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*Promoting Quality in Teacher Education*

**UCET guidance on carrying out risk assessments on ITE school placements in the context of Covid19**

Introduction

The purposes of this guidance is to give UCET members some suggestions about things they might like to consider when carrying out risk assessments and making decisions about the placement of ITE students in schools during the current Covid 19 Pandemic.

This advice is contingent on any future decisions or guidance from relevant statutory authorities.

Background

The English government’s intention is that all schools should re-open from September 2020 ([Guidance for full opening: schools](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools)) and that student teachers should, where possible, undertake school placements as they would have done before the pandemic. However, in recognition of the fact that schools might be reluctant to offer placements to the extent they previously did, and that new national, regional or local school closures might further restrict placement opportunities, the government in England has said that programmes should be designed to allow student teachers to spend enough time in school and other education settings to be able to demonstrate that they meet the teacher standards. While typical periods of time in school and other settings are identified, these are not mandatory. Relaxations made to the ITE criteria in regards to placement schools and age-phase coverage will continue into 2020/21. Details of the revised ITE criteria can be found at: [Guidance Coronavirus COVID-19: initial teacher training (ITT)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-initial-teacher-training-itt/coronavirus-covid-19-initial-teacher-training-itt)

General issues

It is possible, and understandable, that student teachers will have concerns in relation to placements in 2020/21. They might, on the one hand, feel aggrieved that the opportunity to undertake full placements in line with the previous ITE requirements, and possibly institutional course specifications, is no longer available. Others might be concerned about going into, and travelling to and from, settings in which they feel unsafe. Some might expect equity compared to other students, although it should be noted that ‘equity’ is not the same as ‘equivalence’ and instead relates to the quality of both experiences and the achievement of outcomes, the distinction between which might usefully be made in programme documentation. Equity should also be considered in the context of phase, route and subject specialism.

Students deemed to be at high or moderate risk who are advised to take additional measures in relation to staying at home, social distancing or remaining as far as possible within ‘bubbles’ will have particular needs which will need to be considered, documented and shared with students and across partnerships. The needs of students required to self-isolate because they have Covid 19 symptoms (or who live with or have been in contact with someone who has symptoms) will also need to be addressed.

How ITE providers respond to these concerns will depend on a number of factors, including: the terms of the provider’s partnership agreements with schools; the geographical spread of the partnership; institution-level policies on safety and risk; and CMA obligations flowing from course prospectuses.

ITE providers should make it clear to actual and prospective students what the expectations in regards travel to and attendance at placements are, and what measures will be taken in cases when, for example, a student is at high or moderate risk themselves and are required to follow new government guidelines.

ITE providers might consider discussing with partner schools and neighbouring ITE providers the scope to collectively sequence placements evenly across the year to maximise the number of placement opportunities.

ITE providers should consider amending their partnership agreements to reflect new ways of working in discussion with their partner schools. ITE providers should discuss with schools institution-wide health and safety procedures relating to arrangements made to protect and safeguard students while on campus and living in student accommodation, and while travelling between settings.

Scenarios

We have identified eight broad, and potentially overlapping, scenarios for which ITE providers will need to make contingencies:

1. Schools remain open and programmes continue, but opportunities are limited because of school reluctance to offer placements.
2. Students in any category are reluctant to attend placements because of concerns about safety in school and while travelling to and from school.
3. An offer holder falls into the high or moderate risk categories and are unable or unwilling to attend placements and face-to-face teaching sessions.
4. An existing student is at high or moderate risk, or has to shield or self-isolate for any reason, and is required to take additional measures in regard to social distancing, and is or unable or willing to attend placement or teaching sessions.
5. An offer holder is required to self-isolate because they display Covid 19 symptoms or have been in contact with someone that has.
6. An existing student is required to self-isolate because they display Covid 19 symptoms or have been in contact with someone that has.
7. Imposition of local and regional lockdowns.
8. Re-imposition of national lockdown.

Options to consider (context dependent)

* Offering a deferral of programme commencement from 2020/21 to 2021/22 as a reasonable adjustment for prospective and existing students, particularly to those in self-isolation or the high or moderate risk categories. This will depend on institution-wide deferral policies. Account should also be taken of the possible knock-on impact on placement availability in 2021/22 and on the financial position of the provider *(scenario 3)*.
* Develop processes to identify prospective and existing students who fall into the ‘high’ and ‘moderate’ risk categories and agree measures to meet their needs, taking care to explain and document these and share them with prospective and existing students *(scenarios 2-6)*.
* Occupational health processes should identify students with legitimate reasons for being reluctant to go into, or travel to, schools (e.g. those in risk categories or who experience mental health issues). Students should be expected to meet the normal requirements unless there are legitimate reasons for them not to do so *(scenarios 2-6).*
* Maximising the scope to use the flexibilities in regards to the ITE requirements to provide ‘alternative’ options to regular placement opportunities, and making it clear to students that these provide for equity in terms of quality and outcomes, if not uniformity in terms of personal experience *(scenarios, 1-6)*.
* Carrying out risk-assessments specifically related to the use of public transport, and passing on official advice about safe practice and statutory requirements relating to the use of public transport. The advice should differentiate between students in the different risk categories *(scenario 2).*
* Clarifying to students the scope to undertake virtual placement experiences, depending on the requirements of their particular phase and subject specialism. [ITE providers will need to consider whether to build virtual experiences into the design of their programmes – subject to DfE confirming they are consistent with guidance about days spent in school and other educational settings, or to only use them when required because of lockdowns or the personal circumstances of individual students] *(scenarios 1-6)*.
* Pairing placements so that, as far as possible, students remain together in different placement settings to reduce exposure to more people than necessary *(scenarios 1 and, possibly, 5)*.
* Discussing with partner schools the scope to limit students to working within, as far as possible, the same ‘bubbles’ of pupils and school staff, particularly in regards to ‘high’ or ‘medium’ risk students (*scenarios 1 and, possibly, 5)*.
* Utilising larger spaces for both HEI and school-based activities to maximise options for self-distancing *(scenarios 1 and, possibly, 5)*.
* Providing digital rather than hard copy teaching materials *(scenarios 1-6)*.

Conclusion

This paper, as has been stressed throughout, indicates things that UCET members might want to consider when assessing and addressing placement risks. They might not be appropriate in all circumstances and will always need to be contextualised.

UCET would be pleased to receive suggestions about how the content of this paper might be improved and updated. Please contact James Noble-Rogers: [j.noble-rogers@ucet.ac.uk](mailto:j.noble-rogers@ucet.ac.uk)

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