



Principles for working safely on campus during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic

**This joint statement has been agreed between UCEA and the HE trade unions:
EIS, GMB, UCU, UNISON and Unite**

UCEA and the joint trade unions have developed these joint principles to support HEIs in planning to keep their campuses as safe as possible and ensure the health and wellbeing of HE staff, students and visitors.

1. Use of government guidance for safe workplaces

HEIs will use government guidance and public health guidance (e.g. Public Health England and devolved nation equivalent) as the basis for their response to the Covid-19 pandemic. At an institutional level this response will factor in relevant local conditions and circumstances that employers and unions may need to consider. Unions will work with HEIs in the implementation of the relevant guidance for their institution.

2. Health and safety legislation

The government guidance does not supersede existing health and safety legislation. HEIs must continue to abide by statutory health and safety obligations relevant to their nation, such as the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974 and the Safety Representatives and Safety Committees Regulations 1977, which provide rights to recognised trade union safety representatives, and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999, which contains the legal duty on employers to conduct risk assessments.

Health and safety legislation, coupled with the government guidance specific to Covid-19, should be seen as the minimum standards for HEIs to achieve.

3. Consultation with campus trade unions

HEIs recognise the positive contributions that unions can make. UCEA HEI member institutions commit to consulting with recognised trade unions on staff health and safety, and about how the institution will manage risks from Covid-19 including regarding the re-opening of departments and services. HEIs should work jointly with trade union representatives, staff and students to resolve issues.

4. Risk assessments

Plans for managing staff returns to campus will only be implemented when risk assessments have been completed. HEIs will undertake appropriate risk assessments and review them in consultation with trade union health and safety representatives. Unions will support a risk based approach to controls and will help to inform their members regarding the appropriateness of controls.

As part of carrying out risk assessments, HEIs will ensure that relevant advice and expertise is available and given appropriate weight and consideration.

The Public Health bodies have provided extensive guidance on what to consider in any risk assessments, and HEIs will consider the full range of preventive measures aimed at minimising the risk, and spread, of infection. Decisions on any measures, including the provision and use of PPE, will be based on the outcomes of risk assessments, based on what is reasonably practical for that workplace.

A generic risk assessment for Covid-19 should also be conducted to draw out potential issues, considering both mental and physical health during the pandemic. This should be cover all staff and, depending on the size and complexity of the institution, may either be one single HEI-wide risk assessment or a series of different generic risk assessments covering different sites/departments.

5. Communication

HEIs will communicate regularly with all trade union representatives, staff and students on health and safety issues related to Covid-19. HEIs will be clear about what can and cannot be done to adapt practices relating to work and study and consider the provision of any training, as needed, for staff. Staff and students should have clear channels through which to raise with their HEI any concerns that they have or any suggestions which the HEI might not have considered previously.

6. Impact on staff

Universities will assess how the transition back to campus will affect different cohorts of staff and take into account any equality considerations. HEIs will seek to identify reasonable actions to mitigate possible adverse impacts on specific group/s including those, or those living with, people who are shielding or vulnerable.

Although these principles were developed during the coronavirus (Covid-19) pandemic they outline underlying principles with regard to managing health and safety in the sector.

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