

COVID-SAFE BEHAVIOURS AND RETURNING TO CAMPUS



Universities UK

INTRODUCTION

Students have made huge sacrifices in response to the pandemic which has severely constrained their normal experience of higher education. Although the risks of developing serious illness from COVID-19 infection remain low for younger age groups, students have predominantly followed public health advice.

As students and university staff return to campus for in-person teaching and wider activities, it is important for universities to continue encouraging and enabling behaviours that reduce the risk of transmission and increase uptake of testing and vaccination, to respond effectively to behaviours that are not COVID-safe, and to maintain positive relationships with local communities. This guidance has been developed following a roundtable bringing together the sector with key agencies, drawing on behavioural research, effective practice and lessons learned from the past year.

Universities may wish to use the guidance to support and inform preparations as further students return to campus this academic year and ahead of 2021/22. It may be used as a framework for individual universities to adapt to their own institutional settings and contexts. It covers a range of key issues to consider and should be read alongside relevant national and local guidance.

1: PREVENTION

While there is agreement that it is better to prevent unsafe behaviours than to have to respond to them, there is less agreement on the most effective preventive approaches. Effective prevention depends on understanding the enablers, and perceived challenges for students to engage in COVID-safe behaviours such as social distancing, testing, vaccination, and self-isolation. This includes relatively routine issues such as the location of testing centres as well as more serious issues such as the social, emotional, and financial costs at stake.

Universities should consider:

- Building and maintaining trust and self-efficacy through clear guidance and support measures alongside co-producing messages – particularly with students.
- Providing a package of practical, emotional, and financial support so students can follow public health advice including testing and self-isolating. UUK has published a [checklist](#) for supporting students who are required to self-isolate.

- Communicating the reasons for taking certain actions (such as self-isolation), and creating a sense of collective and shared responsibility among university communities.
- Tailoring and co-designing approaches with different student groups, bridging social, cultural, and structural barriers to build trust, perceptions of fairness and to get key messages right.
- Promoting positive behaviours and the positive impact of student efforts and avoiding stigmatising groups of students and particular activities.
- Sharing information that provides reassurance and is explicit about what COVID-safe behaviors are and what to avoid.
- Adapting approaches and responses over time and in different settings.
- Using behavioural science expertise within the university.

Case study: York St John University

The York St John COVID Coordination Centre was created to support students and staff in self-isolation and to reduce the risk of transmission across the community. Students report instances of self-isolation via existing absence reporting processes which have been adapted to capture COVID-19 data. The centre team then issue tailored guidance to the individuals based on their specific circumstances and COVID status. Students can access a Moodle site with information about support, keeping occupied, shopping deliveries, and applying for support funding. Students can contact the centre seven days a week and support advisers stay in regular contact with isolating students with check-in wellbeing calls. Care packages are available with games, puzzles, and snacks in addition to emergency food packages, and support with collecting prescriptions, waste removal and delivery of home testing kits. The centre also helps students with general COVID queries and explains what government guidance means for them.

2: INTERVENTION

Early engagement and effective co-production with students and local partners can significantly reduce the likelihood of unsafe practices and behaviours. However, it is important to have a plan in place to manage issues appropriately if they arise and to communicate disciplinary processes clearly to all students.

Universities should consider:

- Developing and promoting a community code of conduct setting clear expectations around COVID-safe behaviours and being a good citizen.
- Utilising peer-to-peer influence through the voice of the students' union and other initiatives, for example empowering students to be active bystanders to challenge minor incidences around face coverings or social distancing in a safe way that avoids escalation.
- Ensuring that fairness is at the centre of interventions and students are treated as adults.
- Training academic and student-facing staff to confidently challenge students who are not following safety rules in learning environments.
- Developing and promoting a clear disciplinary process for students in collaboration with the students' union. This might include different warning levels and clear consequences where repeated deliberate rule breaking takes place. It may be necessary to illustrate how this disciplinary process interacts or relates to other disciplinary processes, eg for halls of residence.
- Preparing for media scrutiny of student behaviour by engaging early on with local media outlets and ensuring data that may be of media interest to disprove unverified claims is easy to access.

University of Southampton

In recognition of the importance of peer support and positive intervention, the University of Southampton used its existing student ambassador programme to create a network of students who operated as Stay Safe Ambassadors. These students have worked across the academic year to support their peers by being a visible team on campus and around halls of residence. The team are empowered to challenge non-compliance with the community compact that has been created but also to proactively engage with students to ensure: they maintain social-distancing, consistently follow guidelines around wearing face-coverings and practise good hygiene.

3: PARTNERSHIPS

Close partnership working and early engagement with public health and community stakeholders is essential to keeping university settings safe and reducing the risk of transmission. Key partners can include local communities, students, trade unions, local councillors and members of parliament, as well as formal agencies such as public health directors, the NHS and the police, in addition to accommodation providers and the media.

Universities should consider:

- Developing and sharing prevention and response plans with partners. These might include campus safety measures, student engagement plans and initiatives, disciplinary processes, and codes of conduct.
- Sharing positive and reassuring messages and stories with the local community, such as students' community impact work, via external partners including local media. This could include partnering with other local universities.
- Encouraging direct meetings and discussions between students and local public health teams to answer questions, provide reassurance, and create a sense of shared responsibility.
- Ensuring students and student unions are represented in key partnership groups.
- Collaborating with local universities and supporting smaller specialist providers.
- Working closely with trade unions to ensure that messaging around campus safety is agreed and does not create confusion for students.
- Working closely with private accommodation providers to ensure a joined-up and consistent approach, this could include establishing a city-wide accommodation group.
- Supporting the building of positive relationships between local police, university security, and students before issues arise to ensure that police presence is not seen as threatening and instead highlights their role in keeping students, campuses, and local communities safe.
- Adopting a flexible approach to partnerships to enable quick decision making and adaptability as situations evolve.

Northumbria University and Newcastle University

Northumbria University and Newcastle University have worked together for the past 18 months to encourage community unity between students and permanent residents. Challenges associated with students and permanent residents living alongside one another are well known including different lifestyles; different expectations on acceptable behaviour; terraced houses and flats converted into houses of multiple occupancies (HMOs) etc. The two universities co-founded a Community Unity Group comprising of representatives from the students' unions, Newcastle City Council, Northumbria Police, and Tyne and Wear Fire Service. The group reports to the Newcastle Forum, chaired by the deputy leader of Newcastle City Council. The group's remit includes countering potential issues around anti-social behaviour as well as supporting students living in residential areas.

Other activities include:

- updating University Student Charters, including new responsibilities around student COVID-19 safety
- championing students as partners to inform the [Newcastle Agreement](#)
- distributing promotional materials and information leaflets to 4000 households in residential areas with high numbers of students.
- 'Best Neighbour on Campus', highlighting students who are good neighbours
- 'Leave Newcastle Happy', a two-week clean-up campaign at the end of the academic year
- promoting student volunteering projects in the community and student fundraising for the British Heart Foundation through community recycling

Sheffield City Centre Neighbourhood Policing Team (NPT)

Sheffield NPT have been working closely with both universities in the city. After an initially reactive approach responding to COVID-19 breaches, the policing team found that being proactive by building relationships with university security teams was more beneficial. University security now have direct contact with the police crews dedicated to COVID-19 patrols if they need assistance quickly and patrol plans are in place. A poster designed for student accommodation areas explaining the police presence on campus has been well received by students. Information sharing agreements between universities and local police could enable more impactful disciplinary action than the financial penalties that the police can use as a last resort.

RESOURCES

- Universities UK, (updated March 2021) [Checklist: supporting students who are required to self-isolate](#)
- CUBO and USHA (March 2021) [Practical Advice to Minimise the Risk of Coronavirus Transmission within Households](#)
- ONS (December 2020) [How has coronavirus \(COVID-19\) spread among students in England?](#)
- Edmunds et. al (December 2020) [‘The COVID University Challenge: a Hazard Analysis of Critical Control Points Assessment of the Return of Students to Higher Education Establishments’](#)
- SPI-B (January 2021) [Return to Campus for Spring term: risk of increased transmission from student migration](#)
- SPI-B (October 2020) [Increasing adherence to COVID-19 preventative behaviours among young people](#)
- SPI-B (September 2020) [Impact of financial and other targeted support on rates of self-isolation or quarantine](#)
- SPI-B (July 2020) [Principles for co-production of guidance relating to the control of COVID-19](#)
- SPI-B (May 2020) [Key behavioural issues relevant to test, trace, track and isolate – summary](#)

ROUNDTABLE

UUK ROUNDTABLE 30 MARCH 2021

- Professor Sir Chris Husbands, Sheffield Hallam University, (Chair)
- Jayne Aldridge, AMOSSHE
- Jo Attwooll, Universities UK
- Professor Liz Barnes CBE, Staffordshire University
- Martin Blakey, Unipol
- Kieron Broadhead, University of Southampton
- Neil Budworth, Universities Safety and Health Association (USHA)
- Alison Bywater, South Yorkshire Police
- Jason Carter, University of Nottingham
- John de Pury, Universities UK
- Amy Dicks, Universities UK
- Professor Peter Francis, Northumbria University
- Hillary Gyebi-Ababio, National Union of Students (NUS)
- James Kolasinski, Office of National Statistics (ONS)
- Professor Craig Mahoney, University of the West of Scotland
- Professor Brooke Rogers, King’s College London. Prof Rogers also advises the UK Scientific Pandemic Insights Group on Behaviours (SPI-B)
- John Stewart, Association of University Legal Practitioners (AULP)
- Rebecca Varley, Sheffield Hallam University
- Dr Justin Varney, Birmingham City Council
- Dr Amanda Wilcox, York St John University
- Oliver Wilson, South Yorkshire Police

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