Checklist: Communications to prepare for the 2021–22 academic year

About this checklist

As students return to campus for the 2021–22 academic year, it will be critical for universities to communicate effectively with students and local communities. Although Covid-19 restrictions are lifting, the public health situation remains unpredictable.

University communications will play a critical role in making sure:

- Students understand what the university experience will look like in 2021–22 (including in different public health scenarios).

- Students know what support is available to them before they return to campus and know how to access that support.

- Students are aware of the behaviour that is expected of them to ensure responsible and respectful behaviour.

- Students are strongly encouraged to get vaccinated and know how t to get a Covid-19 vaccine.

- Students are given clear advice on any ongoing asymptomatic testing they need to do.

- Local communities are reassured about students returning to campus.The robustness of results themselves and the overall distribution of grades

- The timetable proposed for the release of results and the "decoupling" of results from the UCAS process

- The impact of arrangements on disadvantaged and underrepresented groups.

This checklist can be used by universities to help identify actions before the new academic year. The checklist can be adapted to individual settings and contexts. It can also be used alongside the examples of different university approaches. The checklist

and examples cover student-focused communications and communications to the wider community. A staff communications checklist is being developed by UCEA.

Pre-arrival communications

Safety on campus

- Provide reassurance on what measures the university will be undertaking to keep the university community safe.

- Ensure students who are new or returning to campus understand whether the university will be providing hand sanitiser, cleaning products for communal spaces and where/when face coverings may be required etc.

- Reassure students on safety measures and cleaning protocols in university accommodation.

Expectations for student behaviour

- Develop communications assets which reinforce core behavioural expectations on campus such as continuing to behave responsibly, respecting individual choice, the university's approach to face coverings.

- Develop communications assets which reinforce core behavioural expectations in the community eg, in local hospitality settings, on public transport.

- Signpost students to relevant university codes of conduct and charters

Information on student experience

- Set out how teaching and learning will be delivered and how it may change if there is a shift in the public health situation.

- Provide clear information on the wider student experience and how it may change if there is a shift in the public health situation, for example Students Union activities, freshers' week.

Student welfare

- Provide clear and prominent information on the student support available to new and returning students including on:

  - mental health support available

  - hardship support and how to apply

  - how any students needing to self-isolate in 2021–22 will be looked after

  - initiatives to address digital poverty and how to access them

Further resources available:

NHS England: Covid-19 vaccination FAQs: students in higher education institutions (June 2021)

Public Health England: Covid-19 vaccination programme: Information for healthcare practitioners

International

- Ensure there are clear communications to international students on their expected learning experience, including for those unable to travel to the UK for the start of the academic year.

- Make sure that students understand the current travel restrictions in place for entry to the UK and that these are subject to change and should be checked regularly.

- Provide clear information to students travelling from red list countries on any quarantine arrangements and what support will be available for those in managed quarantine facilities.

- Provide clear information to students travelling from amber list countries on whether they will be required to self-isolate, whether any exemptions are relevant to them and what support will be available to those needing to self-isolate

- Ensure international students have access to clear information on vaccinations which explains their eligibility and how to get the Covid-19 vaccines.

- Consider how communications to international students can provide reassurance on the university's health and safety measures.

- Signpost international students to clear information on the wellbeing support in place including mental health support, student services, health services and financial hardship.

- Provide clear information to outward mobility students on how to ensure they understand and comply with Covid-19 regulations during their period of time overseas

> Further resources available:
>
> Universities UK International: Supporting international student financial hardship: guidance for universities
>
> UUK International, BUILA, UKCISA: Self-isolation for students arriving in the UK: guidance and checklist for higher education institutions

Preparing for university life

- Develop information for students starting university in the autumn which highlights steps they can take to prepare for beginning university and the support available to help them transition to higher education smoothly.

> **Further resources available:**
>
> Case studies: Support for new students starting university in autumn 2021 (June 2021)

Vaccinations

- Strongly encourage students to get vaccinated without delay.

- Provide advice to students on getting vaccinated locally including making clear that GP registration is not a prerequisite for getting vaccinated.

- Promote local pop-up sites or vaccine centres. including information about their locations and how to access them.

- Ensure information on vaccines includes useful information for international students.

- Signpost to official vaccination information on NHS.UK

- Make sure students have access to resources designed to address any hesitancy of getting the vaccine and counter misinformation.

- Consider how information on Covid-19 vaccines can be disseminated to students alongside information on other non-Covid vaccines that they should consider having.

- Be mindful of other public health diseases such as Meningitis that occur around the start of term and ensure messaging on the wider public health challenges mentions these.

> **Further resources available:**
>
> NHS England: Covid-19 vaccination FAQs: students in higher education institutions (June 2021)
>
> Public Health England: Covid-19 vaccination programme: Information for healthcare practitioners

Testing

- Provide clear information to students on asymptomatic testing including any expectations to test before travel, test on arrival and test at regular intervals during term time.

Working with the students' union

- Explore how the students' union can co-produce, amplify and reinforce key messages to students.

- Identify other clubs, societies and groups to reach out to students and work with them.

Reassuring local communities

- Engage with local public health to explore how core messages and communications can be aligned and/or joined up to reassure students and local communities.

- Explore with other universities in the town or city any opportunities to work together on messaging for the local community on the return of students to campus eg joint letters or securing local media coverage.