UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

Guidance for good practice
in socially distanced teaching

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On behalf of the Enhancing Academic Support and Delivery Project, and in collaboration with the Active Campus project and the AY 20/21 Curriculum project.

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Introduction

"Universities will review their teaching, learning and assessment to ensure that there is the required flexibility in place to deliver a high-quality experience and support students to achieve their learning outcomes in a safe manner."

 (UUK 2020:3)

As the University seeks to deliver a proportion of every student's timetable through in-person teaching, while continuing to deliver the rest of the curriculum online, we need not only to understand what good education looks like in this blended model, but also to be able to switch between modes in response to changing public health advice.

This guidance provides some practical advice on how to do that. Drawing from the [Common Framework for Online Education](), it offers suggestions for continuing to structure your planning around the seven elements contained within the Framework, this time beyond the purely online to the physical environment. In this way, continuing to use the Framework as the underpinning structure will facilitate any shifts between modes that may become necessary during the year.

A note on terminology
In-person or face-to-face?
Much of the literature refers to 'face to face' teaching in contrast to 'online' teaching. Following discussions in our own university, we are keen to begin using the alternative term 'in-person' teaching when contrasting to 'online'. The reason for this is that effective online teaching also involves plenty of face to face engagement, albeit mediated through a screen.

Blended or hybrid?
In line with common practice, we use the term 'blended' to refer to teaching which is delivered in a pre-prepared blend of online and in-person activities, and the term 'hybrid' when both are used concurrently (i.e. both an in-person and an online version of the same activities are run, usually - though not exclusively - at the same time.) At time of writing, there is no expectation that all in-person sessions will have a direct online alternative, so your planning should prepare for a blended model primarily.

University policy and principles
The purpose of this guidance is to support you in delivering a good quality educational experience for your students, while adhering to relevant University policies as they relate to COVID-19. Following work undertaken by the Active Campus project and the AY 20/21 Curriculum project, the parameters around the management of the physical space and its implications for teaching were outlined in the Staff Digest email sent to all staff by Professor Alex Neill (VP Education) on Tuesday 18th August (see [Appendix]()).

Key aspects of these parameters which influence the kind of teaching that can take place include:

- Teaching will be in groups of 25 maximum, except for some practical activities.

- Some online teaching will need to continue, as the capacity for in-person teaching will be only about 25%
- Any in-person session will need to be ready to revert to online at short notice according to public health advice
- All students should have some in-person teaching.
- The promotion and support of effective learning communities is a key University priority for in-person sessions

Health, Safety and Risk - policy and practice

In addition to these University priorities for in-person teaching, health, safety and risk protocols will also impact on the way you teach. This includes the need for social distancing, the need to teach for the full hour to alleviate movement around the campus, and the need to sanitize and use face coverings on leaving and entering teaching rooms.

Modelling work undertaken by the Active Campus project has produced two calculations of the capacity of each teaching room: the first assuming a requirement for 2 metre social distancing and the second on the assumption of a 1 metre distance plus mitigations. These mitigations assume that all students will face the same direction and that face covering will be worn by students.

The implications of this for all your in-person teaching are that the number of students you have in your timetabled space will determine whether you need to teach with all your students facing the same direction (and wearing face covering), or whether, by keeping a 2 metre distance they can face each other, which is more immediately amenable to interactive work.

Additional protocols exist for specialist labs, spaces designated for practicals, and fieldwork activities. If you have not already been made familiar with any of these that apply to your teaching sessions, you should liaise with your Deputy Head of School (Education) or your Associate Dean (Education) before you do any detailed planning of your module or in-person sessions.

All the details on health, safety and risk management advice can be found here: Active Campus risk minimisation SharePoint

A note on one-to-one sessions

This document's purpose is to offers tips and advice for teaching sessions of up to 25 students. Other kinds of sessions such as supervision or individual tutorials, or meeting with Personal Academic Tutors have their own distinct protocols, also outlined in the Staff Digest of 18th August 2020 (see Appendix). As staff offices cannot be used for any meeting with students, due to the fact that cleaning protocols cannot be managed, all feasible meeting rooms across the campuses (i.e. where social distancing can be maintained) have been identified and can be booked through the central booking system for these kinds of sessions.

## Initial considerations for all your in-person teaching

1. It is entirely understandable that you may have some anxieties about in-person teaching in this new and unfamiliar environment, and unsure whether the mitigations put in place will give you sufficient confidence to relax and teach well. The more you

can familiarise yourself with the physical environment and take sensible steps to minimise the risk, the more you will be able to focus on the teaching and learning.

2. The key thing to consider is that you will probably only have a few in-person sessions with your students. There needs to be a good reason why you, and they, go to all the additional effort needed to attend. Many students will be anxious about exposure to the virus, and about whether they understand the protocols. This alone may affect attendance. The benefits of attending need to be clear to them - and to you. The primary reason for holding any in-person session is to provide teaching which cannot be equally well delivered online. This will include those practical sessions that cannot feasibly be simulated online and, most importantly, to build a sense of belonging, community and connection to the physical campus environment. This primary focus needs to be at the forefront of your mind as you decide how you are going to teach in these sessions.

3. Because of these additional considerations, in-person sessions need to be very carefully planned and structured to make best use of the time. This means they will probably require just as much preparation as a successful online session.

4. As the road to a non-COVID future is still uncertain, we must be prepared to switch between online and in-person modes at very short notice. Given the additional preparation time needed, it is recommended that you ensure your preparation works in both environments with minimal adaptation. This guidance is designed to give you a number of practical tips to enable you to do exactly that.

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The Common Framework for Online Education for in-person teaching

To help save preparation time while still ensuring a good learning experience for all our students, the practical tips that follow are structured around the seven elements of the Common Framework for Online Education, enabling you to create a coherent pattern of learning across both in-person and online modes.
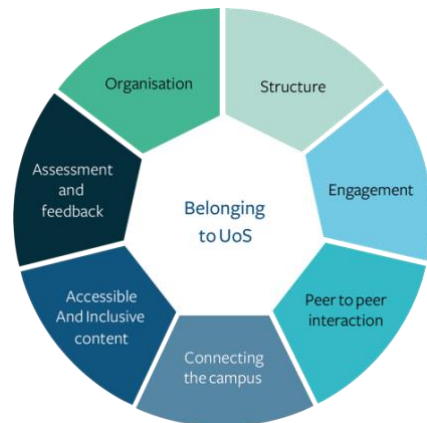
The seven elements of the Common Framework

1. Organisation

Students may be anxious about coming onto campus, so the more detail you can provide about how the teaching will work, the better this anxiety can be managed. It will help allay your own anxiety, too, as careful planning will act as a 'nudge' to yourself to think through every detail of how the session will run to be both safe and educationally valuable.

Explain to your students the purpose of bringing them onto campus for these sessions, particularly the reasons why these sessions in particular cannot be delivered effectively online, which will most likely be to provide opportunities for cohort and community building. The more students understand this, the more they will be able to make the extra effort needed to overcome any of their own anxieties.

You may want to undertake an actual 'walkthrough' in the space where you will be teaching, so you can build confidence on how to make it work.

⏱ Time-saving tip

Think about your module as a whole and plan the information for students which combines both the online and in-person elements at the same time.

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2. Structure

A lecture format may be the most comfortable, familiar and safe mode of delivery, particularly for the first session or two, as you and your students get used to working in this new way. This is sensible, and will enable you to save time by using materials you have already created. The key thing here is to focus on the reason why giving this lecture in person is preferable to delivering the same lecture online. As discussed, this will most often be to build a sense of a learning community. Here are a couple of examples that you could adapt to suit your subject area:

- Have a rota where students take turns to present. They can potentially do this simply by standing to present from their seat, with any presentation slides being managed by you at the front.
- Hold a debate.
- Make a focus of physical artefacts for demonstration purposes.

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- Give the most enthusiastic presentation possible, which exudes your love for your subject.

Flipped learning can be adapted to work well in a blended learning environment. By providing students with a pre-session task (including information about why this is essential to the purpose of your in-person session). This might be a reading, a small information-seeking task, a short piece of writing presenting one side of an argument, a calculations worksheet or any number of preparatory tasks.

Then you can use the session in a number of ways, for example:

- Responding to their questions arising from the pre-prepared activity.
- Asking their peers to respond to the questions they bring, to generate peer-supported dialogue.
- Using their pre-prepared activity to generate a more formalised debate with counter argument, and voting.

> **Time-saving tip**
>
> Design with repurposing in mind, so you can quickly revert to online mode if need be. Record any presentations so they can be reused online and made available to any students who are isolating.

3. Engagement

This is probably the most important element of the Framework that is best fostered in the in-person environment. Even in a room where students are facing the front, there are ways you can promote their engagement. Some suggestions for increasing engagement during your in-person session:

- If you are in a room where 2 metre distance is possible, students can have group discussions. Set them a clearly defined task which can have a range of possible outcomes. These can then be presented to the whole group.
- Using a combination of speaking and technology can work well for engagement. For example you could set up a Padlet on the screen which students can access through their own devices and add their ideas in real time. The benefit of being together for this exercise needs to be clear. This could be done by asking students to agree their response with their neighbour before posting, or to have a discussion about the responses at the end – perhaps aiming to create a 'hierarchy of views' through a series of rounds of discussion.
- Students can be asked to identify the 'Muddiest point' from their reading, or the content of your lecture. These points can be gathered on the screen or whiteboard and answered by their peers and/or by you.

> **Time-saving tip**
>
> Have two or three alternative activities up your sleeve which you can bring out in any session when what you had planned doesn't work well. Focus on activities which get students thinking and talking.

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4. Peer to Peer interaction

This is one of the main reasons for bringing students into an in-person session. Being in the same room as their fellow students is of immense value to students in feeling part of a cohort and belonging to their group. It may be possible for small groups to sit round a table to undertake some group activities, as long as there is a 2-metre distance between them. They will need to take care not to share documents or devices, but could work on a shared document on their own device, and discuss their work together and write it up later.

Group work which requires facing each other will not be possible in all teaching spaces, but you can use the session to set up pairs or small groups who can undertake the activity together outside of the session, returning the following week to present the outcomes of their shared work. Other suggestions include:

- In the first session, time could be spent agreeing together how to make best use of these times together. For example, you could decide what will be the shared etiquette? How can students contribute to building that sense of cohort and community? If you do this, it will be important to stick to it, and refer back to it in future sessions.
- Introducing students to the academic principle of peer review – either of their written work or short presentations. This would need to be managed carefully, and in a supported way, but it can work really well in promoting students talking about their work with each other.
- It may be possible to send very small groups of students (2s or 3s) outside for short periods during the timetabled session itself to do some group work while walking about in the open air, returning to feedback in a final plenary session at the end. This could work well, but will need to be responsive to any changing protocols on movement around campus.

Time-saving tip

Whatever way you choose to foster peer to peer interaction, design it in a way that can form part of each session throughout the module, saving you having to prepare new material for each session.

5. Connecting the campus

Being on campus for an in-person session provides additional opportunities to foster connection. Think about setting short tasks that need completing outside. These could be done as individual tasks, or potentially in pairs, as long as students are reminded to keep their distance. Obviously, some subjects lend themselves more easily to this, but with a bit of creative thinking, this could work well.

Referring to activities and venues that are on any of the University campuses during your sessions will further help students make connections.

Time-saving tip

Invite 'guest' speakers from other parts of the university to contribute to your session and talk about what they do and which part of the campus they work in. (This will need to follow relevant health and safety protocols). Make sure you record them, so they can be reused.

6. Accessible and inclusive content

There may be some reasons why students may not be able to access the in-person session because of their individual accessibility needs. An online option should be provided – which serves this purpose as well as the potential need to revert to online delivery. Students should be encouraged to liaise with Enabling Services where they have specific needs that will need to be addressed.

Similarly, inclusive teaching means considering all your students. Ask yourself what new potential visible or invisible barriers might arise in this environment? For example, we know that mature and BAME students are more vulnerable to the virus. What additional measures or reassurance can you provide to support them and enable them to engage? If you don't know, ask them. Include them in working out together how best to make the session work for them.

> **Time-saving tip**
>
> Record all presentations from in-person sessions so they can be made available online for those unable to attend or who need to revisit the material to support their learning.

7. Assessment and feedback

The in-person environment can be very valuable in discussing the requirements of your assessment, addressing issues and providing feedback. Asking students to undertake some online task before attending the session enables you to make best use of the in-person environment to engage discuss, address questions etc.

> **Time-saving tip**
>
> Provide as much information about the assessment as you can at the start of the module and use time in the session for students themselves to generate questions.

Contacts

These guidelines have been produced as part of the Enhancing Academic Support and Delivery project, in collaboration with the Active Campus Project and AY 20/21 Curriculum Project. For more information, suggestions or questions please contact:

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Appendix

Dear colleagues,

I'm writing to update you on our planning for education next year. First, though, thank you, all of you, for the part you have played in supporting our students through to the end of the academic year, in getting us through the assessment period, and most recently in Confirmation and Clearing activity. (The latter obviously continues to be rapidly evolving terrain, to say the least; we are working on it and will keep you updated.)

Our aim for next year is to provide teaching and support for students that is as broadly equivalent as possible to our provision in a 'normal' year. To this end (based on expert advice about maintenance of health and safety) we aim to provide as much face to face teaching and other activity on our campuses as we safely can, combining this with online education as well as online social and support activity.

We expect that as the COVID-19 pandemic evolves, the balance between our on-campus and our online provision will evolve in response. In particular, we have to be prepared for further periods of 'lockdown' in which public health advice requires us to suspend to a greater or lesser extent on-campus activity. This means that we must be prepared to revert, potentially at very short notice, to online-only educational and student support provision. It is therefore essential that we are preparing an online mode for all teaching (excepting that which simply cannot be delivered online), including the sessions that programme teams hope to be able to deliver face to face.

A number of key decisions have been taken to allow us to proceed with development of the draft timetable. (I would emphasise that the process of developing the timetable this year will need even more than is usually the case to be iterative, in response to developing issues concerning, for example, the practical operation of space, the curriculum, and staff and student experience on our campuses.) Some of the key decisions we have taken include:

1. The teaching week will operate Monday to Friday 09:00 to 18:00, including the use of Wednesday afternoons. (The latter has been agreed with SUSU as a temporary change for next year.) Locally agreed variations to the teaching week will be permitted, as usual, in accordance with our existing Timetabling and Common Learning Space Management Policy.

2. Teaching sessions will commence on the hour from 09:00 and will run for the full hour (as opposed to 45 minutes). This is to enable the timetable and Campus operations to work effectively in support of a COVID-secure environment.

3. Except where teaching has a 'practical' component (for example, labs, fieldwork, studios, performance, clinical skills sessions), the maximum length of a teaching session will be limited to two consecutive blocks. This means a maximum total of two hours per standard lecture/seminar/tutorial session.

4. No student will have back to back teaching sessions, with the exception of timetabled double sessions.

5. As a general rule, and in the great majority of cases, we have confirmed that there will be a maximum class size of 25 for face to face teaching. Possible exceptions to this will be considered on a case by case basis, through an exceptions process that

will be overseen by the Curriculum and Timetabling Team (CTT) in consultation with me.

6. We will be operating with a 'building agnostic' timetabling principle, identifying which activities work best in which spaces.

7. Regarding one-to-one or small-group staff/student meetings: holding such meetings online will be the default option, but in cases where there are pressing reasons for face to face meetings these must not be in individual staff offices, as appropriate cleaning protocols will not be in place. We are working on a process to identify suitable rooms for such meetings, which will be available for booking through the central room booking system.

These are some headline decisions. There are others still to be made, and obviously there is detail behind all of them that we are continuing to work on. We will keep you up to date on all of this as regularly and promptly as we can. In the meantime, please do feed in your thoughts about issues that we need to address – probably the most effective way of doing that will be through your Deputy Head of School (Education) or your ADoFO.

Thank you again for the work that you have done since Easter to get us to this point. Things have been difficult, sometimes very difficult, for all of us, but thanks to your work we ended the academic year in remarkably good form, given the challenges we have faced. And as we prepare for next year, thank you in advance for your understanding and willingness to work in a context in which things are almost inevitably going to be fluid and subject to change, doubtless often without much warning. We face a very challenging new academic year, but the evidence of the last few months is that we're up to it.

With best wishes,

Alex

Professor Alex Neill

Vice-President (Education)