Part of
Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus

Department for Education

Guidance

Further education COVID-19 operational guidance

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Introduction

This guidance sets out what FE and skills providers need to know so that students of all ages can benefit from their education and training in full.

It explains the actions leaders should take to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 in their setting. This includes public health advice, endorsed by Public Health England (PHE). This guidance is for leaders and staff in:

- sixth form colleges
- general FE colleges
- independent training providers
- designated institutions
- adult community learning providers
- special post-16 institutions

It also covers expectations for students with education, health and care (EHC) plans in mainstream FE settings and special post-16 institutions. Special post-16 institutions should also read the guidance for special schools and other specialist settings.

FE providers that have students undertaking other qualifications (such as HE qualifications) should follow FE guidance for these students, and the same prioritisation for attendance should be given to these students.

Apprenticeship providers should also read the current guidance on providing apprenticeships.

We use the terms 'must' and 'should' throughout the guidance. We use the term 'must' when the person in question is legally required to do something and 'should' when the advice set out should be followed unless there is good reason not to.

We will keep this guidance under review and update, as necessary.

Overview

The government will continue to manage the risk of serious illness from the spread of the virus. This marks a new phase in the government's response to the pandemic, moving away from stringent restrictions on everyone's day-to-day lives, towards advising people on how to protect themselves and others, alongside targeted interventions to reduce risk.

As COVID-19 becomes a virus that we learn to live with, there is now an imperative to reduce the disruption to young people's education - particularly given that the direct clinical risks to young people are extremely low, and every adult has been offered a first vaccine and the opportunity for two doses by mid-September.

Our priority is for you to deliver face-to-face, high quality education to all students. The evidence is clear that being out of education causes significant harm to educational attainment, life chances, mental and physical health. We have worked closely with the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Public Health England (PHE) to revise this guidance.

Since the last publication, we have updated the guidance on self-isolation in the tracing close contacts section.

Risk assessment

You must comply with health and safety law and put in place proportionate control measures.

You must regularly review and update your risk assessments - treating them as 'living documents' - as the circumstances in your setting and the public health advice changes. This includes having active arrangements in place to monitor whether the controls are effective and working as planned.

For more information on what is required of leaders in relation to health and safety risk assessments and managing risk, see health and safety responsibilities and duties for schools.

Mixing and 'bubbles'

It is no longer necessary to keep students in consistent groups ('bubbles'). This means that bubbles will not need to be used for any summer provision or in settings from the autumn term.

If your setting is still open, you may wish to continue with these measures until the end of your summer term.

You should make sure your outbreak management plans cover the possibility that in some local areas it may become necessary to reintroduce 'bubbles' for a temporary period, to reduce mixing between groups.

Any decision to recommend the reintroduction of 'bubbles' would not be taken lightly and would need to take account of the detrimental impact they can have on the delivery of education.

Tracing close contacts and self-isolation

Close contacts will be identified via NHS Test and Trace and education settings will no longer be expected to undertake contact tracing.

As with positive cases in any other setting, NHS Test and Trace will work with the positive case to identify close contacts. Contacts from a setting will only be traced by NHS Test and Trace where the positive case specifically identifies the individual as being a close contact. This is likely to be a small number of individuals who would be most at risk of contracting COVID-19 due to the nature of the close contact. You may be contacted in exceptional cases to help with identifying close contacts, as currently happens in managing other infectious diseases.

You're not required to self-isolate if you live in the same household as someone with COVID-19, or are a close contact of someone with COVID-19, and any of the following apply:

- you're fully vaccinated
- you're below the age of 18 years 6 months
- you've taken part in or are currently part of an approved COVID-19 vaccine trial
- you're not able to get vaccinated for medical reasons

NHS Test and Trace will contact you to let you know that you have been identified as a contact and check whether you are legally required to self-isolate. If you're not legally required to self-isolate, you will be provided with advice on testing and given guidance on preventing the spread of COVID-19. Even if you do not have symptoms, you will be advised to have a PCR test as soon as possible. If you are symptomatic you should stay at home.

Adults who do not need to isolate and young people aged under 18 years 6 months who usually attend an education or childcare setting, and who have been identified as a close contact, should continue to attend the setting as normal. They do not need to wear a face covering within the setting, but it is expected and recommended that these are worn when travelling on public or dedicated transport.

Get a free PCR test to check if you have COVID-19, you can choose a drive-through or walk-through test centre for a quick test, or order a home test kit.

Settings will continue to have a role in working with health protection teams in the case of a local outbreak. If there is an outbreak in a setting or if central government offers the area an enhanced response package, a director of public health might advise a setting to temporarily reintroduce some additional control measures.

Face coverings

Face coverings are no longer advised for students, staff and visitors either in classrooms or in communal areas. You can find more information on the use of face coverings in face coverings including when to wear one, exemptions and how to make your own.

The government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law but expects and recommends they are worn in enclosed and crowded spaces where an individual may come into contact with people they do not normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to college.

In circumstances where face coverings are recommended

If you have an outbreak in your setting a director of public health might advise you that face coverings should temporarily be worn in communal areas or classrooms (by students, staff and visitors, unless exempt). You should make sure your outbreak management plans cover this possibility.

In these circumstances, transparent face coverings, which may assist communication with someone who relies on lip reading, clear sound or facial expression to communicate, can also be worn. Transparent face coverings may be effective in reducing the spread of COVID-19. However, the evidence to support this is currently very limited. Face coverings (whether transparent or cloth) should fit securely around the face to cover the nose and mouth and be made with a breathable material capable of filtering airborne particles.

The main benefit from a transparent face covering is that they can aid communication, for example enabling lip-reading or allowing for the full visibility of facial expressions, but this should be considered alongside the comfort and breathability of a face covering that contains plastic, which may mean that the face covering is less breathable than layers of cloth.

Face visors or shields can be worn by those exempt from wearing a face covering but they are not an equivalent alternative in terms of source control of virus transmission. They may protect the wearer against droplet spread in specific circumstances but are unlikely to be effective in preventing the escape of smaller respiratory particles when used without an additional face covering. They should only be used after carrying out a risk assessment for the specific situation and should always be cleaned appropriately.

The use of face coverings may have a particular impact on those who rely on visual signals for communication. Those who communicate with or provide support to those who do, are exempt from any recommendation to wear face coverings in education settings.

You have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for disabled students, to support them to access education successfully. Where appropriate, you should discuss with students and parents the types of reasonable adjustments that are being considered to support an individual.

No student should be denied education on the grounds of whether they are, or are not, wearing a face covering.

Stepping measures up and down

You should have outbreak management plans outlining how you would operate if there were an outbreak in your setting or local area. Given the detrimental impact that restrictions on education can have on students, any measures in settings should only ever be considered as a last resort, kept to the minimum number of settings or groups possible, and for the shortest amount of time possible.

Central government may offer local areas of particular concern an enhanced response package to help limit increases in transmission.

For most settings, it will make sense to think about taking extra action if the number of positive cases substantially increases. Information on what circumstances might lead you to consider taking additional action, and the steps you should work through, can be found in the contingency framework.

You should call the dedicated advice service who will escalate the issue to your local health protection team where necessary and advise if any additional action is required, such as implementing elements of your outbreak management plan. You can reach them by calling the DfE helpline on 0800 046 8687 and selecting option 1 for advice on the action to take in response to a positive case.

The contingency framework describes the principles of managing local outbreaks of COVID-19 in education and childcare settings. Local authorities, directors of public health (DsPH) and PHE health protection teams (HPTs) can recommend measures described in the contingency framework in individual education and childcare settings – or a small cluster of settings – as part of their outbreak management responsibilities.

Control measures

You should:

1. Ensure good hygiene for everyone.
2. Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes.
3. Keep occupied spaces well ventilated.
4. Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19.

1.Ensure good hygiene for everyone

Hand hygiene

Frequent and thorough hand cleaning should now be regular practice. You should continue to ensure that students clean their hands regularly. This can be done with soap and water or hand sanitiser.

Respiratory hygiene

The ‘catch it, bin it, kill it’ approach continues to be very important. The e-Bug COVID-19 website contains free resources for you, including materials to encourage good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

Most staff in providers will not require PPE beyond what they would normally need for their work.

The guidance on safe working in education, childcare and children’s social care provides more information on the use of PPE for COVID-19.

2. Maintain appropriate cleaning regimes using standard products such as detergents

You should put in place and maintain an appropriate cleaning schedule. This could include regular cleaning of areas and equipment (for example twice per day), with a particular focus on frequently touched surfaces.

PHE has published guidance on the cleaning of non-healthcare settings.

3. Keep occupied spaces well ventilated

When your setting is in operation, it is important to ensure it is well ventilated and that a comfortable teaching environment is maintained.

You should identify any poorly ventilated spaces as part of your risk assessment, and take steps to improve fresh air flow in these areas, giving particular consideration to holding events where visitors are on site.

Mechanical ventilation is a system that uses fans to draw fresh air into rooms or extract the room air.

These should be adjusted to increase the ventilation rate wherever possible and checked to confirm that normal operation meets current guidance and that only fresh outside air is circulated.

If possible, systems should be adjusted to full fresh air or, if this is not possible, then systems should be operated as normal as long as they are within a single room and supplemented by an outdoor air supply.

Opening external windows can improve natural ventilation, and in addition, opening internal doors can also assist with creating a throughput of air. If necessary external opening doors may also be used (if they are not fire doors and where safe to do so).

You should balance the need for increased ventilation while maintaining a comfortable temperature.

The Health and Safety Executive guidance on air conditioning and ventilation during the coronavirus outbreak and CIBSE COVID-19 advice provides more information.

DfE is working with Public Health England, NHS Test and Trace and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) on a pilot project to measure CO2 levels in classrooms and exploring options to help improve ventilation in settings where needed.

4. Follow public health advice on testing, self-isolation and managing confirmed cases of COVID-19

When an individual develops COVID-19 symptoms or has a positive test

Students, staff and other adults should follow public health advice on when to self isolate. They should not come into the setting if they have symptoms or other reasons requiring them to stay at home due to the risk of them passing on COVID-19 (for example, they are required to quarantine or have a positive test).

If anyone in your setting develops COVID-19 symptoms, however mild, you should send them home and they should follow public health advice.

If a student in a residential setting shows symptoms, they should initially self-isolate in their residential setting household, so that their usual support can continue, others may benefit from self-isolating in their family home.

For everyone with symptoms, they should avoid using public transport and, wherever possible, be collected by a member of their family or household.

If a student is awaiting collection they should be left in a room on their own if possible and safe to do so. A window should be opened for fresh air ventilation if possible. Appropriate PPE should also be used if close contact is necessary, further information on this can be found in the use of PPE guidance. Any rooms they use should be cleaned after they have left.

The household (including any siblings) must follow PHE guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus (COVID-19) infection.

Asymptomatic testing

Testing remains important in reducing the risk of transmission of infection within settings. That is why, whilst some measures are relaxed, others will remain, and if necessary, in response to the latest epidemiological data, we all need to be prepared to step measures up or down in future depending on local circumstances.

Over the summer, staff and students should continue to test regularly if they are attending settings that remain open, such as where FE education provision continues or you don't operate on a term time basis. FE providers will provide tests for twice weekly asymptomatic testing for students and staff over the summer period if they are attending FE settings. Regular testing will then pause in settings over the summer if they are closed. However, testing will still be widely available over the summer and kits can be collected either from your local pharmacy or ordered online.

As students will potentially mix with lots of other people during the summer holidays, all FE providers, except independent training providers (ITPs) and adult community learning providers (ACLPs), should offer students 2 on-site lateral flow device tests on return, 3 to 5 days apart, in the autumn term.

You may commence testing from 3 working days before the start of term and can stagger the return of students across the first week to manage this.

Students and staff should then continue to test twice weekly at home until the end of September, when this will be reviewed. ITPs and ACLPs are not required to set up an asymptomatic test site (ATS). All tests should be completed at home by staff and students.

FE providers, except ITPs and ACLPs, should also retain a small asymptomatic test site (ATS) on-site until further notice so they can offer testing to students who are unable to test themselves at home.

Confirmatory polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests

Staff or students who receive a positive LFD test result should self-isolate in line with the stay-at-home guidance. They will also need to get a free PCR test to check if they have COVID-19.

Whilst awaiting the PCR result, the individual should continue to self-isolate.

If the PCR test is taken within 2 days of the positive LFD test, and is negative, it overrides the LFD test result and the student can return to their setting, as long as the individual does not have COVID-19 symptoms.

Those with a negative LFD test result can continue to attend college or their FE provider.

Additional information on is available PCR test kits for schools and further education providers is available.

Other considerations

Further information is available in the guidance on supporting students at a setting with medical conditions.

You should ensure that key contractors are aware of the setting's control measures and ways of working.

Admitting students and staff back to the setting

In most cases, parents and carers will agree that a student with symptoms should not attend the setting, given the potential risk to others. If a parent or carer insists on a student attending your setting, you can take the decision to refuse the student if, in your reasonable judgement, it is necessary to protect other students and staff from possible infection with COVID-19. Your decision would need to be carefully considered in light of all the circumstances and current public health advice.

COVID-19 vaccination

You should encourage students to take up the offer of both doses of the vaccine, as soon as they become eligible. This includes health and social care students, aged 16 and above, undertaking related work placements.

COVID-19 vaccination is now being offered to everyone aged 18 and over at local sites run by GPs or community pharmacies, at larger vaccination centres and in some hospitals. More information on how to get a vaccine can be found on the NHS website.

Local areas may also work with partners to set up 'pop up' temporary clinics at locations convenient for students to access. Students registered with a GP can book their appointment at a larger vaccination centre, a community pharmacy run site or at some GP run sites through the national booking service website or by phoning 119.

Individuals can request to book COVID-19 vaccination appointments as an unregistered patient through a local GP practice. You should encourage students to consult the

COVID-19 vaccination FAQs for students in Higher Education Institutions and is also relevant for any student aged 18 and over. This has been published by NHS England and provides a range of important information.

Site safety and estates

Site safety

Some FE 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.

Measures elsewhere

If your setting operates commercial training environments such as hairdressing, barbering and beauty salons, sports and fitness facilities or restaurants, external catering, they must comply with guidance in working safely.

Where settings have kitchens on-site, they and any external catering contractors must comply with the guidance in working safely.

Off-site provision and work placements

External work placements

It is important that you involve staff, students and the organisations who provide work placements to co-produce guidance, student charters or agreements, making clear the responsibilities for staying safe and protecting others. By involving others, the guidance is more likely to be adhered to. Where relevant, other outside bodies that may be affected (for example, suppliers, transport providers) may also be involved.

We are committed to ensuring that all young people undertaking a traineeship can spend time on a work placement with an employer. The work placement is fundamental to a traineeship, which is a work-focused route. We have given you further flexibilities to tailor traineeships during the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes reducing the number of required work placement hours from 100 to 70 and extending the duration of the programme from 6 months to 12 months. The work placement can be delivered flexibly over the full programme duration.

Physical activity, sports and extra curricular activities

Activities for performing arts should be undertaken in line with the guidance on working safely during COVID-19 in the performing arts.

You have the flexibility to decide how activities will be provided while following any control measures.

Refer to:

- (COVID-19) coronavirus restrictions: what you can and cannot do
- guidance on grassroot sports for public and sport providers, safe provision and facilities, and guidance from Sport England
- advice from organisations such as the Association for Physical Education and the Youth Sport Trust
- guidance from Swim England on returning to pools

Education and training delivery

What we expect of FE providers

On-site delivery allows students of all ages to benefit from their education and training in full. This means we expect you to:

- fully deliver planned hours for students of all ages including those with SEND (with or without an EHC plan)
- ensure that students have the opportunity to spend a similar amount of time on-site every week as they did prior to COVID-19

Mode of delivery

During the COVID-19 pandemic FE providers have made extensive use of remote and online learning to maintain delivery, and in doing so have significantly increased their capability to deliver online and utilise education technology and digital resources to support delivery.

WhileFEproviders have been highly successful in delivering remote and online education during the pandemic, we know that it is not a full replacement for on-site education. Remote and online education, however well delivered, cannot replicate the building of relationships between students and teachers nor the close supervision and hands-on training vital to developing vocational competence. For these reasons we strongly expect on-site education to be the norm for the large majority of 16 to 19 study programme planned hours for the remainder of the 2021 academic year.

Guidance on the use of remote and online learning with respect to study programme delivery in the 2021 to 2022 academic year will be provided in updated 16 to19 study programme guidance.

Adult students have always been offered a wider variety of delivery models in comparison to 16 to 19 year olds. You should continue to judge the right balance between on-site and remote delivery for adult students in order to provide high-quality education and training.

Provision of remote learning to students unable to attend on-site for COVID-19 related reasons

For students unable to attend on-site for COVID-19 related reasons, for example, because they need to self-isolate, we expect you to provide remote education to minimise disruption to their learning.

While students are unable to attend on-site, you should use your best endeavours to deliver as much of students' planned hours as possible and meet the expectations set out below concerning participation, live teaching, feedback, assessment, attendance and engagement.

We recognise that for some students the full delivery of planned hours may not be possible, for example where a student is undertaking a course involving practical teaching and training which necessitates the use of specialist equipment and supervision or with respect to work experience and placements.

So that students (and parents of students aged 19 and below) know what to expect if they need to learn remotely, you should set out details of your remote education offer

on your website.

Contingency planning

For individuals or groups of self-isolating students following local or national government guidance related to COVID-19, remote education plans should be in place.

You should continue to operate as normally as possible. In the event that restrictions in education are needed to help contain the spread of the virus, you may be asked to revise your delivery models for a short period of time. To help with this, we have published a contingency framework, which outlines how you should operate in the event of any restrictions.

Any decision that there should be local restrictions in any education settings will be made by central government on a case-by-case basis.

Remote delivery expectations

In circumstances where you need to deliver remotely for COVID-19 related reasons, the following minimum expectations should be met.

Expectations on participation

Set clear expectations of students concerning their participation in the remote elements of their programme, so they know when and how they are expected to engage and demonstrate their learning.

Live teaching

As far as possible provide live online teaching. This is advised because Ofsted and many providers have found that learners generally prefer interactive 'live' online lessons and that it results in greater engagement. Alternatives to live lessons may include recorded lessons.

Feedback and assessment

Confirm with students the different ways in which they will receive individual assessment and feedback when learning remotely to support their progression. The nature and frequency of remote assessment and feedback should reflect the individual need and the courses they are enrolled on.

It should be at least:

- once every week for academic study programmes
- fortnightly if undertaking technical or applied general study programmes

Monitoring attendance

Have systems in place to:

- check, at least weekly, for persistent non-attendance or lack of engagement with remote education
- quickly agree ways in which attendance and participation can be improved

You should give particular consideration on how best to support vulnerable and disadvantaged students and students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We recognise that some students with SEND may not be able to access remote education without support and expect FE providers to work with families to deliver an ambitious curriculum for their level of need.

You should have a named senior leader with overarching responsibility for the quality and delivery of remote education, who should ensure that provision meets the above expectations.

Support for students who are unable to access remote digital education

The get help with technology service is providing support with devices and connectivity for 16 to 19 year olds. This forms part of a £400 million investment to help children and young people continue their education at home and access online social care services.

Further detail on who is eligible and how to access support is available on the get help with technology service.

You can also continue to use the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund to provide financial support to help students overcome specific financial barriers to participation so that they can remain in education. This may include the provision of devices and connectivity support. As set out in the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund guidance, you should decide what support a student needs on the basis of individual assessment, in line with bursary fund rules.

For adults aged 19 and over we introduced a change to the adult education budget (AEB) funding rules for the 2020 to 2021 academic year. This was to enable you to use learner support funds to purchase IT devices or internet access for disadvantaged students to help them meet technology costs, where these costs are a barrier to accessing or continuing in their training. This change has been continued in the 2021 to 2022 academic year. This flexibility is only for providers funded by ESFA. In areas where the AEB is devolved, contact the relevant mayoral combined authority or the Greater London Authority concerning adult student support arrangements.

Support for high-quality remote and blended education

Get help with remote education service

Get help with remote education provides:

- guidance for teachers and leaders seeking help with delivering remote and blended education
- help to access technology to support remote education
- peer-to-peer training and guidance on how to use technology effectively
- links to practical tools, a good practice guide and provider-led webinars to support effective remote and blended delivery

EdTech demonstrator programme

You can apply for support from other schools and colleges who have shown they can use technology effectively and have the capacity to help other schools and colleges to do the same through the nationalEdTech demonstrator programme.

Developing EdTech and online teaching skills

The Education and Training Foundation (ETF) offers support for teachers to develop their online teaching skills.

For practitioners who are just starting out with the use of educational technology (EdTech) a good place to start is the 60-minute starter pack for EdTech training. It comprises of 12 free-to-access, bite-size training modules selected from the enhance digital teaching platform that will give an overview of the basics.

For the full suite of training modules, visit the enhance digital teaching platform to find materials on a wide range of topics including:

- motivating and engaging students in virtual learning environments
- adapting content quickly to deliver online
- different pedagogical approaches to online delivery

For teachers lacking confidence or skills in using the internet and devices, ETF's essential digital skills professional development programme can help teachers develop their digital skills. The online learning modules include topics on:

- using devices
- handling information
- staying safe online

ETF have also developed a guide for FE staff on EdTech and essential digital skills training to support remote working. The guide identifies and provides links to EdTech and essential digital skills training modules on the enhance digital teaching platform as well as other useful resources which can contribute to developing the knowledge, skills and understanding required for teaching and learning online.

The FutureLearn platform includes free courses to develop skills to effectively deliver remote learning. These include:

- how to teach online
- blended learning essentials
- use of technology in evidence-based teaching

Digital curriculum content and resources

Jisc provides curriculum content mapped against qualifications and national standards for 5 vocational subject areas:

- construction
- digital and IT
- education and childcare
- health and social care
- hairdressing

They also provide a wide range of e-books for FE relating to vocational and academic subjects and qualifications.

The Blended Learning Consortium has FE-specific resources across a range of subjects and levels. There is a fee to access these resources.

WorldSkills UK has launched a skills development hub which provides free learning resources across a range of vocational areas for use with students and apprentices remotely and in the classroom.

Through the college collaboration fund, we have funded college partnerships to produce free, high-quality digital content and resources for the FE sector. These can be accessed via the get help with remote education service.

Support from provider associations

Visit your provider association's website for resources and support on remote and blended learning:

- Association of Colleges
- Sixth Form Colleges Association
- Association of Employment and Learning Providers
- Holex
- Natspec

Transport

The government has removed the requirement to wear face coverings in law, but expects and recommends that they are worn in enclosed and crowded spaces where individuals may come into contact with people they do not normally meet. This includes public transport and dedicated transport to college.

Wider public transport

We encourage students and staff to continue to walk, cycle or drive wherever it is possible and safe to so. Where students and staff use public transport, they should follow the safer travel guidance for passengers.

Safe behaviour off-site

You should consider how to reinforce public health messaging to students and staff, particularly at the point where they are entering and leaving college and heading into the community each day.

People are more likely to follow guidance on how to behave if:

- they understand the reasons they are asked to take certain actions

- it is co-produced with the staff and students who will be affected by it

You should develop guidance to promote safe behaviour in the wider community with local community leaders as well as staff and students. You can encourage student organisations to lead in promoting COVID-19 safety.

Educational visits

Given the likely gap in COVID-19 cancellation related insurance, if considering booking a new visit you are advised to ensure that any new bookings have adequate financial protection in place.

International visits

International educational exchanges, study abroad or volunteering programmes

For students who may have plans for study or volunteering abroad that are organised by providers in England, for example, placements receiving Turing Scheme funding from September, or those receiving Erasmus+ funding from projects successfully bid for under the 2014 to 2020 programme.

You should be aware that the travel list (and broader international travel policy) is subject to change and green list countries may be moved into amber or red. The travel lists may change during a visit and you must comply with international travel legislation and should have contingency plans in place to account for these changes.

We expect that students and providers will comply with travel advice given by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) that sets out COVID-19 and other risks from travel abroad.

Workforce

You are best placed to determine the workforce required to meet the needs of your students.

Staff who are clinically extremely vulnerable

Clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) people are advised, as a minimum, to follow the same guidance as everyone else. It is important that everyone adheres to this guidance, but CEV people may wish to think particularly carefully about the additional precautions they can continue to take. Further information can be found in the guidance on protecting people who are CEV from COVID-19.

Social distancing measures have now ended in the workplace and it is no longer necessary for the government to instruct people to work from home. Employers should be able to explain the measures they have in place to keep CEV staff safe at work. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) has published guidance on protecting vulnerable workers, including advice for employers and employees on how to talk about reducing risks in the workplace.

We welcome your support in encouraging vaccine take up and enabling staff who are eligible for a vaccination to attend booked vaccine appointments where possible, even during term time.

Staff and students who are pregnant

You will need to follow the specific guidance for pregnant employees. We recommend that you follow the same principles for pregnant students, in guidance and advice on COVID-19 and pregnancy from the Royal College of Gynaecologists.

Supporting staff

All employers have a duty of care to their employees, and this extends to their mental health.

Because some staff may be particularly anxious about attending, you may need extra systems in place to support staff wellbeing. Read about the extra mental health support for pupils and teachers.

Supporting vulnerable students

Vulnerable students are those who:

- are assessed as being in need under section 17 of the Children Act 1989, including students who have a child in need plan, a child protection plan or who are a looked-after child
- have an EHC plan
- have been assessed as otherwise vulnerable by educational providers or local authorities (including children's social care services) - this includes:
  - students on the edge of receiving support from children's social care services
  - adopted children
  - those at risk of becoming NEET
  - those living in temporary accommodation
  - those who are young carers
  - those who may have difficulty engaging with remote education at home (for example due to a lack of devices or quiet space to study)
  - others at the provider and local authority's discretion, including students who need to attend to receive support or manage risks to their mental health

In particular, young people with a social worker or EHC plans are expected to attend provision (subject to public health advice), because of their safeguarding and welfare needs.

If vulnerable students do not attend, you should:

- work together with the local authority and social worker (where applicable) to follow up with the parent or carer to explore the reason for absence and discuss their concerns
- work closely with other professionals, where appropriate, to support attendance
- notify the student's social worker, if they have one, particularly where the social worker (where applicable) agrees that the student's attendance would be appropriate

If the vulnerable student wishes to be absent from face-to-face education during local or national restrictions, they should let their setting know. The young person should not be included in the COVID-19 attendance monitoring data as 'expected to attend'. Further guidance is available on how to complete the educational setting status form.

Where you have had to close, you should inform the local authority to discuss alternative arrangements for vulnerable students and work towards reopening as soon as possible.

You should work collaboratively with other education providers and local partners to maximise opportunities for face-to-face provision for vulnerable students. This includes:

- the local authority
- social workers
- police
- youth services
- key workers

Transition in and out of FE

You should continue to work with schools and local authorities to support transitions. This includes sharing any relevant welfare and child protection information. Keeping children safe in education sets out responsibilities for sharing information.

Some young people might need additional mental health and wellbeing support. Use external support where necessary and possible. See the mental health and wellbeing section for more information.

You should assess where students are in their learning and agree on a plan to support catch up. This is supported through the 16 to 19 tuition fund. For looked-after children and care leavers, this may mean working with the virtual school head or personal adviser to review personal education and pathway plans.

Students who are clinically extremely vulnerable

All clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) students should attend their college unless they are one of the very small number of students under paediatric or other specialist care and have been advised by their clinician or other specialist not to attend.

Supporting students with SEND

We expect that every 16 to 19 student (or 19 to 25 with an EHC plan) undertakes the majority of their planned hours on site.

Given the importance of therapists (for example speech and language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy) and other health professionals in supporting young people with SEND, all FE providers are reminded that specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for students with SEND should provide interventions as usual.

Many students will have found restrictions exceptionally difficult socially and emotionally. Speak to the student or their parents, to find out if any challenging behaviours or social or emotional challenges are a response to restrictions. If they are, you should offer additional support. Reasonable adjustments should be provided to support a disabled young person to access education successfully.

Where young people with EHC plans are not attending their education setting because they are following public health advice, multi-agency professionals should collaborate to agree how to deliver the provision set out in the EHC plan. This may include face-to-face visits to the home, or virtual support by means of video or telephone calls, or via email.

Safeguarding young people

Your staff should be particularly vigilant about new and additional safeguarding concerns. You should make staff and volunteers aware of what they should do if they have any concerns about a student. It is important that they act immediately on any safeguarding concerns.

Check that the safeguarding and welfare information you hold on all students is accurate. Ask parents and carers to tell you about any changes in welfare, health and wellbeing.

Continue to work with and support:

- young people's social workers
- the local authority virtual school head for looked-after and previously looked-after children
- personal advisers for care leavers
- any other relevant safeguarding and welfare partners

You have a statutory duty with regards to 16 and 17 year olds to provide information to local authority services to enable them to track and maintain contact with these young people. This will help local authorities to identify those not participating so that they can provide those students with the support they need to reach their potential.

Continue following statutory guidance on inter-agency working, set out in working together to safeguard children. You should also refer to keeping children safe in education.

External resources that can support the safeguarding of young people include:

- SafeCall, which offers support to victims of exploitation – young people can contact SafeCall directly or can be referred to SafeCall by professionals
- the Covid-19 Support Hub service provided by Barnardo's to help young people in England who are experiencing harm and increased adversity during lockdown
- a protocol for teachers delivering live lessons online and engaging in one to one activity with under 18s, developed by Kirklees College and the National Association for Managers of Student Services (NAMSS)

Mental health and wellbeing

Many students and staff members will be feeling uncertain and anxious at this time. It is important to support positive mental health and wellbeing, which is necessary for young people to engage in learning.

You should identify young people and members of staff who may need additional support and engage with them and their representatives to understand their needs and ensure they have appropriate mental health and wellbeing support in place. Vulnerable young people are particularly likely to need additional support with their mental health and wellbeing. The guidance on mental health and behaviour in schools might be helpful with this.

Work with local authorities and voluntary sector mental health organisations to ensure that support is in place. Contact your local authority to see if they have a list of services in your area that provide support for young people. In some cases support can be given over the phone for students self-isolating from specialist staff or support services.

NHS children and young people's mental health services may also be able to provide support remotely. Professionals involved with children and young people, including teachers, special educational needs coordinators (SENCO) social workers, youth workers and educational psychologists should continue referring young people to their local NHS children and young people's mental health services where needed. Self-referral options are commonly available and many services offer single points of access. Young people or their parents or carers can also contact their GP or refer to NHS 111 online.

NHS trusts have also established 24-hour urgent mental health helplines in most parts of England for people of all ages. If you have urgent concerns about a young person, find your local helpline to discuss your concerns with a mental health professional. You should also ensure that students are aware of this service. The NHS has published advice on looking after a child or young person's mental health.

Wellbeing for Education Recovery is providing funding to local authorities so they can provide ongoing support and advice for schools and colleges that need it and helping them establish sustainable ways of working together and with longer term services. This builds on the Wellbeing for Education Return programme in 2020 to 2021, which provided free expert training, support and resources for staff. These resources remain available for education staff to supplement existing local offers. This includes a short, recorded webinar - Every interaction matters.

Other resources include:

- MindEd, which includes e-learning modules about young people's mental health
- the Every Mind Matters platform, which has specific advice for adults and young people on maintaining good mental wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic
- the Association of College's (AoC) COVID-19 resource hub, which includes advice for students and staff
- the Education and Training Foundation's mental health and emotional wellbeing advice for FE staff
- Education Support's mental health and wellbeing support services for all education staff
- free apps available on the NHS App Store for mental health and wellbeing support
- the Digital Wellbeing of Students guide from Jisc, which curates a number of resources and guides
- the Samaritans' website which provides guidance on how to prepare for and respond to a suspected suicide in FE colleges
- resources to support student and staff mental health and wellbeing produced by college partnerships funded through the college collaboration fund
- a new college mental health self-evaluation tool (C-MET) has been developed by Charlie Waller and the Association of Colleges (AoC)

Mental health is also covered in keeping children safe in education and these principles continue to apply.

Consider supporting students with their mental health and wellbeing through:

- remote one to one counselling
- encouraging young people to identify their own self-care strategies during this uncertain time, online resources can help with this
- completing welfare checks at the start of each lesson to ensure that all students are engaged and supported
- personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) lessons focused on topics including mental health awareness, healthy living and online safety
- encouraging participation in sport, AOC Sport promotes and supports sports in further education

International students

If you have any international students, aged 18 or over, follow the higher education COVID-19 operational guidance. This applies to international students in FE too.

Funding, assessment and accountability

We have issued the 16 to 19 funding regulations and funding rates and formula guidance for 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. Given the unprecedented circumstances, we will continue to review the guidance and will notify you of changes.

16 to 19 tuition fund

We provided extra funding for the academic year 2020 to 2021 to:

- help mitigate the disruption to learning arising from COVID-19
- support students to catch up with missed learning

The funding is provided to support small group tuition for 16 to 19 students in English, maths, or other elements of technical or academic study programmes to help address gaps in knowledge required for 16 to 19 qualifications.

We have issued guidance on how the funding should be used and allocations. Whilst carry over of unspent funds into 2021 to 2022 is now permitted, we strongly encourage that the tuition funding for 2020 to 2021 is spent in this academic year.

Education recovery plans

In addition to the previously announced extension of the 16 to 19 tuition fund for the 2021 to 2022 academic year, we will provide a further £222 million to continue the 16 to 19 tuition fund for an additional 2 years from the 2022 to 2023 academic year, allowing access to one-to-one and small group catch up tuition.

Young people will be able to catch up in subjects that will benefit them the most, including maths, English and vocational courses.

The 16 to 19 tuition fund will continue to support students with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and 19 to 24 year olds with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) through the provision of one to one and small group tuition. Providers may choose to use this funding to support eligible learners with SEND to catch up on vocational and academic skills, and skills and learning that are important for their preparation for adulthood, subject to them meeting the eligibility for the fund.

Providers of 16 to 19 education will also have the option of offering students in year 13 or equivalent the opportunity of repeating up to one more year if they have been particularly severely affected by the pandemic. Some students with education, health and care plans may meet the criteria to repeat a year.

Students with EHCPs are already able to receive more time to complete and consolidate their learning where necessary and any decision to repeat a year would have to be agreed by the local authority, as part of the EHCP review process.

We will undertake a review of the evidence on extending the school and college day, to conclude in time for the Spending Review, alongside continuing to monitor how effectively students are catching up.

Funding for 16 to 19 students

The 16 to 19 funding regulations set out the principles that need to be met to count towards planned hours. 16 to 19 funding is allocated based on planned hours regardless of how those hours are delivered. If you are planning to combine time in the classroom or workshop with remote delivery, this will not affect the funding you receive.

T Levels

Allocations have been made to providers that will be delivering the first wave of T Levels in 2020 to 2021 based on planned T Level student numbers. We have published the approach for applying a tolerance if the number of students enrolled on T Levels is below the planned number.

Read more about the tolerance and how T Levels will be funded in 2020 to 2021.

We will monitor this approach and communicate any revision for 2021 to 2022.

T Level industry placements

We are closely monitoring the situation regarding the impact of COVID-19 on industry placements.

See the industry placements delivery guidance for information about delivering high-quality industry placements.

Free meals in further education

You should continue to support students who are eligible for free meals.

You should provide support even if students are studying remotely due to COVID-19.

Read further guidance on free meals in further education funded institutions for 2020.

Funding claims and reconciliation

Information is available for education and skills training providers on submitting funding claims to ESFA.

Advanced learner loans

The Student Loans Company (SLC) will continue to make scheduled fee payments to all providers with an advanced learner loan facility.

Contact SLC if a student's circumstances change.

Adult education budget (AEB) funding (grant-funded providers)

Currently, approximately 50% of the AEB is devolved to 7 mayoral combined authorities (MCAs).

These authorities are now responsible for:

- providing AEB-funded adult education for their residents
- allocating the AEB to providers
- considering any provider flexibilities in their areas

ESFA will continue to be responsible for the remaining AEB in non-devolved areas.

ESFA AEB grant funded providers

We are lowering the reconciliation threshold for ESFA grant funded adult education budget (AEB adult skills including non-formula funded community learning and 19 to 24 traineeships) and advanced learner loan bursary fund (ALLB) providers for 2020 to 2021, from 97% and 100% respectively to 90%.

Allocations for the COVID-19 skills offer, including funding for the new level 3 adult offer, are ringfenced and the reconciliation threshold for under-delivery of this provision will remain at 97%.

Our primary aim is to support providers to continue to deliver as much quality provision as possible, including above the 90% threshold, whether that be face-to-face where permitted, online or otherwise remotely, and including through sub-contracting (for AEB-funded provision only) where that is in line with our subcontracting conditions set out in the rules and contracts. For those providers who are eligible and are at risk of insolvency, they would be referred to the insolvency regime or emergency funding process.

In areas where the AEB has been devolved, MCAs and GLA are responsible for considering any provider flexibilities in their areas.

Traineeships

As part of the Plan for Jobs, the Chancellor announced a significant expansion of traineeships to help an increased number of young people to prepare for and find work. The traineeships framework for delivery sets out these reforms.

Whilst these reforms enable providers to deliver a more flexible and tailored programme during the COVID-19 pandemic, training and assessment should happen remotely wherever possible during periods of local or national restrictions.

Supported Internships and Access to Work

Supported internships are structured study programmes for young people with an education, health and care plan, based primarily at an employer. During periods of local or national restrictions, placements should happen remotely wherever possible. The young people can continue to attend COVID-secure settings for work placements where they, the learning provider and the employer all agree this is necessary.

Access to Work funds workplace support for young people who are completing a government-funded supported internship, where they need support or adaptations beyond the reasonable adjustments.

Contact the Access to Work helpline on 0800 121 7479 for more information.

Supported internships returners

Supported interns who were not able to meet the core aim of their internship in the 2020 to 2021 academic year may continue their internship into the 2021 to 2022 academic year.

Where necessary and appropriate, priority for accessing work placements in the 2021 to 2022 academic year should be given to supported interns who were enrolled on a supported internship in 2020 to 2021.

Recording returning supported internships in the school census and individualised learner record (ILR)

Record these supported internship students in the ILR or school census as completed at the end of the academic year 2020 to 2021. You must then set them up with a new programme covering the additional planned activity in the continuing year with start and planned end dates in the academic year 2021 to 2022. This will ensure that students continue to be funded in the unplanned funding year. Students must be on their new programme for the minimum qualifying period to count as a funded student.

You must only use this recording flexibility for supported internships at the boundary of academic years 2020 to 2021 and 2021 to 2022. Do not use it for any other students or academic years.

High needs funding

You should discuss any requirement for high needs funding with your local authority. Students who have high needs will occupy places funded at £6,000 per place (£10,000 per place in special schools) in the normal way. See the high needs operational guide for the period beginning April 2021.

Awarding qualifications for summer 2021

For students taking vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs), different approaches are being taken for different groups of qualifications. Ofqual published its summer 2021 qualification explainer tool, which shows which approach will be taken for individual qualifications. Students can search for their specific qualification to see how it will be assessed. Additionally, Ofqual's revised regulatory framework (the VTQ contingency regulatory framework) sets out the expectations on awarding organisations for awarding this year.

Awarding organisations share information on their approach to awarding for VTQs with schools, colleges and other providers, as well as provide information at individual qualification levels on their websites. They will have also published guidance for centres and relevant materials on teacher assessed grades.

For those VTQs most similar to GCSE, AS and A levels that are used for progression to further or higher education, students will receive teacher assessed grades.

This also includes other general qualifications such as:

- International Baccalaureate
- Pre-U
- Core Maths
- Advanced Extension Awards
- Extended Project Qualifications

For VTQs that require students to demonstrate occupational or professional competency, exams and assessments will be going ahead in the summer term in line with public health guidelines, and so work for these qualifications will continue throughout the remainder of the academic year. Where the assessment cannot take place safely it will need to be delayed.

For VTQs that are used for progression to further or higher education but are not like GCSEs or A levels in their structure, such as Functional Skills qualifications (FSQs) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), exams and assessments for these will also continue in line with public health measures, including remotely, but with alternative arrangements available for those who cannot access the assessments. All details of which approach is being used for individual qualifications can be found on the relevant AOs' websites.

It is expected that the need for teacher assessed grades will be identified on a case-by-case basis. It is not expected that eligibility for teacher assessed grades will be determined for large cohorts of students.

Ofqual has published details of the different assessment arrangements available for Functional Skills qualifications in 2021.

How VTQ students can appeal their results

Schools, colleges and other providers wishing to appeal a VTQ result on behalf of a student should follow the process set out by the individual awarding organisation concerned.

Performance data

We will not publish data based on exams and assessments from summer 2021 on school and college performance tables or publish qualification achievement rates.

See guidance on school and college performance measures and qualification achievement rates for more information.

Inspection

Ofsted has published an updated inspection handbook which takes account of the challenges raised by COVID-19 and sets out the extended intervals for inspection to take account of the suspension of routine inspection activity that resulted from the pandemic.

Ofsted is currently reviewing the findings of the pilots conducted in recent weeks to assess a full return to inspection. Ofsted intend to return to a full programme of inspections from autumn term 2021.

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