



Wider opening of schools & colleges

What to look out for in your school/college risk assessment



Coronavirus crisis
Workplace checklist



This National Education Union (NEU) guidance is for use in conjunction with our joint union checklists on safe wider opening for primary schools and early years, secondary schools and colleges and special schools and PRUs.

It identifies areas which need to be considered when risk assessments are carried out, not the precise standards and safety measures which need to be in place for safe wider opening.

Advice on those matters can be found in the joint union checklists or specific NEU guidance indicated in the text.

The guidance aims to support **NEU leader members** with their role in conducting (with employer support) and implementing their employer's risk assessment, as part of their responsibility for day-to-day management of health and safety.

It also aims to support **NEU members and reps/ health and safety reps** who wish to assure themselves that necessary measures are in place, through the consultation process. By working together, the safest possible outcome can be achieved.

How can this risk assessment checklist be used by NEU leader members?

You can use it to help ensure that any advice and templates for risk assessment provided by the employer, and any you undertake in your management role, cover all the necessary areas. Working through this checklist with union reps and staff will help ensure that your risk assessment is fit for purpose, as well as providing reassurance to your staff that health, safety and wellbeing is the top priority at this time.

Risk assessments must be tailored to each individual workplace – there is no such thing as a 'one-size-fits-all' risk assessment, so simply adopting a model is not an option. Risk assessment is a dynamic process and needs to be kept under regular review, for example when circumstances change and additional hazards become apparent.

Your employer, whether a local authority, trust or governing body, has a legal duty under the Management of Health and Safety at Work

Regulations 1999 to ensure that a suitable and sufficient risk assessment is undertaken in relation to the risks of operating during the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. This is a practical not a paper exercise. It is about identifying hazards (what can go wrong) in the workplace, assessing the risk of harm arising, and taking suitable preventative measures.

Health and safety legislation requires employers to protect the health and safety of employees but also others such as pupils, visitors, agency staff and contractors. The Health and Safety Executive (HSE), which enforces health and safety law in the UK has published guidance including a risk assessment template which may be useful [here](#).

How can the risk assessment checklist be used by NEU members and reps?

It is important to maintain the necessary distinction between the role of the employer and that of the union. It remains the employer's responsibility to ensure that risk assessments are undertaken and to support leaders and managers in doing so. **As a union rep or health and safety rep, it is not your role to undertake a risk assessment for your school or college, nor should you be 'signing off' a risk assessment – that remains the employer's responsibility.**

However, those who work in a school or college understand how it operates and good employers will wish to draw upon that knowledge and experience to produce a risk assessment that leads to the safest possible work environment. **Indeed, there is a legal requirement to consult with health and safety reps when drawing up a risk assessment.**

It is also important to note that contributing to the risk assessment process in this way, whether as a safety rep or as a member of staff, does not mean that you could be held liable for any deficiencies that may later become apparent. The legal duty rests with the employer.

If you are a NEU safety rep, you are also urged to exercise your right to undertake an inspection of the site with management once the initial risk assessment is finalised and before extended opening begins, and regularly thereafter as circumstances change. If there is no NEU safety rep, discuss with members whether someone is

willing to take on the role. Hundreds of new NEU safety reps have come forward during this crisis and online training is available (contact training@neu.org.uk). Even if there is no NEU rep, it is good practice for a joint inspection of the workplace to take place before wider opening commences – the joint union checklists can be used for this purpose by any member of staff.

What should be included in a school or college’s risk assessment for safe opening during the Covid-19 pandemic?

Set out below is a set of pointers covering key factors which will help you, whether in your leadership role or as a union rep or member of staff, to form a view as to whether your risk assessment is adequate. It is not intended to be exhaustive and may not identify all the possible hazards in your particular school or college.

As set out above broad areas are identified for consideration, rather than particular measures which need to be implemented for safe wider opening. Advice on those matters can be found in the joint union checklists or specific NEU guidance indicated in the text. Members in special schools and PRUs are encouraged to consult the [NEU joint checklist for special schools and PRUs](#).

Date, author and review

Is it clear who has carried out the assessment, when it was carried out and in what circumstances it will be reviewed (for example when circumstances change or if it becomes apparent that there are issues which have been overlooked)?

Site capacity

Does the risk assessment address the maximum capacity of the site and the proportion of pupils that can be safely accommodated to allow for safe distancing of 2 metres?

Does the maximum class size permitted specifically address matters of social distancing?

Are there procedures for restricting entry to non-essential visitors including parents?

Staffing

Is it clear how safe staffing levels will be maintained, including at breaks?

Protection for vulnerable groups of staff

Factors such as ethnicity, age, disability and sex can increase the risk posed by Covid-19 to individuals in addition to the risk posed by underlying health conditions. The NEU expects employers to carry out risk assessments for individual staff members, particularly staff in high risk or vulnerable groups, including Black workers. Has this happened and did the risk assessments include consideration of age, sex, ethnicity, health conditions and disability? Vulnerable and at risk workers guidance [here](#).

Assessing the needs of students during and after wider opening

Does the plan assess the transition and re-integration needs of particular groups of students such as students with SEND, looked after children, bereaved students or those who may be particularly anxious or worried?

Is the risk assessment sensitive to the concerns of Black students and their parents?

Does the risk assessment identify practical CPD approaches which will support staff to respond to the social and learning needs in the student population?

Does the risk assessment reflect a realistic approach to learning in the summer term?

Staff training

Does the risk assessment provide for staff training on new routines and safety procedures before wider opening and updates thereafter?

Induction of new staff

Does the risk assessment cover induction on safety procedures for new staff including supply staff?

Suspected cases during the working day

Does the risk assessment set out procedures for dealing with suspected cases, including isolating cases, informing parents and ensuring safe collection of students and appropriate cleaning, and measures to ensure all staff understand what to do if this happens?

Travel to and from the site

Does the risk assessment consider safe travel for staff and pupils, covering matters such as car sharing and use of public transport? Does it consider the risk to anyone who may not have access to safe travel?

Safe arrival and departure

Are routines in place for arrival and departure times, including measures such as staggered start and finish times or limits on numbers of parents/carers present?

Temperature checks

Does the risk assessment set out how any planned temperature checks on arrival will be managed safely?

Movement around the site to ensure safe distancing

Are measures in place to ensure safe movement around the building (for example, one-way systems and floor markings on staircases and in corridors) and to avoid overcrowding between lessons and during breaks/at lunchtime?

Does the risk assessment cover the safe use of, and access to, lifts, toilets and other shared spaces?

Hygiene and cleaning

Are there adequate hygiene and cleaning measures in place?

Books and other student resources

Does the risk assessment set out safety measures on matters such as using and sanitising books and shared resources, marking books etc?

PPE

Does the risk assessment provide PPE to staff at greater risk of airborne contamination due to their involvement with particular pupils?

Does it provide adequate and appropriate PPE for cleaning staff, for visitors working closely with pupils and for emergency situations?

First aid

Does the risk assessment cover first aid provision and the need for PPE for first aiders?

Catering

Does the risk assessment address arrangements to ensure that meals can be safely prepared and served?

Staff breaks

Does the risk assessment set out how staff can safely take their breaks and eat lunch?

Office environment

Does the risk assessment set out how the administrative work of the school can safely continue?

Deliveries and waste collection

Does the risk assessment set out how this will be safely managed in terms of times, locations and hygiene precautions for staff involved?

Sourcing of cleaning products, PPE, sanitiser, tissues

Does the risk assessment ensure that a secure supply of cleaning products, PPE, sanitiser and tissues can be relied upon?

Emergency procedures

Does the risk assessment set out how procedures such as fire drills will be adapted to reflect the need for social distancing?

Messaging to staff and students about new ways of working

Does the risk assessment set out how pupils and staff will be introduced to, and reminded about, the new routines, including via signage?

Communication with parents

Does the risk assessment address the issue of communication with parents on matters such as student safety, parental presence, and communication with school staff?

Does it cover telling parents what to do if their child develops Covid-19 symptoms?

Home working for staff

Does the risk assessment consider the issue of safe home working for those who will continue to work from home?

Mental health for students and staff

Does the risk assessment consider the mental health and wellbeing of students and the support needed to support healthy transition back to school while social distancing and other restrictions are in place?

Does the risk assessment consider the mental health and wellbeing of staff, including by identifying staff members more at risk and by applying measures to ensure a reasonable work-life balance for all?

Risk calculation

Does the risk assessment have a risk calculation integral to it?

For example, some assessments will include this formula: LIKELIHOOD x SEVERITY = RISK.

The outcome will be a score to help determine the level of risk for each component of the risk assessment and whether it is low, medium or high. It is the most reliable means of assessing risk levels and more meaningful than simply attaching a word like 'moderate' to a risk without having anything to back this up.

If a risk assessment describes the overall risk of wider opening, or the risk ascribed to specific matters, as 'low' or 'moderate' without an indication of how this was arrived at, the assessor should explain how they reached this conclusion.

If you think your school risk assessment is adequate

- It is not your responsibility to sign it off, but it will be helpful for your head teacher to know that you are broadly supportive of the preventative measures set out.
- Continue to monitor its implementation and engage as often as necessary with school leaders.
- **All staff should be encouraged to flag up issues not previously considered that are impacting upon health and safety. Risk assessment is a dynamic process.**

If you think your school risk assessment is inadequate

- Seek to discuss the deficiencies with your head teacher and point out areas which are either not covered at all, or where you think the right preventative measures aren't in place. Make any practical suggestions that you see fit.
- If you can share a better example that is being used in a nearby school with similar risk factors then try this approach.
- If you remain concerned and your head teacher will still not engage in meaningful discussions, then contact your district/branch secretary who will seek to resolve the issue.
- Where the matter remains unresolved contact your regional/Wales Office.

If you think your workplace has become unsafe

- If NEU members are concerned that it may be unsafe to return to the workplace after any incident, contact your local branch or district secretary or regional/Wales office.
- The law protects you from detriment if you refuse to attend a place of work (or leave your place of work) that you have reasonable grounds to consider to be unsafe and to pose a serious and imminent danger to yourself and others.
- **The NEU will fully support any member who exercises this right and defend them from any detriment.**