

Group Re-opening Strategy September 2020

1. Background

The College remained open for vulnerable students throughout the lockdown period at its Merton Campus, and in line with guidance at the time opened all four main campuses on a very limited basis during the summer term. Government guidance for wider September reopening issued in July signalled a considerable shift in approach:

“It is our plan that all FE learners, whether young people or adults will be able to return to further education settings in September and experience a full education”ⁱ

There is no strict definition of what constitutes a “full education”, and it is to be left to providers to decide what the best mix of face to face and online delivery is according to their circumstances. STCGs position on this is detailed below.

The guidance covers GFEs, adult and community learning providers; and applies to adult learners as well as 16-19 learners, and sets out interventions institutions can use to be COVID-secure. The Group has incorporated the guidance into this re-opening strategy.

2. Key Elements

This strategy is centred around the key concepts of:

- a. Prevention – minimising contact with individuals who have coronavirus symptoms
- b. Good personal hygiene, including hand washing; catch it bin it kill it
- c. Enhanced cleaning regime
- d. Maintaining social distance
- e. Minimising contact between curriculum groups (use of “bubbles”)
- f. Appropriate use of PPE
- g. Use of risk assessments to consider and mitigate potential risk

3. Prevention

The Group will employ a plethora of measures to ensure as far as possible that individuals who are unwell with coronavirus (COVID-19) symptoms, or have someone in their household who does – do not attend College. These measures include:

- a. The use of sophisticated temperature measurement equipment at all College sites in order to prevent individuals exhibiting a key symptom of COVID-19 from entering the colleges. The process for the use of this equipment is contained in the Thermo-Imaging Temperature Monitoring risk assessment
- b. The strict use of an Escalation Procedure by all staff to ensure that students who declare or display COVID-19 symptoms whilst attending college are immediately isolated, leave

the premises ASAP, and arrange to have a test at the earliest opportunity.

4. Hand Washing

The Group will ensure that all staff and students wash/sanitise their hands regularly through the following measures:

- a. Sanitiser stations will be available at all entrances and security staff will ensure that all students sanitise before entering the Building
- b. Sanitiser stations will also be available at strategic locations throughout the college buildings and sanitiser dispensers available in staff offices
- c. Students will be reminded regularly to wash their hands at frequent intervals.
- d. Students with complex needs will be supervised to clean their hands regularly, using appropriate materials
- e. Posters will be displayed within the colleges to remind students to wash/sanitise their hands
- f. All of the above measures will be reinforced through the induction process and pre-induction materials. All curriculum staff will work throughout the year to build these activities into student routines

5. Catch it bin it kill it

The Group will continue to promote the CiBiKi approach.

- a. All staff rooms will have tissues available
- b. The number of bins available in staff rooms and public areas will be reviewed and increased as necessary
- c. All classrooms and workshops will have tissues available
- d. Posters will be displayed within the colleges to explain and promote CiBiKi
- e. All of the above measures will be reinforced through the induction process and pre-induction materials. All curriculum staff will work throughout the year to build these activities into student routines

6. Enhanced Cleaning

The Group will ensure:

- a. Cleaning procedures have been reviewed and increased in frequency
- b. Specific workshop assessments incorporate cleaning regimes for hand tools and other equipment
- c. All classrooms will be provided with cleaning wipes, and students required to wipe down desks/chairs at the beginning and end of each session

7. Maintaining Social Distance and Minimising Contact

The guidance dictates:

“The overarching principle to apply is reducing the number of contacts between learners and staff. This can be achieved through keeping curriculum groups separate (in ‘bubbles’) and through maintaining social distance between individuals. These are not alternative options and both measures will help, but the balance between them will change depending on the age groups of learners, the layout of the building, and the feasibility of keeping distinct groups separate

while offering a broad curriculum”ⁱ

The Group will seek to both maintain social distance and minimise contact; in interpreting this guidance for the STCG context the following key principles have been adopted.

- a. For study programme groups, primarily aged 16-19 but may include a minority aged 20-25 (see below), the primary control will be minimising contact through the use of bubbles.
- b. For groups consisting exclusively of adults, such as ESOL, access, basic skills etc., the primary control will be social distancing.

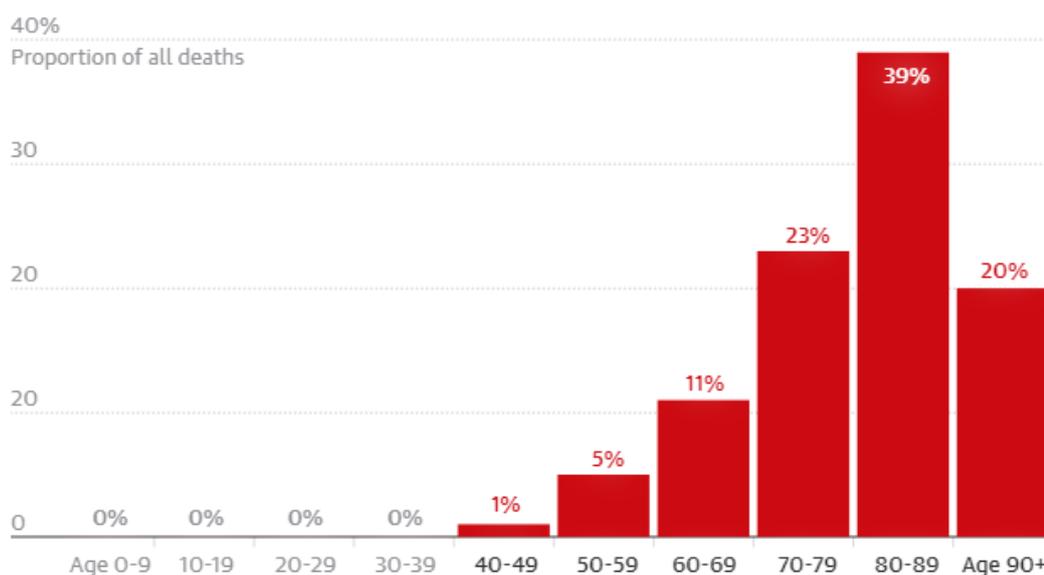
Study Programmes

There are a number of factors that have informed this decision. With regard to study programme groups the Group has taken the following into consideration:

- a. The prevalence of coronavirus (COVID-19) has decreased, and the NHS Test and Trace system is up and runningⁱⁱ
- b. Young people are more likely to have a mild or asymptomatic infectionⁱⁱⁱ
- c. Investigations of cases identified in school settings suggest that child to child transmission in schools is uncommon^{iv}
- d. During the mini summer term in the UK the risk of SARS-CoV-2 infection and COVID-19 outbreaks was very low across all educational settings^{iv}

There is therefore *some* evidence to suggest that transmission amongst young people is less prevalent than for those in older age groups. Along with this, there is substantial evidence to show that the effects of COVID-19 are much less severe on the younger age group.^{vii} Numerous studies have demonstrated this, including analysis from the Office of National Statistics in the UK^{vii}:

Older people have a greater risk of dying from Covid-19, ONS figures show



There is some indication that the risk of hospitalisation is very slightly higher for people in their early 20's, but overall the risk to this age group is very low. The decision therefore to focus our approach on bubbling for study programme groups – including those aged up to 25 is based on the firm evidence that the effects of the virus are much less on that age group, along with relatively low community infection rates and much improved track and trace systems. As the guidance suggests however this is not a binary choice, and every effort will be made to increase social distancing within classrooms, workshops and in circulation spaces. (see below)

Adult Student Groups

The risk of serious illness from COVID-19 to students in higher age groups is significantly raised. These groups also often have high proportion of ethnic minorities who are statistically affected more severely by the virus, for example in ESOL classes. Therefore 1M+ will be maintained in all classes for these groups of students. The mitigation measures adopted for 1M+ will typically be the wearing of face coverings, and physical arrangements, for example students sitting side by side.

Social Distancing – Communal Areas

Whilst the guidance suggests that the risks are minimal for people crossing in corridors, the Group believes that this risk can be reduced even further, and will therefore require all staff and students to wear face coverings in corridors and circulation spaces. Additionally start and finish times will be staggered to ensure as far as possible that there are no pinch points where large amounts of people arrive on site at a particular time. The same applies to lesson changeovers, where small adjustments will be made to lessen contact and avoid bunching in corridors.

All campuses have been professionally assessed by external property consultants, in terms of flows, and subsequently each campus has agreed circulation routes to include dedicated entrance/exit, one way staircases etc. These will be clearly signed and explained at, and prior to first student attendance. These arrangements are very specific to each individual campus and are informed by the building form and layout. Also, numbers of turnstiles, toilet facilities, hand dryers etc. have all been assessed and adjustments made to facilitate social distancing.

The Canteens in the Colleges will either operate a full 2M distancing model (1M+ for queues), this will allow for the cross mixing of adult groups and study programmes. Or alternatively allocate dedicated areas for study programme bubbles and adults (adult areas will be at 2M). Some Colleges will also be able to allocate specific time slots to individual bubbles. The specific arrangements for the actual food offering in canteens will vary by College depending on the space available. This will be specified in the specific College Re-openign Plan.

Social Distancing – balance between face to face and E-learning

As noted above the guidance leaves it to individual Colleges to assess the best balance for their particular operating context. For STCG, this varies by site depending on the physical

layout of buildings. For example STC, Carshalton and Merton are low rise buildings which can achieve good circulation strategies. However the main Kingston campus is an 11 story towerblock with few lifts and narrow corridors and staircases. Therefore the number of students who can be safely dealt with on campus whilst maintaining appropriate social distancing will be different. Merton, STC and Carshalton will operate at approximately 50% face to face for the first two weeks, before moving to close to 100% thereafter. This has been carefully planned and is facilitated by the use of defined bubbles for study programmes, good circulation strategies, and staggered start and finish times.

Social distancing Staff

Research shows conclusively that age is a key determinant of the severity of COVID-19 symptoms, with older people being much more susceptible. Comorbidities including underlying health conditions, ethnic background etc. also impact severity of symptoms. Initial findings from the mini summer term in the UK indicates that transmission between staff is a higher risk than between students. For these reasons, and because STCG has a diverse workforce it is very important that good social distancing is maintained for all staff, and additional measures taken for those at increased risk due to age, ethnicity, underlying health, etc.

To this end all staff rooms have been measured and adaptations made where necessary to ensure appropriate social distancing. This has resulted in each staff room being given a maximum safe capacity for desk occupancy, and each room has this on the door, staff know they should not attempt to sit at a workstation in a room that is at capacity.

All staff are required to complete an individual declaration which records and scores relevant information on age, gender, ethnicity, health conditions etc. Some staff with very severe health conditions must work from home. Staff who score as high or medium risk may attend work so long as appropriate control measures can be put in place.

Staff should ensure good social distance at all times when teaching. They should use space at the front of the room ensuring 2m distance from students wherever possible. If due to the nature of the subject – for example technical demonstration, 2M cannot be achieved then 1M+ applies, which in most cases would involve the use of PPE. Students will be briefed not to approach the teacher. It is however recognised in the guidance that maintaining social distance with learners with complex needs may not always be possible:

“Learners should also be supported to maintain distance and not touch staff and their peers where possible. This will not be possible for learners with complex needs and it’s not feasible in some sites where space does not allow. Doing this where you can, and even doing this some of the time, will help.”

If it is not possible to maintain social distance with a student because of their support need, appropriate PPE will be worn and due consideration given to the individual staff declaration. Only staff who are classified at low risk should undertake these duties.

Approach to the formation of Curriculum Groups (bubbles)

Making bubbles is much less straightforward in a general FE College than a School. Whilst we are able to contain students within their main programme for the majority of their time, many study programme students will study English and/or maths in addition to their main vocational programme. In order to ensure these can be delivered effectively, students will need to mix outside of their main group. Because of this students will typically be in a 'primary' bubble of circa 12-30 in their main teaching group. The overarching bubbles however are driven by the timetabling of English and maths. Typically this means a group of 150-250 students. This is covered in the guidance:

"You may keep learners in their class groups for the majority of the time, but also allow mixing into wider groups for specialist teaching, wraparound care and transport. Endeavouring to keep these groups at least partially separate and minimising contacts between learners will still offer public health benefits as it reduces the network of possible direct transmission"

If bubbled students have gaps in their timetable or finish lunch before the start of their next class they will either be asked to leave the building, or be provided with a waiting area dedicated to their bubble within the College.

8. Use of PPE

In addition to all staff and students wearing face coverings in communal spaces, there will be specific circumstances where appropriate PPE will be utilised:

- a. Where staff are supporting students with additional needs, and it is not possible to maintain social distance
- b. Potentially where staff have scored at high risk on their individual risk assessment, and PPE is considered to be an appropriate control measure
- c. Where staff are dealing with a suspected case of COVID-19 as described in the escalation policy

9. Use of Risk Assessments

Whilst this document outlines the strategy and overall approach to re-opening in September the details of how risks have been identified, and the specific mitigating measures put in place are contained in a comprehensive set of risk assessments – all of which are reviewed and approved by the Group H&S committee. There are various tiers of risk assessment as follows:

- a. **Group:** contains the top level assessment of the context for the Group in relation to risks and the approaches taken to mitigate these
- b. **Campus:** contextualises the Group level RA with detail around specifics such as site layout

- c. **Curriculum area/classroom:** Details the specifics of how risk will be mitigated across either for a course, curriculum area or other grouping such as adults students and includes the necessary controls in specific rooms/workshops within the colleges to reduce the risk of transmission
- d. **Specific Purpose:** For example Thermo-Imaging Temperature Monitoring
- e. **Individual staff declarations:** Each member of staff is required to complete a declaration form which records and scores relevant health information. The result of which determines whether they are permitted to attend college, what role they may undertake, and informs any controlling actions which may be required.

10. Staff deployment

If possible, we will aim for staff to work from home, but this is more likely to apply to those who do not have student-facing roles and the majority of staff are expected to spend the majority of their working week on-site.

We expect student-facing activities to resume as direct interactions and teaching will be timetabled for in-class, face-to-face delivery. Most teaching is expected to be organised in socially-distanced spaces and all other student interactions will be conducted in the same way, protecting staff and students.

Course timetables have largely been reorganised in such a way as to stagger class start times and reduce or eliminate the need for teaching and classroom support staff to use public transport during the morning rush hour, although this has not been achieved in all cases.

Teachers and/or other teaching support staff will be asked to attend College sites to undertake three kinds of duty:

- Teaching and/or other direct student interactions, such as tutorials
- Management of student movement in College, catering queues and/or student 'bubble' waiting areas between classes at various points during the day on a rota basis
- Agreed availability for cover duties should staffing numbers reduce as a result of sickness and isolation measures

All other non-teaching duties can be undertaken from home, including preparation, marking, meetings and CPD. These duties will need to be completed to an expected standard and within the necessary deadlines, as normal. Where extra help is needed to ensure colleagues have effective and safe arrangements for working from home, these will be put in place through discussion with line managers who will agree make appropriate support available through Facilities and IT Services.

Individual staff with significant domestic commitments that have been affected by the pandemic can request flexibility in their on-site attendance and the Group via their line manager will make every effort to accommodate these changes as best it can. HR will monitor such requests and support managers as required.

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- ⁱ What FE colleges and providers will need to do from the start of the 2020 autumn term, updated 15th July (accessed 25th August 2020, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/what-fe-colleges-and-providers-will-need-to-do-from-the-start-of-the-2020-autumn-term#main-changes-to-previous-guidance>.)
- ⁱⁱ Guidance for full opening – schools, updated 7th August 2020 (accessed 25th August 2020, at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-schools-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/guidance-for-full-opening-schools>.)
- ⁱⁱⁱ COVID-19 in children and the role of school settings in COVID-19 transmission, 6th August 2020 (accessed 25th August, at <https://www.ecdc.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/COVID-19-schools-transmission-August%202020.pdf>.)
- ^{iv} SARS-CoV-2 infection and transmission in educational settings: cross-sectional analysis of clusters and outbreaks in England, 12th August 2020 (accessed 25th August 2020, at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/911267/School_Outbreaks_Analysis.pdf.)
- ^v Covid-19: death rate is 0.66% and increases with age, study estimates, 01st April 2020 (accessed 25th August 2020, at <https://www.bmj.com/content/369/bmj.m1327>)
- ^{vi} Coronavirus risk for older people: the updated picture, 9th June 2020 (accessed 25th August, at <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/discover/2020/06/coronavirus-risk-for-older-people-updated/>.)
- ^{vii} Pensioners 34 times more likely to die of Covid-19 than working age Brits, data shows, date unknown (accessed 25th August at <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2020/may/13/pensioners-34-times-more-likely-to-die-of-covid-19-than-working-age-brits-data-shows>.)