



COVID-19 Sector Guidance on the Management of Student Accommodation

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INTRODUCTION

Having lived through the experience of 2020 most higher education institutions are well aware of the precautions and activities that they need to take in order to protect staff and students.

Hence, rather than repeating well known and available information this document has been developed as a prompt list which will allow institutions to consider if they have the relevant arrangements in place.

The primary focus is on the management of Institution controlled accommodation, although other areas are mentioned later in the document.

Pre-arrival

Experience has shown that a successful start of term demands action before any students arrive and that pre arrival communication is critical. There are several key issues that need to be addressed.

Pre-arrival communication could:

- Underline the importance and impact of vaccinations, particularly in relation to self isolation.
- Set expectations on behaviour e.g the fact that the use of face coverings may be required in some areas, the testing regime, access arrangements etc.
- Clearly set out the expectation and arrangements for the domestic and international arrival of students – specifically timing, any restrictions on numbers of visitors on campus etc.
- Highlight the need for domestic students to undertake a COVID-19 test before travelling and two tests on arrival.
- Explain some of the requirements for those travelling internationally – specifically

COVID-19 testing and isolation requirements and if there are any dedicated travel arrangements in place.

- Remind students that it may be wise to prepare in advance in case of the need for self isolation and so ensure that they have enough supplies to last for a 10 day isolation period should they be required to self isolate.
- It may also be appropriate to communicate with local stakeholders outlining the precautions being taken around student arrival to allay fears.
- Outline the cleaning arrangements in place in halls, the part that plays in reducing the spread of COVID-19 and the role that students can play by in this by cleaning common areas after use.
- Highlight any specific arrangements which are in place for those students who are clinically extremely vulnerable.

Arrival

The logistical arrangements and communication associated with the arrival at, and occupation of, accommodation represents a good opportunity to ensure the safety of students whilst setting behavioural expectations and there were some points to be considered.

- In 2020 institutions had good success with spacing arrival times and identifying arrival slots. This not only ensured a smoother check-in experience, but gave confidence in COVID-19 management arrangements.
- Given the large number of people involved and the geographic diversity of the population it may be appropriate to retain elements of social distancing and minimal contact during the registration and check in process.

- The act of key hand over could be used as a point where pre-arrival COVID-19 test status could be validated.
- Specific arrangements will need to be in place for any student identified on check in as being COVID-19 positive.
- Testing on arrival is helpful in establishing the behavioural norm of regular testing and emphasising the importance of cleaning in reducing the spread of COVID-19.
- For many institutions with a large number of arrivals it will be important to coordinate their activities with other local institutions and local authorities to avoid areas or facilities becoming overloaded.

International arrivals

The arrangements for international travel remain fluid. At the time of writing the following are worthy of consideration:

- Providing / providing advice on the best mode of travel to term time accommodation.
- Ensuring that students are aware of additional entry requirements and restrictions that have been introduced at the UK border, including whether the country, or countries the student is travelling from or through are on the UK's Red, Amber or Green list.
- Highlighting that there are specific arrangements in place to deal with the variety testing and isolation requirements. Currently these relate to the Green, Amber, and Red country lists coupled with vaccination status and age. That students understand any requirements and are equipped to deal with self-isolation on arrival. E.g for those arriving from amber list countries, that there are arrangements in place to provide food, kitchen utensils, bedding etc. Universities UK have published [guidance and a checklist](#) to help providers

support students fully and properly throughout this period. There is also a more specific [guide](#) for international arrivals.

- Ensuring that welfare support is available for students during the self-isolation period and that students know what course of action to take if they need to access this support.
- Emphasising that self-isolation is a personal responsibility, but that, institutions can easily remind students of the importance of this measure.
- Checking that students are given clear information relating to the current testing arrangements for international travel. At the time of writing (early August 2021) a combination of tests on day 2 and days 2 and 8 after arrival and in some cases the option of a test on day 5 to be released from isolation. The testing and isolation regime will be dependant on country of origin and vaccination status.
- Encouraging students to register at a local GP surgery as soon as possible on arrival and encouraging them to access the COVID-19 vaccine in the UK if required. COVID-19 management arrangements.

Staff

Whilst the majority of planning for student accommodation relates to students, the impact on staff should also be considered eg:

- Have staff been informed and trained on the arrangements in place to protect them and others and what is expected of them?
- Does any reassurance communication need to be provided.
- Do any specific arrangements need to be made for clinically extremely vulnerable staff eg moving vulnerable staff to lower risk areas during the first few weeks of term.

Households

Whilst the need for defined households is perhaps less important than it was in 2020, they are still required in order to identify close contacts and they will also be important in the event that restrictions on mixing are reimposed.

- Consider household size – Should this be consistent or variable depending on situation. Smaller household sizes are advantageous in times of high prevalence, but potentially can have an adverse impact on student wellbeing?

In 2021 the situation regarding self-isolation is more complex than it was in 2020 with individuals rather than whole households isolating. Individuals who test positive for COVID-19 will still be required to isolate, but there will be different arrangements in place for, close contacts who have not been vaccinated, close contacts who have been vaccinated, international students with non-approved vaccination and those aged less than 18 years and 4 months. Logistically this is likely to be challenging.

Consideration should be given to establishing policies should in the event that restrictions are reimposed. These may relate to:

- Permissible mixing – managing initial mixing on arrival.
- Visitor policy.
- Managing return of existing students with links to wider social circles.

Isolation

As mentioned above, the isolations of individuals rather than whole households is more likely in 2021 than in 2020 because as from 16th August different self-isolation rules apply to vaccinated and unvaccinated individuals.

- Providing physical and mental wellbeing support.

- Providing catering support – to individuals.
- Notifying staff of the presence of isolating individuals.
- Exercise (for close contacts who are required to isolate).
- Cleaning.
- Access for emergency maintenance.
- Potential alternative accommodation arrangements for the clinically extremely vulnerable.

UUK have produced a more detailed checklist on good practice in supporting students in isolation.

USHA and CUBO have also jointly produced a guide on minimising the risk of COVID-19 transmission within households.

Testing

Testing is a central plank in the precautions against COVID-19 and to break chains of transmission. Students will be asked to test before travelling to university in the Autumn term and twice on arrival (3-4 days apart) using either home test kits (LFD Collect) or an on-site testing facility (ATS). DfE and DHSC have confirmed that twice weekly testing for staff and students will continue until the end of September, when this will be reviewed. It may be sensible to consider strategies for encouraging testing uptake throughout September, given students will be vaccinated and may be reluctant to test.

Beyond this timeframe testing arrangements are not yet clear, and institutions may wish to consider planning their testing response to various scenarios e.g.

- Testing arrangements in a low COVID-19 prevalence environment.

- In the event of an outbreak – potentially surge testing in liaison with a local authority or setting up their own pop-up test sites and/or distributing test kits directly to students.
- Testing arrangements in a high COVID-19 prevalence environment – e.g., regular asymptomatic testing.
- Test to access arrangements – requesting evidence of a negative test in order to enter specific facilities such as study spaces and libraries.
- Access to PCR testing for test to travel, and test to release.

Outbreak plans

The guidance from the Department for Education requires Higher Education Institutions to develop outbreak management with their local Director of Public Health and submit them.

Obviously good links with the local public health team are extremely important.

Private Halls of Residence and Houses of Multiple Occupation

High levels of communications are required to allow private providers to best support higher education institutions in the response to COVID-19.

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