

Universities and Colleges Sub Group - Update for the Outbreak Management Advisory Board

Summary

This regular report from the Universities and Colleges sub group provides updates for the Outbreak Management Board on the planned return of HE students; provision of vaccines to students; use of home testing kits; and notes the declining number of covid cases since unlocking began in early March.

Detail

1. HE Return from May 17

At the time of writing we are expecting the Department for Education to shortly confirm that Higher Education students who have not already returned to face to face teaching will be allowed back as part of the Stage Three reopening. In reality - in line with much of the rest of the sector - both the York St. John and the University of York teaching timetable will have mostly finished by the time further students could return. We also know that the vast majority of students eligible to return from May 17 have already elected to travel back to York to make use of our libraries and other study facilities even though we have been blocked by DfE from providing any face to face teaching for them.

Colleagues at both Universities have been working hard to ensure students who have returned already - and who will return in the coming weeks - have a range of activities they can participate in from organised sport through to on-campus social venues. Staff have also continued to work closely with the council's public health team to ensure that these activities are covid secure.

2. Vaccines

Staff from the Universities and College Outbreak Management sub-group, Council public health, NHS, local primary care services, and Nimbuscare (who run the mass vaccination site at Askham Bar) have met to consider how best to support vaccination of students in the city across HE and FE once they become eligible in the coming months. Plans are at an early stage and will depend on local and national vaccine availability - and when age groups under 30 become eligible - but planning so far has been a great example of cross city coordination across multiple health services.

3. Testing and home test kits

The city wide asymptomatic testing sites, including at both Universities, are now rolling out home test kits alongside on-site testing. Take up from students has been positive with several hundred kits already collected from our sites. Currently the data we receive from these testing kits is not centrally managed and fed back to Universities, but we understand from DfE that this will soon be rectified ensuring we will have sight of how many home tests are being carried out on a regular basis

4. Update on cases

Both universities have maintained a very low case count since the Christmas break, with a decline in cases at both institutions since restrictions began easing from 8 March. The University of York's peak 7-day moving average¹ was 10 on 4 January, followed by a drop to a moving average between 2 and 5 before settling into an average that has yet to surpass 1.25 since 8 February. At the time of writing, the 7-day moving average is at 0.43 cases.

Similarly, York St John University reported an average of 4.77 cases a week between the period of 4 January to 7 March across the student and staff population based in York (43 in total). For the period of 8 March to 5 May and following subsequent easing of Government restrictions this average dropped to 1.4 cases per week (13 in total) for students and staff based in York. Neither University of York or York St John University have identified any links of transmission between the cases reported since January.

Since January there have also been a very small number of isolated cases at both colleges. Askham Bryan College had a single case from January through 7 March. Following the wider return of students (from 8 March) staff and students have moved from testing on site for their first 3 rapid tests to home testing. Of the 6,533 tests undertaken, there have been six positive results, one confirmed by a subsequent PCR test after it became a requirement for confirmatory testing. None of the cases were 'connected'. York College have also had a very small number of positive cases - just five since term began in January.

Universities and Colleges Sub-Group
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¹ Case numbers are based on students and staff who are based in York. The dates capture when the positive individual began self-isolation, since some self-reports were retrospective.