



Minutes SAF20-M3

Minutes of the Health, Safety and Environment Committee held on Tuesday 15 September 2020

Attendance

Members:

Neil Budworth, Ruth Casey (ab), Paul Conway (ab), Sandy Edwards, Alec Edworthy, Graham Howard, Chris Linton (Chair), Graham Moody, Chris Rielly, David Roomes, Jo Shields, Oliver Sidwell, Richard Taylor, Maria Turnbull-Kemp.

In attendance:

M Ashby (Secretary), Adam Crawford (in place of Ruth Casey), Adèle MacKinley, Julie Turner.

Apologies received from:

Ruth Casey, Paul Conway.

20/40 University Preparations for the 2020/21 Academic Year

SAF20-P49, SAF20-P50

40.1 The Committee received a presentation on the University's response to the Covid-19 pandemic and on preparations for the forthcoming academic year. Members noted that the University's response to the challenges of the pandemic had been coordinated by Covid-19 Gold, Silver and Bronze Groups. Members were asked to consider whether they were assured that the measures that had been taken were, and continue to be, appropriate from a health & safety perspective.

Covid-19 Planning

40.2 Members noted the considerable amount of planning undertaken by the Groups since the start of the pandemic and the ongoing plans to counter future developments. Thanks were expressed for the contributions made by all three trade unions on a weekly basis to share views and challenge thinking.

40.3 It had become clear to the Groups that there were no risk-free options available to the University, and they had striven to balance the needs of all concerned whilst seeking to reduce risk. With a predicted increase in the number of infections in the wider population during the winter months, the Groups had modelled different scenarios where one or more students were infected and where there were outbreaks in the local community. They had developed flexible plans to respond swiftly and as necessary, heeding the advice of public health experts and the local authority.

Wellbeing

- 40.4 Wellbeing support for staff and students had been strengthened in anticipation of greater demand during the lockdown. The Health and Safety Service agreed to share non-copyrighted material with LSU and would support it in making the material available for use by its staff. **ACTION: HSR Manager**

Communication

- 40.5 There had been a coordinated communication strategy to keep staff and students informed of health and safety arrangements on campus during the lockdown. The use of infographics to communicate messages had been well received. The more recent 'Back to Campus' campaign had set out to give staff a clear idea of what to expect on their return and also what was expected of them. Briefing events had been particularly helpful in reducing anxiety amongst staff.

Return to Campus

- 40.6 Substantial work had been carried out to ready buildings for the return of staff and students. Social distancing measures were now in place in all buildings, and the University's social distancing guidance document had become the industry standard within the sector.
- 40.7 Staff had been encouraged to visit their home campus during the summer to familiarise themselves with the new arrangements well before the start of term in order to minimise the risk to themselves and to others. Anecdotal evidence suggested that doing so had helped staff to overcome anxieties about contracting Covid-19 within the workplace.

Accommodation

- 40.8 A number of communications had been sent to students to inform them of arrangements for their return to campus to minimise the risk of spread of the virus. These had included information about arrangements in halls of residence, such as their being grouped in 'households', and details of the arrival days which would this year be spread over a longer time period. The first international students had already arrived, and a number were completing a period of isolation.
- 40.9 Members noted that the new law prohibiting social gatherings of more than six people could have an impact on student events on campus, and in particular Fresher events. Off campus, the local authority was intending to employ marshals to discourage house parties in rented accommodation. The Vice-Chancellor had informed students in a recent update that if they failed to comply with government guidelines, they would be subject to disciplinary action by the University.

Protection – staff and students

- 40.10 All members of the University community have responsibility for policing compliance with social distancing rules. They would be encouraged to politely challenge those who were not following the rules.
- 40.11 Staff and students would be asked to maintain two metre social distancing at times where additional precautions were not in place. More sanitizing stations had been installed across campus, and increased handwashing and sanitizing would be promoted.
- 40.12 Student and staff numbers would be reduced to 25 to 33 per cent of normal levels in shared work/study spaces, with staff rotas in place to maintain these levels. The Health and Safety Service was asked to ensure that it made clear in communications which settings this figure would apply to. **ACTION: HSR Manager**
- 40.13 Members noted that at the present time face coverings would not be required in meetings and teaching sessions where social distancing was being observed and in work settings which had consistent occupancy. This clarification would be included in a forthcoming communication on face coverings. **ACTION: HSR Manager**
- 40.14 Members noted that the NHS Covid-19 contact-tracing app would be launched on 24th September so would be in operation prior to the start of the academic session. The University would be launching its own contact tracing process, Connect and Protect, in the same week. The Connect and Protect team would work with the local public health authority to trace and contact individuals who may have come into contact with any Covid-19 cases.

Changes to facilities

- 40.15 A number of measures had been taken to ready the University's buildings for the return of students and staff. Social distancing measures had been put in place, occupancy levels reduced, and cleaning increased at common touch points. Appropriate ventilation had been identified as an essential tool for reducing the risk of infection. Therefore, ventilation systems had been checked and verified and, where necessary, changed.
- 40.16 Instruction sheets on use of each teaching space would be attached to lecterns for reference by lecturers to ensure that social-distancing rules were clear in each setting. Access and egress from large lecture theatres would be managed via one-way systems. Members noted the importance of teaching sessions ending on time to reduce the possibility of groups of students congregating around entrances to teaching spaces. The PVC(T) would be asked to include in a forthcoming communication a reminder to staff to ensure that their teaching sessions finished on time. **ACTION: HSR Manager**

Vulnerable Staff

- 40.17 Staff who were concerned about returning to campus were being encouraged to complete a personal risk self-assessment based on the ALAMA Covid age calculation. Those staff who were classified as high or very high risk would be advised by the self-assessment app to consult the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service.
- 40.18 Staff who were anxious about returning to campus but who were not classified as high risk were being encouraged to return to their campus to see the measures that were in place to protect them. If they were still not reassured by this, they would be encouraged by their line manager to contact the Occupational Health and Wellbeing Service for an individual assessment.

Outbreak Response

- 40.19 The Health and Safety Team were meeting on a weekly basis with representatives from the regional public health team, the local authority, Public Health England, Loughborough College and the Local Resilience Forum to discuss virus levels and required measures. The University's plans were also being reviewed on a weekly basis. The Government's current guidance was for students to remain at their university should a local or national lockdown occur to minimise further spread of the virus. This requirement would be possible to oversee for students living on campus but difficult to police for students living in the local community.

The Future

- 40.20 The Gold, Silver and Bronze Groups had plans in place to respond to a further lockdown and new outbreaks. They recognized the importance of local testing to minimize the risk of an outbreak and instances where students would need to isolate until they were tested or until their test results were received. However, they were aware that Public Health England and the Department for Education were currently discouraging private providers from carrying out their own tests.
- 40.21 Investigations were under way into the possibility of the testing of individuals taking place in some capacity on the University campuses. The Health and Safety Service was also considering a pool testing approach including the testing of waste water. The Sustainability Team would share their water testing expertise with colleagues in the Health and Safety Service. **ACTION: Sustainability Manager**
- 40.22 The Gold Group would consider whether the University should carry out testing on its campuses. If testing was approved, the Strategic Scientific Development Officer would be authorised to purchase pre-agents for use in the testing process. **ACTION: HSR Manager to seek Gold Group decision**
- 40.23 Members noted the impact that the pandemic had had on the Health and Safety Service and its ability to progress its core activities. Most of the team had been diverted away from their core responsibilities in order to respond to Covid-19 related business. Many areas were still on track, such as training and radiation protection. However, other areas such as HTA compliance and completion of the Risk Register would require attention in the near future. The Committee wished to record its thanks to the team, and in particular the HSR Manager and the Strategic Scientific Development Officer, for the work that they had undertaken throughout the pandemic.
- 40.24 Members were pleased to note that there had been some positive outcomes arising from the pandemic response. Due to the need to move away from face-to-face to online communication,

the Health and Safety Service had gained expertise in the development of apps, such as the Lone Worker App and the Contractor Management System. Much of its training had been moved online which had resulted in training targets being met earlier than expected. The need to work closely with other parts of the University during the pandemic had resulted in stronger links with staff in imago, IT Services and the Timetabling Team. The new connections forged would be of mutual benefit moving forward.

- 40.25 The LSU representative commended the Health and Safety Service on their achievements during the pandemic. LSU intended to align with the University's practices in relation to Covid-19 and would share their experience with the Service.
- 40.26 The UCU representative commended the Health and Safety Service and the Gold, Silver and Bronze Groups on the action which they had taken to respond to the pandemic. However, they noted that all three of the University's recognized trade unions were opposed to in person teaching in the first term where this was not essential and believed that there should be a review of teaching delivery after that point. The UCU representative noted that online delivery could be very effective and should not be seen as a lesser experience.
- 40.27 The COO noted that the unions' practical input had been extremely helpful in shaping the thinking of the Gold, Silver and Bronze Groups and that they continued to work constructively with the University. However, it was not possible to accede to the unions' request. The University's primary concern was the degree to which campuses could be opened up and signaling clearly to students about their return. The University needed to strike a balance between academic, wellbeing and financial considerations whilst mitigating risk. In doing so, it intended to be nuanced, sensible and reasonable in its plans for the forthcoming academic session.
- 40.28 The unions were encouraged to identify points of risk that their members were concerned about so that these could be considered and addressed where possible by the Health and Safety Service. **ACTION: Union Representatives**
- 40.29 Members confirmed, unanimously, that they were assured by the work that had been carried out in response to the challenges of the pandemic. They agreed that, during the pandemic, it would be acceptable to leave decisions relating to the health and safety of the University to the Gold, Silver and Bronze Groups, with future reports submitted to HSE Committee. This agreement would be conveyed to Senate and Council in due course.

20/41 Dates of Meetings in 2020/21

- 41.1 Members noted that the meeting scheduled for 8th October would now take place on 20th October. It was agreed that the meeting should be briefer and should focus on the University's response to the pandemic and other matters which required discussion. Routine reports normally considered at the Committee's meetings would on this occasion be circulated to members via email.
- 41.2 The remaining meetings in the 2020/21 academic year would take place on the following dates:

Wednesday 3rd February 2021

Wednesday 26th May 2021

M Ashby
September 2020

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