**UNIVERSITY OF ESSEX**

**COVID-19: BUSINESS CONTINUITY PLAN**

**We are currently in Advanced Protection.**

**Stages of protection**

The University’s business continuity plan for COVID-19 initially identified two escalating levels of response from the University: Enhanced and Advanced. Each of these recognised that the University’s campuses would need to remain open at all times to support students residing in University accommodation.

Since moving into the Advanced Protection stage, additional work has been undertaken to identify the steps that would need to be taken to bring the University community back onto campus. Plans have been made for a phased approach to be taken, with two further stages of protection plotted, prior to a return to business as usual (with a note that this is not expected to be the same as our previous business as usual state).

This provides the University with the following five states:

1. Advanced Protection, where essential services only are delivered on campus.
2. Enhanced Protection, with many functions delivered remotely, and other, limited services available safely on campus.
3. Sustained Protection, a new stage, providing measures that enable more elements of on-campus activity to resume than within Enhanced Protection; these are envisaged to be required over an extended time period.
4. Targeted Protection, the stage that is expected to be a 'new normal' for us for some time, with protective measures continuing but limited to particular groups of individuals that may be especially vulnerable, or to particular activities that pose heightened levels of risk.
5. Steady State: a new form of business as usual, as yet undefined.

This document plots the actions that we would need to take to move the University through its expected journey from Advanced Protection, through a new instance of Enhanced Protection, and into a state of Sustained and/or Targeted Protection. The new form of business as usual will be defined as this process progresses; we will capture learning from our experiences of all these stages and retain as many as possible of those elements of our changed ways of working that have proved to be beneficial.

**Moving between stages of protection**

Decisions to move the University back to Enhanced Protection, into Sustained or Targeted Protection, or to business as usual, will be taken by the Vice-Chancellor following consultation with the Chair of Council and the Chair of Council’s Audit and Risk Management Committee, and communicated to all members of the University. Consultation will be undertaken. We will consult safety representatives in good time with regard to these proposals, as well as consulting with the Students’ Union and with the Trades Unions to enable meaningful input both to the content of the plan and the implementing movement between levels of protection. Government regulatory requirements will be followed at all times.

The Business Continuity Plan has been reviewed and revised to include consideration of actions that would need to be taken to move the University to each of these stages. The safety of our staff and students is our first priority consideration in moving between the levels of protection.

The Business Continuity Plan identifies transition measures that would need to be undertaken as part of a transition from one level to the next in the Plan. This is to allow for the careful and planned implementation of the arrangements concerned and to ensure that additional groups of staff and students may re-commence activities on our campuses in a safe and co-ordinated manner. Some activities will be undertaken across our campuses in line with any changes of protection level. These include:

* Enhanced cleaning regimes for areas of high traffic, including door handles and push plates, being re-implemented.
* Hand sanitisers being checked and re-stocked.
* Health and Safety checks and the flushing of water systems have continued to be undertaken in all areas during all levels of protection; these will continue.

The University community will be supported through all these changes with sustained communication of all mitigations, as well as focused information about student and staff expected behaviours and responsibilities.

**Advanced Protection**

Advanced Protection is our highest level.

The Advanced Protection level includes measures to continue to deliver essential services. This will mean that staff working on our campuses will be focused on supporting residential and essential operational services only. For students, these essential services will continue.

**Enhanced Protection**

Re-implementation of Enhanced Protection measures would enable certain additional activities to be undertaken on our campuses, in comparison with Advanced Protection.

The Enhanced Protection level includes measures to protect the University’s staff, students and community, while allowing as many services and functions as possible to continue to be delivered. For many staff, this will mean that, where appropriate and possible, colleagues will be undertaking their work from home, although some functions may be undertaken on campus. For students, as many services as possible will be maintained, although some of these may be delivered in different ways.

Under Enhanced Protection, many University activities would still be undertaken remotely, where possible. These include internal meetings, which would continue using Zoom, and the provision of helpdesks, which would continue online (via live chat, email, telephone, for example). Staff who can still work from home would also be encouraged to continue to do so.

Where on campus activity is necessary, in order to facilitate substantial social distancing, no more than one third of the staff in any Department or Section should be working on campus at any one time, where this is possible for the completion of the activity. It is expected that Departments/Sections requiring staff on site will operate a minimum of a “three team” structure, with colleagues allocated to one of three teams with attendance on campus by rotation. The definition of what constitutes a ‘team’ should be made by the Head of Department or Head of Section as this will vary by activity; however, social distancing should be facilitated at all times.

In addition to facilitating social distancing, this approach will ensure operational resilience in relation to any further waves of infection. Exceptions to the “three team” rule should be approved by Divisional Heads, following a risk assessment. Individuals who are vulnerable or have underlying health conditions would not be expected to come onto campus.

All staff and all students residing on campus will be provided with two cotton, washable face-coverings to be worn if coming into enclosed spaces on campus, where social distancing isn’t possible. Individuals will be responsible for laundering their own face-coverings.

Social distancing will be implemented across our campuses in line with government advice.

**Sustained Protection**

Should it be deemed safe for on-campus activities to be increased, with significant levels of social distancing being required to protect against the spread of infection and expected to be in place for an extended period of time, the University envisages operating under arrangements defined as Sustained Protection. During the period of Sustained Protection, it is envisaged that the University’s operations would be structured on a “two team” basis, typically with attendance on campus limited to a maximum of 50% of staff at any time. Individuals who are vulnerable or have underlying health conditions would not be expected to come onto campus. Staff who can still work from home would be able to continue to do so.

**Targeted protection**

Even when it is deemed safe for on-campus activities to resume to a more significant extent, the University envisages that there will be a requirement for longer term measures, sustaining measures targeted at protecting individuals at particular risk (for example as a result of medical conditions) as well as on activities that pose particular risks because of their nature or the scale of the social gatherings that are entailed. Targeted Protection will focus measures on specific activities where mitigations are required for the longer term, even while the majority of activities have returned to modes of operation that are more equivalent to business as usual.

Within the targeted protection phase, we would expect to see most expected staff and students on site. Staff would be expected to return to campus in pre-defined waves. This would be dictated by the availability of estate, with confirmation of safety processes having been completed prior to re-occupation.

**Tailored support**

Support specific to the individual’s needs will be offered to staff and students across all stages of protection through our existing Occupational Health and Student Wellbeing policies and practices.

**Returning safely to campus**

The Government’s roadmap for easing lockdown was published on 11 May 2020: [*Our Plan to Rebuild: The UK Government’s COVID-19 recovery strategy*](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884171/FINAL_6.6637_CO_HMG_C19_Recovery_FINAL_110520_v2_WEB__1_.pdf)[[1]](#footnote-1). This guidance has and will, as it develops, inform the specific measures put in place at the University. Separate and additional social distancing guidance for the University is under development. Appendix one includes a summary of the Government’s current expectations for the implementation of the steps required to lift restrictions.

The Government’s [COVID-19 Secure guidance](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19)[[2]](#footnote-2) is also available online. It includes specific information on working in the following environments of relevance to the University:

* [Labs and research facilities](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/labs-and-research-facilities)
* [Offices and contact centres](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/offices-and-contact-centres)
* [Restaurants offering takeaway or delivery](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/restaurants-offering-takeaway-or-delivery)
* [Shops and branches](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/shops-and-branches)
* [Other people’s homes](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/homes)
* [Construction and other outdoor work](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/construction-and-other-outdoor-work)
* [Vehicles](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/vehicles)

This COVID-19 Secure guidance will be used to inform additional measures required for any sort of return to campus during a period of Enhanced or Sustained Protection, including, in particular, the requirement to undertake risk assessments prior to re-starting on-campus activities and, following this, the implementation of appropriate health and safety measures to protect the community.

Some staff will still be working from home. The following guidelines should be followed:

* For activities that will revert to on-campus delivery, this will be implemented on a rota basis splitting teams on- and off-campus (using a “three team” or “two team” approach).
* Some roles may continue to be undertaken effectively remotely, and for these staff, work may continue from home where appropriate, and dependent on the current level of protection.
* Those who are vulnerable or have underlying health conditions would still be asked to work from home.
* As schools may still be closed, at least for some year groups, parents of school-aged children may still need to work from home.

Managers will be asked to health risk assess the return to campus of their staff with underlying health conditions, using guidance developed by Occupational Health to determine fitness to work on campus. Due to the confidentiality of the staff member’s medical information, an Occupational Health referral would be needed to inform the manager’s risk assessment if agreement to work back on site is required.

It is possible that staff who return to campus may work in alternative locations to their original offices, in order to maintain social distancing and to maximise the use of our office space.

Those on campus may also be able to stagger start and end times and could be encouraged to work outside usual office hours and take time off during office hours in order to spread the number of people on campus at any given time. Staffing of on-campus functions will be approached with flexibility, sensitivity and creativity.

Staff working entirely back on campus will be asked to return the University equipment they have been using for home working. More information will be made available about the movement of equipment that staff may have taken home, prior to returning it to campus.

The University community will be encouraged to adhere to all these measures when on campus for the benefit of all, supported by sustained communications.

**Updating the Business Continuity Plan**

The detail of the Business Continuity Plan will be updated as necessary in line with the [UK Government’s recovery strategy](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884171/FINAL_6.6637_CO_HMG_C19_Recovery_FINAL_110520_v2_WEB__1_.pdf), and changes shared in line with planned communications.

**Appendix one: Summary of the Government’s expectations of the steps needing to be taken to ease lockdown (dated 11 May 2020)[[3]](#footnote-3)**

Step One (from 13 May 2020):

* For the foreseeable future, workers should continue to work from home rather than their normal physical workplace, wherever possible.
* All workers who cannot work from home should travel to work if their workplace is open.
* It remains the case that anyone who has symptoms, however mild, or is in a household where someone has symptoms, should not leave their house to go to work.
* Schools remain closed, but local authorities and schools are being encouraged to urge more children who would benefit from attending in person to do so.
* Everybody (including critical workers) should continue to avoid public transport wherever possible.
* Social distancing guidance on public transport must be followed rigorously.
* People should aim to wear a face-covering in enclosed spaces where social distancing is not always possible and they come into contact with others that they do not normally meet, for example on public transport or in some shops.
* As well as exercise, people can now also spend time outdoors subject to: not meeting up with any more than one person from outside the household; continued compliance with social distancing guidelines to remain two metres (6ft) away from people outside the household; good hand hygiene, particularly with respect to shared surfaces; and those responsible for public places being able to put appropriate measures in place to follow the new COVID-19 Secure guidance.
* People may exercise outside as many times each day as they wish.
* People may drive to outdoor open spaces irrespective of distance, so long as they respect social distancing guidance while they are there; however, the rules in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland must be respected and people must not travel to different parts of the UK.
* These clinically vulnerable people should continue to take particular care to minimise contact with others outside their households, but do not need to be shielded.
* Those in the clinically extremely vulnerable group (those who are shielding) are strongly advised to stay at home at all times and avoid any face-to-face contact.
* The Government is continuing to provide essential food to those unable to leave their home and is facilitating volunteer support.
* Higher fines will be administered to those who do not comply.
* There will be increased information about the UK’s social distancing regime at border points.
* All international arrivals will be required to supply contact and accommodation information.
* All international arrivals not on a short list of exemptions will be required to self-isolate in their accommodation for fourteen days on arrival into the UK.

Step Two (no earlier than 1 June 2020; changes will be announced at least 48 hours before coming into effect):

* A phased return for early years settings and schools should be planned.
* Non-essential retail would open when and where it is safe to do so and subject to those retailers being able to follow the COVID-19 Secure guidelines. All other sectors that are currently closed, including hospitality and personal care, would not be able to re-open at this point because the risk of transmission in these environments is higher.
* Cultural and sporting events would be able to take place behind closed-doors for broadcast.
* Local public transport would be re-opened in urban areas, subject to strict measures.
* It is expected that people may be allowed to expand their household group to include one other household in the same exclusive group; the way this would work is under development.

Step Three (no earlier than 4 July 2020, subject to the Government’s five tests justifying some or all of the measures):

* There is an ambition to open at least some of the remaining businesses and premises that have been required to close, including personal care (such as hairdressers and beauty salons) hospitality (such as food service providers, pubs and accommodation), public places (such as places of worship) and leisure facilities (like cinemas). All should meet the COVID-19 Secure guidelines. Venues which are crowded by design may not be able to open.

1. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884171/FINAL_6.6637_CO_HMG_C19_Recovery_FINAL_110520_v2_WEB__1_.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884171/FINAL_6.6637_CO_HMG_C19_Recovery_FINAL_110520_v2_WEB__1_.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-3)