

8 April 2022

Sarah Albon
Chief Executive
Health and Safety Executive
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sarah.albon@hse.gov.uk

Dear Sarah

I am writing as general secretary of the University and College Union (UCU), which represents 130,000 academic and professional support staff across post-16 education in the UK, to convey our concerns about the ongoing risk of Covid-19 transmission in further and higher education sectors.

This risk is heightened by the UK government's withdrawal of universal access to free testing, high levels of social mixing in universities and colleges, significant geographical movement of students and staff across the UK, Europe, and internationally, and the poor adherence to recommended public health measures.

The Health and Safety Executive (HSE) have removed Covid-19 risk assessment guidance from their website, and no longer requires every business to consider Covid-19 in their risk assessment or to have specific measures in place. This is deeply concerning.

The ongoing and foreseeable risks of Covid-19 transmission, ill health, long Covid and even death must continue to be subject of workplace risk assessments if we are to protect the health and wellbeing of staff and students and minimise disruption to education.

The UK government guidance, which removes the requirement to explicitly consider Covid-19 in workplace risk assessments, is in conflict with Health and Safety legislation and the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 in particular. We believe this is a potentially dangerous move which could cause further avoidable harm across post-16 education.

Covid-19 risk assessments have been a useful tool for employers and trade unions to work together effectively to improve health and safety and reduce transmission during the pandemic. Removing this requirement on all businesses risks undoing much of the good work that has been achieved so far.

By removing this requirement HSE is sending the wrong message to those employers who need ongoing support and guidance to control Covid-19, following a risk assessment approach.

UCU has already received reports of employers in post-16 education de-prioritising ventilation, removing CO2 monitors and allowing those who test positive with Covid-19 to enter crowded teaching spaces. This does not reflect public health advice and is a recipe for disaster in workplaces that require continued regulatory support and intervention from the HSE.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jo Grady'. The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Dr Jo Grady
General Secretary