



Joint statement between UCEA and the HE trade unions on Covid-19 testing for Staff

UCEA and the joint trade unions (EIS, GMB, UCU, UNISON and Unite) have agreed this statement in their continued efforts to ensure the safety and wellbeing of Higher Education staff and to limit the spread of coronavirus (Covid-19).

UCEA and the joint trade unions:

- promote a culture of safety in Higher Education (HE) through supporting the government's roll out of Covid-19 testing;
- recognise that testing for Covid-19 sits within a legal framework and that employees who know they are suffering from Covid-19 are under a legal duty to inform their employer and to self isolate;
- recognise the difference between Lateral Flow Device (LFD) testing and Polymerase Chain Reaction (PCR) testing, the former being appropriate for testing those who do not have Covid-19 symptoms and the latter for testing those who do have Covid-19 symptoms;
- encourage HE staff who do not have Covid-19 symptoms (even if they have been vaccinated) to take-up the offer of regular LFD testing to help prevent the spread of the virus;
- recognise that asymptomatic testing is voluntary and should be offered in good faith for the sole purpose of preventing the spread of the virus;
- recognise that the purpose of asymptomatic testing is to identify those who are infected by Covid-19 but not displaying any symptoms;
- encourage HEIs, where staff have concerns about the testing process, to listen to them with respect and to seek to reassure them through the provision of factual material from e.g., PHE/NHS or relevant devolved nations;
- support HEIs engaging with contractors, student unions and other employers in encouraging the take-up of asymptomatic student and staff testing to keep HE communities safe and self-isolating when required to keep HE communities safe;
- recommend that HE staff are encouraged to participate fully in the asymptomatic testing schemes available to them, which may vary across the four nations;
- advise that where testing is not a requirement for a specific role, staff should suffer no detriment for deciding not to take-up the offer of voluntary asymptomatic testing;
- advise that HEIs keep to a minimum the number of roles that would require testing and share with the local trade unions a list of any such roles;
- acknowledge that although asymptomatic testing is effective in detecting coronavirus infection, no test is perfect, and results can sometimes produce false positive/negative results;
- reinforce the message that appropriate risk assessments and controls are still required regardless of whether staff participate in testing programmes and

emphasise that a negative LFD test result does not signal the 'all clear' for mitigation measures to be reduced;

- clarify the need for PCR testing where staff are presenting with symptoms, or staff have a positive LFD test result, and ensure that staff are aware that they must not attend the workplace when under a legal duty to self-isolate;
- recommend to HEIs that they make clear the forms of support available for staff who are legally required to self-isolate;
- emphasise that Covid-19 asymptomatic testing programmes are to be run in addition to PCR testing and are not an alternative to Covid-19 risk control measures that HEIs have put in place;
- encourage the sharing of anonymised data with local trade unions in relation to the take-up of Covid-19 testing. For example data on uptake and positivity rate to allow constructive discussions on risk management arrangements in line with broader health and safety legislation;
- reiterate that HEIs follow the [Principles for working safely on campus](#) during the Covid-19 pandemic and remind staff that they are required to comply with the necessary precautions/social distancing requirements in accordance with government guidance.

25 May 2021 and updated October 2021

