

Checklist: Communications in advance of the 2021-22 academic year for staff

As students return to campus for the 2021-22 academic year, more staff will be returning to work on campus albeit to new working patterns. Effective Higher Education Institution (HEIs) communications will continue to be critical. Despite Covid-19 restrictions lifting, the public health situation remains unpredictable. Communications will play a critical role in ensuring:

- Staff understand what the HEI is aiming for the campus experience to look like in 2021-22 (including in different public health scenarios)
- Staff know what the institutional expectations are about ways of working, in advance of returning to campus
- All members of the HEI's community are clearly advised on any ongoing asymptomatic testing requirements and know how to access Covid-19 vaccinations
- Local communities are reassured about the return to campus

HEIs may wish to use this checklist as a framework for identifying communications actions in advance of the new academic year. The checklist can be adapted to individual settings and contexts. It can also be used alongside the examples of different HEI approaches which are appended to this resource. The checklist and examples cover staff-focused communications and communications to the wider community.

Universities UK's [Checklist: Communications to prepare for the 2021-22 academic year](#) can be adapted to individual settings and contexts, covering **student-focused communications** and communications to the wider community.

Pre-return communications

Safety on campus

- Provide reassurance on what measures the HEI will be undertaking to keep the HEI community safe including any risk assessments. This should acknowledge and consider the staff members who have been on site despite the challenges for a long period, or even throughout, who will now need to adjust to the increase of staff and students on campus.
- Ensure staff who are new or returning to campus understand whether the HEI will be providing hand sanitiser, cleaning products for communal spaces and where/when face coverings may be required etc.

- Consider what reassurance might be given around safety measures and cleaning protocols in HEI buildings.
- Consider what assurance might be given around health and safety measures to staff who have been working on campus throughout the pandemic. Some may have concerns as students and more staff start to return.

USHA's Guidance on the management of student accommodation provides guidance to help HEIs to consider whether they have all the relevant health and safety arrangements in place for student accommodation. USHA has also produced guidance on ventilation in HEI buildings

Further resources available: [USHA Guidance on the Management of Student Accommodation](#) and [USHA guidance on Ventilation as a Control Measure in Managing the Spread of COVID-19](#).

Health and Safety expectations

- Develop communications assets which reinforce core behavioural expectations on campus such as continuing to behave responsibly, respecting individual choice, the HEI's approach to face coverings etc.
- Develop communications assets which reinforce core behavioural expectations in the community e.g., in local hospitality settings, on public transport etc.
- Signpost to relevant HEI codes of conduct, charters etc.

For fuller information see the joint output work UCEA has developed with the five HE sector trade unions on safe campus working, vaccinations and testing - www.ucea.ac.uk/library/publications/principles-for-working-safely-on-campus-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-pandemic/

Further resources available: [Universities UK briefing: Covid-safe behaviours and returning to campus](#) (August 2021)

Information on the student experience and how this may affect staff

- Set out how teaching, learning and other campus services 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 and staff experience and how it may change if there is a shift in the public health situation.

Staff welfare

- Provide clear and prominent information on the support available to staff on campus including on:
 - o Mental health support available.
 - o How any students needing to self-isolate in 2021-22 will be looked after and how this may affect staff.

- Signpost staff to information about the relevant self-isolation rules on the gov.uk website and any local policies/arrangements.

Further resources available: [Universities UK Self-isolation checklist](#) (updated August 2021)

International

- Ensure there are clear communications to international staff on their expected working and living experience in the UK, including for those unable to travel to the UK for the start of the academic year.
- Ensure that staff 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 staff 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 staff 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 internationally based staff have access to clear vaccination information which clarifies eligibility and access to Covid-19 vaccines in the UK.
- Consider how communications to internationally based staff can provide reassurance on the HEI's health and safety measures.
- Signpost international staff to clear information on the wellbeing support in place including mental health support and health services.
- Provide clear information to staff travelling to and/or working overseas on how to ensure they understand and comply with Covid-19 regulations during their period of time overseas. Please see UCEA/USHA guidance on staff working abroad for further information.

Preparing for a return to campus working

Signpost staff, trade union and other staff representatives to UCEA's publicly available guidance on *Managing Staff Return to Campus*

(www.ucea.ac.uk/library/publications/managing-staff-return-to-campus-guidance/)

HR Teams will want to familiarise themselves with the Members' version of the UCEA guidance which includes legal guidance from Eversheds Sutherland

(www.ucea.ac.uk/member-resources/coronavirus-topic/managing-staff-return-to-campus-guidance/)

Vaccinations

UCEA issued [a joint statement on vaccinations](#) with the five trade unions in March 2021 to encourage vaccine take-up.

It is important to reassure staff who, if UK based, will have all been offered the opportunity to be vaccinated that you will:

- Provide advice to staff who are yet to be vaccinated (significantly those who have been living outside of the UK since March 2020) on getting vaccinated locally including making clear that GP registration is not a prerequisite for getting vaccinated.
- Promote local pop-up sites/ vaccine centres including location information for ease of access.
- Ensure vaccine information includes information targeted at non-UK residents
- Signpost to official vaccination information on NHS.UK and gov.uk.
- Ensure staff have access to resources designed to address vaccine hesitancy or counter misinformation.
- Consider how information on Covid-19 vaccines can be disseminated to staff alongside information on other non-Covid vaccines that they should consider having such as the influenza vaccine.

Further resources available: (i) NHS England: [Covid-19 vaccination FAQs: students in higher education institutions](#) (June 2021) (ii) Public Health England: [Covid-19 vaccination programme: Information for healthcare practitioners](#) (re-published August 2021).

Testing

UCEA issued a [joint statement on testing](#) with the five trade unions in May 2021 regarding testing for staff. It is important to reassure staff that you will:

- Provide clear information to all members of the HEI community on asymptomatic testing including any expectations to test before travel and test at regular intervals during term-time.

Working with the staff trade unions

- Continue to consult with recognised trade unions on staff health and safety, and about how the HEI will manage risks from Covid-19, including regarding the return of staff to campus and the re-opening of departments and services.
- Work jointly with trade union representatives, staff and students to seek to resolve issues.

Working with the students' union

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

Community reassurance

- Engaging with local public health to explore alignment of core messages and any joint communications activity that might provide reassurance to staff, students and local communities.
- Explore with other HEIs (in the town/ city or area) any opportunities for working together on messaging to the local community on the return of staff and students to campus e.g., joint letters, securing local media coverage.

Appendix: Examples of university approaches

UCEA's [Managing Staff Return to Campus guidance](#) has been developed to support HEIs in managing the safe return of staff to campus. It includes case studies from seven HEIs setting out their approach to planning for and managing the return of staff to campus, including developing new ways of working.

Aston University: Hybrid working

This case study focuses on how Aston plans to make hybrid working a success. They have developed a model for a different way of working they are calling dynamic working which has been developed in part from insights gained from their staff surveys. The case study describes Aston's five principles which are guiding their thinking on dynamic working and the three personas they have developed to cover the range of roles they have across their campus. The study also shares the four pillars that Aston believe are key to making dynamic working a success and discusses the importance of good management and the key challenges.

Lancaster University: Reimagining Working Practices Programme

In this case study Lancaster University describe their wide-ranging Reimagining Working Practices Programme which encompasses many elements of what a return to campus looks like including people, space, and technology. A key principle for Lancaster has been to consider and balance both individual preferences and circumstances and business needs and to reconcile those as locally as possible. Lancaster recognises that insightful conversations between managers and staff are crucial to their approach and will require increased emotional intelligence from managers. Therefore, they have developed a comprehensive toolkit to support their managers to manage staff during the transition to new ways of working. In the case study Lancaster also discuss how they have built on their recently articulated developed institutional values and the opportunity provided by this work to embed those values in practice.

University of Leicester: New normal approaches to leadership and governance on campus

This case study focuses on some of the robust strategies adopted by an HEI that has been constantly subject to the harshest restrictions throughout the pandemic. Leicester describe their Covid Oversight Group (COG) which developed a response framework to map out the journey from local lockdown through to the easing of restrictions in readiness for the start of the 2020-21 academic year. All university decisions relating to Covid-19 are referred to COG which in turn reports to the Executive Board and decisions developed through COG are shared with the trade unions at an early stage. The case study shares how the restrictions imposed by the pandemic provided an opportunity to shift towards more agile styles of working which in turn has led to a greater recognition of the need to ensure effective wellbeing initiatives are in place.

University of Northampton: Introducing mobile working

The University of Northampton (UON) embarked on their journey to smart or agile working three years ago in preparation for their 2018 move to their new Waterside campus. Although they were better prepared than many, the pandemic still required further adjustment to ways of working and the case study describes both UoN's preparations for the Waterside move

and their response to the Covid-restrictions. UoN discuss the results of their staff survey to gauge opinion on ways of working in the future and how, informed by the survey, they have developed a Framework for Post-Covid working which will enable most staff to work flexibly.

Sheffield Hallam University: The transition to new ways of working

In this case study, Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) describe their approach to the return to campus for the 2021-22 academic year and the longer-term development of new ways of working, including hybrid working. At SHU the transition to new ways of working is gradual and the focus for all staff has been on understanding what activities benefit most from being on campus and those that can be undertaken more flexibly with an emphasis on the value of the campus for collaboration. The development of new ways of working is the first step in a wider one towards SHU's future Extended Campus – a fusion of physical and digital ways of working and environments.

Staffordshire University: A cultural journey through change

In this case study, Staffordshire University (SU) describe their unique journey towards establishing a new organisational culture, influenced by the onset of the pandemic. SU adapted an existing programme of work to incorporate the challenges brought on by the emergence of Covid-19 and put workplace culture at the heart of managing and responding to the changes imposed by the pandemic. The case study shares ideas and good practice steps leading to outcomes such as the introduction of a “blended working framework” and the adoption of a new wellbeing strategy. Mental health and wellbeing were paramount for SU in mapping out new ways of working during their cultural journey through change.

University of Wolverhampton: Working together in developing future working

This case study focuses on how Wolverhampton continues its progress in working collaboratively to achieve improved and flexible ways of working for the future. Wolverhampton's planning is being driven by a project entitled 'Agile Working' which aims to bring a significant culture change around performance management. The case study highlights how good communications have been pivotal to both the project and to all the challenges presented by the pandemic. Wolverhampton describe how a year into the pandemic they realised their communications were not always effective and how they therefore developed a range of new, old, and revised communication channels.

Health and Safety expectations

Imperial College London's [website](#) highlights that despite the lifting of restrictions, the spirit of individual responsibility and respect for others continues. The website refers to staff as well as students and sets out expectations on students and staff on face coverings, testing and adhering to local measures which may differ between departments based on specific risk assessments.

Universities UK's guidance on [Covid-safe behaviours and returning to campus](#) includes a range of institutional approaches.

Reinforcing local public health messaging

Coventry University has regularly [retweeted](#) key public health messages from Coventry City Council on staying safe in hospitality venues and use of face coverings.

Vaccination messages

The University of Sussex has published a clear [university position](#) on vaccinations which (i) states that the university is in favour of vaccinations as an effective means of protecting public and individual health and (ii) strongly encourages all members of the University who are able to do so, to be vaccinated against Covid-19 and other diseases.