socially distance and, if this is not possible, reduce any time that students are not able to maintain social distancing.

Regard should be given to the number of students in teaching groups. Smaller teaching group sizes should be used where it is not possible to maintain social distancing. For example, you might consider reducing the sizes of casts in drama, the size of orchestras, or the number of students involved in movement sessions. Where this is not possible, you should take mitigating actions to reduce the risk of transmission between staff and students, such as holding the session in a larger and well-ventilated room.

Where social distancing cannot be adhered to, consider the use of technological solutions to reduce interactions, for example for one-to-one tutorials, rehearsals and practice and, if possible, for assignments. You might consider using booths, barriers or screens between individuals who are not part of a teaching group, between teaching groups and others, and between performers and any staff or students not participating at that moment.

You should ensure that no one is participating in in-person sessions if they are suffering with symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) or when advised to self-isolate.

Singing and playing wind and brass instruments

Additional mitigations, such as extended social distancing, were previously required for singing and playing wind and brass instruments, given concerns that these were potentially higher risk activities. The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport commissioned further scientific studies to develop the scientific evidence on these activities, which has allowed for the reconsideration of these additional mitigations.

Students and staff can engage in singing and playing wind and brass instruments in line with this guidance and Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19): performing arts but routine (2m) social distancing should be maintained.

Managing social and informal interactions

You should consider students' desire to interact socially and creatively with other students as part of their educational experience. If possible, you could look to designate specific areas ('creative spaces') for students to socially and creatively interact beyond the usual teaching environment. These areas could include markings to allow for social distancing or the use of screens.

You should provide students with advice as to where these sorts of interactions would be appropriate, and how to do them as safely as possible.

If tutors are not present, students should take responsibility for these sessions, and for protecting themselves and others. This might include social distancing or cleaning instruments before use.

Equipment

Equipment, including instruments and props, is integral to many performing arts courses. Measures should be taken for handling equipment.

These include:

- students and staff should avoid sharing equipment if possible
- if equipment has to be shared, you should ensure there is increased handwashing before and after handling equipment
- ensuring regular and meticulous cleaning of all equipment, including shared instruments, desks, sound and lighting equipment, mics and battery packs
- handling of paperwork, including music scores, scripts and learning materials

Audiences

You should refer to the Working safely during coronavirus (COVID-19): performing arts guidance for advice about audiences.

You should consider whether there is a need for a live audience. Where it is essential to have an audience, for assessment and teaching purposes, they should be seated in accordance with social distancing. Staff and other students can watch rehearsals and performances, but they should avoid cheering or shouting. This is because of the potential for increased risk of transmission, particularly from aerosol and droplet transmission. You might consider mitigating actions, such as the use of screens to protect audience members where necessary or the use of face coverings.

Students should be prepared for the difficulties of performing without an audience, or with a reduced audience, especially if the production is particularly interactive.

Infection control

Test and Trace

Anyone who displays symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can and should get a test as soon as possible. It is important to only get a test if you have coronavirus symptoms or have been asked to get tested. This will help make sure people who need a test can get one.

HE providers should ensure that staff and students are aware of all their options to access a test if one is required. In all cases, in addition to any local provision, tests can be booked online at Coronavirus (COVID-19): getting tested, or ordered by telephone via NHS 119 for those without access to the internet.

For those who test positive or who have been identified as a contact by NHS Test and Trace, further information is available in the guidance NHS Test and Trace: how it works. This sets out what you should do if you test positive or if you are a contact, and how NHS Test and Trace will work with you to stop the spread of the virus.

Providers should ensure that different elements of their premises, such as cafeterias, canteens or university libraries, should maintain records of those using those services in order to support NHS Test and Trace, and in line with government guidance on relevant types of provision. This means that NHS Test and Trace can contact people if, for instance, there is an outbreak linked to those premises and give them appropriate public health advice. There is information on supporting the tracing process in the guidance on maintaining records of staff, customers and visitors to support NHS Test and Trace.

New workplace guidance on the Test and Trace programme will be relevant to providers.

If a person is symptomatic, has tested positive (with or without symptoms), lives with someone who has symptoms or has tested positive, or has been identified as a contact by NHS Test and Trace, they should self-isolate immediately.

You should ensure that your students are safe and well looked after during their self-isolation period. The person who has tested positive must self-isolate for 10 days from when they first developed symptoms - or longer if they still have a high temperature. Other members of their household must continue to self-isolate for 10 days from the day after the individual tested positive from symptom onset. Non-household contacts notified by NHS Test and Trace must self-isolate for a period ending 10 days from the day after contact with the individual who tested positive.

Self-isolating means staying in your home or place of residence and not going outside for any reason, including not travelling to a different place of residence. Existing guidance is available at isolation for residential educational settings. This may include practical support such as access to food, as well as support to continue or manage the impact on studies during isolation.

You should also ensure that you understand the NHS Test and Trace process, and how and when you should contact your local Public Health England health protection team in response to reports of cases, and how to get advice about all other questions relating to guidance from the DfE helpline number.

Public Health England health protection teams and local authorities will advise where testing as part of outbreak management is required. (Note: this will not always be required, and self-isolation is the way in which transmission is interrupted regardless of testing.)

HE providers should ensure that existing government guidance regarding contact tracing has been implemented.

Staff and student wellbeing

We recognise that many students and staff are facing additional mental health challenges, due to the disruption to study and working practices, and uncertainty caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak. It is important to understand that these are normal responses to an abnormal situation and some people will require additional support.

Student mental health and suicide prevention are priorities for this government. The Minister of State for Universities, Michelle Donelan, wrote to the Office for Students (OfS) and HE providers in March to highlight a need to focus on mental health and wellbeing across HE.

We continue to work closely with the HE sector to promote good practice and support students and providers during the pandemic. HE providers are autonomous institutions, independent from government, and have a duty of care to students when delivering services, including the provision of pastoral support, and taking steps to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of students. This includes responsibility to support students with mental health issues. It is for HE providers to determine what welfare and counselling services needed to provide for students to offer that support. You are experts on your own student population and are therefore best placed to identify the needs of your student body.

At the same time, we recognise that some students and staff will have additional mental health needs which cannot be met in the HE setting. NHS mental health services have remained open throughout the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and community, talking therapies, and children and young people's services, have deployed digital tools to connect with people and provide ongoing support. We expect mental health services to liaise with local partners to ensure referral routes are understood, and we encourage HE providers to work in partnership with local NHS and care services to address any additional needs arising from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic.

The government has 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). HE providers were able to use OfS Student Premium funding worth around £23 million per month for April to July this year, and £256 million for academic year 2020 to 2021, starting from August, towards student hardship funds, including the purchase of IT equipment and mental health support, as well as to support providers' access and participation plans.

We have also worked with the OfS on the recently announced Student Space platform, which seeks to bridge gaps in mental health support for students arising from this unprecedented situation. Funded with up to £3 million by the OfS, and led by Student Minds, it is designed to work alongside existing mental health services offered by providers. This is a new online resource until the end of 2020 which enables your students to access a variety of mental and wellbeing support. But it should not be assumed that it provides a substitute for providers' student support services or for access to NHS care.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic will also put increased strain on the health and wellbeing of staff. The guidance on safer workplaces acknowledges the responsibilities that employers have for their staff. We welcome the agreement between trade unions working in HE and the Universities and Colleges Employers Association, published as Appendix A to Universities UK's principles and considerations for emerging from lockdown, that will help ensure campuses are as safe as possible, and protect the health and wellbeing of staff, students and visitors to campus.

There may be a need for continuing support as campuses start to reopen, and the protective measures to keep people as safe as possible while away from home take on even greater importance. There is guidance on mental health and wellbeing at COVID-19: guidance for the public on mental health and wellbeing.

First aid

Emergency treatment, for example the provision of first aid, should be prioritised and given promptly in the event of an emergency. This means that people do not have to stay 2 metres apart if emergency assistance is required. People involved in the provision of assistance of others should pay particular attention to hygiene measures immediately afterwards, including washing hands.

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