

Covid-19 Briefing Note 6 - Lessons from other countries and research

Friday 12th June 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; law; business and finance; health and sports.

Overview

This is the sixth and final Covid-19 briefing note focussed on preparations for the new academic year, covering topics not fully addressed elsewhere in the series. These notes should be read in conjunction, with a particular focus on Briefing Note 2 (teaching from September) and Briefing Note 3 (socially distanced campus).

Key resources to consider

DfE [Guidance for reopening buildings and campus in higher education](#) (3 June 2020)

DfE Announcement of [support for higher education](#) (4 May 2020)

DfE letter from Universities Minister Michelle Donelan to [providers](#) and to [students](#) (27 March 2020)

OfS [Student guide to coronavirus](#) (ongoing) with FAQs on health wellbeing and support, accommodation and finance, teaching learning and assessment, graduating in 2020 and applying to study in 2020-21.

OfS Briefing Note for [Postgraduate research students briefing](#) (11 June 2020)

UK Research and Innovation have established a [coronavirus resource hub](#)

QAA [Covid-19 Support and Guidance](#)

QAA [Preserving quality and standards through a time of rapid change](#) (2 June 2020)

Advance HE Resources in relation to Covid-19

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/resources-support-you-during-covid-19-pandemic>

Guidance from **BUFDG** on [furloughing researchers](#)

Lessons from other countries

Although each national government is taking its own path out of lockdown and the gradual resumption of normal activity, lessons can certainly be learnt from elsewhere – particularly countries who have been able to re-open higher education campuses earlier than the UK.

Even within the UK, there has been a slightly different tack taken by administrations across the four countries, and details of the Scottish government roadmap were detailed in Briefing Note 3 (socially distanced campus).

Australia

Although Covid-19 arrived early in Australia and New Zealand, for a variety of reasons they were able to halt the spread of the virus which has allowed them to re-open the vast majority of sectors.

In the middle of May, the **Australian** Prime Minister Scott Morrison set out their [3 step plan](#) to remove restrictions. The specific support for the higher education sector has largely been announced on a state by state basis, with a particular focus on providing additional help to international students (financial support for their living arrangements etc.) in order to facilitate their study.

A summary of the major responses from Universities Australia can be found [here](#). The primary lesson for the UK sector will be that although initially the Australian government did not offer additional financial support (like the UK), over time additional support (at state level) did come forward, largely focussed on encouraging international students to study.

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Authority (TEQSA) has pulled together a [series of resources](#) to support institutions, including dealing with regulatory obligations at this time.

New Zealand

Even in **New Zealand** where Covid-19 deaths are recorded at just 22, and a country that was able to lift lockdown more quickly, they are still expecting a significant financial shortfall (largely from the non-attendance of international students). In New Zealand, like the current UK plans, international arrivals are subject to quarantine on arrival.

However the **higher education sector in NZ has worked with the Ministry of Health** to create a [supervised border measures travel exemption for international students](#). This approach is worthy of particular consideration, although it should be noted that the universities themselves have volunteered their own healthcare workforce to support the managed supervision of international students on arrival.

The New Zealand [Ministry of Education have also established a \\$1million hardship fund to support international students](#) address urgent and temporary needs such as inability to access cash due to a lack of part-time work etc.

The [Pie News also covers a story suggesting universities in New Zealand are discussing using charter flights](#) to assist international students in coming to the country, and the Australian Chamber of Commerce has proposed a 'trans-Tasman bubble'.

Republic of Ireland

On 26th May, the Irish government announced that international students who needed to leave Ireland before/during the pandemic may return and resume their studies without the period of their absence needing to be added to their two-year visa.

Students who have got to the end of their two-year visa will be permitted to remain in country until they can safely stay at home. This specific support for international students is part of a wider [5 stage blueprint](#) published by the Irish government. The Irish Council for International Students have also established a [dedicated landing page with information and support](#) for current and prospective international students.

United States of America

The situation in the USA is probably the closest to the circumstances in the UK; namely a relatively late move to lockdown, significant spread of the virus, and therefore a longer period of disruption. There has also been limited support from government (relatively less than the UK government, and like the UK government no specific support for higher education).

In some ways, this means that there are fewer lessons to learn from the US because there are no obvious examples of good practice to draw out. Four articles and announcements below give an overview of key milestones in the approach from the USA.

Summary of the [Covid-19 impact on US higher education](#) (27 May 2020)

Plans for the new [academic year including blended teaching](#) (13 May 2020)

Transcript of [discussion between US Vice President, the Secretary of Education and 14 Principals](#)

Guidance from the US Centre for Disease Control and Prevention to [administrators of US higher education institutions on dealing with Covid-19](#)

China

There are some lessons that can be learnt from the Chinese experience too, though important to bear in mind how vast the country is therefore general lessons are harder to draw.

A useful blog from the British Council which reflects on [lessons for the UK to learn from Chinese universities beginning to return](#) and a separate article and [video also includes insights from 15,000 students based in East Asia](#) (including China) and how their intentions to study have been affected by coronavirus.

The World Economic Forum has included a piece capturing a [case study from Zhejiang University](#) with a particular focus on online teaching, teacher training in online delivery and their digital learning platforms.

Research

Ministerial University Research and Knowledge Exchange Sustainability Taskforce

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ministerial-university-research-and-knowledge-exchange-sustainability-taskforce>

This taskforce provides an advisory forum for ministers to engage with university research and knowledge exchange stakeholders. The aim of the group is to sustain the university research base and its capability to contribute effectively to UK society and economy during the recovery to coronavirus and beyond.

UK Research and Innovation have established a hub of resources with further information relating to coronavirus, and specific sections on the following items:

[Submit proposals for Covid-19 related research](#) and [Covid-19 projects being supported](#)

[Guidance for research and innovation communities](#), including UKRI-funded students

[Understanding coronavirus \(vaccines, testing and tracking\)](#) and ([researching impact of coronavirus](#))

[Addressing technological challenges](#)

[Our global contribution](#)

[How the UKRI community is helping](#)

[The science behind coronavirus](#)

The **Office for Students** [briefing note for postgraduate research students](#) (11th June 2020), covers sections including **reorganising, rescheduling and pausing research**, getting **access to research infrastructure**, issues relating to **funding** and **PGR student wellbeing and mental health**.

Scientific research laboratories

On 11th May the Westminster government released their [roadmap to recovery](#) which includes specific guidance on how [scientific research laboratories could operate](#) and covers the following areas:

- Thinking about risk (managing risk and risk assessment)
- Who should go to work (including people at higher risk)
- Social distancing at work (including workstations and common areas)
- Managing customers, visitors and contractors
- Cleaning the workplace
- Personal protective equipment and face coverings
- Workforce management
- Inbound and outbound goods

Furlough for research staff

Guidance from **BUFDG** on [furlough for research staff](#). Where HEIs are involved in research, including those in receipt of public funding, the BEIS confirms that CJRS applies to:

- researchers on fixed term contracts
- those contracts were due to expire during coronavirus disruption
- the research is unable to continue; and
- the funder has offered a no-cost extension

In addition, the BEIS guidance confirms that a furloughed researcher can have their contract extended until the grant work is eventually completed.

Supporting researchers

There are two useful pieces from **Jisc**, which capture support being provided to researchers. The first includes an [update on the Janet network, open access services and content services](#) and how they will continue to operate.

The second is a more [detailed piece which specifically covers](#); access and copyright rules, computer security, back up plans, cloud and data sharing and video meetings.

Doctoral degrees and current postgraduate researchers

UKCGE have pulled together helpful [guidance which specifically considers a range of themes relating to doctoral degrees and postgraduate researchers](#).

Here are the 5 primary considerations they have set out to support doctoral candidates:

- The quality of their research and the standard required for the research degree to be awarded.
- Their mental health and wellbeing is protected.
- Their funding source is not compromised.
- The likelihood of timely completion and successful assessment.
- Their future ambitions are not impaired by Covid-19.

The Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) has commissioned [Vitae](#), supported by UKRI and Universities UK, to gather evidence to understand the implications of the Covid-19 pandemic on the activities of researchers and research groups. **This evidence will inform BEIS's consideration and design of potential interventions to help protect researchers, research institutions and facilities**, and in the longer term reinforce the research base and sustain research and innovation activity in the UK.

Additional support: GuildHE Research

[GuildHE Research](#) is facilitating in-depth peer-to-peer support for the heads of research in the member institutions. This also includes a Covid-19 Support shared space where members are sharing and developing ideas, particularly around topics where there is not yet formal government or UKRI advice.

In addition, a weekly briefing on Research and Knowledge Exchange summarising key developments is circulated each Friday.

If GuildHE members who are not members of GuildHE Research are interested in accessing this support, please contact Matthew Guest, Policy Manager (Research, Knowledge Exchange & Industrial Strategy) on matthew.guest@guildhe.ac.uk or 020 3393 6135.