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College & University Business Officers

Student Accommodation and Covid-19 (V1.0)

CUBO have produced this document based on current published government guidance at 11/8/2020. This is live document that will change.

It is not a replacement for government guidance, but is a best interpretation by sector practitioners of how the official guidance available at this point could apply to student accommodation.

With thanks to USHA in the production of this document.

1. General Advice and Principles

This document is intended to provide a checklist for accommodation providers to help them consider all aspects of their operations to maintain an environment that minimises the risk of the transmission of Covid-19.

All accommodation providers will focus on providing a good student experience, meeting student needs, and keeping students and staff safe. In doing so, consideration is needed between restrictions on activities and behaviours, and the overall well-being and mental health of all involved.

At this time, it is important that students arriving in accommodation are not only safe from contracting Covid-19, but that they feel safe and are confident that their institution has taken all necessary precautions to manage their safety. Where an institution has nominations agreements or other direct relationships with private providers, equal efforts should be considered. Where no contractual relationship exists, institutions should share advice and guidance and consider direct support to landlords and students to ensure student safety and wellbeing.

The full range of students need to be considered, but in particular institutions should ensure that practical steps are taken to enable equality for those particularly at risk.

a. Government Guidance & Regulation and other guidance

i. 5 Steps to Working Safely
www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/5-steps-to-working-safely

ii. UUK Covid-19 Principles and Considerations
www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Pages/principles-considerations-emerging-lockdown-uk-universities-june-2020.aspx

iii. Risk Assessments
www.hse.gov.uk/coronavirus/working-safely/risk-assessment.htm

iv. Quarantine
www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk/coronavirus-covid-19-how-to-self-isolate-when-you-travel-to-the-uk

v. Travel Corridors
www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-corridors

vi. Face Coverings
www.gov.uk/government/publications/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own/face-coverings-when-to-wear-one-and-how-to-make-your-own

vii. Cleaning of non-healthcare settings outside the home
https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings

viii. Scottish Government Guidance
(while not applicable to other nations, remains a useful resource for all)
www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-college-university-and-purpose-built-student-accommodation/

ix. Guest Accommodation
(Note that guest accommodation advice **ONLY** applies to short term guests or courses and not normal student accommodation where **households** are created)
www.gov.uk/guidance/working-safely-during-coronavirus-covid-19/hotels-and-other-guest-accommodation

b. **Risk Assessments**
Health and Safety Executive recommends a risk-based approach focussed on a hierarchy of control which seeks to reduce risk to the lowest reasonable and practicable level.

Before restarting work, you should ensure the safety of the workplace by:
- carrying out a risk assessment in line with the HSE guidance
- consulting with your workers or trade unions
- sharing the results of the risk assessment with your workforce and on your website

c. **Physical Distancing, Hygiene, Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Face Coverings**

All reasonable measures need to be taken to implement physical distancing in all relevant areas of university and student accommodation. Outside households the best ways of controlling the transmission of Covid are physical distancing, personal hygiene and maintaining a clean environment, and the primary focus of providers should be to place these at the heart of controls in place.

The use of PPE or face coverings is not currently required in areas of student accommodation, but should be considered for common rooms, community facilities, and social hubs.

Using PPE is a last resort after you have assessed the risks.

Many Universities are reviewing their policies to extend recommendations for the use of face coverings in circumstances beyond explicit government regulation and guidance to support increased feelings of safety and security.

2. Households

a. Definition

While it is legal for new households to be formed there is no definition by the UK Government as to what currently constitutes a household in terms of large-scale student accommodation. However, the Scottish government has stated that "Where accommodation is provided in the form of flats with shared cooking and bathroom facilities each "cluster flat" will normally be considered a household. If student accommodation is provided in a different format, for example longer corridors of single rooms, the composition of "household" will be informed by the areas shared by groups of students. In these circumstances, the size of the household should be considered carefully to ensure students can access facilities safely and in line with physical distancing guidelines. The placement of students within households is at the discretion of the accommodation provider."

b. Formation
Household formation will need careful consideration, in particular with the need for some international students to self-isolate.

International students who are self-isolating may be in a household with students who are not self-isolating (as they are part of a household). UK Government states that "It's important to avoid as much contact with other people as possible in your home in order to reduce the risk of transmitting coronavirus. You should stay in a well-ventilated room with a window to the outside that can be opened, separate from other people in your home." Shared facilities including kitchens may therefore prove challenging. Universities should provide clear information on use of shared facilities in such cases, including rotas and food and essential item delivery to those who are self-isolating.

Restricting overnight guest access for at least the first two weeks while the household forms should be considered and is compulsory for students who are self-isolating.

c. Pairing flats
In small flats (or studios) households could be 'paired' to enable mixing of households within guidance.

3. Social interaction
Allowing students to interact will be a key element of any successful student experience within student accommodation, but outside their household the normal physical distancing will remain the critical control for Covid-19.

Students are allowed to visit other households in line with government advice, but this may prove challenging given the multiplicity of relationships between different households, and the restriction of only two households being allowed to meet at the same time and with suggested time gaps between each visit.

Consideration of how this will work in practice is needed: should students be allowed to visit other flats; should there be appointments; what if a student does not want other students in their flat…? Similar consideration is needed for friends and visitors not resident in blocks.

Students in studios will be at greater risk of isolation and consideration should be given to how these students can follow guidance while developing a rich set of social interactions. It may be possible to group the students together and encourage connections in other social spaces.

Consideration should also be given to enabling small groups of students to congregate outside their flat in the outside or other spaces while physically distanced, to help minimise the need/desire for students to enter other students' flats. Accommodation providers might want to make these spaces bookable. Currently there are still restrictions on numbers outside – up to six from different households, or a maximum of 30 from 2 households.

Universities should also consider creating outside covered spaces and outside marquees for socialising, for group activities such as distanced yoga as well as for catering and bars.

4.   **Events and Activities**

Digital and virtual solutions enabling students to interact should be supported and encouraged, as well as a range of safe physically distanced events. Welcome talks and events, either in small groups or online, can help introduce people and activities and explain how to take part.

Publishing a programme of events will help to demonstrate the strength of the student experience on offer – extending the programme of events to meet the needs of earlier arriving students (and those self-isolating) will be essential.

Events might include:
- Cook Offs and Demonstrations
- Online DJs
- Quizzes and competitions
- Exercise classes
- Social forums
- Book clubs
- Comedy nights

- Socially distanced video games tournaments, outdoor movie nights, etc.
- Big night in events, events students can organise in their flat.

Events could include both in person and digital components, in particular to support those self-isolating, while bringing them into the main calendar of events.

5.   Shared Spaces

There are two principle kinds of shared spaces in or around student accommodation, within the household and without:

Within the household there is no need to enable social distancing, except if students are self-isolating having arrived from overseas, and it may be preferable not to mix such students with those who are not self-isolating.

Outside the household all shared spaces should be surveyed to support social distancing. Given the reduction in capacities, spaces will need reviewing for to facilitate socialising through:
- clearly stated room capacities that must be observed
- the introduction or removal of furniture
- one-way systems
- seat and place mat markings for change of sitting in dining areas
- sanitising stations
- provision of advisory signage
- increased use of external spaces
- changes of function

While face masks may not be explicitly required by legislation in shared spaces such as common rooms, they could be considered as an extra measure, for consistency across the campus and for reassurance.

6.   **Cleaning**

Within flats, consideration needs to be made of the responsibility of households to maintain their own clean environment.

Risk assessments should be undertaken for any cleaning activity undertaken by university staff once households have been formed.

Guidance for non-healthcare settings sets out the expected cleaning regime outside households and regular cleaning plays a vital role in limiting the transmission of COVID-19.

Risk assessments should be carried out to assess the needs of cleaning in areas. Reducing clutter and removing difficult to clean items can make cleaning easier a number of other actions should be considered: the frequency of cleaning, using standard

cleaning products such as detergents and sanitisers, paying attention to all surfaces but especially ones that are touched frequently, such as door handles, light switches, work surfaces, remote controls and electronic devices.

Hand-sanitising facilities when entering accommodation could be considered alongside encouragement of handwashing before leaving or on entering flats.

7. **Maintenance**

Consideration will be needed in determining whether all normal maintenance tasks will be carried out while students are in residence, but at a minimum, protocols will be needed to carry out essential maintenance.

Risk assessments for maintenance activity should by undertaken once households have been formed. However, it is essential to minimise contact between staff and residents, and to make students' responsibilities clear.

8. **Signage**

There should be appropriate signage within flats to encourage and remind students of safe behaviours outside the flat and expected behaviours as a household. Signage should also be displayed in locations of high footfall and traffic outside the flat and in particular in shared spaces. Signage should reference students' personal responsibility and how universities support this by providing appropriate facilities.

9. **Online Induction**

Online induction is already becoming the norm for accommodation, but a number of areas could be reviewed in the light of Covid-19:

- Medical Advice
- Covid-19 behaviour
- Well-being support
- Activities and Events (how to take part)
- Fire safety – fire is a pre-existing risk that universities will still need to mitigate against. Consideration is needed of the best way to do drills and tests, whether fire safety training will take place in person, and fire evacuation that does not result in assembly points bringing people together. As a result, induction materials may need updating.

10. **Student Responsibilities**

Government regulation and advice is based upon the ability to minimise transmission of Covid-19 and Universities will need to set a framework that creates a safe environment for staff and students, and that encourages students to abide by guidance.

Universities should consider:

- How to ensure guidance and expectations are clear for students and staff
- How to support positive behaviours including personal hygiene and the ability of others to enjoy their time at University,
- How to appropriately intervene if students are not following guidance.

Where there are *Flat Share Agreements* these could be updated to include references to Covid-19 and in particular the need to act as a household if any individual shows symptoms or tests positive for Covid-19.

Universities should also consider creating or updating Community Responsibility Pledges, particularly in view of local community concerns around student return.

11. Arrivals

a. Phased
Staggered and booked arrivals may assist in reducing contact between students and others when moving in, and also facilitate the creation of households. There are two approaches to phasing:
- Allow students to select a day/time of arrival – the advantage being that students can choose days and times that suit them. However, students may not get the time they want.
- Give students a day/time or arrival – with the advantage that creating a phased plan will be more straight forward. However, students may not be able to arrive on the date/time.

Universities may wish to encourage minimum additional numbers of attendees, e.g. student plus one other. Consideration should also be given to setting daily arrival limits by individual halls, accounting for circulatory space, lift availability, flat size, etc.

b. Meet and Greet
When students (and families) arrive, it is essential that the process maintains physical distancing and other precautions and in addition to modifications needed to receptions a number of other things should be considered:
- Pre-arrival advice
- Number of key collection points
- Key cleaning
- One way systems
- Parking and separation
- Managing use of toilet facilities on arrival
- Help with possessions and moving in

12. Well-being

Student wellbeing is very important. Universities need to ensure that students are provided with clear guidance and links to support both inside and outside the institution.

Access to Wi-Fi in accommodation will enable students to access university wellbeing and counselling services as well as external support, including local information on medical services, delivery services and the local area, in a safe manner. Additionally**,** a comprehensive residence life programme will assist in maintaining student well-being.

13. Vulnerable Students

Some students will have underlying medical conditions that make them more vulnerable to Covid-19. While government advice for vulnerable and extremely vulnerable students is currently less stringent, the risk to some students in the future may be higher and when selecting accommodation, it may be necessary for adjustments to be made to support them over the longer term: in particular reserving studio or one-bedroom flats may be appropriate. Vulnerable students will include students who need to quarantine but also need to be in very specific adapted accommodation. An individual risk assessment is needed for these.

14. Visitors

Students must be discouraged from having large groups of visitors. Managing this in groups of students may be challenging. Given the range of friends that a student may make outside their household, consideration will be required how stop to multiple households mixing in flats. Encouraging individuals (or those from one household) to only visit individual rooms may reduce unnecessary mixing.

However, visitors, including family members, provide a benefit to health and welfare. Consider ways to enable visitors to attend properties safely, either in public spaces or within households while maintaining physical distancing.
It may be appropriate to have a booking system to support visitors.

15. International Students

a. Late arrival
Due to late Visa issuing, the potential for flight delays, travel corridors being opened or closed, and concerns of students, it is likely that many international students will not arrive on the expected date and potentially much later: planning will need to take account of this.

b. Self-Isolation (Quarantine)
   i. Travel
Students should only use public transport where it is the only option and Universities should consider collection and drop off from airports to facilitate this.

Arranging transport might provide an opportunity to create flats of people who travel together more easily.

ii. Self-Isolating
Students can self-isolate for 14 days within a flat with others, but the only people who then can have contact with them are those who travelled with them (also self-isolating) or people who are living in the same flat.

Students who travel/arrive together can be housed together as a unit and as a result can have more freedom as a household in terms of shared facilities. Where groups of students are quarantined together it may be necessary to explain that facilities will be shared: some students may wish to entirely self-isolate for 14 days and will in those circumstances need more support. Accommodation providers should be honest with students, telling them in advance of their arrival if they will be required to self-isolate with other students who have just arrived in the UK.

Students can self-isolate in households with others who are not self-isolating, but must avoid as much contact with other people as possible in their household in order to reduce the risk of transmitting coronavirus – including shared spaces. There is a balance to be struck between the creation of diverse households and the need to self-isolate which each institution will need to risk assess in the absence of government advice. Students who are not self-isolating may be concerned about sharing a flat with those that are.

Once allocated a room, students are not allowed to change the place where they are self-isolating except in very limited circumstances, though they may move once they have self-isolated for 14 days (so long as they do not show symptoms).

iii. Essential Supplies
Students arriving in the UK will not be able to bring many essential items with them and Universities will need to decide what essential supplies they will provide students on arrival (whether for free or for a fee). These could include starter food and essentials boxes, bedding, crockery etc.

While students are permitted to leave accommodation for essential supplies if they have no other choice, it is likely that Universities will support deliveries, as many new students who are self-isolating will not have friends or others who can make deliveries for them.

Students arriving in the UK may choose to use online sites to order products that are not 'essential' and Universities should consider how such deliveries should be handled and whether such deliveries should wait until after self-isolation.

iv. Keeping in touch
It is critical that there is an effective method of keeping in touch with

students who are self-isolating, both to identify any students who have Covid symptoms and also to support their well-being.

Many Universities are using Apps to provide this connection, but social media groups or phone calls could be used. A regular check is recommended.

v. Information
It is important that students receive comprehensive information before and when arriving to self-isolate. This should include:
- Current government advice on self-isolation
- Travel advice to accommodation from the point of entry to the UK
- Medical advice and contacts
- Access to food and other essential supplies

16. **Staff Safety**
It is essential that staff safety is considered for all staff who are providing services to students and in particular those who may be isolating or exhibiting Covid-19 symptoms. A comprehensive Risk Assessment is required.

17. **Test & Trace, Isolation and Local Lockdowns**
It is essential to ensure that all students have sufficient information on what to do if they have symptoms.

While national guidance and advice may change, it is clear that local lockdowns may cause additional challenges to Universities and it is worth considering protocols to address lockdowns at a variety of levels:
- Household
- Building
- Campus
- Town/City
- Region

Proactive relations with local public health authorities will help determine actions to be taken, but also enable early intervention and support. It is worth considering discussion in advance with public health authorities at which point action might be taken to lock down blocks, floors, buildings, etc.

Some institutions are considering additional testing for Covid-19 in addition to Test & Trace. If this is in place it is important to integrate with PHE and Test & Trace. It is also essential that protocols are in place to deal with students in accommodation who test positively under these circumstances.

Taking contact details for cafés and restaurants is required, but institutions should consider supporting "Test and Trace" for community events by also collating attendance.