

**Responses to USCET survey on Covid related disruptions facing ITE providers**

The impact of Covid on staffing at provider level or on ITE colleagues in schools

We have been more Covid affected this time than in the first lockdown. Staff are unwell, self-isolating or caring for children who are at home. A number of staff have also been unwell following the booster – short-term absence but having an effect.

Outbreaks of COVID among University and school-based teacher educators has impacted on the taught sessions. Staff affected have had to move to tach online and occasionally sessions have had to be postponed until staff are well enough to deliver. In some instances students on school placement have had to work at home on school planning and preparation for a day or so as there are not the staffing levels in school to supervise them adequately.

At provider level, the team have worked hard to continue with providing at least 8 hours per week on-campus provision for student teachers. Practical sessions have been prioritised for on-campus activity, with other provision being online, either synchronously or asynchronously. The continuing challenges of Covid are having an impact upon staff’s workload and wellbeing as we adapt to further changes and continue to support student teachers through the uncertain times. At school level there have been no significant issues relating to the impact of Covid on ITE staff. Any mentor/senior mentor absences have been covered, in line with standard operating procedures.

Varies by schools with staff isolating etc, but not impacting significantly on student teachers on placement. University sessions not impacted on, we had on-campus and online sessions as planned.

We have a robust system in place to enable staff and students to report positive Covid cases. Changes have been made to sickness and absence policies in terms of Covid to enable staff to self-report over a longer period of time that is the norm. Where necessary we have allocated Associate Tutors to cover the work of permanent staff. Overall, there has been minimal disruption as colleagues have managed the absence locally within their programmes. Where appropriate colleagues have changed their mode of delivery to enable them, to continue to work from home. This has only been the case where staff have tested positive but have no symptoms. The level of staff absence in partner schools varies considerably. In the main, schools have managed the student experience very effectively. In some cases, students have been utilised as an additional resource. Overall, there has been minimal disruption to the student experience.

The scope for schools to participate in ITE (e.g. in regards the offering of school placements, allowing external visits into schools)

Placements have been secured but we are not able to visit schools. Lesson observation and quality assurance processes have been adapted.

We have been fortunate that to date only a couple of providers have pulled placement. However, finding additional placements for resitting students has been a real challenge.

All partner schools have continued to engage fully. University tutor placement visits have largely taken place online. In-person placement visits have only been permitted in cases where is student is a cause for concern and in these cases a robust risk assessment process is in place. This has created additional workload for placement officers in the university.

Some potential pressures on placement 2 have been noted by some ITE Leads, but at current time no students have been impacted.

Placements have been secured across the primary and secondary sectors for all student teachers. All University Tutors have visited schools to conduct their quality assurance/enhancement visits. This was after a thorough risk assessment had been completed and ratified by our School and University Health and Safety Committee.

Student teacher absences and isolation issues

This is the most significant challenge and we have a number of students who are on their second or third period of self-isolation. The option for online teaching is reduced as the pupils are still in school. I think, also, there is a lack of confidence in the year 1 cohort due to extensive disruption to their learning. My instinct is that they have missed key milestones or ‘rites of passage’ – driving tests for example.

Many students are needing to take time out of school to get PCR and there are also many student teachers with positive cases of COVID.

There has been a higher percentage of student teacher absences on campus and on placement this academic year compared with 2020/21. Many more cases of absence are linked to stress, anxiety and the ability to engage. This seems to be a pattern with this year’s cohort and could be due to the impact of Covid and prolonged periods of studying from home.

Some schools note it is more difficult to find preparation space for student teachers with need for social distancing in schools. Processes to record absences are being followed. Student teachers are missing days at a similar rate to last academic year due to need to isolate/ illness.

Student teachers report their positive Covid cases through a central system operating in the university. These are reported to the Dean of School and then followed up by the lead ITE colleague and the students Personal Tutor. Although cases have decreased, we continue to receive a few cases each week. In most case alternative arrangements are made for students to access both university and school-based provision so that their studies are not interrupted. The extension to the number of days a student can be absent from school is welcomed and has been utilised in a small number of cases.

The extent to which disruption might make it difficult to meet accreditation and WG ITE requirements and Estyn expectations

I think this will be ok.

We will be able to meet the expectations of the amended WG requirements (which I believe we will receive soon). We would hope that EWC and ESTYN show awareness of the situation in any scrutiny visits.

The provision is not at risk of breaching any accreditation or inspection requirements. However, the additional workload created by monitoring visits and/or inspection activity would severely impact upon staff and school’s capacity to support student teachers, school partners and each other during this challenging time.

We can deliver our programme but the number of school days students can achieve remains a question. The processes adopted in the previous year should still be followed.

We have no concerns and will be able to meet the WG requirements and Estyn expectations. Estyn are fully aware of the challenges we face and have been sympathetic to these in considering the quality of programmes.

Your ability to host Estyn inspections and accreditation visits

This is possible but the level of disruption needs to be appreciated – the focus has been on operational matters and not so much strategic time.

I think that these visits would add a lot of pressure in what is a challenging time.

We have an EWC monitoring visit booked in March to monitor our progress towards meeting our conditions of PGCE Primary accreditation. We have been planning for this since the date was set last October so this is in hand. However, we have made it clear to school partners that their priority must be supporting their learners and student teachers so they may not be able to join on the days. Any further visits or inspection activity this year would place a severe strain on partnership staff both in schools and in university for the reasons outlined above. A streamlining and amalgamation of accreditation, monitoring and inspection activity, as discussed between USCET, WG, EWC and Estyn would support partnerships to manage this activity in a much more holistic and authentic way without losing the rigour and opportunities for evaluation and improvement.

This would present significant logistical problems for all schools if visits were expected.

This has not been a problem.

Strategies and measures you area adopting to mitigate the impact of the current challenges

More regular meetings with schools and the student cohort – trying to keep the communication levels high even though the messages might be the same.

Focus on supporting student's ability to deliver online to their learners. Changes to the attendance policy where COVID is the reason for absence. Offering more asynchronous materials to support students who miss aspects of provision. Showing more flexibility with schools around placements and teacher support i.e. sometimes a mentor is absent and the class teacher is supply. We would typically not want supply cover to mentor students but at times we need to accept this as schools are facing a severe staffing crisis. Tutor visits sometimes need to be online.

Regular meetings/communication with students and school partners to keep them informed of the latest thinking, developments and support available to them; Robust risk assessment processes to allow in-person school experience and university tutor placement visits to continue; Online school experience provision for student teachers who are unable to attend placement and contingency plans for additional in-person placement later in the year; Online monthly community of learning meetings to ensure mentors are fully informed of university-based practices and updates on government/partnership guidance; and Continued online Executive Board, Leadership and steering group meetings to monitor progress, address partnership actions and to ensure procedures are in place for possible changes.

The partnership governance structure continuously reviews and adapts to Covid-19 related issues – inclusive of amending observation and learning and teaching approaches.

The biggest issue has been the need to move face to face teaching online because of staff illness. This has resulted in student teachers having to access part of their lectures on campus and part online on the same day. This has occurred on a few occasions with very little prior notice to the student teacher themselves. Very regular communication with student teachers and partner schools to keep them informed. Professional learning for mentors has continued. In addition, research seminars and other such activities have continued. Modifications have been made to teaching. We offer a hybrid approach to teaching and learning. We have:

* Robust risk assessment processes to allow in-person school experience and university tutor placement visits to continue.
* School -Led training days remain online.
* Contingency plans for additional in-person placement later in the year.
* Online weekly ITE TV session to touch base with students and enable them to ask questions and raise issues.
* Electronic access for university and school-based staff to key information
* Publication of the ‘Partnership at a Glance’ document.
* Continued online Strategic Board and steering group meetings to ensure the leadership and management of the partnership is not compromised.

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