



COVID-19 Resilience Plan for the post-16 sector

Guidance for safe operation from 12 April 2021

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This guidance is national guidance that applies across Wales. Any local restrictions need to be adhered to as well as the contents of this guidance.

Introduction

This guidance sets out arrangements for the delivery of learning from 12 April 2021 onwards in the further education, work-based learning and adult learning sectors. It is part of our overall COVID-19 [Resilience Plan](#) for post-16 learning.

All post-16 learners are entitled to expect a high-quality learning programme. For most, this will involve a “blended learning” model which combines elements of face-to-face and remote learning; our strategic framework and [blended learning guidance](#) set out more information on the key underpinning principles. The balance of face-to-face and remote learning will vary to meet the diverse needs of learners and their qualifications, with learning providers having flexibility to determine how this is managed in each case.

While remote and online delivery models can be of great benefit in delivering rich learning experiences, face-to-face learning is a vital part of the learner experience. It helps learners to develop team-working and social skills, gives them structure and routine, and ensures that every individual has the support they need to progress towards their learning goals. Learners will vary in their ability to work independently and to stay motivated, so for many that routine will be vital to staying engaged.

We recognise that learning providers will have to strike a balance between meeting the educational needs of learners, and ensuring the health and safety of both learners and staff. We expect providers to follow the protective measures in this guidance and to prioritise actions that will help to minimise the transmission of COVID-19. For colleges and some other learning providers, this means applying a hierarchy of controls that will be different for different types of learning and learners.

It is not possible, even with the most careful planning, to eliminate the risk of operating learning settings. However, all workplaces and premises open to the public must take all reasonable measures to [minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19](#). In planning their delivery, providers should follow the principle of ensuring that robust control measures are in place, so that learners and staff are not exposed to a greater risk of COVID-19 in their learning setting compared to the ongoing background risk of COVID-19 in their local community. Following this guidance, and complying with their statutory health and safety duties, will help providers to identify and mitigate risks as far as they can. Providers should proactively inform learners, parents and staff of the measures they are taking, and be prepared to discuss individual concerns.

Some aspects of this guidance relate specifically to learning which takes place on college campuses, or in other learning centres (including community-based adult learning, “off the job” elements of apprenticeship programmes, and centre-based delivery of employability programmes). In these cases, learning providers have control over the learning environment and are responsible for ensuring that it is safe for learners and staff. For employed learners, including apprentices, whose learning takes place in the workplace, the responsibility for the safety of the learning environment rests with the employer; but the learning provider must satisfy itself of the safety of its staff who are undertaking workplace delivery. Where providers are arranging work placements for learners, they must carry out checks to help ensure the learners’ safety.

Planning for the safe attendance of learners and staff

Providers must be able to articulate their approach to managing risks, and how it complies with the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020. Based on subject-level risk

assessments, if it is not safe for an individual learner to return to face-to-face learning, the provider must put a plan in place for them to access their programme of learning remotely. We do not expect providers to undertake risk assessments for every individual learner (with the exception of Independent Living Skills learners, as set out in this guidance), but to give learners the opportunity to identify their own risks and to discuss any concerns with their provider.

We expect providers to:

- Undertake and publish a full risk assessment and implement arrangements to manage health and safety risks, in order to ensure that workplaces are COVID-secure before learners and staff are asked to attend (see guidance below on risk assessments) and refer to the [Health & Safety Executive's guidance](#));
- Consult with staff, unions and stakeholders;
- Develop communication plans for staff, learners, parents/carers and employers, including clear ways for them to ask questions and raise concerns;
- For campus or centre-based learning, consider how the learning environments and communal areas are prepared to meet the "minimising contact" requirements set out in this guidance. See also additional guidance from Public Health Wales on [contact tracing in education](#) which provides guidance on safely minimising the number of contacts resulting from a positive case;
- For work-based learning, undertake a health and safety review of employer premises to assess whether it is safe for provider staff to undertake visits;
- For adult learning, undertake a health and safety review of community venues used for teaching and learning, following the Welsh Government's [guidance on the safe use of multi-purpose community centres](#);
- Ensure that learning areas are adequately ventilated and that they are aired between classes, taking account of [HSE guidance](#);
- Clearly communicate expected behaviours to learners including [social distancing requirements](#); hygiene requirements such as regular and thorough hand-washing; what to do if they feel unwell; what to do if they have concerns or anxiety; and what would happen if they do not comply with requirements;
- For programmes directly linked to a workplace setting, including apprenticeships, confirm with employers that appropriate hand washing and respiratory hygiene and social distancing arrangements are in place and that they accord with the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020;
- Consider how social distancing and handwashing and respiratory hygiene requirements should be reflected in disciplinary policies and ensure that learners are made aware of any consequences of non-compliance with social distancing requirements;
- Consider travel to and from learning centres, referring to the Welsh Government's [guidance on travel](#), [guidance on face coverings on public transport](#), and [guidance on public use of face coverings](#);
- Determine cleaning and disinfection requirements and issues such as reconnection of water supplies prior to and after re-opening, referring to the UK Government's [guidance on decontamination in non-healthcare settings](#) and the [Health & Safety Executive's guidance on legionella risks](#);
- Consider requirements to provide personal protective equipment (PPE) to learners and/or staff in line with the provider's risk assessments; and
- Consider timetabling, including staggered opening hours and break times, as well as breaks for learners and staff during remote learning sessions to avoid screen fatigue.

Learners and staff who have had the COVID-19 vaccine should continue to follow the control measures set out in this guidance.

The use of face coverings

Face coverings **must** be worn by staff and learners in all areas, where it is difficult to maintain two metre social distancing. This includes when moving around the premises, such as in corridors and communal areas where social distancing cannot easily be maintained. This should form part of a provider's risk assessment recognising that in communal areas such as corridors the physical layout means that contact groups cannot remain separated to the same degree and where it is difficult to adhere to other control measures. Face coverings **must** also be worn on dedicated transport.

Face coverings **must** be worn by other visitors, including parents, to any site (whether entering the building or otherwise), including at drop-off and pick-up points.

Considering the wellbeing of learners is critical to any consideration of the use of face coverings. Face coverings may need to be provided to certain groups of learners who may be unable to obtain them through other means, if they are recommended by risk assessments. Providers should be sensitive to the needs of those who may have exemptions, such as people who have disabilities or other complex needs which means that they cannot correctly use a face covering, or those who are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who is deaf or has any level of hearing loss. Providers should put systems in place to ensure that exemptions can be signalled and staff know when and how to challenge those not using face coverings.

Face coverings are not a replacement for more effective controls such as social distancing and hand hygiene. Where a decision is made to use a face covering we would encourage that individuals use recyclable/multi use face coverings and use them correctly, covering the mouth and nose, ensuring hand hygiene before putting on and following removal. The World Health Organization recommends that face coverings should be made up of three layers, but do not need to be medical-grade face masks. Guidance on types of face covering, and how to use, wash and dispose of them safely as appropriate to their type is included in the [face coverings guidance](#).

In the event of a rise in transmission rates locally, or if there is a cluster of cases at a college, advice will be provided by the Environmental Health Team and Public Health Wales on whether any additional measures are required, including the use of face coverings.

Where providers run any facility which is open to the public (and in planning for future reopening in line with the wider lifting of Covid restrictions), such as a café or salon, face coverings are **mandatory** for staff, learners, customers and visitors using the facility. Guidance for these facilities is available [here](#). Learners on work placements and visiting tutors must abide by the rules in place at those workplaces.

Regardless of their provider's policy, learners and staff may choose to use face coverings to help minimise the risk to themselves and others, and should be encouraged to do so if this helps them to feel more confident about attending their college or learning setting. If anyone wishes to wear a face covering for personal reasons anywhere in the college, they should be permitted to do so. This may help support wider wellbeing, reduce anxiety and provide additional reassurance for some individuals alongside other mitigating measures.

Safeguarding vulnerable learners and staff

Extremely vulnerable or previously 'shielding' learners and staff

The Chief Medical Officer confirmed on 12 March 2021 that, from 1 April, advice to the clinically extremely vulnerable to follow shielding measures should be paused. Please refer to the [Guidance on protecting people defined on medical grounds as clinically extremely vulnerable](#).

Where a staff member falls into the extremely vulnerable (ex-shielding) category there is a need to consider working from home as their default position, regardless as to whether national or local health protection measures are in place. This will be the most appropriate mitigatory measure in order to take account of their vulnerability. Providers and employers should undertake full considerations, taking account of all reasonable measures to minimise the risks of exposure to coronavirus in the workplace setting. The Welsh Government recommends that risk assessments be made on an individual basis for such individuals, taking account of their individual needs and circumstances. For example, where an extremely vulnerable member of staff is willing to return to the work place and undertake face-to-face duties, they should be enabled to do so as far as is reasonably practicable, [taking all reasonable measures](#) into account and subject to additional mitigatory measures based on their individual risk assessment. In some cases, such as some supporting and technical staff, it will not be possible to work from home, so it is particularly important that up to date risk assessments are in place, and all reasonable measures have been considered and put in place. It is also important that all staff and learners in this category have opportunities to discuss any concerns they may have before they return to the education/work setting, and consideration should therefore be given to arranging a meeting with individuals to allow for these discussions to take place.

The Welsh Government's [workforce risk assessment tool](#) can be used by staff to undertake a self-assessment. There are also a number of models which can be used to support managers during discussions with their teams about an individual's personal risk factors when returning to, or remaining in, the workplace. The aim is to help enable good quality conversations between managers and colleagues about any personal circumstances which may increase their risk from coronavirus, and to agree any actions which need to be carried out. "[Talking with your workers about working safely during the coronavirus pandemic](#)" is guidance from the Health and Safety Executive on how employers may approach this conversation with staff.

For both learners and staff who were previously shielding and then return to the education setting/college/learning centre/work setting, it is important that extra care be taken to ensure that those individuals in particular, and those around them, adhere to [strict social distancing guidelines](#) and [workplace guidance](#), respectively.

If in doubt about whether an individual's health condition means they should not be attending their workplace or learning provider, staff, learners, parents and carers should take advice from their GP or hospital doctor. They may wish to discuss the risks of attending with their doctor and their provider before making a decision, and this may result in their doctor providing a medical certificate to indicate that they should not return at this time.

We would not expect any staff who are at increased risk but who are attending the workplace to be placed with learners who cannot reasonably adhere to the social/physical distancing measures.

Learners or staff at 'increased risk'

Individuals at '[increased risk](#)' are at a greater risk of severe illness from COVID-19. This category includes people aged over 70, those who are pregnant and those who have a range of chronic health conditions.

The advice to this group is the same as it is to the wider population. Learners and staff in this category can attend their college or centre, as long as safety measures are in place as set out in this guidance and the [reasonable measures guidance](#). Where possible, staff should be offered the option of the safest available on-site roles, enabling them to maintain social distancing. Providers may wish to encourage individuals to undertake their own risk assessments, and offer to meet with the individual to discuss their concerns.

If in doubt about whether their health condition means they should not be attending their provider, staff, learners, parents and carers should take advice from their GP or hospital doctor. They may wish to discuss the risks of attending with their doctor and their provider before making a decision.

We would not expect any staff who are at increased risk but who are attending the workplace to be placed with learners who cannot reasonably adhere to the social/physical distancing measures.

Guidance for pregnant women and employers is available from the Royal College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists [website](#).

Living with an extremely vulnerable (formerly shielding) person

If a learner or staff member lives in a household with someone who was previously shielding, they should closely adhere to the social distancing measures when they attend their college or learning centre, and the learner should be able to understand and follow those instructions. This may not be possible for learners without the capacity to adhere to the instructions on social distancing. In those instances, we do not expect those learners to attend and they should be supported to learn at home. This should, however, be considered in the light of the most current advice around [shielding](#).

Learners and staff who are anxious about returning to face-to-face learning

All other learners and staff should be expected to attend in line with their provider's own attendance policy and staff employment conditions.

Providers should bear in mind the potential concerns of learners and staff who may be reluctant or anxious about returning and put the right communications and support in place to address this. This may include those who have themselves been shielding previously but have been advised that this is no longer necessary, those living in households where someone is at increased risk, or those concerned about the comparatively increased risk from COVID-19, including those from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic backgrounds, or who have certain conditions such as obesity and diabetes.

If learners or staff with significant risk factors (or learners' parents or carers) are concerned, we recommend the provider discuss their concerns, conduct an individual risk assessment and provide reassurance of the measures they are putting in place to reduce the risk of attending. It may be possible for providers to put arrangements in place for remote learning for some programmes.

Our [workforce risk assessment tool](#) can be used by staff in all education settings, to carry out a self-assessment of known COVID-19 risk factors and to plan mitigating actions.

Learners with additional learning needs (ALN)

Our goal is to ensure that learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities are not disadvantaged compared to their peers.

Learners with ALN will benefit from face-to-face learning and support, and this should be part of their learning programme unless risk assessments indicate that it is not safe for individual learners to return at this time. Where learners with ALN, including those on discrete Independent Living Skills programmes in FE, are unable to benefit from a blended learning approach, providers should plan to deliver a full programme of face-to-face teaching. Providers must make reasonable adjustments to meet learners' needs in line with their statutory responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.

In planning for the safe return of learners, providers need to consider that learners with ALN may struggle with:

- Returning to face-to-face learning after a long period away. Providers should work with learners and their families to put suitable arrangements in place to prepare them for the transition, which may include a phased return over the first few weeks of term, visits to college, and social stories.
- Changes to their learning environment or routines, where the provider has made adjustments (for example, by reconfiguring classrooms or reducing furniture or equipment).
- Social distancing. Where possible, learners should be supported and encouraged to maintain distance and not touch staff and other learners. This may not be possible for some learners with complex needs or at all times. Colleges should ensure that learners on ILS programme are kept in their contact groups and avoid mixing with other cohorts. Staff who provide close or contact support to learners should undertake risk assessments and be provided with PPE if the risk assessment shows that it is needed (refer to Section 6 below). Providers should provide guidance and information such as posters in accessible, “easy read” and visual formats, and make this available to learners and parents before they return so that they know what to expect.
- Following hand washing and respiratory hygiene requirements and the “catch it, bin it, kill it, wash your hands” protocol. Providers should consider what frequency of hand washing is best for learners, and incorporate time for this in timetables, with supervision if required. Increasing the frequency and thoroughness of hygiene routines will help to mitigate the risks of contact between learners. Some learners may also require personal care such as help with toileting; in these cases, PPE should be used as set out elsewhere in this guidance.
- Articulating their symptoms if they are feeling unwell.

Specialists, therapists, clinicians and other support staff for learners with additional learning needs can visit and provide interventions as usual. These visitors should be given clear [guidance](#) on site safety requirements including social distancing and hand washing and respiratory hygiene.

Independent Living Skills

Our expectation is that learners studying Independent Living Skills (ILS) programmes in colleges should undertake a full programme of face-to-face learning. This is because this cohort is not sufficiently able to learn remotely without significant family or carer support, and needs the structure and support that the college environment provides in order to flourish and progress.

We recognise that this brings practical challenges for colleges, given that some ILS learners have underlying health conditions and that it may not be possible to fully maintain social distancing for this group. Learners may have difficulties in understanding and complying with distancing requirements, and some may require personal care such as help with toileting. We expect colleges to do all they can to mitigate and manage risks, in line with this guidance. This may include increasing the number of rooms available for ILS, and adapting the structure of learning programmes in order to help ensure learners’ safety (for example, by scheduling activities that involve more physical contact to a later stage of the programme). ILS learners who were previously shielding (see above) should not attend college at this time if they are not able to understand and comply with social distancing requirements.

Where learners are able to follow a blended learning programme, with appropriate support from staff and with the agreement of their parents or carers, colleges can deliver on this basis. This may be possible, for example, for learners on Entry Level 3 programmes. We would expect the majority of the programme to be delivered face-to-face and for learners’ progress, engagement and wellbeing to be closely monitored, so that the pattern of delivery can be adjusted if required.

Protective measures

Learning providers must continue to follow the system of controls set out below.

Prevention:

1. Minimise contact between individuals wherever possible.
2. Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have COVID-19 [symptoms](#), or who have someone in their household or extended household who does, do not attend their college or training centre or work setting.
3. Ensure adequate levels of ventilation.
4. Ensure good hand and respiratory hygiene.
5. Continue [enhanced cleaning](#), including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach.
6. Wear face coverings and/or, where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

Response to any infection:

7. Comply with the Welsh Government's and NHS' [Test, Trace, Protect strategy](#) and under GDPR rules staff and parents, carers, guardians will need to be informed of the learning providers' obligations under the TTP strategy.
8. Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice.

Prevention

1. Minimise contact between individuals wherever possible.

We know that minimising contacts and mixing between people reduces the transmission of COVID-19. The diversity of the post-16 sector, in terms of the learning environments, provision and learners involved, means that in order to reintroduce face-to-face teaching a tailored, risk-based approach needs to be adopted; this is why our guidance differs from the operational guidance for the schools sector, but we have aligned it as far as possible for similar groups of learners. A key aim of this guidance is to ensure that there is clarity on how providers may resume face-to-face teaching for different groups of learners.

We have worked with Public Health Wales to outline requirements for different types of learning and groups of learners, as set out below. These reflect the higher transmission rates for COVID-19 in adults compared to children; the need to ensure parity between similar types of learning in different settings; the practicalities of limiting contact between individuals; and the relative risks of learners and staff moving between different settings. The overarching principle to apply across all groups is to reduce the number of contacts between individuals.

Contact groups can be effective in reducing the number of contacts and reducing mixing. How contact between learners, learners and staff, and between staff are reduced will depend on individual college's circumstances. Guidance produced by Public Health Wales, [on reducing the number of contacts](#), provides further information on the different levels of contacts.

Outside classrooms and other teaching environments, colleges and other providers should avoid large gatherings and must apply the required social distancing measures of two metres. This applies to communal areas such as refectories, sports halls and reception areas. Staff should also maintain social distancing in their interactions with one another, including in staff meetings and

non-teaching environments. If this is not possible, then appropriate [mitigating measures](#) should be put in place such as screens, reorganising work areas, staggering start and finish times, and/or industry-standard PPE. This is because staff-to-staff transmission risks widespread transmission throughout the institution, putting colleagues at risk.

Staff are required to strictly observe social distancing from learners and their colleagues at all times, irrespective of whether they move between different contact groups.

Individuals who are part of the same household or extended household do not need to socially distance from one another, unless any [local lockdown restrictions](#) in place requires that, and if so it should be adhered to for all groups.

Work placements for FE and Traineeship learners can be arranged (or resumed), subject to up-to-date health and safety and risk assessments being carried out. The provider must be assured the workplace is safe and the employer is complying with regulations and relevant sector workplace and reasonable measures guidance. The employer's safe working practice policy should be considered as part of health and safety checks. The provider should make sure the learner understands safe working practices around social distancing and hand washing and respiratory hygiene, and that they know to inform the provider if they have any concerns about safety in the workplace.

(a) Full-time learners in FE colleges

This cohort of learners, including those studying A level, vocational and Access programmes, should be assigned to contact groups. This approach is consistent with that for schools, and should help colleges to ensure that the experience for young people in colleges is equivalent to that in schools.

Colleges should aim to keep contact groups as small as possible, in order to minimise the risk of transmission of COVID-19 and the numbers of learners who may have to self-isolate if a member of the group tests positive.

For vocational programmes, colleges must comply with any appropriate [workplace guidance](#) for the relevant industry (and in planning for future reopening in line with the wider lifting of Covid restrictions), to ensure that their workplaces are COVID-secure when planning and managing delivery. In particular, for "close contact" industries like hairdressing or care, where learners require physical contact with clients or with one another in order to learn skills and carry out assessments, industry-standard PPE must be worn. Learners studying close contact subjects such as hairdressing or beauty therapy may practice techniques on other members of their contact groups. Learners must have training on the safe use of PPE. Where learners are based in any workplace and if tutors visit, they must adhere to the rules on [wearing face coverings](#) in indoor public places as appropriate to the [workplace](#).

Social distancing remains the most effective way of reducing transmission, and therefore even within contact groups, where distancing of two metres can be achieved through classroom reconfiguration, it should be implemented.

Colleges do not need to differentiate their approach for groups aged 16-19 and those aged 19 and over. However, older learners joining groups which are predominantly made up of 16-19 year olds, such as A levels, are more likely to readily adhere to social distancing requirements and may wish to use face coverings in order to help protect themselves from infection, and they should be supported in doing this. The decision about whether face coverings should be worn and where, will be a local decision for the college to make, depending on their assessment of the risk and in the context of local circumstances.

(b) Part-time learners and employed learners on college- or centre-linked programmes, including apprentices

Learners in this category will have a wider range of contacts with colleagues and customers, which are beyond the providers' control. This means that the contact group model is not sufficient to control the risk of transmission.

Providers must undertake risk assessments at subject level and put appropriate safety requirements such as PPE, recognising the increased risks around delivering “close contact” subjects. Social distancing should still be used as the primary control measure where this is possible in addition to all reasonable measures to [minimise the risk of exposure to COVID-19](#).

Learners who are interacting with clients or in a “hands-on” way with one another to practice techniques, and learners who spend time on employer premises, are at greater risk of contracting and transmitting COVID-19 and this should be reflected in risk assessments and ensuing actions.

Colleges must comply with any appropriate [workplace guidance](#) for the relevant industry when planning and managing delivery as well as the reasonable measures guidance. Where learners are based in any workplace they must adhere to the rules on [wearing face coverings](#) in indoor public places as appropriate to the [workplace](#).

Assessors may undertake workplace visits to apprentices, subject to the risk assessment requirements set out in this guidance. Assessors must maintain a two-metre distance from other people during visits and wear a face covering if the workplace visited requires it under rules for indoor public places.

(c) Adult learners in community settings

Adult learners must maintain social distancing of two metres. Where this is not possible because of insufficient space or other constraints, face-to-face learning should not resume at this time. Where learners are based in any community setting they must also adhere to the rules on wearing face coverings in indoor public places as appropriate to the workplace. In a college setting, the decision about whether face coverings should be worn and where, will be a local decision for the college to make, depending on their assessment of the risk and in the context of local circumstances.

(d) Learners on Independent Living Skills programmes

Learners in this group are likely to interact with relatively high numbers of teaching and support staff, and the nature of the cohort and of their learning means that distancing is unlikely to be an option. Colleges should operate contact groups for ILS learners and should avoid them mixing with learners from other cohorts at this time. Colleges should consider undertaking individual risk assessments for learners to identify their specific health and safety risks and needs, and should liaise with parents and carers to help them decide whether learners with complex health needs should return to college at this time. Separate [guidance](#) is available for vulnerable and disadvantaged learners, (which although is for a different age group), provides information on managing social distancing and PPE in the context of people with additional needs.

(e) Traineeships

For traineeship learners who are fully centre-based, providers can operate a contact group model as set out in (a) above.

Under no circumstances should a learner, or an employer, feel under any pressure to commence a work placement if they have health, safety or well-being concerns. As part of the regular progress review that the provider will hold with each learner, the provider should check the learner’s understanding of safe working practices, and where possible the work placement provider should be involved in the review.

Trainees whose programme comprises a mix of centre-based and work-based provision should maintain social distancing of two metres, both in their centre and workplace. Where this is not possible, and before commencing centre based activity, providers must undertake a risk assessment and put mitigating measures in place accordingly. Work placements must not be arranged where the provider cannot meet these requirements.

Where trainees are based in workplaces that are included within the rules of [face coverings in indoor public places](#), they must comply with these rules unless they have an exemption. Visiting tutors or assessors must also comply with wearing a face covering whilst on the [workplace](#) premises when relevant.

(f) Higher education students in FE institutions

FE institutions should apply the same approach to their HE students as set out for other groups of learners in this guidance, i.e. contact groups for full-time learners and social distancing for part-time learners.

For all groups of learners, enrichment and extra-curricular activities can be delivered where that is possible within the guidance on minimising contact set out above, and subject to appropriate risk assessments. For activities such as sports academies the relevant governing body and Sports Wales guidance should be consulted and followed. While sports and fitness activities can take place within colleges, intra-college sports competitions should not take place at this stage.

Examinations

- **Arrival and departure of candidates**

As candidates arrive before the scheduled start time of exams, you will need to ensure this is managed alongside the arrival of other students at the college or learning centre, in order to keep exam candidates separate from other students.

You should also ensure social distancing measures are followed for any candidates who arrive late for the exam.

You will need to ensure that there is a plan to manage candidates entering and leaving the examination room and site, particularly as exams may finish at different times. As part of this, you will need to take account any candidates who require additional time in exams.

- **Set up of the exam room**

All candidates should be seated two metres apart from each other. These candidates can be seated in the same room but two metres distance should be maintained between candidates. Provided candidates remain two metres apart at all times, then this should not count as a contact for the purposes of test and trace.

There is no overall limit on the number of candidates who can sit in a room, provided desks are correctly spaced. The upper limit to the number of candidates who can take an exam in a room together is dictated by the desk spacing requirements.

As detailed elsewhere in this guidance, it is important to ensure good ventilation and maximise this wherever possible.

Invigilators may walk up and down aisles between desks, but there must also be points in the room where an invigilator can stand at least 2 metres from the nearest desks and can see all the candidates in the room. If an invigilator passes close to a desk but spends the majority of time elsewhere, e.g. at the front or outskirts of a room, that does not make them a contact.

- **Invigilators**

Invigilators can move between different schools, colleges and learning centres. They should ensure they minimise contact and maintain social distancing from other staff, and follow all other protocols for visitors including face coverings.

Invigilators should be fully briefed ahead of the exams about what the expectations are for them to minimise contact and maintain as much distance as possible from other staff.

There is no requirement for invigilators to wear gloves when collecting exam scripts from candidates but they should wash their hands thoroughly and more frequently than usual and particularly after handling exam papers.

- **Maintaining distance between staff and candidates**

Invigilators and other staff should stand alongside candidates when interacting with them rather than face to face. For prolonged encounters of over 15 minutes, for example when scribes/readers or other individuals are providing support to candidates, staff should maintain a two metre distance where possible, for example using separate rooms from other candidates to accommodate this. Where this is not possible, they should avoid close face to face contact and minimise any time spent within one metre of others.

These arrangements may not be possible when working with some candidates who have complex needs, in which case these candidates' educational support should be provided as normal during exams. For additional information, refer to the [guidance for supporting vulnerable and disadvantaged learners](#).

2. Minimise contact with individuals who are unwell by ensuring that those who have COVID-19 symptoms, or who have someone in their household or extended household who does, do not attend their college or training centre.

Under no circumstances should learners or staff attend their college, training centre or workplace if they:

- feel unwell and have any of the identified COVID-19 [symptoms](#). If this is the case, they must [self-isolate](#) immediately and book a COVID-19 [test](#);
- have tested positive to COVID-19
- live in a household with someone who has symptoms of COVID-19, or has tested positive for COVID-19 (in which case they should be aware of the need to self-isolate immediately)
- have been asked to self-isolate by the NHS Wales [Test, Trace, Protect](#) service.

Colleges play an important role in supporting contact tracers to undertake their role in determining the contacts of a positive case. The overall aim is to safely [minimise the number of contacts](#) resulting from a positive case. It will not be a one size fits all approach and settings will need to determine how they can most effectively implement the guidance to reflect their local context and circumstances.

Providers should have a clear escalation policy and procedures in place if learners or staff begin to show symptoms of COVID-19 while at their college or centre. These need to be fully understood by staff, learners (where able) and parents/carers.

Surfaces that learners or staff with symptoms have come into contact with should be carefully and thoroughly cleaned according to this [guidance](#).

Anyone displaying symptoms of COVID-19 should stay at home and self-isolate while also making arrangements to be tested. The Welsh Government's [self-isolation guidance](#) sets out the actions to be followed and the periods of isolation required for those with possible or confirmed cases of COVID-19, and their household/extended household members, and this should be read carefully and adhered to.

Learners or staff who have had a positive Lateral Flow Device (LFD) test should not attend their learning provider, and should arrange for a confirmatory PCR test.

3. Ensure adequate levels of ventilation.

Providers should ensure adequate levels of ventilation. Where centralised or local mechanical ventilation is present, re-circulatory systems should be adjusted to full fresh air. If this is not possible systems should be operated as normal. Ventilation should commence ahead of the start

of the day and continue after classes have finished. Where ventilation units have filters present enhanced precautions should be taken when changing filters. Ventilation systems should be checked or adjusted to ensure they do not automatically adjust ventilation levels due to differing occupancy levels. Providers should consult [HSE guidance on ventilation systems](#).

Ventilation is a key mitigation measure to control the far-field (greater than two-metre) transmission of COVID-19 by aerosols between people who share the same indoor space. Ventilation is not likely to have significant impacts on close range transmission by droplets and aerosols (within 1-2m) or transmission via contact with surfaces (high confidence).

Higher viral load associated with people who have the new variant could have significant implications for transmission via the air, as previous scientific modelling suggests that viral load is a major determinant of airborne transmission risks. SAGE before the introduction of the new variant stated; for most workplaces and public environments adequate ventilation equates to a flow rate of 8-10 l/s/person based on design occupancy, although guidance for some environments allows for lower flow rates of 5 l/s/person. Since the introduction of the new variant, SAGE has recommended where possible, increasing ventilation flow rates mentioned above by a factor of 1.7 (70%) to account for the increase in transmissibility.

For some existing and older buildings, ventilation systems may not have been designed to meet current standards and additional mitigations may be needed. As a precautionary measure it is recommended that ventilation is included as part of any workplace or public indoor environment COVID secure risk assessment, and the necessary mitigation measures are adopted.

In most buildings, maintaining comfortable temperatures and humidity above 40-60% relative humidity is likely to be beneficial to reducing the survivability of the virus. However, this is likely to be less important than the ventilation rate mentioned above (medium confidence).

Where providers rely on natural ventilation including opening windows and doors to provide a supply of fresh air, this practice should continue to improve ventilation. It is however recognised that there will be a need to optimise the amount of fresh air entering a workshop or classroom whilst balancing this with thermal comfort (maintaining a reasonable temperature) and the risks associated with open windows. The Fire Safety Risk Assessment should always be reviewed before any internal doors are held open.

Windows and doors do not have to remain fully open to obtain the levels of fresh air required to provide good ventilation, they can be partially opened. Staff may need to be advised how to achieve the most appropriate ventilation in any setting. Additional ventilation can be achieved by ventilating classrooms more fully between classes and uses.

Whilst improving ventilation is a key control providers should continue to ensure that the wider controls of social distancing, hygiene and enhanced cleaning are implemented and maintained.

Evidence indicates that the virus is spread primarily through larger droplets and smaller aerosols, which are expelled when we cough, sneeze, laugh, talk or breathe. Indoor transmission is therefore more common than outdoor transmission, as a result of increased exposure and decreased dispersion rates for droplets and aerosols.

Opening windows in the morning before people come into work or before classes start for at least five minutes and in the evening when everyone has gone home will allow air to circulate. If at all possible, open all windows for a few minutes in the working/college day to allow for cross ventilation – that is for stale air to flow out and fresh air to come in.

Air conditioning

Most air conditioning systems do not need adjustment, however where systems serve multiple buildings, or you are unsure, advice should be sought from your heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers.

For fully mechanical centralised air-conditioning systems, which both deliver and extract air from multiple rooms it is best practice to avoid recirculation of air. All centralised mechanical ventilation systems should have the facility to turn off recirculation and use only a fresh air supply.

For mechanical systems in individual classrooms, where recirculation modes enable higher rates of supply of **fresh air** to be provided to a space, for example by the prevention of cold draughts, then these devices should be allowed to operate.

Fans would recirculate the current air, so are not advised.

Water Systems

Where buildings have been limiting attendance, or have had reduced occupancy, water system stagnation can occur due to lack of use, increasing the risks of Legionnaires' disease. Advice on this can be found in the [HSE guidance on legionella risks during the coronavirus outbreak](#).

Where mains water has been turned off since the close of the premises at lockdown, when it is reconnected it will need running through to flush away any microbiological or chemical residues built up while the water supply was disconnected.

Steps that will usually be needed:

- Checking any water supplies - mains water supplies that have to be reconnected (because they were turned off when a premises was closed) will need running through to flush away any microbiological or chemical residue that might have built up while it was disconnected.
- The Drinking Water Inspectorate, who are the Regulators and technical experts in England and Wales, has produced this advice on maintaining drinking water quality when reinstating water supplies after temporary closure due to the COVID-19 outbreak
- Checking whether you need to service or adjust ventilation systems, for example, so that they do not automatically reduce ventilation levels due to lower than normal occupancy levels.
- Most air conditioning systems do not need adjustment, however where systems serve multiple buildings or you are unsure, advice can be sought from your heating ventilation and air conditioning (HVAC) engineers or advisers.
- Removing any fans from, for example, workstations, to avoid the recirculation of air.
- Opening windows and doors frequently to encourage ventilation, where possible, and if it is safe to do so.

4. Ensure good hand and respiratory hygiene.

Washing hands thoroughly and frequently with soap and running water or hand sanitiser is an effective way of minimising the risk of contracting COVID-19. Providers should, via messages, signage and notices, remind all learners of the need to clean their hands regularly, including when they arrive, when they return from breaks, when they change rooms and before and after eating. More information on correct handwashing procedure is included in the [social distancing guidance](#). Regular and thorough hand cleaning is going to be needed for the foreseeable future. Points to consider and implement include:

- whether the site has enough hand washing or hand sanitiser 'stations' available so that all learners and staff can clean their hands regularly
- supervision of the use of hand sanitiser given the risks around ingestion. Learners with complex needs should continue to be helped to clean their hands properly
- building these routines into the organisational culture, supported by behaviour expectations and helping ensure everyone understands the need to follow them.

The 'catch it, bin it, kill it, wash your hands' approach continues to be very important, so providers must ensure that they have enough tissues and bins available to support learners and staff to follow this routine. As with hand cleaning, providers must ensure that learners with complex needs are helped to get this right, and all learners understand that this is now part of how your provider operates.

Some learners with complex needs may find it difficult to maintain good respiratory hygiene effectively. This should be considered in risk assessments in order to support these learners and the staff working with them, and is not, on its own, a reason to deny these learners face-to-face education.

5. Continue enhanced cleaning, including cleaning frequently touched surfaces often, using standard products such as detergents and bleach.

Providers should follow the latest [cleaning guidance](#) for non-healthcare settings. Points to consider and implement include:

- putting in place a cleaning schedule that ensures cleaning is generally enhanced and includes:
 - more frequent cleaning of rooms/shared areas after they have been used by different groups
 - frequently touched surfaces being cleaned more often than normal
 - consideration of providing cleaning products and encouraging learners to clean their own desks before and after use
- where possible, providing separate toilets for different contact groups. Where this is not possible, using hand sanitiser before entering the toilet and ensuring toilets are cleaned regularly will help. Learners must be encouraged to clean their hands thoroughly after using the toilet.

6. Wear face coverings and/or, where necessary, wear appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).

It is important to remember that social/physical distancing, hand hygiene and respiratory hygiene (catching a cough or sneeze in a tissue or covering the mouth and nose with an elbow or sleeve then washing your hands) remain strongly evidenced to be the most effective ways to prevent the spread of coronavirus. There is therefore no need to use PPE when undertaking routine educational activities in colleges or centres. Exceptions are set out below.

Face coverings

Face coverings must be worn in all situations where two metre distancing cannot be consistently maintained (except when eating and drinking). As a minimum, these should be three-layer face coverings, as recommended by the World Health Organisation. Guidance on types of face covering, and how to use, wash and dispose of them safely as appropriate to their type is included in the [face coverings guidance](#).

Providers should be aware of and sensitive to legitimate exemptions, such as people who have disabilities or other complex needs which means that they cannot correctly use a face covering, or

those who are speaking to or providing assistance to someone who is deaf or has any level of hearing loss. Providers should put systems in place to ensure that exemptions can be signalled and staff know when and how to challenge those not using face coverings.

Where providers run any facility which is open to the public (or is planning to open these facilities in future in line with wider lifting of Covid restrictions), such as a café or salon, face coverings are **mandatory** for staff, learners, customers and visitors using the facility. Guidance for these facilities is available [here](#). Learners on work placements and visiting tutors must abide by the rules in place at those workplaces.

Suspected cases of COVID-19

- Gloves, aprons and a fluid-resistant surgical mask should be worn if someone becomes unwell with symptoms of COVID-19 and needs direct personal care.
- Eye protection should also be worn if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of splashing to the eyes such as from coughing, spitting, or vomiting.
- Gloves and aprons should be used when cleaning the areas where a person suspected of having COVID-19 has been.

Intimate care

- Gloves and aprons should continue to be used when providing intimate care to a learner. This can include personal, hands-on care such as washing, toileting, or first aid and certain clinical procedures such as assisted feeding.
- Fluid-resistant surgical masks and eye protection should also be worn if a risk assessment determines that there is a risk of splashing to the eyes such as from coughing, spitting, or vomiting.
- Gloves, fluid repellent gowns, FFP3 masks and eye protection are indicated when undertaking aerosol generating care procedures such as suction.
- Gloves and aprons should be used when cleaning equipment or surfaces that might be contaminated with body fluids such as saliva or respiratory secretions.

Vocational learning

As set out above, providers should carry out risk assessments for vocational and work-based delivery and should use appropriate industry-standard PPE to help reduce the risk of infection. This will be necessary for “close contact” industries in particular, and for employed learners such as apprentices. Learners and staff must have training on the safe use of PPE as appropriate for their industry. Where learners are based in any workplace and if work-based learning practitioners visit, they must adhere to the rules on wearing face coverings in indoor public places as appropriate to the workplace.

The use of PPE by staff within providers should be based on a clear assessment of risk, taking into account needs of the individual learner. Following any risk assessment, where the need for PPE has been identified, it should be readily available and provided. Further information has been provided by the [Health and Safety Executive](#). All staff should understand how to put on or remove PPE in the right order, safely dispose of the waste and use correct hand hygiene steps to reduce the risk of onward transmission of infection. In any case, hand washing should always be practiced before putting on and after removing PPE.

Response to any infection

7. Engage with the Test, Trace, Protect scheme

[Test, Trace, Protect](#) works by:

- testing those people who have coronavirus symptoms, asking them to isolate from family, friends and from their community, or requiring that they, their household and extended household self-isolate while they take a test and wait for the result. People with symptoms can apply for a test for themselves, or someone in their household with symptoms can apply for a test. This includes adults and children including the under 5s. Information and [guidance](#) for staff and how to apply for a test can be found [the Welsh Government website](#).
- tracing those people who have been in close contact with people that have tested positive for the virus, requiring them to take precautions through [self-isolation](#). Further information on contact tracing and how it operates can be found [on the Welsh Government website](#).
- ensuring that if the symptoms are not due to coronavirus, individuals and their contacts can get back to their normal routines as soon as possible
- providing advice and guidance, particularly if the person who has symptoms or their contacts are in the 'shielding group' or the [increased risk](#) group.

By reducing transmission in our communities, and quickly identifying and isolating those at risk of developing COVID-19 following their close contact with a positive individual (e.g. a known contact or family member) we will support the wider opening of schools, colleges and early years settings.

Providers should reinforce these messages and in particular, remind all those who show any of the virus symptoms to self-isolate immediately and book a test. Those living with someone showing symptoms should also self-isolate.

In the event of a positive test, a contact tracer will contact the person tested to help identify potential contacts. A second contact tracer will then get in touch with those contacts and advise them to self-isolate. These people will only be required to take a test if they develop symptoms.

Where staff have maintained social/physical distancing rules and adhered to hand washing and respiratory hygiene measures during work and where required have used personal protective equipment (PPE) or worked behind an appropriate screen or partition, it is unlikely that they would be regarded as part of a contact tracing exercise for these purposes. It is important, however, to remember that even where a provider has all of the appropriate controls in place, employees may not always remember incidences where they have failed to follow these controls.

A positive test on site does not require closure of that site. The process of testing and contact tracing is part of the 'new normal' and where providers follow these guidelines carefully, there is no cause for alarm. The latest information on contact tracing and testing in educational settings can be found on the [Welsh Government website](#) and should be read in conjunction with this section.

The Welsh Government has published [guidance](#) on keeping records on staff, customers and visitors, in order to help track COVID-19 infections and contain outbreaks. This applies to certain sectors including hospitality, tourism and leisure, close contact services, and facilities provided by local authorities. Colleges and training providers are not required to keep these records, but the guidance **does** apply to some services run by colleges which are used by the public, such as hairdressers, beauty salons, leisure facilities and restaurants, which should follow the sector guidance to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19 as these sectors reopen.

To support the reopening of education settings, lateral flow device (LFD) testing is being made available to provider staff and learners. Guidance is available via the [LFD asset bank](#).

8. Contain any outbreak by following local health protection team advice

Building upon the Disease Outbreak Plan for Wales (2020), Public Health Wales has provided [specific advice](#) regarding the investigation and management of clusters and outbreaks of COVID-19 in educational settings. The advice outlines what steps should be taken to protect individuals and communities where outbreaks are occurring, as well as reducing spread to other communities.

Provider operations

Risk assessments

Providers must take all [reasonable measures](#) to protect staff, learners and others from COVID-19 within their sites. They should revisit and update their risk assessments by building on the learning to date and any practices they have already developed. This will enable them, to consider the additional risks and control measures to put in place for delivery after Easter 2021.

Individual campuses, centres and specialist areas may require their own risk assessments, or a COVID-19 focused update to existing risk assessments. Risk assessments should be published either on the provider's website, staff intranet or shared drive.

For guidance on carrying out risk assessments, see the Health & Safety Executive's website: <https://www.hse.gov.uk/news/working-safely-during-coronavirus-outbreak.htm>

Learning providers are subject to and must follow the requirements of the [Management of Health and Safety in the Workplace Regulations 1999](#).

For learners, including apprentices, whose learning takes place in the workplace, the responsibility for the safety of the learning environment rests with the employer; but the learning provider must satisfy itself of the safety of its staff who are undertaking workplace delivery. Apprenticeship providers must undertake a health and safety review of employer premises to determine how assessors can safely undertake visits, and must confirm with employers that appropriate hygiene and social distancing arrangements are in place that accord with the Health Protection (Coronavirus Restrictions) (Wales) Regulations 2020. Where providers are arranging work placements on behalf of learners they must carry out a risk assessment and assure themselves that the workplace is COVID-secure.

Learning providers should work with staff, parents/carers, learners and employers so that there is clarity on what and how the revised arrangements will work in practice and have active arrangements in place to monitor that the controls are:

- effective;
- working as planned; and
- updated appropriately, considering any issues identified and changes in public health advice.

Workplace learning

The latest Welsh Government guidance for staying safe at work is available [here](#). This includes guidance for some specific industries, which is being expanded and updated as more sectors reopen for business.

Workplace assessors visiting employers should familiarise themselves with any guidance for their sectors, to ensure that they understand what employers should be doing to keep their staff safe.

If a learner reports concerns about their safety in their workplace, or if an assessor observes unsafe practices (such as poor hygiene, or failure to observe social distancing in enclosed spaces), the provider should escalate these concerns to the employer. Assessors and other staff involved in workplace delivery must **not** be required to visit workplaces if the provider is not sure that they are safe.

Learners or assessors can report an issue relating to protecting people from COVID-19 in the workplace to the Health & Safety Executive:

- on 0300 790 6787 (lines are open Monday to Friday 8:30am to 8pm)
- online using their [working safely enquiry form](#).

Transport

Whilst post-16 transport is discretionary, it is recognised that many colleges make arrangements for assessing and meeting the travel needs of learners aged 16 and over. This guidance is for those colleges who make transport arrangements for learners, and applies to dedicated home to college transport (services which exclusively carry learners travelling to and from college premises). Colleges may be required to have regard to:

- the needs of learners with disabilities and/or additional learning needs
- any particular needs of learners who are 'looked after' or formerly looked after by a local authority

Colleges are responsible for working with the operators with whom they contract to ensure necessary measures are put in place in line with risk assessments (which should involve appropriate consultation with trade unions and staff). Parents, carers and staff should all play a role in educating learners on acceptable behaviour on college and public transport.

Key messages

- Colleges, working with transport operators and local authorities as appropriate, should undertake a risk assessment for dedicated college transport journeys in their local area that takes account of the routes travelled and the users of the services; the nature of the transport used and the opportunity for adaption and local transport capacity, i.e. the opportunity to scale up provision. The risk assessment must be signed off by the appropriate person at the college. They must then work through the system of controls set out in this section and adopt measures in a way that addresses the identified risk, works in the local circumstances, and allows learners to attend their college.
- [Face coverings](#) should be worn by all learners when travelling on dedicated home to college transport (unless there is a medical exemption).
- Wherever capacity allows social distancing should be implemented between learners, and between drivers/passenger assistants. Where it is not possible, other measures such as allocated seating plans should be considered.
- There is no requirement to maintain contact groups on college transport providing a consistent group of learners travel on the same bus each day they attend. The use of dedicated college transport to serve several campuses should be avoided where possible.
- Colleges should ensure that operators and learners are aware of the safe use of face coverings, such as hand washing before and after putting on and removing face coverings, safe disposal or storage and that these are not a substitute for other control measures advocated .
- General guidance on safe travel during the pandemic is available [here](#) and specific guidance for transport operators [here](#).

- During this time as far as it is safe to do so, the use of active travel routes by parents, carers, staff and learners should be encouraged. Walking and cycling, scooting, wheeling, etc. should be strongly encouraged. In view of the potential for capacity constraints on public transport to impact learner's ability to attend college, all sustainable and active travel modes should be considered.

Taxis and private hire vehicles

Some learners, including those with additional support needs, rely on taxi or private hire vehicle transfers to get to and from their college. Where taxis are used solely for the purpose of transporting children and young people to and from college, as with dedicated college bus and coach services, [guidance on the operation of taxis and private hire vehicles should be followed](#). It is recommended that in taxis and private hire vehicles learners travel in the back seat only.

There should be careful consideration of how learners with additional needs can be provided with safe, bespoke transport arrangements. This could include the introduction of cleaning protocols, driving with the windows open (when possible) or finding larger vehicles for transportation. Colleges should liaise with their local private hire providers on the measures they are putting in place to protect learners, including for the arrangements for carrying multiple learners.

When travel by taxi or private hire vehicle is necessary, learners should be advised to follow the advice of the driver. Appropriate cleaning and sanitising measures will also be necessary. Face to face seating where available should not be used.

Taxi and private hire vehicle drivers in Wales will be able to [claim a free pack of high quality PPE and vehicle cleaning materials](#), funded by Welsh Government. The move is intended to increase confidence in travelling safely for drivers and passengers.

Contact

Any questions or comments on this guidance should be sent to FEAD.COVID-19@gov.wales.