



FE England joint trade unions five Ws: question areas to inform discussions about a return to work in FE

Any risk assessment should eliminate risks or reduce risks to the lowest level as is reasonably practicable. In the current circumstances of Covid-19 this means all staff and students working from home where possible and ensuring that if there is any return to the workplace following the latest government guidance the risks of infection and transmission are controlled and remain low. Given Covid-19 can lead to severe illness or death and there is no cure or vaccine in place, the risk level is at the highest level

possible. The likelihood of a risk causing harm then depends upon the control measures implemented which should reduce the risk to low levels. The risk assessment will need to consider who employers propose to return to onsite work, what activities will be taking place, and where those activities will be happening - Why should these people / groups / activities be involved / take place? Where are the activities to take place? When will the activities begin?

The risk assessment should consider all these 'Ws' so that all potential hazards and risks can be identified, then eliminated or reduced to low levels. The risk assessment should thus inform any strategic decision making on what a return to work could look like to ensure any decisions prioritise the health, safety and welfare of staff and students.

WHO?

Who are the students and staff affected by any proposed return to onsite working and who will be expected to return to college?

No one is suggesting that everyone is to return. Government guidance for FE only talks about some form of face-to-face delivery before the end of summer term, for some students, phased, and in small and limited numbers. Identify who the college are proposing to be included in any pre-summer return and include all impacted groups in the risk assessment. Have they considered those who are at greater potential risk of infection or poorer outcomes from Covid-19? - Government guidance identifies three categories including those with specific long-term health conditions, older age groups, pregnancy, and emerging evidence suggests people of BAME background, and males are at greater risk. Have they considered those with caring responsibilities who are unable to attend the workplace? Based on who can or should return to the workplace

have they considered the safe staffing levels required to implement their plans and safe working arrangements? Government is not saying a definite **WHEN** for FE, so consider and deal with all other **Ws** for each group before agreeing **WHEN**.

WHY?

Why are colleges proposing to bring back these students and staff? Do they really need to come back? Why can't remote working continue until the Joint Trade Union's first three tests can be met by government? Why return before the risks of Covid-19 transmission can be significantly reduced? Why return these groups before test and trace systems are in place to quickly identify and control new infections and prevent spread across workplaces and the local community?

Why prioritise these staff, students and activities? Discuss the rationale for their return, the attributes of those students (family Covid-19 vulnerabilities e.g. BAME etc.), their educational needs, and the timing of the return. What other options, e.g. for alternative remote delivery, have been considered and why aren't they an adequate alternative for these students? What could we do to make the alternatives work?

Why are these the right staff to bring back? Discuss the rationale for their return, and the attributes of those staff affected, including Covid-19 vulnerabilities, mental health, transport options and if they are available to return in a safe and healthy way? Can we achieve necessary delivery with volunteers and/ or what do we need to do to make that happen?

Try to establish that home working and online delivery is currently the default position unless there is a sufficient reason why this cannot be made to work, and the five tests are met.

WHERE?

Where will the proposed staff and students return to? Which buildings and spaces on campus will these students and staff work, learn, and circulate in and through?

Identify all the spaces that will need to be considered for risk assessments such as infection control measures (for safe physical distancing, increased cleaning frequency and access to appropriate welfare facilities) What other building considerations have been risk assessed – water quality, appropriate ventilation, fire safety measures, pest control, security.

WHAT?

What are the health, safety and welfare risks associated with the college proposals? What does a *safe* return to college look like for these students and staff?

A thorough risk assessment of all spaces classrooms/learning settings/communal areas indoors and outdoors is required in terms of physical distancing and hygiene, to identify safe ways of working.

What tasks will students and staff be required to undertake? Identify the tasks that need to be risk assessed in order to agree safe ways of working.

What travel is required and how can we establish safe ways of travelling?

What PPE will be required? Identify the spaces and tasks where the only way to achieve safe ways of working requires PPE. Identify what PPE is necessary, and how and when it will be reliably available.

WHEN?

Only after there is agreement over what a safe return for any groups of students and staff looks like, can a date for their return be agreed.

This discussion should take account of the **five tests**, including consideration of factors external to the college referenced in the first three tests.

We have concerns about the government's test, track, trace and isolation system. These arrangements need to be working effectively and consistently. More time is needed for the arrangements to bed for confidence in them and for the number of cases in local areas to reduce. This test that will need to be met at all times through out the pandemic and while Covid-19 is active in the community.

Test the necessity of any educational needs being addressed before summer, or whether this can be deferred until autumn - is the net educational benefit commensurate with the potential risk to students and staff?