

Annex to Safeguarding & Prevent Policy & Practice Guidance

COVID-19 Changes

April 2020

Response to COVID-19

There have been significant changes within our environment in response to the outbreak. Many of our students are now at home and staffing is likely to be significantly affected through illness, self-isolation and flexible working arrangements.

Despite the changes, Writtle University College's Safeguarding & Prevent Policy & Practice Guidance <https://writtle.ac.uk/pdfs/Safeguarding-and-Prevent-Policy.pdf> is fundamentally the same: **young people and vulnerable adults come first, staff should respond robustly to safeguarding concerns and contact the Designated (or Deputy Designated) Safeguarding Lead in line with our established safeguarding procedure.**

This annex sets out some of the adjustments we are making in line with the changed arrangements in the institution and following [advice from government](#) and local agencies.

The current position and local advice

So we can best protect the health and wellbeing of all members of the Writtle University College (WUC) community during this period of national lockdown, we have implemented the following plan.

We will move fully to online teaching, support and assessment for our FE and HE courses. All students will be receiving detailed and regular guidance and support from their course teams and others across WUC as we implement and deliver our online arrangements.

WUC staff have been working from home from Tuesday 24th March except those required to deliver essential support to those students unable to leave campus or to maintain business-critical functions, including the care of our animal population.

We will continue to provide support for students currently in WUC accommodation who are unable to return home and remain on campus.

All university college buildings across all campuses are closed, with the exception of:

- Student accommodation required to house remaining students
- Thyme Out (with hours as communicated to residents via email)
- The HE Hub (from 8am – 6pm)
- Departments and facilities essential to maintaining business-critical functions

Students living off campus are required to work remotely. If they have been identified as a Key Worker and are working for us on our animal, farm or equine unit/campus or have a horse at livery they may travel to attend to those duties as guided by the relevant manager. These are considered to be essential services in place to protect the welfare of our animals.

The Coronavirus Bill has relaxed some of the duties around Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) including the requirement of LAs to maintain the precise provision and allows institutions to use 'reasonable endeavours' (rather than 'best endeavours') to support young people with EHCPs. WUC has risk assessed and decided whether those with EHCP on WUC roll can stay at home in line with the current guidance. Any additional support required will be led, coordinated and accessed via WUC's Learning Support team.

Essex County Council is compiling a list of level 3 safeguarding trained staff to facilitate coverage across schools. WUC have a number of its own staff trained to this level so are not anticipating any problems with cover; but if the situation arose, WUC could contact Schools.Communication@essex.gov.uk to see if they could assist.

Reporting arrangements

WUC reporting arrangements continue in line with our Child Protection Policy.

The Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) is: **Janine Rusbridge**, janine.rusbridge@writtle.ac.uk.

The Deputy DSL is: **Claire Cross**, claire.cross@writtle.ac.uk.

All level 3 trained Safeguarding Officers (WUC's safeguarding panel) are contactable via safe@writtle.ac.uk.

WUC's normal approach ensures a member of the safeguarding panel is always on site whilst the university college is open. In the unusual and exceptional circumstances we are currently in this is not possible. However, all are contactable by emailing as outlined above.

Staff will continue to follow WUC's policy and advise the safeguarding team immediately if they have safeguarding concerns about a member of the WUC community, whether on site or not. COVID-19 means a need for increased vigilance due to the pressures on services, families and young people, rather than a reduction in standards.

Local Authorities' Children's services may be affected by the impact of the virus on staff and an increased demand for services. Where a child is at risk of significant harm there may be a need to be persistent in referring concerns to the local authority. The arrangements for contacting children's services remain unchanged - for Essex resident young people – call Essex Safeguarding Children Board on 0345 6037627.

Essex Adult Safeguarding Board continue to be contacted for information and advice about the abuse and safety of adults and to discuss a specific concern about maltreatment of an adult in Essex <https://www.essexsab.org.uk/professionals/reporting-concerns/>.

If a young person or vulnerable adult is believed to be at risk of significant harm, the police should be called immediately on 999.

WUC has not been advised of any changes to Essex's procedure in relation to safeguarding allegations linked with a member of staff/volunteer, matters should be referred to one of the staff leads within the WUC safeguarding panel and normal procedures should be followed in the first instance. If a referral to ECC is required, information on the link below will be helpful:

[https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Safeguarding/Managing allegations in the Childrens Workforce/Pages/ManagingAllegationsInTheChildrensWorkforce.aspx](https://schools.essex.gov.uk/pupils/Safeguarding/Managing%20allegations%20in%20the%20Childrens%20Workforce/Pages/ManagingAllegationsInTheChildrensWorkforce.aspx).

Identifying vulnerability

We have undertaken a scoping exercise to identify the most vulnerable young people, including those with EHCPs, high needs funded learners and looked after children. We have put in place specific arrangements in respect of the following groups:

- Looked After Children (LAC) & Previously Looked After Children – all students are directly in contact with their course teams allowing them to continue to access their education. Learning and wellbeing support continues to be available remotely and those LAC will have a weekly term time welfare phone call to them and to speak to their carers. Any concerns about vulnerable young people bursary payments can be raised with the Bursary Administrator (elizabeth.lancaster@writtle.ac.uk).
- Young people with an EHCP or who have, or have previously had, a social worker – all students are directly in contact with their course teams allowing them to continue to access their education. Learning and wellbeing support continues to be available remotely and those with high needs funding and/or EHCPs will have a weekly phone call to check in with parents/carers.

The pressures on children and their families at this time are significant. There will be heightened awareness of family pressures through being contained in a small area, poverty, and financial or health anxiety. These areas should be considered in the setting of any work for young people to undertake at home (including recognising the impact of online learning – see below). Staff will be aware of the mental health of both young people and their parents and carers, they should contact the wellbeing team and/or safeguarding panel about any concerns.

FE bursary payments

FE Students have not been required to attend WUC from Monday 16th March 2020, but bursary payments have been made up to the Friday 3rd April 2020. The next payment due to be made is 15th April 2020.

- Students in receipt of a bursary entitlement for free meals, work placement meals, hardship and residential bursaries will be paid as normal on 15th April 2020.
- WUC will also be paying cash direct to the student's bank account on 15th April 2020 which are the meal credits that would normally be added to the student's ID card.
- Childcare will NOT be paid unless the student is a key worker.
- At this time, travel payments will NOT be made. Please be assured that if and when students can return to WUC to resume their studies, the travel payments will be made.

If there are any queries, please direct them to WUC's Bursary Administrator, elizabeth.lancaster@writtle.ac.uk.

Attendance

WUC recognises the importance of continuing to monitor attendance, particularly for our most vulnerable students. This will be done via monitoring engagement with online material and communications and submission of work. For the most vulnerable (already known and identified), additional arrangements have already been put in place. Any significant concerns re attendance (particularly for younger and/or more vulnerable), will be followed up with reasonable endeavours, consistent with the core principles of WUC's attendance policy.

Peer on peer abuse & online risk

We recognise the potential for abuse to go on between young people, especially in the context of an educational institution partial closure. Our staff will remain vigilant to the signs of peer on peer abuse.

Young people will be using the internet more during this period. The university college will also be using online approaches to deliver training, teaching and support. Staff are aware of the signs and signals of cyberbullying and other risks online and will apply the same child-centred safeguarding practices as when students are learning at WUC.

It should also be noted that:

- WUC continues to ensure appropriate filters and monitors are in place on its network.
- Staff have been reminded of the risk that professional boundaries could slip during this exceptional period and will adhere to WUC's code of conduct. Wherever possible staff should use WUC systems to communicate with students and their families. Where this is not possible, consideration should be given to appropriate and reasonable safeguarding arrangements and controls.
- Children and young people accessing remote learning will have previously received guidance on keeping safe online and know how to raise concerns with WUC, but they also can seek further guidance or report concerns through Childline, the UK Safer Internet Centre and CEOP.
 - https://www.childline.org.uk/?gclid=EAAlQobChMInYaYj4fH6AIVQofVCh0KfGVPEAAAYASAAEgIyyfD_BwE&gclid=aw.ds
 - <https://www.saferinternet.org.uk/>
 - <https://www.ceop.police.uk/safety-centre/>
- Free additional support for staff in responding to online safety issues can be accessed from the [Professionals Online Safety Helpline at the UK Safer Internet Centre](#).
- There is further guidance available online that may be useful to tutors but it is acknowledged that this is very much aimed at schools and pre 16 children. Some links are included here nevertheless <https://www.tes.com/news/coronavirus-10-safeguarding-rules-teachers-home> and <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/news/2020/march/undertaking-remote-teaching-safely/>.

New staff

All offers of employment remain subject to an enhanced DBS check, where presentation of formal identification is required. However, in these unprecedented circumstances to reduce the need for face to face contact our online provider uCheck have provided a replacement mechanism to verify original ID documents for a candidates DBS application, only where the case is urgent and it is not possible to follow the normal identity checking guidelines. It should be noted, however, that the applicant will be required to present the original versions of these documents when they first attend WUC. Details of this are available from the HR department.

All new starters who are due to commence during these unprecedented circumstances, will be presented with their induction folder electronically, this includes details of the

University Colleges Safeguarding & Prevent Policy, Staff Code of Conduct Policy and Part 1 of Keeping Children Safe in Education. All new starters are given an overview of the policies and documents and advised to read them fully, raising any queries as to their understanding thereafter to the most appropriate person. The new starter will be specifically advised of the Safeguarding team panel, importantly the Designated and Deputy Designated Safeguarding Leads and who to contact if they have concerns linked to a young person or a vulnerable adult. The WUC company induction will take place remotely thereafter and the Department Induction will take place by the Line Manager following the usual process.

All new starters are still required to complete the online safeguarding training prior to a start date being confirmed.

New starters will only be commencing with WUC in these unprecedented times if they represent a key worker or an essential worker to a part of WUC operational service requirements at this time.

The process in relation to Volunteers remains as per the current process.

Mental Health

Restrictions to movement and contact with other people means students are more likely to be at risk of mental health problems. There is lots of help and support available. The Department for Education has produced guidance to support parents:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-parents-and-carers-on-supporting-children-and-young-peoples-mental-health-and-wellbeing-during-the-coronavirus-covid-19-outbreak>

It should be noted that our students continue to have access to the wellbeing team by emailing wellbeing@writtle.ac.uk, as well as a wealth of wellbeing self help resources on the team's moodle page. Online mental health support is available through Big White Wall (24/7), Kooth and Chat with Charlie.