

On Campus Working: Support for Colleagues previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable and their managers

Introduction

1. The Government's shielding advice to individuals previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable (CEV) from Coronavirus¹ has now ended in England. The Government advises those previously considered CEV "as a minimum, to follow the same guidance on staying safe..... However, as someone with a health condition, you may wish to consider, alongside any advice from your clinician, if additional precautions are right for you".
2. Letters sent to those previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable from the Dept of Health and Social Care state that "Although most people will be well protected by the vaccine, no vaccine is 100% effective. In particular, people who are immunosuppressed may not respond as well to COVID-19 vaccines as others. That is why the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI) advised on 1st September that people over the age of 12 who were severely immunosuppressed at or around the time of their first or second dose, should be offered a third dose of the vaccine to increase their chances of being protected against COVID-19 as part of their primary immunisation course". You should follow the advice of your clinician.
3. We recognise that colleagues previously considered CEV will have concerns about working on campus, particularly those who have not worked on campus since the start of the pandemic and other colleagues in student facing roles, including teaching staff. This paper sets out how they should be supported by managers and appropriate arrangements put in place so that they can feel confident about their working arrangements.

Context

4. Managers will be having conversations with colleagues about returning to on-campus working within the context of broader University communications on this issue. These key messages include explaining why we are returning to on-campus teaching and other on-campus operations, what steps we have taken to assess and mitigate risk and the actions which employees themselves must follow to keep themselves and others safe.
5. [Comprehensive guidance for managers](#) on returning to on-campus working has been issued. The Registrar's all-staff email of 18 June 2021 about returning to on-campus working advised colleagues to read information on "[What you need to know and do before you come to campus](#)", outlining the mandatory training, personal risk assessment and testing requirements which everyone is expected to complete before they return to campus.
6. Managers should continue to encourage colleagues who are anxious about returning to work on campus to access the [wellbeing resources](#) which the University has developed². Although the specific context of this guidance is colleagues previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable there will be other colleagues who are anxious about returning to work on campus, including those who live or care for family members previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable. Some colleagues will need more [personal support from their manager](#) to reassure them about working on campus. Step 7 of the manager toolkit provides guidance on preparing team members for a return to campus working.
7. As part of the return to on-campus working project, the Project Sustain Gold Group has endorsed "[Six Principles of Campus Working](#)". These principles were approved by VCEG on 13 May 2021 and are included in the manager toolkit. They should continue to be applied to decision-making about re-starting on-campus operations and when managers respond to specific individual circumstances.

Return to on-campus working

8. Managers should remind all staff returning to campus working to follow the guidance at www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/employment/coronavirus/personalriskassessment/. As a first step, colleagues should complete the online COVID-19 age calculator to calculate their COVID-19 age, including the “additional health questions” at the end of the assessment (which includes the question “Did you receive a shielding letter?”). If the employee’s covid age is “high” or “very high” and/or they have answered Yes to one of the additional questions, they should then complete a COVID-19 Personal Risk Assessment and Action Plan with their line manager. There is an option to seek advice from Occupational Health at this stage. The expectation is that this process will identify any staff previously considered CEV who have concerns about working on campus.
9. In addition, the following mitigation measures apply to all members of the University community working and studying on campus:
 - Encouragement to take regular lateral flow tests.
 - Engagement with the government’s vaccination programme, where possible.
 - Encouragement to wear face coverings in shared areas which are crowded and enclosed, including teaching spaces, and other working arrangements.
 - Regular handwashing, supported by the provision of hand sanitiser points.
 - Enhanced cleaning protocols in shared spaces, particularly before and after use.
 - Ventilation.
10. For teaching activity, the University has agreed [teaching guidance](#) for 2021-22, which has been informed by an updated teaching risk assessment which takes account of the Government guidance and the [Government’s advice](#) that education providers should not limit the education and wider student experience. Protocols for research have also been agreed³.

Specific support to managers of previously considered CEV staff

11. Where the Covid-age calculator identifies that a Covid-19 Personal Risk Assessment is necessary, managers should consider whether additional mitigations are reasonable and appropriate, taking advice from occupational health where appropriate. For example:
 - Re-arranging work to reduce close contact. In a teaching situation, such as laboratory work, this may mean arranging for another member of staff to deliver this part of the class. In other work situations, it may mean considering room layout and/or the number of people in the room where the previously considered CEV employee works.
 - Providing screens where possible and provided this does not hinder business delivery. There are likely to be practical challenges of sourcing suitable screen in sufficient numbers within the period between now and the start of term. The provision of screens in teaching spaces is not likely to be practical.
 - Agreeing blended working arrangements so that the time spent working on campus is kept to the minimum which is essential to the delivery of on-campus services such as teaching.
 - Exceptionally, continued homeworking may be agreed, subject to regular review, where there is clear evidence that the work can be effectively delivered remotely without impacting negatively on the experience of students and the workload and wellbeing of colleagues. (See Decision Making below.)
 - In a limited range of circumstances, as part of the requirements of a risk assessment, Respiratory Protection Equipment (RPE) – ie FFP3 masks - may be provided⁴.

12. Some staff previously considered CEV may also be covered by the disability provisions of the Equality Act. The duty to consider reasonable adjustments will encompass the issues above and Occupational Health and HR will advise as necessary.
13. There will be a continued provision of "sunflower lanyards"/ "Please give me Space" badges for previously considered CEV colleagues who choose to wear them, to give visibility to their request for space from others.

Decision Making

14. The return to campus working framework, agreed by Gold and VCEG in May 2021, provides for decisions to be made at local level within parameters agreed by College Executive Groups/Directorate Senior Management Teams "to ensure that the [six] principles are applied appropriately and consistently within the college/service"⁵.
15. Decision making on adjustments therefore lies with managers, who are encouraged to take advice for specific individual circumstances from Occupational Health and HR to support consistency and equity of approach. Staff previously considered CEV are likely to work across the full spectrum of University activities, including education, research and Professional Services and the opportunity to accommodate requests to continue homeworking will vary according to the roles they carry out, but our aim should be to achieve consistency within similar roles and activities.
16. With regard to education and research, taking account of the Government regulatory context, and the importance of consistency of decision-making across academic departments and programmes, consideration of requests to deliver teaching remotely instead of in-person must be referred to the Head of Department. The HoD's decision should be reviewed by the Associate Dean of Education and Associate Dean for Research - so that they both have the opportunity to comment on work the academic may be engaged, across both education and research - and the Pro-Vice-Chancellor.
17. It is recognised that, within the definition of "previously considered clinically extremely vulnerable", each individual's health concerns are different, and it is important that advice from Occupational Health on individual circumstances is taken into account, but generally it is expected that it will be exceptional for remote-only teaching to be approved given the nature of the University's business. (This is consistent with the arrangements for students who were previously considered CEV to request remote learning: requests - which must be made via Accessibility - will be approved only in exceptional circumstances, and initially only for Term 1.) To ensure consistency in education/research settings, the Head of Department, Associate Deans and PVC can take advice from the Assistant Director for HR (Business Partnering and HR Operations) or the Assistant Director for HR (Policy and Reward)⁶.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19/guidance-on-shielding-and-protecting-extremely-vulnerable-persons-from-covid-19>

² See particularly www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/mentalhealth/ - and www.exeter.ac.uk/coronavirus/staff/ (FAQ on "Information for colleagues in a vulnerable group" and "Questions on returning to your workplace").

³ See the Registrar's Covid-19 Update for Staff of 25 August 2021.

⁴ An FFP3 mask needs to fit the wearer's face properly to be effective and a face mask fit test is needed to ensure that the selected equipment is suitable for the wearer. The University's Safety Team should be contacted to arrange face mask fitted for RPE (contact safety@exeter.ac.uk). Half mask and disposable mask fittings can be carried out in-house by the team (free of charge) and will take around 30 minutes per person. For more information see www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/safety/guidance/controlofsubstanceshazardoustohealthcoshh/ and www.exeter.ac.uk/staff/wellbeing/safety/safetyguidance/covid-19-safe-working/#tab3

5 Step 7 of the manager guidance also includes the following guidance on how to manage circumstances where the manager and team member cannot reach an agreement about working arrangements:

If you cannot reach an agreement with a team member, having taken time to speak to them about the operational needs of the department / service and their personal circumstances, and following the [COVID-19 age and personal risk assessment](#) process where appropriate, then you should refer them to another senior manager so that, if they wish, they have the opportunity to make their case to another person. This is not a formal process, but we want to make sure that colleagues feel that they have been listened to and can take forward concerns quickly and informally. As part of the roll out of the return to campus plan for colleges and services, your senior team should consider who is best placed to take on this role, should it be necessary. The member of staff will be advised of the name of the senior manager and invited to submit their concerns in writing. The senior manager will be expected to meet with the individual to listen to their concerns and to ask questions. The senior manager may ask for additional information and take advice from their HR Business Partner/Adviser. The manager will notify the individual of their decision in writing. This is not a formal process and there is no right of appeal.

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