

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

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## Summary

This regular report from the Universities and Colleges sub group provides updates for the Outbreak Management Board on the start of term across our institutions, on efforts to ensure Higher Education (HE) and Further Education (FE) students across the city are vaccinated, and on how the government's "Plan B" arrangements might impact on the HE/FE sector.

## Detail

### 1. Start of Term and Case Data

The Autumn term is now well underway for all institutions and our data suggests the outbreak control measures we have in place are working well. Rates at both Universities are far below where they were at this point last year (with considerably more face to face teaching and other activities taking place compared to a year ago). At the time of writing there are less than 10 active cases amongst students at the University of York and less than five student cases at York St John.

All institutions continue to see staff cases. Drivers of these cases most often appear to be via school age children rather than workplace transmission and we continue to see no evidence in our data to suggest transmission between students and staff.

Our existing covid measures remain in place, including use of face coverings and regular testing. Both Universities are continuing to run an on-site test centre and all four institutions are making lateral flow test kits widely available. Survey data from the University of York suggests that at least three quarters of our students are testing at least once a week (which compares positively with recent data from the Office of National Statistics which reported around 50% of students testing once a week or more).

Regular communications continue to support our key public health messages linked closely to the city wide **Protect. Respect. Be Kind.** campaign.

### 2. Vaccinations

All four Universities and Colleges are continuing to work closely with city partners to ensure high vaccination rates across our student population. We continue to see good uptake and little to no sign of vaccine hesitancy across our communities. At York St. John University Student (YSJ) survey data last month showed 90% of students at YSJ were fully vaccinated with another

6% awaiting their second vaccination. At the University of York current data suggests a 93% fully or partially vaccinated rate, with significant interest in pop up clinics that have been held on campus.

The success of our city based partnerships have also been recognised by the Department of Education as sector best practice, and received positive coverage within sector media<sup>1</sup>.

All institutions are continuing to regularly promote uptake of vaccinations to our students using our own communications material; locally coordinated messages and collateral from national campaigns. Further pop up clinics targeting our student communities are also planned.

### **3. Plan B**

The government has not implemented the “Plan B” contingencies that are described in the national covid response policies. All institutions have nonetheless considered their potential impacts. The most significant impacts would likely be: moving back to a mandatory position on face coverings (although all institutions already have a face covering policy in place); a greater use of home working (although we expect both face to face teaching and most research activity to be exempted from this) and potentially the introduction of vaccine passports (via the NHS “covid pass”). Any kind of vaccination passport would likely only be required outside of core teaching activities (for example, for large student activities - a similar scheme in Scotland applies to gatherings of over 500 people).

All institutions also have their own local outbreak response measures which could be deployed in response to a rise in local cases independent of any national introduction of Plan B.

Universities and Colleges Sub-Group  
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<sup>1</sup> For example - <https://wonkhe.com/blogs/students-are-taking-covid-19-vaccination-seriously/>