University of Reading

Safety Note 78   2nd Edition, January 2021

COVID-19 RISK REDUCTION IN TEACHING, LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT ACTIVITIES

Contents

Introduction and Scope

Safety Notes 75,76 & 77 provide guidance on working on campus during the Covid-19 pandemic. They will be reviewed and updated as UK Government regulations and guidance changes. This Safety Note provides further guidance to School and Departmental Directors of Teaching and Learning (SDTLs and DDTLs), Programme Directors, Module Convenors, other teaching staff, and colleagues in Timetabling and Estates. Throughout this Safety Note "teaching" should be understood to encompass a wide range of teaching, learning and assessment activities.

The University currently provides a flexible model of teaching, typically involving on-line and in-person teaching, with additional restrictions applied during lockdowns. Staff should consider this Safety Note as they organise timetabling, design teaching activities and modify physical spaces. For advice in interpreting this guidance consult the local Health & Safety Co-ordinator (HSC). HSCs requiring further advice should contact their Liaison Advisor within Health & Safety Services (HSS).

The guidance in this Safety Note applies to teaching delivered by staff and post-graduate students within the UK, both on and off campus. Where student-only learning sessions are convened under University instruction, but under student control with no staff supervision, participants should comply with the instructions provided in the student induction and FAQs on Covid-19.

Responsibilities

The **Major Recovery Team** agrees corporate-level Covid-19 risk controls, including minimum social distancing expectations for calculating occupancy capacity limits in teaching spaces. Changes will be communicated to the Leadership Group

Space Management determine occupancy capacity limits for centrally-booked rooms.
Timetabling & Room Booking publish occupancy capacity limits for centrally-booked teaching spaces within the timetabling software.

Heads of Schools (HoS) determine occupancy capacity limits for non-centrally booked teaching and study spaces under their School's control. (Space Management calculates and publishes limits for most teaching spaces and HoS may adopt these or use them as a guide for setting limits, subject to the MRT's steer on minimum social distancing expectations.) HoS should organise the removal or blocking of seating. They should communicate limits to staff and students within their School. Where demand for teaching space within the School's rooms exceeds available capacity, HoS are responsible for resolving conflicts.

Corporate Communications co-ordinate communications to inform students and staff of: generic covid-secure expectations and restrictions, actions in event of suspected and confirmed cases, and policy regarding shielding.

SDTLs, working with Programme Directors and Module Convenors, review the teaching activities in each module to ensure they are designed to comply with the guidance in SN 75-78. This includes reviewing existing risk assessments. They should consider where interaction should be done remotely.

Those leading in-person teaching sessions should ensure they have already established appropriate permissions to be working back on campus.

The **local HSC** should, where requested, advise School staff on the interpretation and application of University health and safety guidance to teaching activities. Where HSCs themselves require further health and safety advice they should seek it from their allocated Liaison Advisor within Health & Safety Services (HSS). HSCs amend Common Areas Plans and agree physical adjustments, if required, in common areas, such as in building entrances/exits, lobbies, corridors, toilets and kitchens. This includes one-way systems, door restraints, removal or blocking of seating in centrally booked rooms, screens, and signage to communicate changed arrangements. Physical adjustments within School/Function areas remain the responsibility of the School or Function.

Building Support Officers (BSOs) liaise with local HSCs to ensure the BSOs understand changed arrangements. They should communicate changes to building occupants, including tenants and contractors, to ensure they are informed of new one-way systems, queuing protocols, restrictions on informal gatherings in lobby areas, etc.

Chairs of local Health and Safety Committees, which cover buildings shared by more than one School work with SDTLs to resolve conflicts where demand for shared teaching spaces exceeds supply. They should escalate non-resolvable conflicts to the MRT. Chairs should consult with local HSCs before escalating any issues.

Local Health & Safety Committees seek and collate feedback on the implementation and effectiveness of risk control measures, monitor compliance, consider incidents reported through the online notification process, and review health and safety arrangements. They should decide on and communicate

recommendations for action to the relevant Heads of School (as is routine for local health & safety committees within the University's Safety Management System).

Health & Safety Services provides professional health and safety advice to support HSCs and local H&S and addresses Covid-19 arrangements within H&S Audit Programme.

Principles for designing teaching and planning the use of workspaces

For the academic year 2020/21 the University is committed to providing a high quality in-person teaching and learning experience to students, with the exception of large lectures, subject to UK Government regulations, guidance and lockdowns. During times when the UK government explicitly restricts University teaching, eligibility criteria for access to campus are available [here](#).

At other times the flexible model is intended to reduce and control the risk of transmission of the virus which causes Covid-19, while also maintaining high academic and experience standards.

Those designing teaching activities are expected to take account of the commitment to the in-person experience of students, while otherwise reducing unnecessary contacts where that is reasonably practicable. On this basis they should distinguish which elements of their interaction with students need to be in-person, and which do not. When deciding to teach elements online or in-person staff should consult their line manager, who can seek further advice from the local HSC, if necessary.

Where teaching activities are in-person they should be designed to control transmission risk for both staff and students. Review existing risk assessments. A generic Covid-19 risk assessment is [available here](#), to be tailored for local application.

Opportunities to carry out the activity with fewer participants and/or in outdoor, open-air spaces should be considered, where this is compatible with other objectives.

In buildings in use, lecture theatres, classrooms, studios, performance or exhibition spaces, workshops, meeting rooms and offices will continue to be used for their current purpose. Any proposed changes, eg from offices into classrooms, must first be agreed with Space Management.

Occupancy capacity limits are set for teaching spaces. Those designing in-person teaching activities should take account of current room capacity in their planning.

Teaching staff should maintain a minimum distance of 2m from others at all times.

Teaching activities should be designed to minimise the need for participants to move close to each other. Care should be taken around activities which might compromise social distancing, such as studio work, group work or close supervision. Other health and safety control measures should not be compromised for the sake of social distancing.

Particular care should be given to inviting in an audience, eg for performance assessment. Consider if having no audience, a remote online audience, or a minimal in-person audience, would still achieve academic and learning experience objectives. Consider if exhibitions can be primarily on-line, with no or minimal in-person visits. If visitors are necessary, organise the exhibition to enable and encourage visitors to maintain social distancing. In any publicity stress the importance of not attending if symptomatic or required to self-isolate. Audiences will not be permitted during lockdowns or periods of high restrictions.

Higher risk activities may require additional control measures. Additional forced ventilation may be appropriate in some circumstances, but electrical, equipment, noise, trip and manual handling safety risk must all be managed adequately. If in doubt consult the local HSC.

Where teaching is in-person, but assessment might be conducted online, consider separating assessment from teaching activities to reduce the duration of in-person sessions.

Where possible, provide and request information in electronic rather than in paper form. Minimise the passing around of items, including papers. Where it is necessary to collect papers, try to avoid walking around the group, rather ask participants to drop on a pile next to the door as they leave.

Inclusion of staff and students in the session should take account of people obliged to shield due to their own medical status or who are limiting participation due to having a household member who is obliged to shield, in accordance with HR and Student Services guidance and procedures which cover these circumstances.

Include opportunities for communicating the stay-at home message and practising good personal hygiene.

Principles for timetabling and room management

Timetabling should be designed to reduce congestion and crowding in common areas. Staggered start and finish times should by adopted, where possible. Consider providing more sessions of shorter duration, to encourage reduced time-at-risk and discourage early finishes, which can defeat staggered scheduling. Those delivering teaching should book the shortest session compatible with other objectives.
Portering Services have discretion to specify fixed or restricted layouts for teaching spaces, where this is necessary to control the risk of exposure for portering staff.

Principles for inducting students, leading the activity, and managing behaviour

All students should receive induction on-line prior to any in-person sessions, covering the essentials of the UK Government advice on staying safe and protecting others, as is current at time of induction. In particular, all students must be instructed to not enter academic or administrative buildings or attend any teaching sessions if they experience any relevant symptoms, even mildly, or if they fulfil any of the criteria for self-isolating in force at the time of induction. They must also be instructed to use tissues responsibly and frequently wash their hands with soap for a minimum of 20 seconds, as far as that is compatible with their individual skin care and other health needs. They should be instructed to maintain the minimum distance being advised by the UK Govt at the time of induction, as far as possible.

At the beginning of the first session in every module these essential messages should be repeated, and updates given if advice has changed since induction.

Any participant indicating they are experiencing relevant symptoms must be instructed to leave, even if they have recently tested negative for Covid-19. Any participant who has tested positive for Covid-19 within the previous 10 days must also be instructed to leave, even if their symptoms have ceased or they have experienced no symptoms. In either of these cases, if the participant complies and leaves then the session may proceed. However, an incident notification must be raised by the leader of the session as soon as possible after the session ends.

If the participant refuses to leave then the session must not proceed. All students must be asked to exit the room, as quickly and safely as possible. An incident notification must be raised by the leader of the session as soon as possible. If the participant leaves, or all the other participants leave, less than 15 minutes after that participant first arrived, this will not be counted as "contact". However, the incident notification should still be submitted, including as much detail as possible, including specific location and time.

Where the participant was present and within the social distance guideline proximity for more than 15 minutes this represents a potential "contact".

Protocols for action in event of a positive test result are available [here](#) for students and [here](#) for staff.

Induction should also advise students to avoid arriving early or loitering after each session ends. Students should be encouraged to meet-up and hold casual conversations outside buildings wherever possible. It should be communicated to students that they are expected to maintain social distancing throughout the session. However, where first aid treatment or emergency evacuation is required social distancing may be breached to achieve the necessary emergency response. Induction should explain that University-trained First Aiders have been provided with updated guidance taking account of Covid19 – see SN 77. In the event of any spill of body fluids, after first aid needs are met and medical needs resolved, the staff member supervising the session should ensure Cleaning Services are informed on ext 7000, without delay.

In using common facilities such as toilets students should be reminded to maintain awareness of other individuals, step aside in narrower spaces to allow others room to pass, and generally behave with courtesy and consideration to avoid raising anxiety among other building users. Common Area Plans will establish other controls such as one-way systems in some buildings.

There should be no eating during teaching sessions.

Staff should pay particular attention to personal hygiene, especially if touching shared devices. Use handwashing facilities, or hand sanitiser if available. Try to restrict contact with eg whiteboard pens by carrying and using pens on personal issue.

The requirements and expectations around use of face coverings have changed and may change again – find the latest [here](#).

Students should also be reassured that because of the strict instructions given to staff and students about complying with self-isolation, hand washing and social distancing, attending teaching sessions is likely to be a lower risk activity, and considerably lower risk than general circulation in high street shops, travel on public transport, etc.

These messages should be repeated at the start or end of teaching sessions wherever appropriate to provide reassurance. Where one-way systems oblige students to exit via a different route to how they entered draw this to their attention before they begin to leave. One-way restrictions will typically not apply to disabled people if they need access in both directions.

Persistent or serious breaches of social distancing should be managed through existing disciplinary processes.

Study spaces

It will be the responsibility of the relevant HoS to ensure that signage and messaging encourage students to socially distance while such guidelines are in place within School-controlled study spaces, in a manner

compatible with the government advice on social distancing. When official advice changes signage and messaging should be amended if necessary.

Outside or off-campus teaching

Sessions held outside should be designed to maintain social distancing.

Those planning and in control of teaching activities in other premises should seek information from those in control of those premises about what Covid-19 controls the teaching group will be expected to comply with. Any additional induction or instructions necessary to prepare the group for these arrangements should be communicated to them before the session starts.

Particular consideration should be given to transportation. Where the use of minibuses or public transport, is unavoidable, such exposure should be minimised wherever possible and any UK Government restrictions which apply to public transport activities in force at the time of travel should be complied with.

Fieldwork

All fieldwork is controlled and approved by Schools. All proposals should be prepared in accordance with Safety Code of Practice 32 which include requirements for risk assessment, monitoring and review. Risk assessments should currently consider UK Covid-19 requirements.

Encouraging feedback, monitoring effectiveness of risk controls, reviewing and amending arrangements

Due to the novel nature of this viral hazard, advice and restrictions are rapidly changing. It is important that those in control of teaching activities seek and gather feedback and pass it to local Health & Safety Committees to allow intelligent review of health & safety arrangements.

In particular, local H&S committees and Heads of Schools should consider the impact of Covid-19 arrangements on the health & safety of disabled and disadvantaged students and staff. It is possible, though not likely, that some reasonable adjustments previously agreed for disabled staff or students are no longer reasonable within the restrictions imposed on the University by new UK Government regulations. Where this is suspected consultation should be undertaken to seek workable alternatives in consultation with the Disability Advice Service, who may seek input from Legal Services where appropriate to do so.