

Covid-19 Briefing Note 3 – Socially distanced campuses

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; education; health and sports.

Overview

The purpose of this briefing is to bring together guidance to support institutions who wish to resume on-campus teaching in the next academic year. This should be read in conjunction with **Briefing Note 1** (summary of announcements and publications) and **Briefing Note 2** (teaching from September).

Preparatory questions and considerations

Before embarking on the process to begin planning to open a socially distanced campus, there are a number of questions worth reflecting on:

- Are there any permissions (e.g. from the governing body) that may be required in order to re-open campus (socially-distance or otherwise)?
- Can you demonstrate adherence to the Public Health England (or equivalent) guidance?
- Does anything prevent you from embarking on the process to re-open?
- How will you organise the project to re-open campus? (full executive team, sub-group, are there additional stakeholders who should be involved?)
- How will you ensure the relevant involvement of the student voice and staff representatives?
- Are there any principles that you would like to embed to guide your decision making? (e.g. maintenance of standards and learning outcomes, cost envelope, applies to all students etc.)
- What legal advice may be required or additional information from your insurers?
- Are there other bodies who need to be kept informed or consulted (e.g. Public Health England, Office for Students/SFC, local authority etc.)

Key resources to consider

Office for Students –

Summary of Covid-19 guidance for providers

[https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus/Student accommodation](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/coronavirus/Student%20accommodation) (22 April 2020)

Public Health England – [Covid-19 guidance](#)

Health and Safety Executive [Covid-19 latest information and advice](#)

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Advance HE has been conducting an in-depth project with webinars and resources to support specific learning around socially distanced campuses. Some public links:

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/news-and-views/socially-distanced-campus-education-next-big-question>

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/consultancy-and-enhancement-services/creating-socially-distanced-campuses-and-education-project>

QAA Covid-19 Support and Guidance –

[Securing academic standards and supporting student achievement](#) (7 April 2020)

[Practice and lab based assessment](#) (7 April 2020)

[Work based learning](#) (8 April 2020)

[Accelerated degrees](#) (8 April 2020)

[Initial guidance for providers on standards and quality](#) (23 March 2020)

[Advice to degree awarding bodies on mitigating the disruption to students](#) (20 March 2020)

Association of University Directors of Estates coronavirus resources:

<https://www.aude.ac.uk/Resources/News/View?q=73da95b8-b679-4fe3-84d2-bddde59a7f51&m=4&y=2020&t=Coronavirus%20resources>

Parameters for a socially distanced campus

- Ensuring that everyone on campus remains a safe distance away from one another, currently 2m (6.5 feet), although some institutions are additionally planning for 1m. GuildHE has raised with the DfE whether there will be additional HE sector specific guidance.
- Group gatherings are prohibited (usually more than 20 people)
- Introducing a cap on the total number able to access campus (and specific buildings) at any given time
- Consideration for a limit on the number of people allowed in any room at a time (possibly 20)

Government advice on re-opening campus

At the time of publication, there is no specific steer from the UK government whether campuses should re-open in September. On 15 May 2020, in response to a question from Lord Truscott, the government spokesperson in the Lords, Baroness Berridge (Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Department for Education) gave this response:

Response from Baroness Berridge (15th May 2020):

“...Regarding the re-opening of universities, the department expects universities, as autonomous institutions, to make their own judgements based on the latest Public Health England guidance. Universities are continuing to provide high quality teaching online. We are working with the higher education sector to develop guidance and best practice that will be needed for universities to make informed decisions about their provision.”


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In **Scotland**, the government has set out a specific approach the education sector (including colleges and universities) should follow as part of their “[Covid-19 Framework for decision making – Scotland’s route map through and out of the crisis](#)”.

Although not applicable in the rest of the UK, this may be a helpful guide to those based outside of Scotland.

Scottish Government COVID-19 Routemap



	Lockdown	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
	Lockdown restrictions:	As with previous phase but with the following changes:	As with previous phase but with the following changes:	As with previous phase but with the following changes:	As with previous phase but with the following changes:
 Schools, childcare and other educational settings	Schools and childcare services closed. Measures in place to support home learning and to provide outreach services to vulnerable children. Critical childcare provision for key workers and vulnerable children provided through hubs, nurseries and childminding services. Universities and colleges closed – remote learning and research.	School staff return to schools. Increased number of children accessing critical childcare provision. Re-opening of child minding services and fully outdoor nursery provision. Transition support available to pupils starting P1 and S1 where possible.	On campus university lab research restarted subject to physical distancing.	Children return to school under a blended model of part-time in-school teaching and part-time in-home learning. Public health measures (including physical distancing) in place. Subject to the progress of the scientific evidence, schools are expected to open on this basis on 11 August. All childcare providers reopen subject to public health measures, with available capacity prioritised to support key worker childcare, early learning and childcare (ELC) entitlement and children in need. Universities and colleges phased return with blended model of remote learning and limited on campus learning where priority. Public health measures (including physical distancing) in place.	Schools and childcare provision, operating with any necessary precautions. College and university campuses open – including key student services with any necessary precautions.

The table above sets out the roadmap the Scottish government has provided to colleges and universities for what they should do at each stage after lockdown.

Advice in preparation for re-opening a socially distanced campus

Staging the return of staff to gradually increase numbers on campus (seek to identify work which is essential on campus, and staff that can more easily continue to work remotely).

Staging the return of students (segmenting the student body to gradually increase the return where possible: e.g. by discipline, level or year of study)

Briefing for all staff on what they should expect before return to campus, and where questions and additional support can be raised.

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Briefing for all students before they return to campus (both as a webinar and email), where support and further information will be provided and questions can be raised.

Consider **staggering start times for members of staff** if there are standard working hours which are typically adhered to, to help avoid a bulge of people arriving and leaving campus at the same time.

Purchase of barriers and cordons which can be deployed to help manage the flow of people on campus. **Erecting clear signage** on campus (to include messages such as “maintain 2m distance” and “wash hands regularly”) add 2m marks to the floor, and to direct the flow of people)

Erecting **transparent protective screens** in front of people facing services such as main reception, food service and other outlets on campus

Depending on the space between buildings (and the ownership of these) consider the appropriateness of **designated walking routes between buildings**.

Making a decision about **whether “non-essential” buildings on campus will be open** (e.g. shops, catering, printing) and communicating that to students and staff as part of the briefing.

Additional **self-serving takeaway food and drink stations/machines** to minimise queues.

Deciding whether some or all **buildings will have a one-way flow of people** to help manage and avoid congestion. Designate a **single point of entry into buildings** to help manage the flow and population within a building and set up **queueing lanes outside buildings** to regulate the flow entering buildings.

Consider whether **additional staff/security may be desirable** to help manage social distancing on campus.

Consider how to deliver large lectures safely or move to online provision, but theatres may be used for other teaching.

Work to **re-configure the furniture in rooms on campus to establish social distancing** (e.g. cordon specific seats in a lecture theatre, space chairs and tables 2m out in seminar rooms)

Identify existing spaces owned by the university which are generally not used for teaching, but may be accessed for teaching and other activity (e.g. sports halls, dining areas etc.)

Work to **re-configure any open plan office space** to adhere to social distancing guidelines.

Establish **open computer labs** (with social distancing) which students will be able to access to support study (particularly important for students who may not have easy access to technology).

Establish, and clearly signpost, a **room on campus which anyone should head to should they feel unwell/experience** symptoms of Covid-19.

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Increase **facilities for bicycles to be stored on campus**, and further steps to try and reduce the use of public transport.

Revise the cleaning regime on campus to ensure more regular cleaning of all surfaces and areas of high use, and the wider resource available to cleaning. Prohibit the **use of lifts** to only essential use (i.e. those who are unable to use stairs) or regulate the number of people who can use the lift at any given time.

Additional support for a socially distanced campus

As well as the primary considerations set out above, some institutions are also considering some of these additional elements:

- Consider what additional flexibility exists in your approach to timetabling which may allow for a longer day, but also a reduced footfall on campus.
- Provide face masks for those coming onto campus and invite students to wear face coverings.
- Provision of specific protective equipment where that is necessary for specific roles.
- Sanitising dispensers around campus to encourage hand hygiene or festival style basins for hand-washing
- Consider whether any visitors should be allowed onto campus.
- Consideration whether any contractors should be allowed onto campus, and if they are what Covid-19 protocols they will be adhering to.
- Where practicable all assessment to be submitted electronically, to avoid peaks where students physically submit assessment in person.

Given large parts of the sector are looking to acquire a number of similar items (e.g. cordons, barriers, protective screens, sanitizer etc.) a number of the [sector procurement](#) consortiums are facilitating this.

Society of Occupational Medicine have produced an excellent **toolkit** - [Returning to the workplace](#)

Returning to work on a socially distanced campus

In addition to the guidance above, KPMG have compiled some useful additional resources which are worth reflecting on in terms of your organisation as a place of work.

<https://assets.kpmg/content/dam/kpmg/uk/pdf/2020/05/kpmg-covid-19-webinar-returning-to-work-reactivating-your-operations.pdf>

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Partnership with the students’ union

Regular and meaningful consultation with the students’ union will be an important dimension in helping to prepare and execute successful delivery for the next academic year. As well as the wider partnership with the SU, working with them to consider that any premises they are housed in is considered as part of the wider campus approach to social distancing will be important.

Working with SUs will be important to ensure there is a joined-up approach to acquiring cordons, and a consistent approach on the rules around distancing and the flow of people on campus.

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.

For institutions for whom they have a range of students across a number of disciplines, they may seek to identify these students as amongst the first to return – with the **possibility of social distancing, or treating the students as a ‘household’ cluster 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).

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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, particularly after disrupted schooling experiences in many cases. 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 (new start points include late October, November and January 2021)?
- 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).

Accommodation

A number of higher education institutions will also be providers of accommodation for students. There will be a series of considerations for how to organise any accommodation which is run by the

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university, accommodation which is offered to students in conjunction with private sector partners and any more general advice which can be offered to students who will be living in the private rented sector.

A decision will need to be taken about **whether accommodation can be re-opened** in any form. Although if any form on-campus teaching is being planned for, some provision of accommodation will almost certainly be necessary for most institutions.

Students who are sharing a room can be considered part of the same “household unit” for the purposes of social distancing.

The **configuration of accommodation will hugely influence the approach** taken to social distancing. Properties where 2-20 students live together, might reasonably be considered as a “**household unit**”. Therefore students who live together, can study together as a safe cluster.

Accommodation which houses 100s of students will need to be segmented, and more stringent rules to prevent large gatherings of students. This may include advising students that they can only mix with students from a particular area/wing/corridor etc. of a specific building.

For social distancing to operate effectively **groups beyond 20 will need to be prohibited**, until restrictions can be lifted. This may mean introducing temporary barriers to segment bigger buildings.

The **preparation, serving and consumption of food** will need to be a particular consideration to ensure that household groups dine together, but that they may not mix with other groups.

For some buildings, the **arrangements for bathroom/washing facilities** may also need to be managed if they do not conform to an acceptable “household unit”.

Enforcement is clearly going to be difficult and communication of the expectations will be important. Beyond communication of the rules, institutions will need to decide the extent to which they will have an enforcement role. Prior consideration for what will happen to students if they are found to be contravening the rules should be set in advance, ideally jointly with the students’ union.

DfE Guidance on Leaving or collecting belongings from student accommodation in England

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-he-providers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/actions-for-he-providers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

For students living in the **private rented sector**, the provider should initiate contact with them to ensure that adequate arrangements are in place, and how this will be communicated to students.

International students

Alongside the guidance in this briefing and elsewhere, there will be additional considerations for international students. At present, the Home Office have announced that international arrivals into the

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UK will be subject to a two-week quarantine – this will apply to international students (or indeed any students or staff returning from overseas). In order to comply with this, international arrivals need to provide details of accommodation where they can safely quarantine for the two-week period. For your students, this will in many instances be student accommodation.

Providers are paying particular attention to additional support which can be provided to international students, especially new starters, for whom their first experience of living away from home (and of your institution) may be 2 weeks in quarantine. In place of face to face support, what can your institution do to support students (e.g. daily video calls for all international students, assigning them a named contact at the provider, online buddying with other students?) If international students are using your accommodation for the quarantine period, will the provider offer to take responsibility to provide food and other essentials?

Monitor and evolve your approach

Prior consideration should be given to whether the approach from an institution is working, and **whether specific changes might need to be made** to tighten or loosen the approach.

Has a group been designated to have **management responsibility** to oversee this, and review feedback and evidence?

The provider's management will also need to **be prepared to enforce a return to complete shutdown** of campus if there is a spike in Covid-19 infections on campus, locally, regionally or nationally.