**Equality Impact Assessment (EIA): Phased return to work and study on campus during COVID-19 pandemic**

The vast majority of staff and students, have been working and studying off-campus since 16 March 2020. This presented both opportunities and challenges to individuals and the University as a whole and necessitated work to be carried out at pace in order to ensure staff were equipped to carry out their role effectively and students were able to complete their year of study.

The priority throughout the pandemic has been to protect the health and wellbeing of staff and students based on a scale of levels of protection, defined in the University’s Business Continuity Plan. The four levels of protection are (i) Advanced (the most stringent) (ii) Enhanced (iii) Sustained (iv) Targeted.

We conducted an EIA on working and studying remotely in April 2020, when we were in Advanced Protection. We conducted a subsequent EIA on returning to campus in July 2020 when we were in Enhanced Protection.

This EIA was conducted in September 2020 as we moved from Enhanced Protection to Sustained Protection, allowing for a return to work and study on campus in three phases. Details of which groups of students are included in which phase are in Appendix A.

The principles that have informed the phased approach are that priority should be given to students in accessing an element of in person teaching based upon the following considerations:

a. Where the learning outcomes of the course require face to face teaching to take place, for example in lab and practice-based subjects, and the point in time during the first term when this would be necessary;

b. Where a timely start to term is vital for the overall learning experience, for example induction and orientation for first year students;

c. Where the characteristics of groups of students would make it difficult for them to respond flexibly to changes in patterns of teaching because, for example, of their reliance on the availability of international travel;

d. Where the absence of an element of face-to-face teaching would impact most substantially as a proportion of the overall course duration;

e. Where the proximity to final assessment may impact most on students’ graduate outcomes; and

f. Where limiting the ability of students to return to campus might result in them being disadvantaged.

This EIA does not repeat the findings of our previous EIA on returning to work and study but seeks to identify the specific, additional impacts of this phased approach, both positive and negative, on different groups of students and staff. Given that any return to campus for staff is based on their role, this EIA assumes that all relevant risk assessments have been carried out prior to any member of staff being permitted to return to campus and screening testing takes place as agreed by Council. It also assumes that all staff and students will have varying levels of anxiety around being on campus and/or being required to continue working/studying from home and therefore does not single out any one group in this respect.

In line with the University’s aspiration to go beyond legislation wherever possible and to obtain a holistic overview and understanding of the impact that University activities have upon equality and inclusion, a broader range of characteristics than those contained within the Equality Act 2010 have been considered. The protected characteristics contained with the Equality Act 2010 are: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

**Table 1: Equality Impact Assessment: phased return to work and study on campus by protected characteristic - staff**

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| **Protected characteristic** | **Potential positive impacts** | **Potential negative impacts** | **Mitigating actions to address identified negative impacts** | **Person(s)/service responsible** |
| Age | No specific positive impact identified | Older staff who are required (and their risk assessment has deemed them able) to come on to campus in the first phase may feel particularly anxious about returning and contracting the virus due to feeling vulnerable | Encourage staff to speak to someone if they are anxious about being required to return to campus. If you have serious concerns about the mental wellbeing of a member of staff, talk to Occupational Health (in confidence if necessary)  Promote avenues of support for staff, including the Employee Assistance Programme, staff networks | Reporting Manager  CER |
| Disability – physical and long-term illness | No specific positive impact identified | Staff with a physical disability or long-term illness who are required (and their risk assessment has deemed them able) to come on to campus in the first phase may feel particularly anxious about returning and contracting the virus due to feeling vulnerable | Encourage staff to speak to someone if they are anxious about being required to return to campus. If you have serious concerns about the mental wellbeing of a member of staff, talk to Occupational Health (in confidence if necessary)  Ensure information about the steps the University is taking to protect the health and wellbeing of staff is communicated widely and frequently | Reporting Manager  CER |
| Disability – mental illness (includes anxiety, stress, depression, bipolar, eating disorders, learning disorders, OCD, PTSD) and neuro-diversity (includes dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Autistic Spectrum) | Staff with existing mental health conditions, who either want to return to campus and are able to do so, or do not want to return and are not required to do so, may experience an improvement in their condition | Staff with existing mental health conditions, who either want to return to campus but are not permitted to do so, or do not want to return but are required to do so in the first phase (and their risk assessment has deemed them able), may be susceptible to a worsening of their condition | Encourage staff to speak to someone if they are anxious about being required to/not permitted to return to campus. If you have serious concerns about the mental wellbeing of a member of staff, talk to Occupational Health (in confidence if necessary)  Ensure information about the steps the University is taking to protect the health and wellbeing of staff is communicated widely and frequently  Promote the Access Forum as a source of support | Reporting Manager    CER  CER/Access Forum |
| Gender[[1]](#footnote-1) | No specific positive impact identified | No specific negative impact identified | N/A |  |
| Marriage and civil partnership (including those who are single) | No specific positive impact identified | Staff who are single and live alone and are not permitted to return to campus but want to return, may feel frustrated/upset/angry | Provide opportunities for staff to voice their concerns about their particular situation and reiterate the university’s primary aim of ensuring the safety and wellbeing of all staff and students. If you have serious concerns about the mental wellbeing of a member of staff, talk to Occupational Health (in confidence if necessary) | Reporting Manager |
| Pregnancy and maternity | No specific positive impact identified | Staff who are in the first trimester of pregnancy or have given birth within the last 6 months and who are required (and their risk assessment has deemed them able) to come on to campus in the first phase may feel particularly anxious about returning due to being concerned about catching the virus and passing it on to their baby | Encourage staff to speak to someone if they are anxious about being required to return to campus. If you have serious concerns about the mental wellbeing of a member of staff, talk to Occupational Health (in confidence if necessary)  Promote the Parent’s Support Network as a source of support | Reporting Manager  CER/Parent’s Support Network |
| Race | No specific positive impact identified | Staff from BAME communities who are required (and their risk assessment has deemed them able) to come on to campus in the first phase may feel particularly anxious about returning and contracting the virus due to feeling vulnerable | Encourage staff to speak to someone if they are anxious about being required to return to campus. If you have serious concerns about the mental wellbeing of a member of staff, talk to Occupational Health (in confidence if necessary)  Promote the BAME Staff Forum and the Global Forum as sources of support | Reporting Manager  CER/BAME staff forum/Global Forum |
| Religion or belief | No specific positive impact identified | No specific negative impact identified | N/A |  |
| Sexual orientation | No specific positive impact identified | No specific negative impact identified | N/A |  |
| Caring responsibilities | Staff with caring responsibilities who are required to return to campus may feel relieved at being back in the workplace | The additional uncertainty for staff with caring responsibilities, for either children or older people, not required to return in phase 1, around whether/when they will be required to come on to campus (depending on the University’s ability to control the virus) could make it difficult to ensure appropriate care is in place when needed | Ensure that decisions taken in relation to phases 2 and 3 are taken and communicated in a timely way to enable staff with caring responsibilities to make the necessary arrangements | CER/USG/Council |
| Socio-economic background | Staff from low socio-economic backgrounds, who may have been on furlough and who return to work in phase 1, may feel more positive about their job security going forward | Staff from low socio-economic backgrounds, who may have been on furlough, who do not return to work in phase 1, may feel increasingly anxious about their job security | Maintain regular communication with all staff on furlough  Promote the availability of the Staff Hardship Fund | Reporting Managers  CER |

**Table 2: Equality Impact Assessment: returning to study on campus by protected characteristic – students**

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| **Protected characteristic** | **Potential positive impact** | **Potential negative impact** | **Mitigating actions to address identified negative impacts** | **Person(s)/service responsible** |
| Age | No specific positive impact identified | No specific negative impact identified | N/A |  |
| Disability – physical and long-term illness | Being able to choose whether to return to campus or not may be beneficial for some students with a physical disability or long-term illness | Students with a physical disability or long-term illness, not included in phase 1, may be concerned about returning to campus when significant numbers of students are already there and have become used to navigating the COVID-safe environment  Some disabled students studying subjects in which face-to-face teaching has been assessed as essential may feel particularly anxious about returning in phase 1 or 2 due to feeling vulnerable  Disabled students who haven’t been on campus from the start of term, may feel overwhelmed by the guidance in place, but haven’t had the same ‘learning’ opportunity to familiarise themselves with the guidance at the start of term as their peers | Ensure all disabled students, but particularly those in phases 2 and 3, are given the earliest opportunity to familiarise themselves with campus through a campus tour  Ensure necessary control measures identified through the campus/departmental risk assessment are implemented rigorously in respect of disabled students  Need to ensure that the signage remains very clear throughout the academic year, and isn’t damaged or faded over time, as this would reduce confidence on the distancing rules being enforced which may negatively impact on disabled students. | SWIS  Estate Management Section  Departments/Sections |
| Disability – mental illness (includes anxiety, stress, depression, bipolar, eating disorders, OCD, PTSD) and neuro-diversity (includes dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Autistic Spectrum) | Being able to choose whether to return to campus or not may be beneficial for some students with some mental health conditions | Students with existing mental health conditions may be particularly anxious about returning to campus whether they are included in phase 1, 2 or 3. Being able to choose whether to return to campus or not may also be difficult for some students with some mental health conditions  Changes to guidance and information will cause particular distress and anxiety for some groups of students (e.g. ASC or OCD students). | Promote Student Space, a safe, confidential service set up to make it easier for students to find the support they need during the coronavirus pandemic <https://studentspace.org.uk/>  Ensure eligible students are aware that they can request a return to campus accommodation should they feel they are being disadvantaged  Ensure students who choose not to return to campus when they are eligible to do so (i.e. when face-to-face has been assessed as essential) are able to access the necessary learning materials | SWIS/CER  CER/Accommodation Essex  Academic staff |
| Gender | No specific positive impact identified | No specific negative impact identified | N/A |  |
| Marriage and civil partnership (including those who are single) | No specific positive impact identified | Single students, particularly those who live alone, who are not in phase 1 and who had been looking forward to engaging with their fellow students face-to-face may feel a sense of frustration or anger at not being able to do so from the start of term | Ensure opportunities to create a sense of belonging and engage in activities are communicated widely | CER  Departments  Students’ Union |
| Pregnancy and maternity |  | Pregnant students in phase 1 may feel particularly anxious about being amongst the first group of students being allowed back on to campus | Ensure pregnancy risk assessments are carried out as soon as a student tells us they are pregnant and at regular intervals thereafter | Departments (supported by SWIS) |
| Race | No specific positive impact identified |  |  |  |
| Religion or belief | No specific positive impact identified | No specific negative impact identified | N/A |  |
| Sexual orientation | No specific positive impact identified | LGBTQ students who are living with unsupportive family/carers, and/or they are not out to their family/carers because they do not feel safe to do so, could experience increased levels of anxiety/fear/frustration if they are not able to move on to campus at the start of term as expected | Ensure the support available to LGBTQ students, both through the University and the Students’ Union, is prominent within communications  Ensure eligible students are aware that they can request a return to campus accommodation should they feel they are being disadvantaged | CER  Students’ Union  CER/Accommodation Essex |
| Caring responsibilities | Having the opportunity (for some students) to opt to study entirely online and not need to move out of home could be a particular benefit to some students with caring responsibilities | Students with caring responsibilities e.g. for an elderly or disabled relative, who are not in phase 1 but had assumed they would be starting term as normal, may have arranged for someone else to carry out the care needed, and now that is not necessary, could incur unnecessary costs associated with that  The additional uncertainty around whether/when they will be coming on to campus (depending on the University’s ability to control the virus) could also make it difficult to ensure appropriate care is in place when needed | Consider how to respond to any claims made in this respect  Ensure students are aware of the Student Hardship fund  Ensure that decisions taken in relation to phases 2 and 3 are taken and communicated in a timely way to enable students with caring responsibilities to make the necessary arrangements | USG/Council  CER/SWIS  USG/Council/CER |
| Socio-economic background | Having the opportunity (for some students) to opt to study entirely online and not need to rent accommodation near campus could be a particular benefit to students from low socio-economic backgrounds | Students from low socio-economic backgrounds in phases 2 and 3 (deferred start on campus) may be particularly negatively impacted by committing to renting private accommodation and then not needing to use it because all their delivery remains online | Work with private providers to be as generous as possible in these circumstances  Ensure students are aware of the Student Hardship Fund | Accommodation Essex  CER/SWIS |
| Being estranged | No specific positive impact identified | A change to the anticipated date of return to campus could result in an estranged student not having anywhere to live | Estranged students who have been offered on-campus accommodation but are not in phase 1 should be given the opportunity to be included in phase 1 as they fall under Principle (f): limiting the ability of students to return to campus might result in them being disadvantaged | Academic Section/Accommodation Essex |
| Care leavers | No specific positive impact identified | A change to the anticipated date of return to campus could result in a student leaving care not having anywhere to live | Students who are care leavers, who have been offered on-campus accommodation but are not in phase 1 should be given the opportunity to be included in phase 1 as they fall under Principle (f): limiting the ability of students to return to campus might result in them being disadvantaged | Academic Section/Accommodation Essex |
| Commuting students | Not being required to come on to campus could save commuting students money (fuel/bus or train fares) | No specific negative impact identified | N/A |  |
| Fee status/nationality | International students have certainty about their ability to return to, and live on, campus as planned | Students in phase 3, the vast majority of whom are not eligible for on-campus accommodation, may have already committed to private rented accommodation and find themselves having to pay for this even if they would prefer, and are able, to study entirely online  Home and EU27 students entitled to live on campus but not included in phase 1 may feel they are being disadvantaged | Work with private providers to be as generous as possible in these circumstances  Ensure students are aware of the Student Hardship Fund  Ensure eligible students are aware that they can request a return to campus accommodation should they feel they are being disadvantaged. | Accommodation Essex  CER/SWIS  CER/Accommodation Essex |

Appendix A

***Phase One: Normal Start (week commencing 5 October) 7201 students***

i. All First Year undergraduate students (Home, EU27 and International), to ensure they are properly inducted into the University departments and briefed on accessing learning resources and student support facilities. This covers all academic departments and all campuses and is estimated to be 4625 students, 3954 at Colchester, 523 at Southend and 148 at Loughton.

ii. Selected returning postgraduate students from programmes of study where access to face to face teaching from the outset of the autumn term has been

assessed to be essential. This is estimated to be 155 students, 52 at Colchester, 0 at Southend and 103 at Loughton.

iii. International students at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This covers second and third year undergraduate and new and returning PGT and PGR students. This is estimated to be 2421 students, with 2239 at Colchester, 142 at Southend and 40 at Loughton.

**b. *Phase Two. Deferred Start on-campus by 3 weeks (week commencing 2 November) 6605 students in total***

i. 3rd year Home undergraduate students. This is estimated to be 2624 students, with 2374 at Colchester 203 at Southend and 47 at Loughton.

ii. All returning EU27 undergraduate students. This is estimated to be 1528 students in total, with 1422 at Colchester, 74 at Southend and 32 at Loughton.

iii. Home and EU 27 PGT and PGR students in Departments not included in Phase 1. This estimated to be 1364 students, 1322 at Colchester, 37 at Southend and 5 at Loughton.

iv. Selected returning 2nd year undergraduate or Foundation degree students from programmes of study where access to face to face teaching is required from 2 November. This is estimated to be 1089 students, 815 at Colchester, 216 at Southend and 58 at Loughton.

**c. *Phase Three. Deferred start on-campus by 6 weeks (week commencing 23 November) 2695 students in total***

i. 2nd year Home students in Departments not included in Phases 1 or 2. This is estimated to be 2695 students across all campuses (2623 at Colchester and 72 at Southend).

1. Consideration of the impact upon gender should be inclusive of all genders across the gender spectrum including (but not limited to): trans, non-binary, pangender, cisgender\* women, cisgender\* men, and individuals undertaking gender reassignment. The Equality Act 2010 identifies ‘gender reassignment’ as a protected characteristic, which is the process of transitioning from one gender to another. The University’s policies go beyond the requirements of legislation and protect a broader group of people than those covered by the term ‘gender reassignment’ and include all trans and non-binary people.   
   \* Someone whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)