

Chester Students' Union contingency plan for Coronavirus

Overview

Last Reviewed 17/03/2020

The Coronavirus outbreak is an ongoing issue which our contingency planning will require continued review. A copy of this plan and any supporting documentation will be put on Microsoft Teams viewable by all CSU staff colleagues. The Chief Executive and Management Team will regularly review preparations and ensure our planning responds to any changes in both the University of Chester and Government approach to effectively dealing with the disruption of the Coronavirus.

The UK was in the containment phase which seeks to isolate individual actual and suspected cases whilst keeping public services, schools, universities etc. open. The next phase known as the delay phase began on 12th March. Based on Government advice around working from home wherever possible (16th March) CSU moved to being fully remote as of 17th March. We have prepared for remote working as part of our contingency planning.

The Chester Students' Union Chief Executive also sits within a University Coronavirus task group at which there is a two-way sharing of information of both of our approaches to mitigation and business continuity and ensuring the student experience is not unnecessarily impacted. Much of the University's preparations positively impact and support our ability to provide a service to students and where appropriate we will dovetail our approach with the University.

Beyond the organisation having an obligation to ensure it takes appropriate steps for its employees and business continuity, we also have a considered interest in supporting members of the Union in ensuring they get the appropriate support both for their health and wellbeing and that the impact on their student experience is minimised.

Therefore our work around mitigation reflects on several of the phases outlined* in the Government approach:

- Containment Phase
- Delay Phase
- Mitigate

*An additional fourth phase around research largely describes Government processes and has no significance on our internal planning

Due to the nature of the campus being situated across multiple sites and locations it is also conceivable that one campus may be shut whilst others remain open. Relevant principles from this documentation will be used as and when is required.

This contingency plan will continue to be updated by the CSU management team led by the Chief Executive.

Our approach to supporting Students

Whilst the University continues to be open we will mirror the University procedure for students who suspect they have contracted Coronavirus. The Chief Executive will keep CSU colleagues up to date with the University approach.

The CSU Head of Marketing & Sales will liaise with University corporate communications team to ensure key messages shared by them to students are shared through our communication channels. We have agreed with colleagues within the University that there are key contacts for student communications regarding Coronavirus.

Utilising existing external relationships to support students

CSU will work with the University in contacting private accommodation providers that we have a relationship with to understand how these providers are responding and planning for the Coronavirus.

In the event of partial or full closure of the University and Students' Union

Should CSU physical locations be closed either across all sites or partially communications for our social media and website will be authored by the Head of Marketing & Sales and agreed with the Chief Executive and President.

This message should include prior input on how to access Advice from CSU whilst the Union is closed from the Head of Advice and Policy and any impact on Union events for example Societies Awards from the Head of Student Opportunities. Any cancellation of CSU events should be agreed with the Chief Executive prior to announcement.

Finally the Head of Marketing & Sales will liaise with the University marketing and communications team to ensure messages both at the point of closure and throughout any closure period are consistent limiting scope for ambiguity.

Our approach to contingency planning within our organisation

Preparation for closure and minimising risk

The Containment phase is largely seen as 'business as usual' with mitigations in place to minimise risk.

We envisage the following actions will need to be undertaken by all employees:

- Ensure all personal and emergency contact details are up to date on BrightHR
- Complete the Tech Audit on Microsoft Teams in preparation for remote working
- Complete the Events Audit on Microsoft Teams where you are coordinating any CSU event between now and July 2020
- Follow NHS England guidance on how to minimise the risk of contracting the Coronavirus
- Pro-actively look after your own health following NHS England guidance should they suspect they have COVID-19 which may include self-isolating if advised by a medical professional and in such an instance making the Chief Executive aware of the reason they are either self-isolating or sick (in line with Appendix 1: Managing Attendance Policy Supplementary provisions relating to the coronavirus - COVID-19)
- Trouble shoot and work with your line manager to find solutions for any issues that may make working remotely during a partial or full closure of CSU challenging; for example CSU tablets may be prioritised to colleagues who do not have access to their own computer from home
- Identify activities and events that may be at risk of going ahead and discuss and agree a plan for how to mitigate this with your line manager
- Identify work that can be undertaken remotely and agree this with your line manager
- Log onto and learn how to use Microsoft Teams
- Download and sign up to the University of Chester App which will be one of the primary methods of communication from the University
- Encourage staff to remain part of a Whats App group originally used for elections communications so that messages can be shared quickly with the rest of the group

We envisage the following actions will need to be undertaken by departments:

- Department Heads will identify with their teams contingencies in place for key support for example such as offering of advice remotely, responses to media enquiries, any updates for our website and social media, any activities that may need to be postponed or cancelled
- Departments should identify work that could be done remotely potentially by several members of the team communicating remotely

We envisage the following actions will need to be undertaken by organisation led by the Chief Executive and Management Team:

- Relevant communications shared with the CSU team about University mitigation and any anticipated next steps that may impact on business continuity
- A positive approach to supporting employees to minimise risk of contracting Coronavirus for example where reasonably practical encouraging more remote working for individuals who may take public transport

Sickness reporting

Sickness reporting taking into account the addendum to our Managing Absence policy should be reported through the normal channels. Where a member of staff is required to self-isolate they should report this to their line manager. The line manager should liaise with the CSU Administrator who will maintain a record of any self-isolation absences from the organisation.

Union Events & Commercial

A full audit of Union Events is being undertaken. This is to pre-empt social distancing legislation which may well come into effect within the UK over the next few weeks.

Social distancing is likely to include limitations on capacity of events, prohibition of certain events to take place and potentially restrictions of how venues are managed. Whilst the Union does not manage commercial spaces it will need to seek assurances from partners hosting any events that they are following any legislation.

Not running commercial services means our financial liabilities are limited. However, as part of our events audit we are assessing the potential costs to us as an organisation and the Head of Student Opportunities and the Chief Executive will be leading review of this. All income derived through commercial sales being managed by the Head of Marketing & Sales who will work closely with third parties to find digital alternatives or reschedule activity.

We have confirmed that our insurance does not cover any cancellation of events. Our insurer says *“in terms of the cover, I’m afraid that business interruption will not respond, as coronavirus is a new disease and not on the defined list of notifiable diseases in insurers’ wording. This is the case with a lot of insurer wordings, so everyone is in the same boat unfortunately..”*

Potential Partial or Full Closure of the University

The Chief Executive is responsible for informing staff of a University closure once they are notified by the University. They will also notify the Board of Trustees to make them aware of the Union closing.

Messages will be put out via email, What's App or Microsoft Teams to all staff to communicate closure of CSU.

Where this is partial closure employees whose usual place of work is that campus will be contacted to make alternative arrangements by either the Chief Executive or their line manager.

Working Remotely

Prior to any closure all employees should have worked with their line manager to identify any additional equipment needed to support remote working. Some initial work that can be undertaken remotely will also have been agreed in advance.

LIS have provided guidance on working remotely which will also be included on our Microsoft Teams files area.

Colleagues can also obtain a USB stick from the CSU Administrator for key files they may need remotely. This should not include any files that include personal data.

Files of a confidential nature can be uploaded on to the One Drive and accessed securely off campus.

Colleagues can also upload files that contain information that should not be kept confidential from colleagues to the Microsoft Teams file area which can then be accessed remotely.

Both typical one to ones and more informal catch ups may happen more often to ensure that staff are getting the support with work that may come from more informal conversations were we to be working in the same office.

All employees should regularly agree with their line manager what work is being undertaken and sharing updates and any documentation created.

Managing Sickness and Annual Leave

Whilst the Union is closed staff are expected to work from home. The only exception to this is where a member of staff is off sick. Sickness should be reported to the Chief Executive on their mobile phone. The Chief Executive will then liaise with the Line Manager and Bright HR should be updated with the duration of the sickness absence.

As with at any point of the year employees may add or cancel annual leave in advance of the day or dates they intend to take. Where previously booked annual leave is not taken then this is a usual working day where identified work that can be undertaken remotely would be actioned.

Appendix 1: Managing Attendance Policy

Supplementary provisions relating to the coronavirus - COVID-19

Chester Students' Union Managing Attendance policy is deemed to be modified to reflect the current circumstances, although it should be noted that the following provisions may be subject to further change at any time as the situation evolves, including in the light of advice from Public Health England (PHE) and other relevant organisations.

Initial Contact

1. The latest advice from PHE divides the countries and areas most affected by the novel coronavirus into either Category 1 or Category 2.
2. On the first day of absence a member of staff who is self-isolating because either:
 - they have within the last 14 days returned from a **Category 1 country/area** ([link](#)) (even though they may be showing **no symptoms of the virus**); or
 - they have within the last 14 days returned from a **Category 2 country/area** ([link](#)) and **are showing one or more symptoms of the virus**: fever, cough or shortness of breath;
 - they have been in **close contact with someone with a confirmed case of coronavirus** (i.e. they live in the same house, have had face-to-face contact for more than a few minutes, they have been within 2 metres of the person for more than 15 minutes, they have been coughed on or have had contact with their bodily fluids)
 - they have been advised by a medical professional to self-isolateshould normally contact their line manager (or the Chief Executive should this not fall within the typical working pattern of the line manager) within 1 hour of the time when s/he would have been expected to start work. This will enable the organisation to reallocate workloads and ensure replacement cover can be arranged where necessary. Staff with a flexible or irregular work pattern should make contact as early in the day as possible.
3. When reporting absence from work due to self-isolation, staff will be required to supply the following information and, where applicable, to update it from time to time:
 - the reason for the need to self-isolate i.e. where they have returned from within the last 14 days (Category 1 or 2 country/area) or whether they have been in contact with someone with a confirmed case of coronavirus;
 - whether they are showing any symptoms of the virus and what the symptoms are;
 - whether they have contacted NHS 111 (or 0845 46 47 for staff living in Wales) – if so what advice have they been given, if not when do they intend to call NHS 111/0845 46 47; and
 - details of any outstanding or urgent work that needs to be dealt with during the absence.
4. A line manager (or other designated person) who has been contacted by a member of staff in relation to the above should immediately notify the Chief Executive by email. Should the Chief Executive be off sick they will designate a member of the management team to effectively take on any of the roles within this documentation that refer to the Chief Executive.

5. If, at the time of the initial contact with the Union to report the absence, the member of staff had not yet contacted NHS 111 (or 0845 46 47 for staff living in Wales) s/he should thereafter, after having spoken with NHS 111 (or 0845 46 47 for staff living in Wales), again contact her/his line manager (or the person designated as responsible for recording and reporting sickness absence within the department) to provide an update on the outcome of the discussion with NHS 111 (or 0845 46 47 for staff living in Wales) and what further action, if any, is being advised/taken. The line manager (or other designated person) should inform the Chief Executive of any relevant updates using the contact details provided above.

Absence Recording

6. Whether or not a member of staff has shown signs of symptoms, or has been diagnosed as having had the virus or has self-isolated in accordance with Government advice to limit the spread of the virus, the absence - since it is effectively a health measure - will be treated for reporting and recording purposes as sick leave. The absence should be recorded on BrightHR by the line manager in the usual way.

Documentary evidence

7. As regards the documentary evidence that the Union would normally require to substantiate the reason for absence from work and in support of a claim for Statutory Sick Pay (SSP) or Occupational Sick Pay Allowance (OSPA), the Union will exercise its discretion and permit staff to Self-Certify (using the Self-Certification and Return to Work Discussion Form) for a period of between 1 and 14 calendar days. If the period of absence exceeds 14 calendar days, then from the 15th calendar day the member of staff will be expected to provide a Statement of Fitness for Work (Fit Note). In cases of admission to hospital the member of staff must provide an Inpatient's Certificate.
8. For the purposes of (OSPA) any employee within the first year of service regardless of whether they have been with the organisation for more or less than 6 months will be eligible for full pay for 1 month followed by half pay for the following 2 months should they be off sick due to suspected or actual COVID-19. This is to encourage employees to self-isolate without the financial disincentive putting them off from prioritising both their own long term health and that of their colleagues.
9. The member of staff will be expected to update her/his line manager (or the Chief Executive in their absence) on their prognosis and the likely duration of their absence.
10. The Union reserves the right to ask for documentary evidence of the member of staff's travel abroad, including to a Category 1 or 2 country/area.

Provision of False Information

11. Where there is reason to believe that the member of staff purported to be absent by reason of self-isolation but was unable to substantiate this, then further action may be taken against the member of staff for breach of contract.
12. The submission of false or misleading information as to the reason for absence or any other abuse of these provisions may be treated as Gross Misconduct, which may lead to disciplinary action and ultimately to the member of staff's dismissal.

Other provisions

13. **Remote working** - Where a period of self-isolation is necessary but the member of staff is not displaying any symptoms of the coronavirus they should discuss the feasibility of remote working with their line manager and, where possible, this should be facilitated.
14. **Unforeseeable breakdowns in caring arrangements** - Members of staff who are unable to attend work because of school closures or caring issues associated with the coronavirus should contact their line manager. As this is an unforeseeable breakdown of normal caring arrangements other procedures such as annual leave, remote working or use of accumulated TOIL will apply.
15. **University shutdown contingency** – The Coronavirus is an ongoing issue. CSU Management Team will be meeting regularly to plan for a University shutdown. The Chief Executive is also a member of the University Coronavirus task group. In the event of a University shutdown, Union employees will be asked to work from home. As far as is reasonably practical line managers will discuss in advance of any such closure work that is being under taken and any measures that can be put in place to facilitate a potentially prolonged period of home working.