



COVID-19: Business Continuity Plan

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Stages of protection

The University has developed five operational levels under which it can function during the COVID-19 pandemic:

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, providing measures that enable more elements of on-campus activity to resume than within Enhanced Protection and envisaged to be required over an extended time period.
4. Targeted Protection, 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, where the University functions without time-limited COVID restrictions, save where those are part of the ongoing post-pandemic arrangements required to manage the continued existence of COVID-19 and any subsequent variations.

This document plots the actions that we would need to take to move the University between these levels of protection. It is entirely possible that the University may have to move between the levels of protection in a non-linear way, increasing and relaxing restrictions, or to nuance elements of its delivery across protection levels, in line with the external context.



Moving between stages of protection

Decisions to move the University into a new protection level will be taken jointly by the Vice-Chancellor and the Chair of Council, and will be communicated to all members of the University. 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 to the implementation of movement between levels of protection. Union safety representatives serve the entire University community in matters of health and safety. Government regulatory requirements will be followed at all times.

While the decision to change the level of protection under which the University is operating will be taken by the Vice-Chancellor and the Chair of Council, the re-commencement of any departmental and sectional activities will only be undertaken following the completion of risk assessments, with the results and any mitigations approved at the appropriate level. The safety of our community (including our staff, students, and any visitors to our campuses, including contractors) is the top priority consideration in moving between the levels of protection.

Information about the use of our campuses and the risk assessments to be undertaken prior to any return is included in the associated guidance that has been developed to support this Plan. This guidance has been developed to comply with government requirements and is supported and informed by scientific advice¹. The guidance will be updated as more evidence is available, and to protect quality of experience and educational delivery. The detailed guidance is listed below (see Guidance for returning safely to campus). The guidance about our return to campus has been, and will continue to be, developed with due and sensitive regard to the needs of all our community. Those who identify with a disability may have different requirements to those who do not. Any sort of return to campus, when moving from a more restrictive level of protection to a less restrictive one, will be expected to be undertaken in a phased way.

¹ See the paper 'Adapting our individual behaviours while the threat of COVID-19 transmission remains' for the scientific resources that have directly contributed to the development of the guidance. Further research resources on COVID-19 have been collated here: <https://library.essex.ac.uk/c.php?g=675869&p=4838936>

The Business Continuity Plan identifies transition measures that would need to be undertaken as part of a transition from one level to another in the Plan. This allows for the careful and planned implementation of arrangements 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** protection levels. These include:

- Enhanced cleaning regimes for relevant areas.
- Hand sanitisers being checked and re-stocked.
- Health and Safety checks and the flushing of water systems being undertaken in all areas.

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

This Plan refers equally to all three of our campuses at Colchester, Southend and Loughton; however, each will have their own needs. These have been noted, where appropriate, in the detailed actions and activities table. Those who are required to work on multiple campuses should include consideration of their specific needs when completing a return to campus risk assessment.

NB while the term 'social distancing' has been used in this document, this should refer to physical distancing. Social interaction is encouraged where it is safe to do so.

Advanced Protection

Advanced Protection is our highest level.

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

Enhanced Protection

Enhanced Protection measures 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 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 as the default (via live chat, email, telephone, for example). Staff who can still work from home are encouraged to continue to do so.

Where on campus activity is essential, 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. For clarity, teams are not required to have a third of their staff working on site; rather, those who are undertaking essential work on campus should have no more than a third of their staff members working in University buildings. Occupational Health will advise individuals who are medically vulnerable. If schools are closed, parents of school-aged children may also need to work from home.

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 the successful completion of a risk assessment. Individuals who are vulnerable or have underlying health conditions would not be expected to come onto campus. The premises guidance including, for example, requirements for social distancing, should be followed.

Social distancing will be implemented across our campuses in line with government requirements and following scientific advice.

Sustained Protection

When it is deemed safe for on-campus activities to be increased, with appropriate mitigations in place to protect against the spread of infection, the University envisages operating under arrangements defined as Sustained Protection.

During the period of Sustained Protection, it is envisaged that the University’s business operations would be structured on a “two team” basis, typically with those working on campus limited to a maximum of 50% of staff at any time. Again, it would not be a requirement for all teams to field 50% of their staff on-site; however, no teams should have more than half their staff working on the University premises at any one time. Individuals who are medically vulnerable (see the guidance on health risk assessments) 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, sustaining measures, targeted at protecting individuals at particular risk (for example as a result of their level of medical vulnerability) as

well as targeting activities that pose particular risks because of their nature or because of the scale of the social gatherings that they entail.

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 staff and students on site. Consequently, Targeted Protection would see increased numbers of people being expected to be able to be on campus. Any return to campus would be dictated by the availability of estate, with confirmation of safety processes having been completed prior to occupation.

Steady State

Steady State is defined as the operational model where the risk to the University and its community is considered low enough to allow emergency COVID-related restrictions on campus to be lifted. Under Steady State the University would operate without reference to time-limited measures in place, save where these are part of the ongoing management of COVID. This means that the University will be operating under standard arrangements, developed through its usual processes and approval routes. Some of these arrangements will differ from those that were in place prior to the pandemic, to accommodate the continued existence of COVID-19 and potential future variants.

Tailored support

Support specific to the individual's needs covering, but not limited to, those with medical vulnerabilities and those who identify with a disability, will be offered to staff and students across all stages of protection through our existing Occupational Health and Student Wellbeing policies and practices.

Activities under each protection level

A detailed document has been developed, describing the activities provided within or by the University and expected under each level of protection, along with the actions needing to be taken in advance. We also work with colleagues in our local communities to direct our staff and students to activities available from arts, cultural and sports organisations that may be of benefit to our community. These will be highlighted in communications and on our website.

At a thematic level, the following activities would be expected to return to campus in the following way for each level of protection:

Teaching

Advanced protection

Most teaching delivered and engaged with remotely, with the exception of those courses where dual delivery including a face-to-face component is permitted by the Government.

Enhanced protection

Dual delivery, with essential teaching delivered face-to-face.

Sustained protection

Dual delivery

Targeted protection

On campus delivery expected, with remote delivery available if necessary.

Student Support

Advanced protection

All delivered and engaged with remotely.

Enhanced protection

Predominantly remote delivery with face-to-face service focused on supporting students in emergency circumstances and to enable support for students on campus.

Sustained protection

Basic frontline services provided with reduced hours.

Services continue to be available online.

Targeted protection

Services provided on site, with appropriate safeguards in place.

Research

Advanced protection

Predominantly delivered and engaged with remotely. Time-critical lab work may be permitted on site, following approved risk assessments and regular asymptomatic testing for all individuals involved.

Enhanced protection

Delivered and engaged with remotely where possible. Essential lab work on site following approved risk assessments.

Sustained protection

Delivered and engaged with remotely where appropriate. Lab work on site following approved risk assessments.

Targeted protection

Research expected to be undertaken on site, with appropriate safeguards in place.

Technical IT services and systems

Advanced protection

On site systems supported

Majority of staff working off site

Enhanced protection

On site systems supported

Majority of staff working off site

Sustained protection

On site systems supported

Majority of staff working off site

Targeted protection

Student facing IT services provided on site, with appropriate safeguards in place

Libraries

Advanced protection

Library buildings open over reduced hours, with limited services available to students, such as click-and-collect and bookable study spaces.

Enhanced protection

Library buildings open with limited services available to students, such as click-and-collect and bookable study spaces.

Sustained protection

Library buildings open where possible. Frontline services provided at all three campuses (dependent on partners) with reduced hours if necessary.

Services continue to be available online.

Targeted protection

Services provided on site, with appropriate safeguards in place.

Grounds and buildings

Advanced protection

All buildings continue to be maintained with skeleton staff.

Enhanced protection

All buildings continue to be maintained with staff on rotation.

Sustained protection

All buildings continue to be maintained with staff on rotation.

Targeted protection

All services provided on site, with appropriate safeguards in place.

Day Nursery

Advanced protection

Nursery provides services in line with Government guidance.

Enhanced protection

Nursery provides services in line with Government guidance.

Sustained protection

Nursery provides services in line with Government guidance.

Targeted protection

Nursery expected to be open with appropriate safeguards in place.

Food, Shops, Wivenhoe House and Sport

Advanced protection

Take-away services only from catering outlets

Hotel closed

Shops limiting numbers of customers at any one time

Sport centres and facilities closed; elite teams to continue, in line with Government advice.

Enhanced protection

Services provided in line with Government advice: for example, take-away services available from catering outlets, or external table service available.

Sports facilities such as the Gym open where possible in line with Government permissions.

Shops open, implementing social distancing requirements.

Sustained protection

Catering outlets open with appropriate safeguards in place

Shops continue in line with safety requirements

Hotel activities increased, in line with safety recommendations

Limited sporting activities.

Targeted protection

All services provided on site, with appropriate safeguards in place.

Office-based working

Advanced protection

All working remotely.

Enhanced protection

All working remotely where possible.

Sustained protection

All working remotely where necessary.

Staff re-familiarise themselves safely with the campuses.

Targeted protection

Return to on campus working where appropriate and as agreed with Heads of Department/Section.

Guidance for returning safely to campus

The specific measures put in place at the University are compliant with regulatory and government requirements^{2,3}, and informed by scientific evidence, advice from relevant medical organisations and the University's needs. These sources will continue to be used to review and further develop guidance as necessary. The guidance includes, for example, 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.

The following guidance documents have been developed to support the University community's return to on-campus activities:

- [Policy statement for the management of COVID-19 at the University of Essex](#)
- [Use of University of Essex premises during the pandemic](#)
- [Adapting our individual behaviours on campus while threat of COVID-19 transmission remains](#)
- [Health, safety and wellbeing responsibilities of all staff during the pandemic](#)
- [Managers guide to return to on campus working risk assessments \(stage 1\): work activities](#)
- [Managers guide to return to on campus working risk assessments \(stage 2\): individuals' health](#)
- [Display screen equipment for those working at home during the pandemic](#)

The University community is asked to demonstrate responsible behaviours and to adhere to all these measures when on campus for the benefit of all.

It is possible that staff who return to campus, when it is safe to do so, 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 flexibly 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.

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campus>

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 to campus.

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, scientific advice and the University's needs.

All updates to the Plan and to the guidance will be supported by sustained communications.

