**Equality Impact Assessment: Returning 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.

Our previous Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on working and studying remotely sought to identify the positive and negative impacts of these changes to working and learning environments from an equality perspective and provided advice and guidance on how to address identified negative impacts.

This EIA builds on that work and seeks to identify the opportunities and challenges presented by returning to work and study on campus and to provide advice and guidance for staff and students on mitigating actions to address potential negative impacts. It recognises that any return may only be partial. For example, staff working full-time may be required to continue to work from home for 3 days per week and work on campus for 2 days per week and delivery of learning may be dual-mode (a mix of face-to-face and online) or may continue to be delivered completely online, even if students are present on campus.

Given the nature of the challenge and the rapid, iterative nature of the pandemic, identifying what it might mean for our community as we start to return to campus, is not straightforward. This EIA therefore does not present an exhaustive list of impacts; it sets out what we have identified to date, having drawn on the knowledge and expertise of people from both within and outside our community. Each time the University moves into a different level of protection as set out in our Business Continuity plan, we will revisit the EIA to ensure it remains fit for purpose. The four levels of protection are (i) Advanced (the most stringent) (ii) Enhanced (iii) Sustained and (iv) Targeted.

The EIA complements other work in this area. This includes (i) the development of a suite of COVID-19 risk assessments[[1]](#footnote-1) for department premises, work activities and individual members of staff, which detail how the risk of COVID-19 infection will be managed and minimised or eliminated (ii) the development of Welcome information and activities for new and returning students and (iii) responding to the findings of our ‘Working during COVID-19’ staff survey, run in May 2020.

Of the 757 staff who responded to this survey the majority felt that the University had managed the transition to different working environments well and overwhelmingly colleagues appreciated the efforts of, and consideration given by, others. However, while many staff have clearly found solutions to specific challenges arising from their own personal and professional circumstances, it was clear that for others this remains a very difficult moment of transition and the impact considerable. In addition, many colleagues asked questions and were anxious about their return to on-campus working.

The following specific aspects of returning to work and study on campus, a combination of which affect all staff and students to a greater or lesser degree, have been considered:

* Adapting to using and navigating physical spaces differently due to social distancing requirements
* Adapting to dual-mode delivery of teaching
* Continuing to balance work/study and caring responsibilities, particularly for staff and students with children
* Overcoming fear of working or studying on campus for health, safety and wellbeing reasons[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Dealing with uncertainty over the timing of any return to campus, how the physical environment will have changed, who will be on campus at any one time
* Anxiety over returning to former ways of working e.g. having less flexibility again
* Dealing with an uncertain external environment that may necessitate further periods of lockdown

In line with our aspiration to go beyond legislation wherever possible, and to obtain a holistic overview as possible, a broader range of protected characteristics than those contained within the Equality Act 2010[[3]](#footnote-3) have been considered. In addition, when considering the impact on disabled staff and students, thought has been given to the following:

* Physical impairments and long-term illness
* Mental health conditions
* Those who may not have disclosed a disability
* Those who do not have a diagnosis of a disability but are living with a significant health condition or impairment

Whilst we are aware that significant numbers of staff have not disclosed information such as whether they consider themselves to have a disability, the current situation provides an opportunity for reporting managers to encourage staff to do this, for example through completion of a relevant risk assessment.

**Table 1: Equality Impact Assessment: returning to work 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 | The ‘pivot’ or ‘sandwich’ generation (those with caring responsibilities for both children and parents) may find returning to the physical workspace gives some respite from caring | Staff aged over 70, who are classed as vulnerable, may feel particularly anxious about returning to campus  Some staff may have new caring responsibilities for elderly relatives as a result of the pandemicStaff with partners who are elderly may feel anxious about returning to the workplace due to the increased risk to their partner of doing so A limited physical return to campus may create greater isolation for those staff who are not able to return because they are vulnerable (*i.e.* shielding) or caring for someone who is vulnerableAs lockdown is lifted the negative impact on older staff may increase if support services begin to be withdrawn  | Promote ‘Managing anxiety when returning to campus’ and ‘Wellbeing at the Hex’ Zoom sessionsRetain flexible approach adopted when working solely remotely to dual-mode and on-campus working and focus on outputs rather than time spent on tasks Ensure an appropriate risk assessment has been carried out for staff aged over 60 and those with elderly partners  | Occupational HealthCERAge Inclusion ChampionReporting managersDirector of People and CultureReporting managersOccupational Health |
| Disability – physical and long-term illness | Returning to work on campus and being able to engage with others in a physical environment, particularly if they have been shielding, may be a benefit for some disabled staff | Routes for navigating campus may have changed to accommodate social distancing requirements Visually impaired staff may not see some of the new signage, and the installation of additional screens may disrupt routes around campus.Access to some areas of campus may be restricted/less easy due to social distancing measures being put in place e.g. restricted use of lifts or teaching rooms in corridor ‘cul-de-sacs’Staff with a hearing impairment who lip-read may have their ability to do so reduced due to members of the community wearing masks Staff who are ‘clinically vulnerable’ and have a higher risk in relation to COVID-19 due to having a long-term illness may have concerns regarding immunity to infection, but staff may have other diseases, such as HIV that do not make them ‘clinically vulnerable’ but mean they share concerns regarding immunity to infection A limited physical return to campus may create greater isolation for those staff who are not able to return because they are vulnerable (*i.e.* shielding) As lockdown is lifted the negative impact on disabled staff may increase if support services begin to be withdrawn  | Give disabled staff the time to find the most appropriate route(s) around campus for them and support them in doing soEnsure staff with a health condition or impairment are given an opportunity to discuss changes to the working environment and what it might mean for them and adjustments made as necessary before returning to campus.Ensure an appropriate risk assessment is carried out with staff who have a health condition or impairment or a long-term illnessConsider using alternative modes of communication for those with limited access to the internetPromote the Essex Access Forum as a peer support mechanism for disabled staff  | Reporting managersOccupational HealthReporting ManagersChair, Essex Access ForumDisability Inclusion Champion  |
| Disability – mental illness (includes anxiety, stress, depression, bipolar, eating disorders, learning disorders, OCD, PTSD) and neuro-diversity (includes dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Autistic Spectrum) | Increased face-to-face contact with colleagues in the physical work environment may be a benefit for some neuro-diverse staff  | Potential challenges and causes of anxiety/stress for staff with mental health problems or disorders and neuro-diverse students include:(i) uncertainty around when their teaching will be scheduled, the mode of delivery, the level of digital literacy required, the length of time it will take them to prepare their learning content(ii) a change of structure and routine, including working pattern, place of work and methods of communication (iii) introduction of new workplace practices e.g. social distancing, use of screens, masks(vi) lack of confidence in reaching out to colleagues for interaction or support (v) concern for the health and wellbeing of family, friends and colleagues (vi) limited ability to engage with University communications due to having limited access to the internet or poor digital literacy | Ensure an appropriate risk assessment for staff with a mental health condition is carried out. Reasonable adjustments put in place, where possible, in response to any identified negative impact  Identify and agree any changes to arrangements for contact during a partial return to campus to keep track of workload, establish goals and respond to potential challenges Include reference to the specific support available to staff with health conditions or impairments, including the Essex Access Forum, in relevant University-wide communicationsProactively look out for signs that the mental health of any member of staff is deteriorating and address this as appropriate, within the limitations of your role and expertise, seeking support where needed Consider using alternative modes of communication for those with limited access to the internet or poor digital literacy | Reporting managersOccupational HealthDisability Inclusion Champion/CERMental Health First AidersHealth ChampionsReporting Managers/CER |
| Gender  | Staff going through transition who are now able to access planned medical treatments, that were delayed due to the pandemic, may feel a renewed sense of hope/positivity Staff in abusive home situations including emotional abuse and harmful traditional practices such as honour violence (predominantly women) may use campus as a refuge and feel a sense of relief at being able to return to campus  | Potential causes of anxiety/stress for trans and non-binary staff include:(i) Ongoing/prolonged delays in obtaining a Gender Recognition Certificate due to social distancing/lock down measures (ii) Ongoing/repeated delays/cancellations to planned operations as part of transitioning (iii) the physical appearance of trans staff may have changed significantly during the period of home-working and if little face-to-face interaction has taken place, trans staff may be anxious about returning to the workplace (iv) Some trans or non-binary staff may have been in the workplace with unsupportive colleagues, and/or they may not be out to their colleagues and may therefore be anxious about returning to the workplace (v) Some staff may have changed their gender identity whilst in lockdown and be anxious about returning to the workplace and telling colleagues, or not feeling able to tell colleagues this and therefore not being able to be themselves at work Staff in abusive home situations may be anxious about what limitations an abusive partner/family member might impose on them when they return to the workplaceWomen in particular, who are more likely to take on the majority of caring responsibilities, may be concerned about not being able to keep up with research and the impact (short, medium and long-term) this may have on their career progression | Trans staff to be given particular opportunities to discuss the impact of changes to the working, and wider, environment on their transition Include reference to the support available to trans staff, including staff networks and the ‘Supporting trans and non-binary staff’ document, in relevant University-wide communicationsEnsure visibility is given to the known/potential impact of the pandemic on trans people through information on the University’s website and in all-staff communicationsEncourage all staff and students to add their gender pronouns to their Zoom identityCheck-in regularly with staff to ensure they remain connected with workRaise safeguarding concerns if there are signs that something might be wrong e.g. meeting requests continually being declined, non-attendance at meetings that had been accepted, emails not answered or always answered at a particular/irregular time, obvious increase in levels of anxiety Maintain communications around availability of Report and Support, what it can be used for and the support available once a report has been made Raise awareness of potential issue and available support in ongoing all-staff communicationsEnsure pathway to permanency and promotion criteria and procedures take into account the impact COVID-19 has had/could have/might have on women *(12-month extension for evaluating probationary objectives has been agreed to support staff on the Pathway to Permanency)*  | Reporting managersNamed People and Culture contactsCERDirector of People and CultureTrans Inclusion ChampionLGBT+ ForumEssex LGBT AllianceAll staffReporting Managers Safeguarding OfficersCERDirector of People and CultureGender Inclusion ChampionAcademic Staffing Committee |
| Marriage and civil partnership (including those who are single) | Staff who are single, live alone and rely on work for their social interaction may feel very positive about returning to the workplaceSingle parents may feel a sense of relief at being able to return to the workplaceStaff going through divorce or relationship breakdown may feel a sense of relief at being able to leave the home environment and go to work  | Staff who are single and live alone may have become used to their own company and be anxious about returning to the workplaceSingle parents may be concerned about how they are going to continue to balance work and caring responsibilities when they are working in a dual home/workplace environment Staff going through divorce or relationship breakdown may be particularly vulnerable to poor mental health  | Particular attention paid to the wellbeing of staff who live alone or who are going through a relationship breakdownMaintain communications around availability of Report and Support, what it can be used for and the support available once a report has been made Raise awareness of the support available to single parents through all-staff communicationsEncourage single parents to join the Parent’s Support Network | Reporting managersCERDirector of People and cultureParent’s Support Network |
| Pregnancy and maternity | Staff who were due to return to the workplace during lockdown following the birth of a baby may feel a sense relief at returning | Staff who were due to return to the workplace during lockdown following the birth of a baby may feel a sense of nervousness about returning having spent more time at home with their child than originally planned Staff who are pregnant and classed as vulnerable, may feel particularly anxious about returning to the workplaceReturning from maternity leave during this period may have caused some staff to feel isolated and less connected to work than they were, and returning to the workplace may feel quite daunting  | Ensure an appropriate risk assessment has been carried out with pregnant staff and staff returning to work who have a baby who is less than 6 months oldEnsure access to, and cleaning of, the Parent and Baby room on Colchester campus and accessible toilets with baby-changing facilities are COVID-safeReporting managers with a member of staff in their team who is pregnant to regularly revisit pregnancy risk assessment and COVID-19 risk assessment (particularly if we go into lockdown again), adapting it as necessary Raise awareness of the support available to parents through all-staff communicationsEncourage staff parents to join the Parent’s Support Network  | Reporting managersOccupational HealthParent’s Support NetworkCEREstate Management Section  |
| Race | Heightened awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement during lockdown may have inspired positivity and a desire to foster change, leading to an eagerness to return to the workplace | Evidence to show the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) people are at greater risk of death from COVID-19 may lead to heightened levels of anxiety about returning to the workplaceHeightened awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement during lockdown may have increased the sense anger/frustration/vulnerability of some staff who may feel anxious about returning to campus as a result Staff may have been subjected to harmful traditional practices such as honour violence (predominantly Black, Asian and minority ethnic women and children) during the lockdown period  | Ensure appropriate risk assessments are carried out with Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic staffRaise awareness of potential and available support, including staff networks and new BAME mentoring scheme, through ongoing work associated with the Tackling Racism Working Group, the Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team and in ongoing all-staff communications | Reporting ManagersOccupational HealthCERDirector of People and CultureRace Inclusion Champion Global ForumBAME ForumTacking Racism Working GroupRace Equality Charter Self- Assessment Team |
| Religion or belief |  | On campus worship facilities may not always be available which may limit the opportunity to observe some faith practices Extended teaching times (into evenings and weekends if necessary) may mean some staff are asked to work on Holy days | Include reference to the availability of the Faith Centre and possible alternative ways to worship e.g. live-streamed religious services, in communications to staffConsider setting up virtual groups for religious communities, including group prayer and discussion groups onlineEnsure requests not to teach at a particular time, on a particular day for religious reasons are considered sensitively and fulfilled wherever possible | Faith and Community ManagerCERDirector of People and CultureReligion or Belief Inclusion ChampionInclusion Champion for Jewish staff and studentsReporting managers |
| Sexual orientation | LGBT+ staff not out to those they live with may feel a sense of relief about returning to a supportive workplace in which they can be themselves | Some LGB staff may have been in the workplace with unsupportive colleagues, and/or they may not be out to their colleagues and may therefore be anxious about returning to the workplace  | Include reference to internal and external support networks e.g. the LGBT+ Forum and Outhouse East in communications to staffPromote the ‘Supporting trans and non-binary staff’ document in communications to staff  | CERDirector of People and CultureSexual Orientation Inclusion ChampionLGBT+ Staff Forums |
| Caring responsibilities | Staff returning to the workplace, even for part of their working week, after months of home-schooling may feel a sense of relief Staggering start and finish times and potentially extending the working week in order to allow for social distancing could be a benefit to staff with caring responsibilities  | Potential causes of anxiety/stress for staff with caring responsibilities include:(i) trying to balance working from home/going onto campus on some days and caring responsibilities, including dealing with potential local lockdowns which means their child’s school is closed for a period of time (ii) having taken on additional responsibilities in relation to caring for older or vulnerable family members due to COVID-19 whilst working from home all the time, being concerned about how to continue to manage that when returning to the workplace (iii) needing to devote additional time to caring for older or vulnerable family members, meaning less time for relaxation and taking care of own wellbeing (iv) some staff may live with someone who is recovering from COVID-19 and be concerned about the impact on them of returning to the workplace as well as balancing work and caring for them (v) Not being able to keep up with research and the impact (short, medium and long-term) this may have on career progressionA limited physical return to campus may create greater isolation for those staff who are not able to return because they are caring for someone who is vulnerableAs lockdown is lifted the negative impact on carers may increase if support services begin to be withdrawn  | Ensure appropriate risk assessment is carried outEnsure staff are kept informed of the University’s approach to supporting staff with caring responsibilities and available networks for supportEnsure maximum flexibility in terms of working patterns is retained. Managers should discuss suitable work patterns with individuals through open and honest conversations about what works best for that person and adapting as necessary as the days and weeks progress. Managers must focus on work output, as opposed to time spent ‘at the desk’, to help staff to balance their work and home priorities. Managers must consider additional flexible options to support staff such as allowing staff to buy additional annual leave/exchanging salary for additional annual leave or offering flexible bank holidays– rather than requiring staff to take these days as paid leave, allow staff to work on a bank holiday if they wish and take the days off at another time of their choosing to better fulfil/share caring responsibilities.Positive discussions around reducing working hours temporarily or taking a career break to take place as appropriate, prompted by the individual member of staff Ensure pathway to permanency and promotion criteria and procedures take into account the impact COVID-19 has had/could have/might have on staff with caring responsibilities  | CERDirector of People and CultureReporting managersParent’s Support NetworkAcademic Staffing Committee |
| Socio-economic background  | Uncertainty over job stability could be particularly worrying for staff from low socio-economic backgrounds and returning to the workplace may feel very positive  | Uncertainty over job stability could be particularly worrying for staff from low socio-economic backgrounds, meaning they are anxious about returning to work and potentially spending more on travel and subsistence than they have done in lockdown Staff on furlough may be anxious about when/if they are going to return to the workplace and the ongoing impact this has on their ability to meet their financial commitments | Recognition of this to be reflected in University-wide communicationsEncourage staff on furlough to attend relevant webinars run by Organisational Development as a means of support and information | CERDirector of People and Culture |
| Being estranged | Returning to work on campus may feel very positive for estranged staff | Lack of family support network, at a time when others may be spending more time with, or connecting with, their families could cause increased feelings of loneliness and isolation  | Frequent contact maintained with staffKnown community support groups highlighted in relevant University-wide communications  | Reporting managersCER |

**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 | Student with childcare commitments (primarily mature students) may benefit from coming on to campus to study and being able to focus on being a student for that period of timeThe ‘pivot’ or ‘sandwich’ generation (those with caring responsibilities for both children and parents) may find returning to campus to study gives some respite from caring | Students with children (primarily mature students) may find it difficult to balance childcare and study in a more flexible/fluid/changing environment Students aged over 70, who are classed as vulnerable, may feel particularly anxiousA limited physical return to campus may create greater isolation for those students who are not able to return because they are vulnerable (*i.e.* shielding) or caring for someone who is vulnerableAs lockdown is lifted the negative impact on older students may increase if support services begin to be withdrawn Some mature students may need support with online learning because of a lack of relevant skills and confidence in using technology  | Information provided to students includes advice/guidance on studying at home and balancing study and childcare commitment and how the University will take this into account as part of assessment processes Extenuating circumstances forms/guidance include explicit reference to how having caring responsibilities will be taken into account in assessment processes Communicate the range of available support in terms of digital competencies and ensure that mature students, in particular are aware of this  | Academic SectionCERMature Students’ Network |
| Disability – physical and long-term illness | Returning to work on campus and being able to engage with others in a physical environment, particularly if they have been shielding, may be a benefit for some disabled students | Routes for navigating campus may have changed to accommodate social distancing requirementsVisually impaired students may not see some of the new signage, and the installation of additional screens may disrupt routes around campus.Access to some areas of campus may be restricted/less easy due to social distancing measures being put in place e.g. restricted use of lifts or teaching rooms in corridor ‘cul-de-sacs’Students with a hearing impairment who lip-read may have their ability to do so reduced due to members of the community wearing masks Students who are ‘clinically vulnerable’ and have a higher risk in relation to COVID-19 due to having a long-term illness may have concerns regarding immunity to infection, but students may have other diseases, such as HIV, and share concerns regarding immunity to infection A limited physical return to campus may create greater isolation for those students who are not able to return because they are vulnerable As lockdown is lifted the negative impact on disabled students may increase if support services begin to be withdrawn | Reasonable adjustments to remain in place to support students and to be clearly communicated within departments and to academic staff. Particular consideration given to ensuring no student is negatively impacted by ‘mask-to-mask’ teachingConsider use of visors when teaching, rather than masks, so that students can see the whole face Ensure clear signage is in placeOffer an individual accessibility tour (in a COVID-safe way) on campus to visually impaired students Liaison between SWIS and DDEs regarding awareness of reasonable adjustments for remote studies and examsInformation provided to students includes advice/guidance on keeping safe and well with specific reference to health conditions or impairments and long-term illnessEnsure Health Centre is equipped to support students with HIVAll communications are sensitive and do not ‘other’ disabled students  | DDEsDDLOsOccupational HealthEstate ManagementSWISCERDisability Inclusion ChampionHealth Centre |
| Disability – mental illness (includes anxiety, stress, depression, bipolar, eating disorders, OCD, PTSD) and neuro-diversity (includes dyslexia, dyspraxia, ADHD, Autistic Spectrum) | Increased face-to-face contact with colleagues in the physical work environment may be a benefit for some neuro-diverse students | Potential challenges and causes of anxiety/stress for students with mental health problems or disorders and neuro-diverse students include:(i) uncertainty around when their teaching will be scheduled, the mode of delivery, the level of digital literacy required, the length of time it will take them to complete an activity (ii) a change of structure and routine, including study pattern, place of study and methods of communication/feedback (iii) delays in diagnosis resulting in a lack of recommendations regarding adjustments, leading to a lack of assistive technology or specialist tutoring and mentoring for which they might be eligible(iv) Reduced opportunity for informal conversations and lack of confidence in reaching out to peers/staff for interaction or support  | ‘Chunk’ learning activities into smaller sections and give each one an estimated time for completionCommunications to students include clear messaging around support available to disabled students, including those awaiting a diagnostic assessment Source a suitable alternative assessment until a full diagnostic assessment can take place face to face. This ‘Evaluation of Needs Assessment’ will ensure that adjustments can be put in place for students. This form of assessment is currently accepted by SFE for award of DSA to students with disabilities Ensure that methods used to evaluate students’ digital literacy are appropriate for all students and they reach those in digital need  | DDEsDDLOsSWISPersonal Tutors |
| Gender  | For some trans or non-binary students, coming on to campus enables them to be themselves in terms of their gender identity in a way they may not feel safe or able to do when living with familyStudents in abusive home situations including emotional abuse and harmful traditional practices such as honour violence (predominantly women) may use campus as a refuge and feel a sense of relief at being able to return to campus  | Potential causes of anxiety/stress for trans students include:(i) students undergoing transition who need to live in their acquired gender for at least 2 years in order to obtain a Gender Recognition Certificate may have their transition delayed due to social distancing/lock down measures (ii) planned operations as part of transitioning may be delayed or cancelled (iii) the physical appearance of trans students may have changed significantly during the period of virtual learning and trans students may be anxious about returning to campus/seeing people face-to-face again(iv) Continued restricted access to campuses and peers may impact significantly on the mental health and wellbeing of trans and non-binary students who are not able to be themselves at homeStudents in abusive home situations may be anxious about what limitations an abusive partner/family member might impose on them when they return to the workplace | Reinforce importance of using gender neutral language in guidance provided to teaching about delivering learning onlineInclude reference to the support available to trans students in relevant University-wide communications e.g. relevant student societiesEncourage all staff and students to add their gender pronouns to their Zoom identityMaintain communications around availability of Report and Support, what it can be used for and the support available once a report has been madeContact to be maintained with students who are known to be vulnerable in this way Raise safeguarding concerns if there are signs that something is wrong e.g. obvious increase in levels of anxiety, marked difference in engagement in learning  | Organisational DevelopmentCERTrans Inclusion ChampionCERGender Inclusion ChampionSWIS Departmental staff |
| Marriage and civil partnership (including those who are single) | Students who are single, live alone and rely on University for their social interaction may feel very positive about returning to campusSingle parents may feel a sense of relief at being able to return to the workplaceStudents going through divorce or relationship breakdown may feel a sense of relief at being able to leave the home environment and go on to campus | Students who are single and live alone may have become used to their own company and be anxious about returning to campusSingle parents may be concerned about how they are going to continue to balance study and caring responsibilities when they are working in a dual home/study environment Students going through a divorce or relationship breakdown may be particularly vulnerable to poor mental health | Include reference to relevant information/support available to students in relevant University-wide communications e.g. relevant student societies, Students’ Union servicesMaintain communications around availability of Report and Support | SWIS |
| Pregnancy and maternity |  | Potential for reduced contact with ‘first point of contact’ might result in less frequent monitoring of pregnancy risk assessment to ensure it remains fit for purpose Reduced opportunity to interact with others during pregnancy and following the birth of a baby could cause anxiety/stressStudents who are pregnant and classed as vulnerable may feel particularly anxious  | Staff assigned as the ‘first point of contact’ for a pregnant student to maintain regular contact and revisit pregnancy risk assessment, making changes as appropriate  | Staff assigned as ‘first point of contact’ for pregnant studentsSWIS  |
| Race | Heightened awareness of the Black Lives Matter movement during lockdown may have inspired positivity and a desire to foster change, leading to an eagerness to return to campus | Evidence to show the Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people are at greater risk of death from COVID-19 may lead to heightened levels of anxiety about returning to campusNot all students will respond in the same way to social distancing. E.g. home students may behave differently to international students as a result of the pandemic and behavioural norms in different countries varying with regard to the COVID-19 virus. Examples might include the use of facemasks and the amount of social distancing that is acceptable. International students may have specific concerns, due to the current situation, about studying and being in another country Some international students may need to quarantine for a period of time after arriving on campus and therefore may not be able to fully engage/participate during this time | Ensure students know where they can go for information, help and support and staff supporting students are equipped to deal with students’ concerns Promote available support including student societies and new BAME mentoring scheme for students, through ongoing work associated with the Tackling Racism Working Group, the Race Equality Charter Self-Assessment Team and in ongoing all-student communicationsEnsure expectations and guidance around social distancing is clear, and staff are equipped to manage tensions around different behaviours if they ariseEngage with all students in quarantine on an individual basis to ensure equity of engagement/participation during this period  | SWISWelcome TeamCERStudents’ Union Black OfficerPeople and CultureCERDepartmental staff |
| Religion or belief |  | On campus worship facilities may not always be available which may limit the opportunity to observe some faith practices Extended teaching times (into evenings and weekends if necessary) may mean some students have lectures scheduled on Holy days | Include reference to the availability of the Faith Centre and possible alternative ways to worship e.g. live-streamed religious services in communications to students Consider setting up virtual groups for religious communities, including group prayer and discussion groups online Ensure that students who are not able to attend a scheduled event (at a time that is outside the ‘normal’ timetable) for religious reasons are able to access the materials online and are not penalised | Faith and Community ManagerCERReligion or belief Inclusion ChampionInclusion champion for Jewish staff and studentsAcademic staffProgress Team |
| Sexual orientation | For some LGB+ students, coming on to campus enables them to be themselves in terms of their sexual orientation in a way they may not feel safe or able to do when living with family | Continued restricted access to campuses and peers may impact significantly on the mental health and wellbeing of LGB+ students who are not able to be themselves at home | Include reference to internal and external support networks e.g. LGBT+ student societies and Outhouse East in communications to students | CERStudents’ Union societies |
| Caring responsibilities |  | Potential causes of anxiety/stress for students with caring responsibilities include:(i) trying to balance studying from home/going onto campus on some days and caring responsibilities, including dealing with potential local lockdowns which means their child’s school is closed for a period of time (ii) some students may live with someone who is recovering from COVID-19 and be concerned about the impact on them of returning to campus as well as balancing study and caring for them(iii) needing to devote additional time to caring for older or vulnerable family members, meaning less time for relaxation and taking care of own wellbeing A limited physical return to campus may create greater isolation for those students who are not able to return because they are caring for someone who is vulnerableAs lockdown is lifted the negative impact on students with caring responsibilities may increase if support services begin to be withdrawn | Information provided to students includes advice/guidance on balancing study and childcare commitment and how the University will take this into account as part of assessment processes Extenuating circumstances forms/guidance include explicit reference to how having caring responsibilities will be taken into account in assessment processes Consider the possibility of providing online activities for children in order to support their parents/carers to free up time for studying All-student communications contain information about support available to student carers both within and outside the University   | CERAcademic SectionDay NurseryCERStudents’ UnionSWIS |
| Socio-economic background | Students from low socio-economic backgrounds who have been quite severely affected by working in a crowded home environment, where they may also have been sharing computers and competing for clear Wi-Fi access may particularly benefit from returning to study on campus | Students, particularly from low socio-economic backgrounds, who need to work to support their studies may have lost their jobs, leading to increased anxietyStudents from low socio-economic backgrounds who commute may be concerned about how frequently they will be required to come on to campus to attend a learning event and the cost of doing so Some students from low socio-economic backgrounds may not have access to the same digital technologies as other students  | Messages around accessing the Student Hardship Fund and other potential financial support to continue As far as possible, the frequency with which commuting students are required to come on to campus is minimisedEnsure that methods used to evaluate students’ digital needs are appropriate for all students and they reach those in digital need | CERTimetable OfficeDepartmental staffSWISDepartmental staff |
| Being estranged |  | Lack of family support network, at a time when others may be spending more time with, or connecting with, their families could cause increased feelings of loneliness and isolation  | Known community support groups/mechanisms highlighted in relevant University-wide communications Proactive contact from SWIS (recognising that this relies on self-disclosure) | CERSWIS |
| Care leavers |  | Lack of family support network, at a time when others may be spending more time with, or connecting with, their families could cause increased feelings of loneliness and isolation  | Known community support groups/mechanisms highlighted in relevant University-wide communications Proactive contact from SWIS  | CERSWIS |
| Commuting students |  | Commuting students may be concerned about how frequently they will be required to come on to campus to attend a learning event and the time and cost, of doing so | As far as possible, the frequency with which commuting students are required to come on to campus is minimised | Timetable OfficeDepartmental staff |

1. Our individual risk assessments for staff help the University calculate a “COVID-age” which will be considered in conjunction with clinical judgement. As more data about COVID-19 have been collected and analysed, current evidence makes it apparent that age has the biggest effect on clinical outcomes, with underlying conditions, gender, BMI and ethnicity having a smaller but significant effect. For this reason, in the individual risk assessments, we ask staff to disclose their ethnicity, together with their age and gender. Staff who identify as Black, Asian or from a minority ethnic background are therefore not automatically considered to be in the high risk category and therefore the last to return to campus. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Although not mentioned in relation to any protected characteristic, the main negative impact for everyone is contracting a debilitating and potentially deadly disease [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The protected characteristics contained with the Equality Act 2010 are: age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation [↑](#footnote-ref-3)