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The Independent Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE)

The Independent SAGE Report 11

Independent SAGE Statement on Universities in the context of SARS-CoV-2

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Submitted to The UK Government and the People of Great Britain
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Independent SAGE Statement on Universities in the context of SARS-CoV-2

Executive Summary

We recommend that to protect the safety of students and staff, and prevent community infections, all University courses should be offered remotely and online, unless they are practice or laboratory based, with termly review points.

1. Universities should focus on providing excellent quality remote learning by default, with regular review points, rather than deliver in-person teaching on campuses that are likely to close again.
2. Universities, with the support of government funding, must ensure that all students have the resources necessary to participate in online teaching and study.
3. When students and staff attend campus, a Covid-safe university should be secured through:
 - i. An online welcome week and online delivery of ALL teaching in the first two weeks of term, alongside restrictions of social activities among students where feasible.
 - ii. Mitigations in classrooms and other spaces (e.g., corridors where social distancing is reduced) including face coverings, social distancing of two meters as the norm, ventilation, PPE provision, and regular cleaning.
 - iii. Residential 'bubbles' and segmenting, which will be more effective if not breached via constantly changing in-person class compositions.
 - iv. A collaboratively designed social agreement of Covid-safe behaviours on campus for students and university staff.
 - v. Full consultation with University staff, rigorous health and safety procedures, attention to equality and diversity issues, and an overarching communication strategy.
 - vi. An overall mitigation plan that includes a clear public health strategy and advice on testing and support.
4. We recommend that national coordinated steps are taken by universities and maintained as the pandemic evolves. While universities vary greatly in terms of geography, student body, facilities, etc., they should work together to develop guidance, policy, and practice, rather than 'compete' in their offers to students.

We believe that these measures are essential to deliver the best education to students, while also preventing clusters of infection and transmission to local communities of Covid-19. Without these it is unlikely that universities can realistically deliver on their mission to provide the best student experience.

1. Overview

This autumn will see the mass movement and migration of millions of people to university campuses and towns. This will affect not just university employees and students but also the communities within the towns and cities and hosting these universities. This report sets out recommendations for best practice regarding the behavioural implementation of and adherence to measures for a **Zero Covid University** and a **Covid-Safe Student Experience** ahead of the new university terms across the UK in Sept/Oct 2020.

The risks are tangible. Over recent weeks, US universities (e.g., University of North Carolina and University of Notre Dame) have had to shut down on-campus teaching soon after the start of the academic year due to COVID outbreaks. In at least one case, this was due to lack of infection control at social events.

2. Response to the Independent SAGE Consultation Event for this Statement

At the Independent SAGE consultation event for this document on August 21st 2020, John de Pury of Universities UK emphasized that “UUK is *not* recommending significant in-person teaching, but rather asking members to look at risks and balance learning always with safety in mind”.

Since the consultation, the University College Union (UCU) has stated that “We are grateful to Independent SAGE for its new report. The government and employers now need to listen to the report’s proposals” and that “Universities and the government must urgently work with us to create a proper health and safety plan that makes sure workplaces are Covid safe.”ⁱ

3. Key Recommendations for a Zero Covid University and a Covid-Safe Student Experience

Becoming a student involves far more than timetabled hours of teaching and learning. Universities UK (UUK) measures the ‘student experience’ in terms of the social and cultural dimensions via student societies, facilities, sports, and social life. Many students move to another town to attend university rather than attend their local HEI for multiple reasons.

To enable this important rite of passage, we recommend the following:

- i. Because in-person modes of delivery carry the most risk of transmission (prolonged interactions in enclosed indoor spaces), universities should deliver teaching and learning via remote platforms by default, for all but lab-based or practice-based programmes and/or student/staff support services that cannot be delivered online, **with semester-by-semester or term-by-term review points, planned well ahead**. Hybrid approaches (some in-person, some online, with universities preparing to rapidly transition to full online depending on cases) are also the most disruptive for staff and student planning and workload intensity alongside off-on lockdown measures, Covid-19 infection, isolation, and sickness. A planned, stepwise pivot TO in-person delivery, underpinned by, for example, national and local data regarding transmission and cases rates, is more practical and safer than a rapid pivot AWAY from hybrid/dual modes.
- ii. While universities should “be cautious when abandoning conventional, in-person and socializing model”ⁱⁱ, we also recommend that universities invest in creative, innovative technological solutions for the longer-term. Rather than regarding remote learning as ‘reduced quality’ by default, research shows the opposite can be the caseⁱⁱⁱ. The demonstration of innovative and **effective online academic experiences** is also led by young researchers^{iv} (e.g., PhD students), so online learning modes may involve students directly shaping their learning experiences as well as wider Covid-Safe campus policies.
- iii. For students, enabling remote learning requires extensive government support for digital **accessibility and safe remote working**. First, all universities should conduct an audit before the start of term to determine whether students have the facilities to study online and work collaboratively with students to co-create solutions (e.g., computers, internet access, study space). Second, universities should then implement a strategy, supported by government funding, to ensure that all students have the necessary resources. This could include use of on-campus IT facilities, provision of equipment to students, or use of space in the community.

- iv. To enable essential in-person on-campus activity to restart (or continue), including laboratory-based work, programmes with practical elements, performing arts, etc., we recommend a clear **testing strategy** for students and staff.

4. Why are we focusing on Universities rather than any other large organization?

Universities present specific challenges regarding Covid-19 safety in addition to those faced by other large organizations (see Independent SAGE's **Covid-19 Safe Workplace Charter**) and schools for the following reasons:

- i. Core to university operations is the mass movement and mass migration of a million or more people around the world, at multiple points of the year (at least the start and end of every term, if not more frequently). A report from the Department for Education (DfE) to SAGE in June 2020 included the following implications:
 - “Students moving from their family households to set up new, temporary households during term time, and will want to return to their family households at the end of term. This may vary from small shared households with fully mixed living environments, to large scale university accommodation blocks;
 - “Additional pressure on public transport infrastructure around universities, particularly if there is a continued need to limit capacity to preserve social distancing;
 - “Commuter students, who travel regularly to university from home. About 25% of full-time undergraduate students are now commuter students. In 2018, in 10 universities, including City University London, University of Wolverhampton and University of Bradford, more than 50% of students lived in the parental home.
 - “International students arriving from overseas will create a further potential impact on the transmission of the virus, although some students, depending on the country they are arriving from, will have to comply with a 14 day self-isolation expectations upon arrival to the UK”^v.
- ii. Universities also vary greatly in their physical organization, from central city to campus locations, connected to large and smaller towns and cities, with larger and smaller international populations, and many or few postgraduate students, making implementation of consistent safe behaviours complex.
- iii. Most students in the UK are under 25 and therefore more likely to be asymptomatic carriers of Covid-19, and thus undetected. There is a concern that the spread may be masked by so-called ‘Freshers’ flu’. Further, there is increasing evidence of a surge of infections in young people which has led to WHO issuing a specific warning^{vi}
- iv. Most students are in the age group which the latest data shows has the lowest level of both complete and partial compliance with social distancing rules.
- v. Around the world, many of our recommendations have been implemented outside of the UK

In addition:

- vi. Unlike school-aged students, university students are adults with more resources and more autonomy to decide where to travel to, where to live, etc., including whether to travel to their parental home if they fall ill.
- vii. If campus facilities are closed, this “may prompt staff and students to visit external cafés or travel home to eat, which could lead to higher risk of transmission.” In other words, universities will likely have to consider risks in the community, not just on campus.^{viii}

- viii. Local spikes in Covid-19 cases may be attributed (accurately or not) to imported students (including in Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales, where cases will be readily attributable to English and international students), leading to local resentment, conflict, weakened town/gown relations.
- ix. The heterogeneity of University populations intensifies opportunities for targeted stigma (e.g., against students from China in the first wave), and of difficult relationships between students leading to blame culture.
- x. Also core to University operations is a particular intensity, variety, number, and duration of (teaching) interactions, with constantly changing populations, in enclosed indoor spaces, increasing the likelihood of 'superspreader events'.
- xi. Students also socialise together - in each other's rooms, in university bars, at parties, at sports and other clubs, with alcohol.
- xii. Students may be reluctant to get tested if it means they and their friends must isolate for 14 days. There may be further reluctance for contacts to isolate - especially if they are repeatedly contacted for different cases.
- xiii. There is potential to make assumptions about what motivates people (e.g., the erroneous concept of 'behavioural fatigue') leading to stereotyped assumptions about what students want (hence beginning this report via a consultation) and what they will and will not adhere to mitigating behaviours.

In short, what happens on campus has direct implications for the wider populations in the town, city, regional, and (inter)national communities that Universities operate within.

5. Policy, practice, and procedural challenges

The National Union of Students (NUS) "says a third of students are worried about safety, staff are inevitably starting to raise concerns, and there are growing worries about the ability of Estates Directors to actually create Covid-secure campuses as our understanding of viral transmission improves."^{viii} Media reports from the UK and overseas are already reporting 'blame and shame' stories about student and policy U-turns.^{ix}

Especially where students pay fees^x, market forces have resulted in a focus on maintaining quality of 'student experience' in terms of teaching and learning (rather than other aspects such as social life, or sports). This has produced a mixed picture of commitments to the provision of in-person teaching with universities in different positions with regards to what they are able to offer. All of this is driving the need to address complex logistical and behavioural practices and mitigations – more complex than they would be if remote-only was adopted for the first term (at least). While some have stated that, for example, all lectures will be online-only^{xi}, others are adopting hybrid models, increasing the likelihood of constant disruption as cases increase and decrease alongside on-off local and national lockdowns.

With the drive to ensure students take up places, use campus facilities and accommodation, there is a strong drive to operate 'business as usual', in contrast to many universities elsewhere. This means that there is potential to focus less on the health and safety of staff required to deliver the student experience: academic / research staff, professional services (including frontline student-facing services), estates & facilities, IT, and contracted staff (e.g., cleaners). Thus, Independent SAGE recommends minimizing in-person teaching to essential lab- and practice-based teaching and student support services, where online is not practical, unless Covid-19 cases are established as less than 2/1000 on campus and surrounding towns.

Currently, there is significant variation in approaches by regional public health authorities causing confusion and cumulative imprecision, which hinders behavioural implementation. For example:

- i. There is a lack of clarity and consistency around testing and containment, particularly for Universities that have campuses that cross boundaries or have campuses in multiple regions.
- ii. There is variation across the UK in how Universities are planning for core activities such as in-person teaching in enclosed indoor spaces.
- iii. There is no consistent guidance about likely maximum numbers that can gather in Covid-secure premises, including student societies, sports fixtures, drama, music, debating, and so on.
- iv. Universities often comprise tens or hundreds of separate buildings which vary enormously in their affordances or constraints for physical distancing and reducing aerosol transmission via inconsistent ventilation abilities.
- v. What counts as a household, a bubble, and a gathering, is complex and varied^{xii}. For instance, a 'hall' or 'household' bubble is unlikely to overlap with multiple seminar or tutorial group bubbles.
- vi. Segmentation is not possible as in schools as students take courses in different departments and any such division would require a drastic change in course requirements and structure that cannot be made at short notice.
- vii. Like elsewhere in the population, there is a need to balance the risk of student mental health linked to isolation versus risk of transmission.

6. Detailed recommendations for a Zero Covid University

The aims of the measures suggested below are to mitigate risk and create strong social norms; that is, a collective sense of responsibility and personal agency to avoid university closures. It is crucial to have clear and consistent messaging about policies, practices, and procedures, across all channels (see Appendix A for an exemplar strategy). There must also be clear procedures for implementation in behaviourally specific terms – who needs to do what, where, and when, rather than agentless information 'dumps' or emails.

Clear policies and practices will make it easier for students from different countries to come to the UK knowing that these are in place to protect them both from Covid-19 (and other SARS) and from attacks by those who blame them if there is a spike due to a lack of planning and implementation.

a. Recommendations for a testing strategy:

Any strategy^{xiii} should take into account the following:

- Student health services, and University occupational health services must foster a constructive working relationship with their local public health team(s) and local primary care and must discuss and agree a joint approach to Covid-19 testing for staff and students. There needs to be clear clinical and public health oversight to ensure appropriate advice, action and support can be provided for those testing positive.
- The approach to testing within the University needs to be well communicated to staff and students in order to ensure that the system is trusted and adhered to.
- Diagnostic testing for anyone with symptoms must be readily available and easy to adhere to. Clear information is needed on how to access this, especially for new students.
- Contact testing must be readily available for anyone who believes they may have been in contact with someone who has Covid-19.
- Support needs to be provided for all those required to isolate, including support to enable them to self-isolate.

- Systems for contact tracing and testing within the University must be agreed with the local public health teams, with clarity about who is responsible for what.
- Noting the provisions that enable data processing for purposes of occupational and public health purposes set out in Art 9.2 (h) and (i) of the General Data Protection Regulation, full use should be made of university student and staff information systems as required for efficient contact tracing, with notification and management of any clusters of cases.
- Universities may wish to consider encouraging students and staff on arrival at the university to access testing through University or community health services. There are two key purposes to testing: a) to enable pre-symptomatic or symptomless cases to be identified and self-isolation to occur, and b) to gather information about likely levels of infection, necessary for decisions on countermeasures. Interpretation of any local surveillance data must be done in association with relevant public health teams to ensure that epidemiological good practice is ensured.
- It is important to include University populations within government funded surveillance studies of SARS-CoV-2 to help inform national and regional pandemic response strategies. Universities are encouraged to participate in studies and pilot studies, provided that research protocols are well designed and there is appropriate ethical approval and governance and public health and clinical oversight. Such pilots are currently being planned at several Universities including Nottingham, Leicester, and Southampton.
- Information about the purposes, strengths, and limitations of testing and the need for careful interpretation of test results must be widely communicated to students and staff; in particular, the fact that a negative test result does not rule out infectivity.
- The precise details of the testing and monitoring regime should be determined in advance of campus opening, and considering local testing facilities, and risk assessment.

Testing strategy needs to be nationally coordinated, in partnership with appropriate national public health bodies. This will also help universities make the case for infrastructure and testing capacity across all communities.

We refer to Independent SAGE's 'Integrated Find, Test, Trace, Isolate, Support (FTTIS) response to the Pandemic' document for further information.

b. For staff who cannot work from home and before students arrive on campus:

Note: 'Staff' refers to all groups including academic and research staff, professional services, estates and facilities, IT, contracted staff (e.g., cleaners) and 'students' refers to UG, PGT, PGR.

- Survey all staff to assess their needs, concerns, and preferences around working on campus and teaching in person, where in-person contact (e.g., lab and practice-based courses; some student services) is necessary to deliver programmes.
- All students, including UK students, should also be asked to restrict social interactions for two weeks maintaining residential bubbles and they should attend online classes and welcome events to prevent infection
- Include a statement on adhering to quarantine in student codes of conduct (including disciplinary procedures if breaking of quarantine after a positive test result).
- Make pre-registration (for students) online training and information mandatory for all. Advise students for the two weeks before they come onto campus how they can practice safer Covid-19 behaviours in the lead up to their attendance at University.
- Include a 'Social Agreement for a Safer Campus' pledge (see example in Appendix B) in pre-registration and online training. The contract, of mutual responsibility for each other's health and

well-being, should focus on support and respect rather than shame and blame, but include how to intervene if people are behaving irresponsibly and possible disciplinary measures.

c. Implementation on campus for students and staff:

- Levels, modes, and types of activity on campus should be further calibrated to the good/poor practices at local airports/borders; established and functioning FTTIS locally, and low community transmission (less than 2/1000 on campus and surrounding towns).
- UK students should also be asked to restrict in-person activities and social interactions for the first two weeks of term. Interactions should be within residential bubbles and online welcome activities should be offered.
- For university towns and cities, where students represent large proportions of the population, transport authorities should consider laying on increased number of buses and trains to and from campus to support social distancing.
- Monitor students daily during quarantine and provide support to self-isolating students (e.g., delivering meals on campus and to other accommodation; conduct well-being checks via phone or video chat).
- Provide regular check-in support to self-isolating staff.
- Align mandatory use of face coverings on university sites with mandatory use of face coverings in public transport, shops, restaurants, and enclosed indoor spaces.
- Publish and publicize consistent guidance on 2m distancing practices and other mitigations such as handwashing.
- Identify flows of students and staff around campus which ensure that social distancing can be maintained.
- Ensure clear information and implementation of hygiene/disinfection guidance for lecture theatres, residential buildings, offices, restaurants (e.g., Use booking systems in libraries and ensure cleaning takes place at the end of each time slot).
- “SPIMO is working on the assumption that as part of efforts to manage social distancing effectively, universities should be planning to “timetable effectively in a way that staggers arrival and departure times in a way that will also reduce pressure on public transport to an extent.”^{xiv}
- Establish clear guidance for how to configure new households in halls and other shared accommodation.
- Ensure a clear strategy and implementation regarding “bubbles”, households, and gatherings. On bubbles, SAGE has “consistently advised caution” around the application of bubbles, but for universities recommends that the term “bubble” is not used – instead, where it can be done, referring to “segmenting of the population” instead.^{xv}
- For catering outlets, follow national guidance, but maximize takeaway and eating outside.
- Follow individual risk assessments mutually agreed with each member of staff to the direct implications for individual shared or sole-occupied offices and related working environments (e.g., kitchens, bathrooms).
- For all measures, including risk assessments, take Equality and Diversity issues into account so as to protect and support students and employees.

d. Planning for essential in-person teaching (e.g., lab- and practice-based subjects) and other essential in-person contact with students:

Minimal in-person teaching will reduce the likely ramifications of in-person and hybrid models for staff and students who may develop symptoms and need to self-isolate or may at any point be subject to local lockdown, requiring a constant reorganizing of whatever in-person teaching has been organized, including last-minute personnel and room changes. It would mitigate the intensification of work for staff by removing unnecessary duplication of (largely teaching) effort that risks burnout. Some of the

rhetoric about the need for in-person teaching rests on incorrect assumptions about the reduced quality of online communication.^{xvi}.

Furthermore, while measures to reduce all modes of transmission in teaching spaces may be in place, reviews of evidence from Independent SAGE strongly suggest that online delivery should be the norm rather than the exception (with **exceptions** as above: lab-based sciences, drama, practice based learning like medicine or teacher training) with **termly review points**.

Where sustained contact between staff and students is essential, including student support provision:

- Provide information (per-room risk assessments) about safe ventilation, equipment (e.g. PPE), and so on, to staff and students to ensure that key health and safety measures are not left to individual interpretation, assessment, or choice.
- Publish thresholds of infection within certain subjects/labs which would require closing of that facility, or a stop to in-person teaching and moving online.

e. Equality and Diversity Impact Assessments

- Ensure that all measures introduced to deal with Covid-19 on campus are viewed through an Equality and Diversity perspective by conducting regular EDI assessments, including the implications for caring responsibilities/gender, and are systematically embedded in Return to Campus processes.
- Regularly survey staff across all groups and career stages to elicit and act upon concerns, preferences, personal risk situation, caring responsibilities leading to an individual risk assessment mutually agreed with each relevant member of staff.
- Implement an explicit Covid-19 social agreement in the campus community, which makes everyone responsible for each other's health but at the same time counteracts blame narratives. There may also need to be targeted comms led by University comms teams to prevent and counteract any blame narratives that emerge
- Ensure a social media code of conduct is in place to mitigate conspiracy theories online leading to offline attacks.

f. Ensuring an Equal Learning Environment for Non-Campus Based Students

For the students who are not attending university there needs to be a joined-up policy initiative between government and educational institutions. This would assure access to technology, study materials and safe spaces for students not on campus. Lack of these will particularly affect the most disadvantaged students who may live in cramped homes, or areas that do not have access to fast broadband and cannot afford technologies. We recommend:

- The Government makes available a means tested student-at-home fund to which students can apply for grants to support home learning
- The University surveys its students who are studying at home to check they have adequate provision and encourages students who do not have these to apply for government funds
- The Government makes it a priority to fund and make Covid-safe local libraries in which at home students can study safely. Local libraries have been decimated in funding cuts over the past ten years and now need immediate large-scale investment. If this is not possible other 'study-hubs' created within the large amounts of empty offices and retail space in high streets should be provided. These can be used if infection rates remain low in the local area.
- The Government should immediately invest in and deliver on digital inclusion strategies and a nationally standard subsidised or free-to-students fast broadband service.

7. Caveat

In this paper we have not discussed the situation of further education colleges as these do not involve such large-scale movements of people as for Universities. However, they merit further discussion especially as they provide education for disadvantaged young adults. We will consider this in the future.

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Appendix A

Principles for organisational communication for universities and similar organisations in the context of Covid-19

Overview

In this document we provide and explain key principles to direct organisation-wide communications strategies during Covid-19. The principles apply to communication with all staff groups and students. We articulate key principles, overarching strategy, and practice recommendations.

Reducing transmission of Covid-19 is multi-factorial. New behavioural norms are needed to minimize transmission and progress towards 'Zero Covid' whilst also enabling people to work together safely and without unnecessary concerns, now and in the future. The effectiveness of all strategies aimed at establishing these new behavioural norms crucially depends upon messaging that is strong, clear, and unambiguous.

The principles are underpinned by high quality research evidence about effective communication. Messaging never provides merely factual information. Along with what is directly stated, communications unavoidably convey all sorts of assumptions (subtext, indirect meanings, and implications). Therefore, we recommend that content creators attend to both direct and tacit messaging.

Whilst this document is intended to be Covid-19 specific, it is also designed to be applicable to other large-scale and disruptive challenges that organisations may encounter and need to deal with.

Principles in summary

a. Develop an overarching strategy that is consistent and coordinated.

Develop and implement an overarching strategy that is consistent and that avoids bundling very different messages, and/or messages from different leaders within the organisation.

b. Explicitly and tacitly convey what the organisation knows, assumes and expects of its staff and students

Design messaging and guidance that explicitly and tacitly convey what the organisation does - or should – know, assume, and expect of its staff and students.

c. Explicitly and tacitly convey the organisation's character and identity, and its core stance on Covid-19

Design messaging and guidance that explicitly and tacitly convey what is - or should be - the organisation's character and identity, and its core stance on the matter at hand (here, Covid-19).

A coordinated and mutually reinforcing strategy with a clear accountability structure should:

- Avoid conflicting messages or messages that bundle contrastive kinds of news or information.
- Ensure that core messaging is consistent across the different modalities for different audiences.
- Be role-modelled by staff and student leaders.

Convey:

- That the organisation wants and expects its staff and students to have agency: to be in control of, and responsible for, their working lives.
- The organisation's position on whether and how staff and students are working.
- The organisation's stance on staff members' and students' psychological states and responses: avoid implying that people are being disproportionate or irrational given that their responses are grounded in scientific evidence about actual risk.

Convey that the organisation:

- Recognises that Covid-19 presents an actual medical risk to staff, students, their loved ones, and the local community; also that the risks vary across individuals.
- Is proactive, decisive, independent, in control, and accountable.
- Is open and honest about the nature of the news it communicates.
- Is fully aware of, and is proactively planning for, the evolving and fluctuating nature of Covid-19 risks as identified by scientific research.

Detailed recommendations

a. Develop and implement an overarching strategy that is consistent and that avoids bundling very different messages, and/or messages from different leaders within the organisation

1. Develop a coordinated and mutually reinforcing strategy, with a clear accountability structure. The strategy should avoid conflicting messages, and avoid messages that bundle contrastive kinds of tone, news, and information:

- a. Do not broadcast information about individuals' or organisational successes and support measures (including for particularly affected staff/students) on the same day, nor in same bundle as information likely to be perceived as bad news, such as about financial shortfalls or redundancies. Doing so is likely to be perceived as dishonest, and as trying to 'bury bad news'.
- b. Given there are multiple and diverse staff and student groups, produce separate guidance and messaging for different audiences whilst keeping core messaging clear and consistent.
- c. Ensure that all high-level messages are accompanied by a Question and Answer (Q&A) opportunity led by the content creator or their colleagues. This will ideally be via a remote video platform which can be recorded, and which affords multi-channel communication via video-on, video-off, chat, etc. The Q&A opportunity means that immediate queries can be addressed.
- d. Do not send important messages on a Friday: send them on a Monday.

b. Design messaging and guidance that explicitly and tacitly convey what the organisation does - or should - know, assume, and expect of its staff and students.

2. Explicitly and tacitly convey the organisations' knowledge, assumptions, and expectations about its staff and students:

- a. Compose messaging for the majority, not the minority.
 - i. Shape communications to both implicitly assume and explicitly convey that staff and students are competent, trustworthy, have the best intentions, are trying their best, and will act in good faith.
- b. Where messaging or guidance is intended to address, or to support those who are addressing staff or students whose competence, behaviours, good will, or performance is at issue, make it clear that the organisation sees them as both exceptions and a small minority.

3. Convey that the organisation wants and expects staff and students to exercise control and responsibility for themselves and their working lives, and will support them in doing so:

a. This is likely to be the most effective way of maximising the number of staff/students committing to in-person work and on-campus study.

b. Avoid paternalism, infantilization, and blanket orders.

i. Given that the mitigating behaviours to reduce transmission of Covid-19 involve social isolation, avoid messaging that isolates individuals further (e.g., by excluding opportunities for discussion; by leaving staff unaware of other understandings and perspectives against which to calibrate their own).

c. Maximise opportunities for staff and students to exercise their own agency. For instance, given that universities cannot accommodate all staff or students at the same time on the same day for the same duration (and provided benefits can outweigh risks), the organisation should support and enable those who want to work or study on campus to exercise their own judgement and will in doing so. Conversely, for those whose judgement and will are to work or study remotely, and to engage in university life and activities off campus, the organisation should support and enable them to do so effectively.

d. Regularly encourage staff and students to engage, giving them concrete opportunities to share their views, experiences, and needs, and to engage in dialogue with others including with their managers.

e. Importantly, provide an anonymous whistle-blower portal for staff and students to report concerns – including concerns about risk management and risk-taking practices amongst staff or students. Providing an anonymised channel of communication is likely to result in more reporting by staff and students at all levels of seniority.

4. Explicitly and tacitly convey the organisation's position on whether and how staff and students are working or studying.

a. If messaging is to people who the organisation expects to be working or studying when they are at home, avoid messaging that could be read as implying they are not. Hence:

i. Avoid 'back to' or 'return to'.

ii. Avoid conflating return to campus with return to work.

b. Communicate positive messages about new norms and practices, including positive news about innovations in remote working and learning. Recognise and address unquestioned assumptions – for instance that online communication and teaching are inherently of lower quality than in-person.

5. Explicitly and tacitly convey the organisation's stance on their staff members' and students' psychological/emotional state and responses. Good communications will treat people's concerns about risks as grounded in facts and evidence about real risks and dangers. Good communications will avoid implying people's concerns are disproportionate or irrational.

a. When communications address people's concerns about risks, do not do so without also clearly addressing and acknowledging the reality of those risks, and the continuing uncertainties about them. Doing so could be read as implying that people's worries and concerns have little or no basis in reality.

- a. Ensure messaging to people who are in particularly affected and at-risk groups does not focus on worries or concerns, but on the real risks they face.
- b. Show that the organisation realises that the risks associated with work and study on campus are not confined to individuals, but also affect staff members' and students' loved ones, close family, dependents, and so on – including those who staff and students live with, but also their wider contacts.
- c. Avoid communicating a sense of false equivalence or false choice. For instance, staff and students with childcare responsibilities may or may not opt to send their children back to school but this is not a 'choice' in the routine sense (as is, for instance, the choice to home educate). Currently, sending children to nursery, other childcare, or to schools requires making a decision based on evolving scientific information with substantial uncertainties and knowledge gaps.

c. Design messaging and guidance that explicitly and tacitly convey what is - or should be - the organisation's character and identity, and its core stance on the matter at hand (here, Covid-19).

6. Convey that the organisation recognises that Covid-19 presents real risks to staff and students, and that risks vary between individuals.

- a. Be up front and (best available) evidence-based about the risks and the uncertainties and acknowledge honestly that they exist.

7. Convey the organisation as proactive, decisive, in control, and accountable.

- a. Be up front and (best available) evidence-based about the risks and the uncertainties, acknowledge honestly that they exist.
- b. Avoid passive voice such as "Cost reductions will be necessary" because this can portray the organisation as passive and reactive. Avoiding passive voice also helps generate a sense of collective response; e.g., "We have decided" rather than "It was decided".

8. Be open and honest about the nature of the news the organisation communicates.

- a. Avoid wording that implies something is good news when it is not or might not be for everyone:
 - i. e.g., "We propose a redundancy scheme that some colleagues will be able to take advantage of".
 - ii. See also point 1a. on avoiding communications that are vulnerable to being interpreted as 'burying bad news'.
- b. Avoid sending messages without including immediate opportunities to raise queries or concerns. Ensure that these opportunities are fitted to the intended audience and are:
 - i. Multimodal (in person, face-to-face on a remote platform, via telephone, via email).
 - ii. Enabling (for some this will mean one-to-one; for others this will mean as part of a group).

9. Explicitly and tacitly convey that the organisation is fully aware of and also proactively planning for the evolving and fluctuating nature of Covid-19 risks.

a. Set explicit review points and report review findings and decisions.

b. Ensure coordinated contingency planning.

Prof Ruth Parry, Prof Elizabeth Stokoe

Loughborough University

30th August 2020.

ⁱ For example:

Antaki, C. (Ed.) (2011). *Applied conversation analysis: Intervention and change in institutional talk*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Stokoe, E. (2018). *Talk: The science of conversation*. London: Little, Brown.

Toerien, M. (2017). Conversation analysis. In B. Vine (Ed.), *The Routledge handbook of language in the workplace*. London: Routledge.

ⁱⁱ Edwards, D. (1991). Categories are for talking: On the cognitive and discursive bases of categorization. *Theory and Psychology*, 1(4), 515-542.

Appendix B

Social Contract for a Safer Campus

We the [Insert University/College name here] Community in order to form a safer union, establish care for each other, ensure a supportive learning environment and keep ourselves well consent to this agreement.

- We will recognize the rights of everyone to a caring environment that supports their physical and mental well-being during the Covid-19 pandemic and beyond
- You will consent to the guidelines below to ensure this
- Together we will join with all [Insert University/College name here] employees and students to create a safer campus
- While this preserves the rights of all of us, it will especially protect groups and individuals who face particular risk of contracting Covid-19.
- We will at all times prioritise support for each other and help individuals and groups to overcome any disadvantages they may face

We agree this union founded on the following principles and practices:

Caring for each other

- Recognising everyone is an equal member of the community whether teacher, student, administrator, cleaner or security worker. Everyone should be extended the same respect and support
- Not being judgemental about each other. We agree not to blame or stigmatise groups or individuals. For example if they become unwell with Covid-19 or are not able to follow all protective behaviours due to reasons of disability or medical exemption.
- Helping your fellow students whether on campus, online or in halls, especially if they are in difficulties or don't understand procedures.

Supporting each other

- Remember that there are lots of people who want to support you. If you are a student reach out and access support from your department, Student Wellbeing, halls of residences and across [Insert University/College name here] when you need it. Keep in touch with mentors, join peer study groups and house systems so you can look out for each other. If you are an employee do reach out to colleagues, your line manager and Wellbeing services.
- Identify a workplace, or if you are student a class/seminar, buddy. Offer them help if they cannot attend work or class and agree to check in with each other if they are absent from online or face to face sessions. Help your buddy to catch up on any missed work and stay in touch with them

Ensuring Health for All

If I experience Covid-19 symptoms I will:

- Immediately contact the NHS, the [Insert University/College name here] testing service
- Contact if I am a student my mentor, class teachers and class/seminar buddy even if my symptoms are mild (bearing in mind that younger people often have less severe symptoms). Or if I am an employee contact my line manager and work buddy
- Isolate myself from contact with others even if I am only experiencing minor symptoms
- Only participate in teaching or work remotely and online
- Follow LSE guidance on its current test, track and trace programme
- Follow all the current UK Government and LSE instructions on quarantine, isolation and contact tracing
- Cooperate with messages and calls from contact tracers and answer questions about contacts completely and honestly

To ensure the safety of myself and others I will:

- Wear masks in all University facilities, including classrooms, departments, workplaces, places of worship, dining facilities (unless eating), and residential halls (except in assigned room) and on University premises
- Physically distance, maintaining at least two meters separation between myself and others in all University premises at all times that this is possible
- Follow all guidelines for dining safely including distancing both inside and outside
- Agree to follow current guidelines on socialising issued by the UK government
- Receive a flu vaccine from [Insert University/College name here] or my doctor
- Follow all health and safety practices required or recommended by the University, such as hand-washing often
- Consult and follow current UK government guidance about quarantine or testing requirements if I leave campus once I return from my travel
- Seek accommodations from the Disability and Well-being Service if I am unable to follow the University's procedures

To ensure mutual respect I will:

- Report the Covid-19 illness of others if, and only if, I have their explicit permission
- Not spread rumours about the illness of others
- Support others if they are unwell with Covid-19, as I would hope to be supported by them in turn

Addendum: Clause to be added in for relations between Students/ Class Seminar Teachers.
This contract can be discussed and signed in the first online or in person teaching session.

Learning safely and with equality

In order to create a safer learning environment, I agree to:

- Observe all safety guidelines and following safe practices in classes and seminars
- Follow campus guidance on distancing, one-way systems, queues etc
- Support my class/seminar leaders to help everybody stay safe in the classroom
- Agree to arrive on time to classes/seminar whether face to face or online
- Prepare before classes/seminars with reading and/or online activities
- Ensure that no one dominates discussions and listens with care to fellow students
- Follow instructions for the use of technology in the classroom and online including rules on using chat and break-out rooms
- No use of mobile phones and/or laptops unless needed for learning activities in face to face class/seminar
- Contributing in each class/seminar
- Valuing all contributions in and out of the classroom
- Ending class discussions on time
- Talking to my class/seminar teacher if I do not feel safe for any reason

indie_SAGE

Following the science