Covid-19 hazards and controls

Considerations for ongoing scrutiny and implementation of risk assessments in HE

This document aims to support union health and safety reps to scrutinise Covid-19 risk assessments by listing some of the potential hazards related to Covid-19 transmission in the workplace and some potential control measures that should be considered for higher education institutions during any phased return to on-site work.

Control measures should follow a **hierarchy of control** that first seeks to eliminate a hazard and where this is not possible, control the hazard to as low a level as is reasonably practicable.

Who can be harmed and how

A risk assessment should consider all those who could be affected including employees, contractors, and students, members of the public, and anyone who could be harmed by their business activities. When considering who should return to the workplace and when, certain groups of staff at greater risk will need specific considerations and specific control measures implemented. For instance, current data shows that there is disproportionate impact of Covid-19 on older people, pregnant women, people with underling health conditions, BAME people, and men. This includes an increased risk of contracting Covid-19 and/or increased risk of severe illness or death.

Other groups of staff to consider in the risk assessment include: new or expectant mothers, temporary workers, migrant workers, transient workers, disabled people, young people, newly recruited and inexperienced workers, lone workers, home workers and contractors.

Employers risk assessments, safe systems of work, information and guidance should be easy to follow. Employers should ensure workers understand what hazards and risks they could face and the measures in place to control these risks, including any emergency procedures.

Everyone should be clear on what they need to do to keep themselves and others safe and this will require adequate health and safety training that is relevant and effective. Appropriate levels of supervision should also be in place to ensure safe systems of work are implemented effectively.

The table below lists the potential hazards and controls for higher education. The list is not exhaustive and you will need to identify hazards and controls specific to your organisation and the people working there.

Hazards and hazardous activities (Covid-19 transmission)	Potential controls
Labs and research facilities Particular issues: ■ fixed equipment and room layout ■ inability to social distance due to need for collaboration between people, often in close proximity	Avoid any activity if it cannot be undertaken safely. Restrict numbers accessing labs and equipment to ensure social distancing. Change room layout to ensure social distancing. Physical screens and barriers between people unable to socially distance. Increase frequency of hand washing. Back to back or side to side working arrangements. Reduce time spent in labs and research facilities to as low as possible. Use 'fixed teams and partnering' to reduce numbers of people you will be in contact with. PPE – type, use, storage, disposal, cleaning.
Cleaning of labs and research facilities/ equipment Equipment that cannot be cleaned Activities that limit ability to clean effectively	Enhanced cleaning regime and increased frequency of surface cleaning. Cleaning workstations and shared equipment and machinery, where feasible. Limit use of high-touch items and shared office equipment e.g. test equipment, apparatus, shared control terminals. Ensure appropriate air-handling and filtering systems are installed and maintained in high-risk areas where there is a risk for airborne particles.

	Staff to change into work clothing on-site using appropriate facilities/changing areas, where social-distancing and hygiene guidelines can be met. Staff provided with suitable storage space for clothes and bags.
	Lab clothing and equipment cleaned on-site and not at individual staff members home.
	PPE – type, use, storage, disposal, cleaning.
Group teaching on site / face-to face / shared offices	Homeworking to continue.
	Invest in IT equipment and training to allow for effective remote working.
	Teaching and assessment delivered online.
	Ensure administrative tasks are undertaken from home (e.g. lesson planning, marking and assessment, timetabling, advice and guidance).
	Implement new ways of working to reduce the number of activities and people needed to engage in on site work. E.g. alternative curriculum, teaching methods and assessments.
	Ensure social distancing of two metres minimum for all on site work. Use signage, floor markings and reduce numbers of people onsite at any one time - staggered start times, staggered breaks, etc.
	Reconfigure office or classroom spaces to ensure social distancing of two metres minimum and ensure staff or students are sitting side to side, or back to back, avoiding face-to-face set ups.
	Use of screens or dividers to separate areas using a physical barrier where two metres social distancing cannot be guaranteed.
	Use approved ventilation systems to ensure airborne particles are safely dispersed. Consider use of air purifiers

	and other ventilation systems following expert advice where appropriate. Open windows to increase air flow in shared spaces. Ensure appropriate spaces are used for office work and teaching that are well ventilated, avoid enclosed spaces and recirculated air and consider maximum occupancy levels. Reduce social mixing - identify safe routes through buildings, corridors and rooms and safe use of any shared facilities or communal areas (e.g. kitchens, printing rooms). Use rotas and cohorting of staff and students to reduce contact with other people as much as possible. Reduce usage of shared equipment or desks – assign own equipment, restrict access, ensure cleaning of shared equipment between users. Use of PPE – FFP3 /two masks, gloves, aprons and coveralls, face masks (safe system of work where required to ensure safe usage and disposal). Face coverings to be considered as an additional measure where groups of people may congregate or where two metres social distancing could be difficult to maintain. Safe system of work required for safe usage or disposal.
1:1 meetings with staff or students	Conduct meetings online or via teleconferencing. Consider alternatives and interim arrangements. Reduce number and frequency of 1:1 meetings. Ensure social distancing of two metres and avoid use of enclosed spaces with poor ventilation for meetings.
On-site meetings	Conuct meetings online or via teleconferencing. Review processes to reduce need for on site or face to face meetings.

	Ensure social distancing in place for any meetings. Reduced numbers attending meetings to low levels and avoid enclosed spaces with poor ventilation for meetings.
Libraries	Remain closed during this emergency period in line with Reg 5 (1) of the **Health Protection (Coronavirus, Restrictions) (England) Regulations 2020)**. However, they are allowed to provide services for orders made via website or on-line communications, telephones and text messaging, and post. Consider safe systems of work, risk of viral transmission via paper or other shared materials and use of PPE.
Communal and shared areas ■ break rooms ■ canteens ■ social spaces ■ toilets and other welfare facilities	Close non-essential communal and shared areas. Reduce numbers of people who need to access communal or shared areas. Physical partitions, screens or dividers in shared areas to reduce social mixing across individuals or groups. Packed lunches provided or brought in to avoid or reduce any social mixing. Minimise social mixing - restrict access to communal areas to specific groups or cohorts of staff and students. Introduce rotas, staggered times for breaks, schedule work activities before or after lunch breaks to allow people to eat lunch from home where possible. One-in-one out system for small, enclosed spaces and spaces with poor ventilation e.g. toilets and welfare facilities. Ensure there are sufficient toilets and welfare facilities for all those on site at any one time, taking into account safe systems of work. Activities and lessons scheduled to avoid crossing over lunch times so staff and students can eat at home before or after classes.

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	Social distancing clearly communicated with appropriate levels of supervision, instruction and signage for all entry and exit points. Associated safe system of work.
	Ensure emergency arrangements (e.g. Fire and first aid) are in place for those on site and safe systems of work, emergency procedures and procedures for serious and imminent danger.
Campus access	Minimise contact points between staff, students, visitors, contractors, members of the public while travelling across university site. Consider closing off routes with bottlenecks or 'pinch points' and introducing one way systems where appropriate.
Bottlenecks into buildings, corridors, stairwells, lifts, classrooms and offices	Avoid routes that are likely to create bottlenecks or queues into buildings, classrooms.
	Identify different entry and exit point for different cohorts of staff and students.
	Identify where one-way systems are needed with associated signage and route markings.
	Queuing arrangements in place for entry and exit points to buildings and rooms with appropriate supervision arrangements. Associated signage, information and instruction to ensure compliance – safe system of work.
	Restrict and control numbers entering buildings, classrooms or offices at the same times (e.g. rotas, staggered start and finish times).
	Restrict or control access to areas where two metres distance will be difficult to implement or maintain.
	Restrict or control access to areas where people may gather or congregate.
	Restrict or control usage of lifts.
Cleaning regime and personal hygiene	Homeworking to avoid contact with infected surfaces or objects.

| | Reduce time spent on site to reduce likelihood of contact with infected surfaces.

Reduce number of touchpoints by reorganising the workplace to ensure touch free movement or activities e.g. fixed opening of non-fire doors, fire doors held open using mag-locks or equivalent engineering control.

Restrict or control access to shared equipment.

Avoid taking infected equipment or documentation home (e.g. initial studies find Covid-19 can last between three hours and four days on paper at room temperature).

Enhanced cleaning regime (cleaning after every group activity, class, and lecture) with associated safe system of work. Implementation of regime closely monitored and documented for assurance checks.

Deep cleaning before reopening of buildings and after any suspected case of Covid-19 following safe system of work (see PHE guidelines on **Covid-19: cleaning in non-healthcare settings**).

Enhanced and more frequent cleaning of touchpoints in buildings, classrooms, corridors, stairwells, lifts etc.

Clean equipment before and after usage and between users.

Restrict access to areas that have not been cleaned or have no infection control measures in place.

Clean shared equipment or desks between usage.

Wash hands before and after using equipment, before and after entering rooms and before and after each activity.

Use hand sanitiser that can kill virus (e.g. minimum 60% alcohol) when handwashing facilities unavailable. |
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	Ensure adequate provision of hand sanitiser, soap, paper towels, and lidded, pedal push bins at key points across the workplace. Clear workspace and remove waste and belongings from the work area at the end of a shift. Use of PPE – gloves, aprons, RPE, face masks. Review of COSHH assessments for all cleaning chemicals and appropriate PPE.
Infected waste	Infected waste (tissues, paper towels, aprons, gloves, masks etc) to be disposed of in lidded pedal push bins were possible. Hand dryers in bathrooms turned off and provision of lidded pedal operated bins. Lidded toilet seats to be used when flushing. Appropriate signage and instruction for safe usage of bathroom facilities. Arrangements in place for regular collection and disposal of hazardous waste with safe systems of work. Waste double bagged, labelled and disposed of as clinical waste. Safe procedure for storage, use and disposal of cleaning materials and PPE.
Travel to and from work	Homeworking to avoid travel to workplace. Covid-19 travel to work policy. Avoid all non-essential travel – consider remote options first. Avoid use of public transport where possible. Promote and support alternative travel arrangements e.g. Travel to work on bike or walk to work. Travel to work in cars alone (unless travelling to work with other members of your household).

	Increase car parking availability and bike storage facilities.
	Suggest safe systems for use of car or public transport and provide information on safe systems to decontaminate clothing either at work or at home.
	Increase access to showers and changing facilities on site. Regulate use of locker rooms, changing areas and other facilities to reduce concurrent usage.
	Covid-19 travel to work policy to confirm local arrangements and safety measures.
	If using public transport, use PPE, face masks, hand-gel, and follow safe systems including changing and cleaning contaminated clothing.
On site staffing levels - absences due to Covid-19 related illness, requirement to self-isolate, and caring responsibilities.	Reduce social mixing and reduce unnecessary contact by cohorting of staff and students into fixed teams or partnering. This will also reduce impact of any confirmed or suspected cases and reduce number of those required to self-isolate for 14 days.
	Increase access to testing and encourage use of any track, trace and isolate technology to reduce impact of any outbreaks.
	Workforce plan to consider safe staffing levels during any phased return and contingency plans if staff are shielding or isolating.
	Minimum staffing levels considered for key roles to ensure safe operation of the workplace (e.g. cleaners, fire wardens, security staff, and those implementing control measures).
	Procedure in place for staff to remove themselves from any serious and imminent danger from Covid-19.
	Emergency procedures in place for phased return to onsite work with arrangements to mitigate any risks associated with absences of key duty holders or staff e.g. fire wardens and first aiders.

	Lone person working procedure for phased return and safe systems of work.
Roles that may involve less than 2m social distancing e.g. First aider role, personal care duties, working with student with emotional and behavioural difficulties	Consider if activity can safely take place. Consider different ways of working to maintain social distancing. Reduce numbers of people on site to minimise contact with others. Reduce time spent on site to limit exposure to Covid-19. Reduce time spent with others where social distancing cannot be maintained. Cohort staff and students into smaller groups. Safe systems of work in place for specific roles or activities. Use appropriate PPE – RPE, gloves, aprons or coveralls, face masks.
Safety culture and behaviour of staff and students	Take actions that will increase motivation to follow safe systems of work such as additional training, inductions, safety checks, supervision. Identify areas where additional training, information and instruction are required and consider use of signage throughout workplace to support implementation of various control measures. Undertake refresher training on work tasks and equipment, particularly where that work is safety critical. Publish risk assessments and safe systems of work and encourage feedback and review to ensure risks continue to be managed to their lowest possible level. Implement H&S training as identified in risk assessments and training for staff in various safe systems of work before any reopening.

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	Consider piloting smaller and lower risk areas first and make improvements to risk assessments and safe systems of work as needed. Utilise a range of communication methods to suit different groups. Provide clear, consistent and regular communication to improve understanding and consistent of ways of working.
Failure to control risk of transmission	Procedure for serious and imminent danger agreed with unions. Training and information of health and safety arrangements to increase awareness of any health and safety reporting mechanisms. Establish clear communication routes for staff and students to report any new hazards, failed controls, near misses and exposure to Covid-19. Increase supervision of areas and activities that are higher risk for Covid-19 transmission and regularly review the effectiveness of control measures.
People at greater risk of viral transmission and poorer outcomes Those in older age groups (60+) Those with underlying health conditions Those from BAME groups Men	Home working Encouraging staff to disclose any increased risk factors and reassurance that they will be given additional protections and considerations e.g. homeworking, lower risk groups phased back to the workplace before higher risk groups. Workforce planning to identify those staff and students at greater risk and for this data to inform return to work plans. Alternative duties to allow for home working. Temporary redeployment to allow work from home. Lower risk on-site activities with safe systems of work. Increased access to testing. Individual risk assessments where required.

	Priority access to PPE (FFP3/two respirators, gloves, aprons. PPE that is fit tested and staff have training in storage, cleaning, use and disposal. Safe system of work for PPE.
Staff at greater risk of ill health due to impact of Covid-19 Disabled staff (impact on reasonable adjustments, safe working environments, access to support and conditions that increase ill health) Parents and carers – predominantly women (more likely to have additional caring responsibilities) less able to attend the workplace Those with members of their household who are at greater risk of contracting Covid-19 or suffering poorer outcomes.	Home-working and flexible working arrangements in place. Review of reasonable adjustments and additional support. Encourage staff to disclose any issues and offer reassurance that support can be given to prevent or minimise impact on health, safety or welfare. Consider potential equality impact and increased risk to health and safety. Findings to inform any return to work plans and workforce planning. Induction to workplace and safe systems of work. Alternative roles, duties, tasks considered where necessary. Individual risk assessments where required. Flexible or alternative working arrangements. Access to PPE for on-site work if appropriate.
Health surveillance – workers becoming ill at their place of work	Health surveillance arrangements in place to ensure early signs of illness can be detected to prevent transmission e.g. Temperature checks before entry to the workplace or during the working day. Daily self-assessment or self-reporting to confirm health checks completed i.e. high temperature, loss of smell/taste, new persistent cough (coughing a lot for more than an hour, three or more coughing episodes in 24 hours). Health surveillance as an early warning system for any outbreaks within the workplace.

	Health surveillance to ensure suitable control measures are in place to prevent and reduce exposure to Covid-19 in the workplace.
	Isolation rooms to contain any potential transmission of virus for those displaying symptoms on site. Isolation and surveillance of those potentially infected until Covid-19 test results known.
Domestic violence – increased isolation at home and increased risk of physical and mental harm	Domestic violence policy for the workplace.
	Employer to increase awareness of domestic violence and sources of advice and support.
Welfare facilities / personal hygiene	Access to welfare facilities for frequent handwashing.
	Restricted access to welfare facilities and safe systems of work.
	Washing stations provided or installed where needed, well stocked with soap and paper towels.
	Provide additional waste facilities and increased waste collection. Use lidded pedal bins to eliminate need to use hands and keep hazardous waste well contained.
	Access to sufficient hand sanitiser that meets standards to eliminate the virus.
	Access to shower rooms and rooms to change out of travel or work clothes. Safe system of work.
	Isolation rooms or spaces for those who may become ill with Covid-19 symptoms at place of work with safe system of work and deep cleaning process.
Stress	Refer to generic, preventative and organisation level stress risk assessment.
	Risk assessment should identify potential stressors during Covid-19 and preventative and protective control measures that need to be implemented.

14	Multiple changes to ways of working, new technology and pace of work due to Covid-19 and other impacts on mental health such as bereavement and isolation. Stress risk assessments should consider the **HSE Management Standards** (demands, control, support, relationships, role, and change) to draw out the potential stressors for workers from various groups undertaking various work activities both on site and at home. Controls can also look at workload agreements, reduced workload demands, alternative duties and activities, increased support and communication from managers, bereavement policy, etc. Individual stress risk assessments to be competed as needed.
Homeworking	Refer to generic homeworking risk assessment. Homeworking risk assessments can consider home environments, access to suitable equipment, training, advice and support, measures to support physical and mental well-being. Individual DSE risk assessments to be completed where required and/or self-assessment checklists to ensure safe working practices at home.
Emergency evacuation and emergency roles (e.g. Fire, first aid)	Emergency evacuation systems, procedures and training should be reviewed and adapted to take into account social distancing requirements and minimum staffing levels required for safe operation of emergency procedures.
PPE	Ensure adequate supply of appropriate PPE as identified in risk assessments. Implement safe systems of work for use and disposal of PPE and ensure fit testing and training is implemented in advance to prevent transmission of Covid-19.

Additional considerations

Risk assessments should also consider hazards associated with ad hoc and non-routine operations, seasonal tasks, different weather and environmental factors to ensure controls are adequate for all circumstances. For example, in hot weather people will be less likely to wear a face mask and may need increased access to drinking water. In addition, some controls may fail due to human behaviour or practical issues. For instance, PPE may not be available in sufficient type or quantity and some activities may not be able to continue as a result.

Reopening buildings and restarting systems safely ensuring all required checks have been done and remedial actions taken. All plant and equipment which have been closed during lock-down must be reviewed for safe operation and to identify new and existing hazards. For instance, hot and cold water systems present a risk of Legionnaires disease. Pest control and other environmental health considerations should also be reviewed and measures implemented before reopening of workplaces.

Suggested questions for employers to inform the risk assessment process

- What is the local infection rate/ R number?
- What is the make-up of the workforce and student body by risk factors – women, men, BME, disability, underlying health conditions, young people, new or inexperienced workers, transient workers, women of childbearing age, pregnant (list not exhaustive)? What steps have been taken to capture accurate information from staff and students on this? How has this informed workforce planning and return to work plans? Need to share this information and data with UCU.
- How will the above data inform their risk assessments or plans to re-open colleges?
- Are there sufficient numbers of people in the organisation who are competent and understand their duties under health and safety legislation? To undertake suitable and sufficient Covid-19 risk assessments in consultation with trade unions? To inform decisions about when to reopen university sites and what activities to prioritise for on-site work?
- What H&S training will be implemented before reopening and what expertise will be sought to ensure the organisation implements all necessary safety measures and checks before wider re-opening?
- How can they prevent outbreaks in the workplace and local community without effective local health surveillance? How effective are track, trace and isolate systems in their areas? Are they fully operational with quick access to health data at local level?
- What assurance do we have that their re-opening plans will be phased in when it is safe to do so? What about plans for potential local outbreaks or a second wave of the virus?

■ Will they confirm that all training, safety checks and safe systems of work have been completed and implemented before reopening?

Other resources

Hazards Campaign: reviewing Covid-19 risk assessments

Higher Education: reopening buildings and campuses

Working safely during coronavirus: Labs and research facilities

five steps to working safely during Covid-19

British Occupational Hygiene Society Covid-19 Return to Work Guidance

Chartered Institute of Environmental Health Covid-19 Hub

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