Covid-19 Briefing Note 2 –

TEACHING FROM SEPTEMBER 2020

Friday 29th May 2020

GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private sectors. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; law; business and finance; education; health and sports.

Overview

This briefing brings together the relevant published guidance and briefings related to teaching from organisations including the Office for Students, QAA and Advance HE, as well as additional questions and considerations that institutions will wish to consider in preparation for next academic year. Of course teaching does not re-commence from a standing start in September, it is ongoing. Although the next academic year presents an opportunity to evaluate practice and reset where necessary, based on what are likely to be different student expectations than over recent months

Please note there will be a separate briefing on **Socially Distanced Campuses** (Briefing Note 3) and also on wider **support for students** (Briefing Note 4) and **staff support and HR considerations** (5).

The **primary consideration for institutions** in considering how you will structure your teaching next year **is the maintenance of quality and standards, learning outcomes and adherence to regulatory guidance**. We expect regulatory compliance to evolve and develop as the start of the next academic year approaches (as it has with school re-opening), so this will require ongoing review.

Given that next year the learner experience will almost certainly be different, what steps have you taken to ensure active and regular **engagement with your students' union** to help your preparation.

Key resources to consider

OfS guidance about quality and standards during the coronavirus pandemic –
https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/guidance-for-providers-about-quality-and-standards-during-coronavirus-pandemic/

QAA Covid-19 resources –
https://www.qaa.ac.uk/news-events/support-and-guidance-covid-19

QAA Scotland Technology Enhanced Learning hub –
https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/focus-on/technology-enhanced-learning

Advance HE Resources -
https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/resources-support-you-during-covid-19-pandemic

Communications from the Scottish Funding Council on coronavirus -
http://www.sfc.ac.uk/COVID-19/COVID-19.aspx

Covid-19 Briefing Note 2 –

TEACHING FROM SEPTEMBER 2020

Scenario based planning

Given that at the time of publication (May 2020) for most institutions next academic year is still four months away, it is highly likely a number of the current unknown variables will change. To that end, the majority of institutions are approaching the next academic year with three scenario based models in mind, and are preparing plans for (a combination of) all three eventualities, both for the start of the new academic year and for any additional waves of lockdown:

Three main scenario based models:

- Entirely Online (some providers have already decided to go entirely remote for autumn 2020)
- Blended learning
- Socially distanced on-campus provision

Entirely Online and blended

Key suggestions and questions that institutions are considering in relation to online teaching:

Platforms

- Is your online learning platform suitable for starting the academic year and potentially delivering a significant part of 2020/21?
- Would it be sensible to invite a small number of online learning platforms to present how they may be able to support you as an institution?
- Will there be different student expectations for online learning, interactivity and resources starting the academic year compared to finishing it? Have you spoken to your students (and students' union) about this?
- A number of students will be accessing online content through their phone, is your digital content accessible via mobile (as well as laptop, tablet and desktop devices)?

Quality and standards

- In moving teaching online (either entirely or as part of a blended offer) how are you mapping the learning outcomes and assessment methods?
- Where appropriate have you engaged with relevant PSRBs to update them on your plans?
- How robust are online assessment methods and specific academic integrity questions?
- Are there greater risks of essay mills use when online assessment is open for longer period?

Discipline specific considerations

- How will online provision provide for particular practical elements of courses or other more vocationally based elements that require access to specialist equipment, artistic or performance spaces, hands-on access to animals or patients?

- Can activity be re-profiled to bring theoretical content more easily taught online forward in the year, and practical activity later when face to face may more easily be able to resume (whilst considering possible second waves or Winter spikes).
- Where field or study trips have previously been an important part of delivery, how can these be re-imagined virtually or what contingency needs to be considered in place if they can't proceed?
- Given that placement, year abroad and clinic settings may not be accessible next year, what steps can be taken to try and create virtual settings ahead of next academic year?

Supporting staff

- Are staff adequately supported to deliver a high-quality online learning experience? How can they be supported to develop, and encouraged to flag any potential issues they can foresee?
- How well resourced are your central IT/technical teams to support staff across the institution?
- What support can be made available from your Learner Management System or other suppliers to aid your staff?
- Do you have mechanisms to share practice and support amongst your staff (either within departments or across the institution)? Virtual staff rooms and clinics?
- Some platforms only allow users to see a maximum of four faces – could this lead to disengaging? What can be done to stimulate engagement where faces cannot be seen?

Supporting students

- How are students supported to engage with online learning? Either in terms of pedagogic approaches or practically in terms of soft and hardware.
- Do some students need to be provided with any equipment in order to allow them to participate? How will this be funded and practically distributed?
- If students are suffering from persistent challenges accessing online content, is available support clearly sign-posted?
- Do students have full online access to journal articles and other resources?
- What additional support ought to be provided to students with specific requirements?
- Are there particular challenges in inducting new students on a wholly online programme and what can be done to support online induction? What lessons can be learned from existing programmes which are already wholly online (elsewhere in your institution or elsewhere in the sector)?
- Have you been able to take into account that different students might be able to engage with online learning at different times (due to caring and other responsibilities)? Might this strengthen the case for a mix of synchronous and asynchronous delivery?
- Feedback from the sector suggests that use of the chat function in online sessions can be important to encourage students to then contribute via video chat.

Covid-19 Briefing Note 2 –
TEACHING FROM SEPTEMBER 2020

Organisation and management

- Have you been able to undertake an evaluation of the online teaching provided this spring to inform your preparation for autumn 2020?
- Does your institution have any evaluation or lessons learned from online delivery which already exists within your institution?
- Have you identified any courses or programmes for which being run wholly online is impossible, and therefore a decision would need to be taken about delaying/postponing (for one term or possibly an entire academic year?
- Is there a more important role for learner analytics to help track which students are engaged (and not) in teaching? How might this management information be shared appropriately with staff and what reassurances might students need

Blended learning

Most programmes in higher education are already, to some degree, a form of blended learning. In the context of Covid-19, it will be important to evaluate at department level (and possibly on a course by course basis) the preparedness for each programme to flex the current balance of face to face/online.

- How easily are you able to take stock of the current blended balance at department or programme level?
- What can be done to re-balance the ratio between campus based and online content on programmes which need to be re-configured?
- Can existing online teaching in some courses/programmes be re-profiled to shift more of the online teaching earlier in the academic year (when there may be greater need to reduce on campus delivery)?
- Are you easily able to identify some programmes which have a particularly small amount of online content and make contingency plans for these?
- Is the role of the personal/academic tutor going to be more important when there is greater emphasis on a blended experience with a greater online component than historically?

Socially distanced on-campus provision

Briefing Note 3 will provide more detailed guidance on the steps that can be taken to establish socially distanced and safe on-campus provision.

Identifying which groups to return to campus – students

Feedback from institutions indicates that providers are **seeking to identify cohorts of students for whom being on campus is particularly important for their experience**. Some of these groups include students who are on lab-based, studio and land-based courses.

Institutions who have a range of students across a number of disciplines may seek to identify these students as amongst the first to return – with the **possibility of social distancing, or treating the**

students as a cluster or "household unit" who will be able to mix together but are unable to mix with others.

There may also be a case to consider whether already enrolled postgraduate research **students**, who will often work alone and be highly accustomed to the pattern of their study, to be invited to return (with the possible condition that they operate in isolation).

A number of providers have decided all **postgraduate taught** teaching in 2020/21 should be delayed to January 2021 or will be entirely remote next academic year (given most courses are one year).

Some institutions are seeking to **try and separate their teaching for students into two groups (Group A and B)** who would – at least for the first term – come onto campus in alternate weeks (or alternate times in the day, e.g 8.30am – 1pm and 1.30pm – 6pm). This would mean that the total headcount of campus would be approximately 50% lower at any time than ordinarily the case.

Newly enrolled students will require a more intensive initial interaction with the institution. To facilitate that, institutions are considering a range of different approaches to enable this. Can any lessons be learned from existing online provision about how these students are ordinarily inducted?

- Have you identified segments/cohorts of students for whom, if required, you would prioritise their return to campus?
- Would it be helpful to delay the start of term for newly enrolled students or should they be first, in case campuses are locked down again?
- Could you set aside a specific period of days (possibly an entire week) where the only students on campus will be new students? This might allow them to have a tailored and dedicated orientation, before then being invited into blended provision or a Group A/B structure.

Identifying which groups to return to campus – staff

In the process of building up the return to campus, management teams will seek to try and make a judgement about which staff may need to return sooner than others.

Some principles which might be worth bearing in mind:

- What constitutes "key work" on campus?
- Who is only able to undertake their work on campus?
- Can some activities be profiled to a later point in the academic year?
- Does the risk profile of some categories of workers mean they should be prioritised or de-prioritised in terms of the return to work?
- What additional support might staff need to access if they are to continue working at home?
- What decisions can be devolved to department or unit level so they can manage their return to campus in a controlled or staged way? (e.g. inviting departments to organise their staff return to work on a rota basis, with no more than 50% of staff on campus at the same time).

Covid-19 Briefing Note 2 –
TEACHING FROM SEPTEMBER 2020

Further details on the **socially distanced campus are available in Covid-19 Briefing Note 3**.

Some additional questions to consider

Governance

- If a decision is taken to increase numbers back onto campus have the relevant sign offs been secured? (e.g. from the governing body, from insurers, seeking legal advice if appropriate, revised risk assessment etc.)
- How will you continue to reassure and report back to your governing body? (some GBs have created a sub group of governors for the executive to report to more regularly)

Staging the return to campus

- Can your staff and student body be segmented in such a way to identify priority groups to return to campus first?
- Can an increase in staff and students on campus be achieved in a staged way? (e.g. start with a small priority cohort, and then build up in stages)
- What might a staged return through August, September and October look like?
- In a multi discipline campus, are there specific cohorts of students on lab-based, studio or land-based courses for whom returning to campus is especially crucial?

Segmenting your student body

- Can your institution explore a potential Group A and Group B structure from the beginning of term, where each group would spend one week on campus and one week with remote support, alternating between the groups.
- Might postgraduate research students who are largely able to operate in isolation be amongst the first groups of students invited to return to campus?
- Might postgraduate taught courses be delayed until January 2021 – and what the impact of a second wave be on that - or taught entirely online next academic year?
- New students – might it be reasonable to consider some different approaches for newly enrolled students this autumn?
- Are there any categories of staff or students for whom a decision can be taken that their interaction with the provider will be entirely remote this autumn (so for them there will be no campus teaching in the first term)?

Study abroad/placements

- There are particular considerations about students who were due to undertake study abroad or placement activity, particularly in the first part of the next academic year.
- Some institutions have sought to re-profile activity, so that placement or study abroad activity which was due to take place in the first half of next academic year are delayed to the second half, or 2021/22.

- For some placement activity, plans are being arranged to allow students to undertake remote placements (allowing students to engage with employers remotely).
- The general view of the sector is that, for at least the remainder of 2020, study abroad activity will not be able to go ahead in those countries. What alternative arrangements or mitigations can be place? Can you identify which courses this will have a material impact on the learning outcomes?

Clearly there are a number of practical steps, and questions which need to be considered in relation to teaching. The **driving consideration needs to be the protection of the student experience and the maintenance of quality, standards and learning outcomes** – informed by engagement with your students.