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for Education

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Dear colleague

Key workers in higher education

We understand that the sector has requested further clarification about how key workers in higher education should be identified.

The government issued guidance on maintaining educational provision on 19 March:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-educational-provision/guidance-for-schools-colleges-and-local-authorities-on-maintaining-educational-provision>.

This relates to the government advice to schools that they should continue to offer provision to the children of critical workers, following school closures to help tackle COVID-19. The indicative list published in the guidance does not confer special status on individuals included in the guidance pertaining to travel, business or any other services. The Government's position remains that everyone who can work from home should do so. Where that is not possible, people should go into work where it is safe and they are not symptomatic. Of course, any staff who travel should follow the Public Health England guidance on social distancing.

Our guidance does not attempt to be exhaustive. We expect employers to identify which staff roles are critical to their business but to keep those numbers to the minimum needed for essential operations. In higher education, we believe that such roles would usually fall in three broad categories:

1. Staff responsible for research and other activities to mitigate the effects of COVID-19 and for other essential research and supporting activity necessary to meet regulatory, legal, health and safety or other on-going requirements. This would include long-running research which cannot tolerate a break, staff looking after live animals, plants, bacterial cultures or hazardous materials; and technicians for essential maintenance of equipment and facilities¹.
2. Staff responsible for providing services for students who need to remain in student accommodation (including those who are isolating after contracting COVID-19), including catering staff, cleaners, wardens, mental health support, IT and security staff.

¹ Science Minister Amanda Solloway's letter of 23 March to all higher education institutions and research institutions at <https://www.ukri.org/news/coronavirus-impact-on-ukri-supported-research/>

3. Staff critical to the safety and security of the university estate and business-critical operations.

We understand from UUK that some providers are already providing letters confirming that certain staff have been deemed critical to the continuing operation of the institution, for the purposes of securing school places and also to demonstrate reasons for travel. We commend this practice and suggest that provider colleagues might wish to consider following their colleagues' example.

With best wishes at this challenging time.



Ian Coates

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