

Higher Education (HE) Mass Testing: best practice toolkit

January 2021



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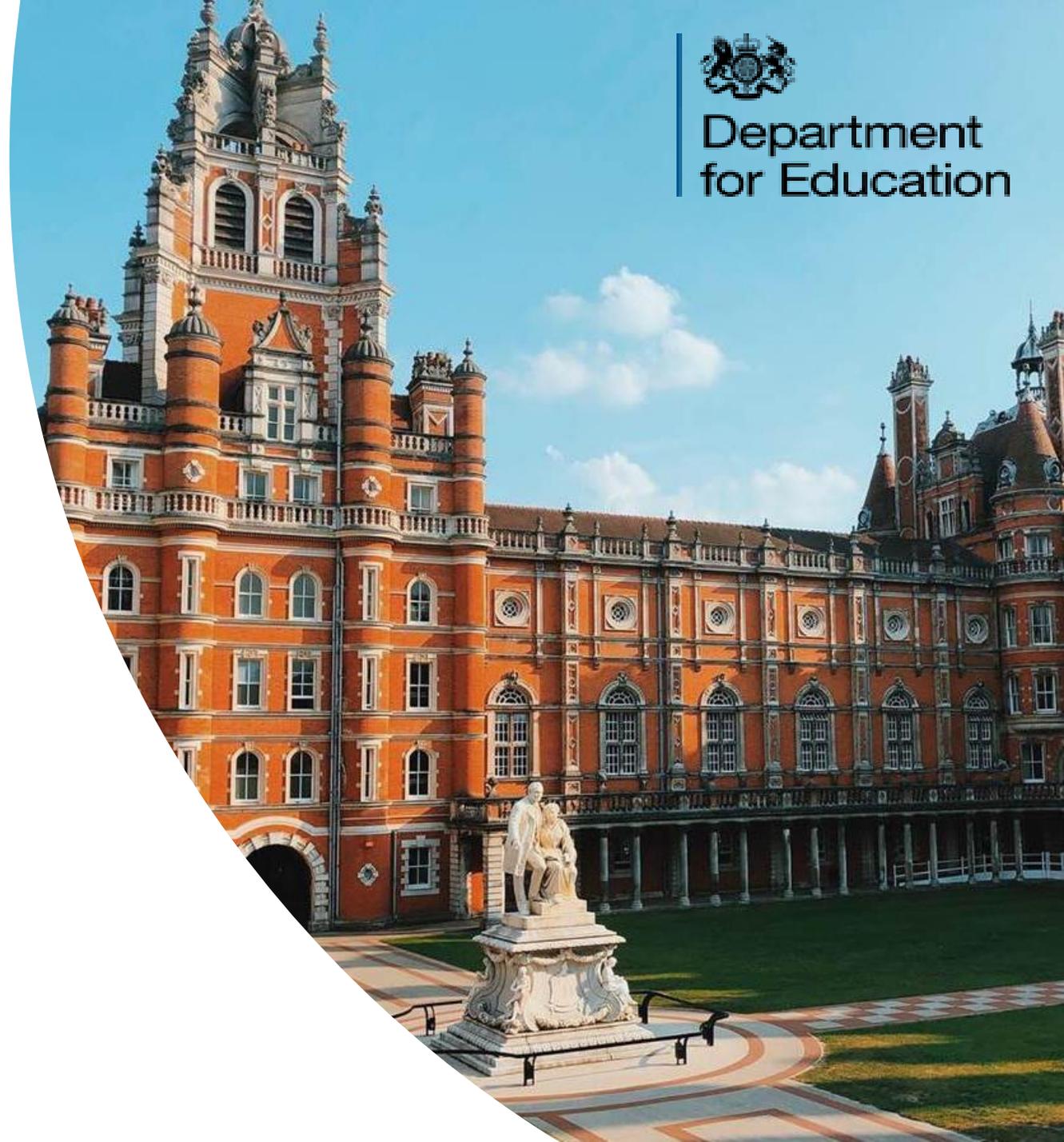
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1. Introduction: context and purpose of this document



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- The Minister of State for Universities, Michelle Donelan MP, wrote to all providers on 18 December emphasising the importance of improving the uptake of asymptomatic testing of students. Ensuring that all students get tested is essential to helping contain the transmission of COVID-19.
- The Department for Education (DfE) is keen to support all Higher Education providers to build on December 2020 testing outcomes and help increase testing of students from January 2021. The expectation is that every eligible student is tested.
- DfE officials have engaged with HE providers to obtain insight into the successes, challenges and student feedback received from mass testing in December 2020 and what their engagement plans will be to increase testing uptake from January 2021.
- Officials have used these insights to identify best practice, common pitfalls and testing examples in order to improve student testing engagement preparations, so universities can tailor their plans according to the nature and size of their institution.



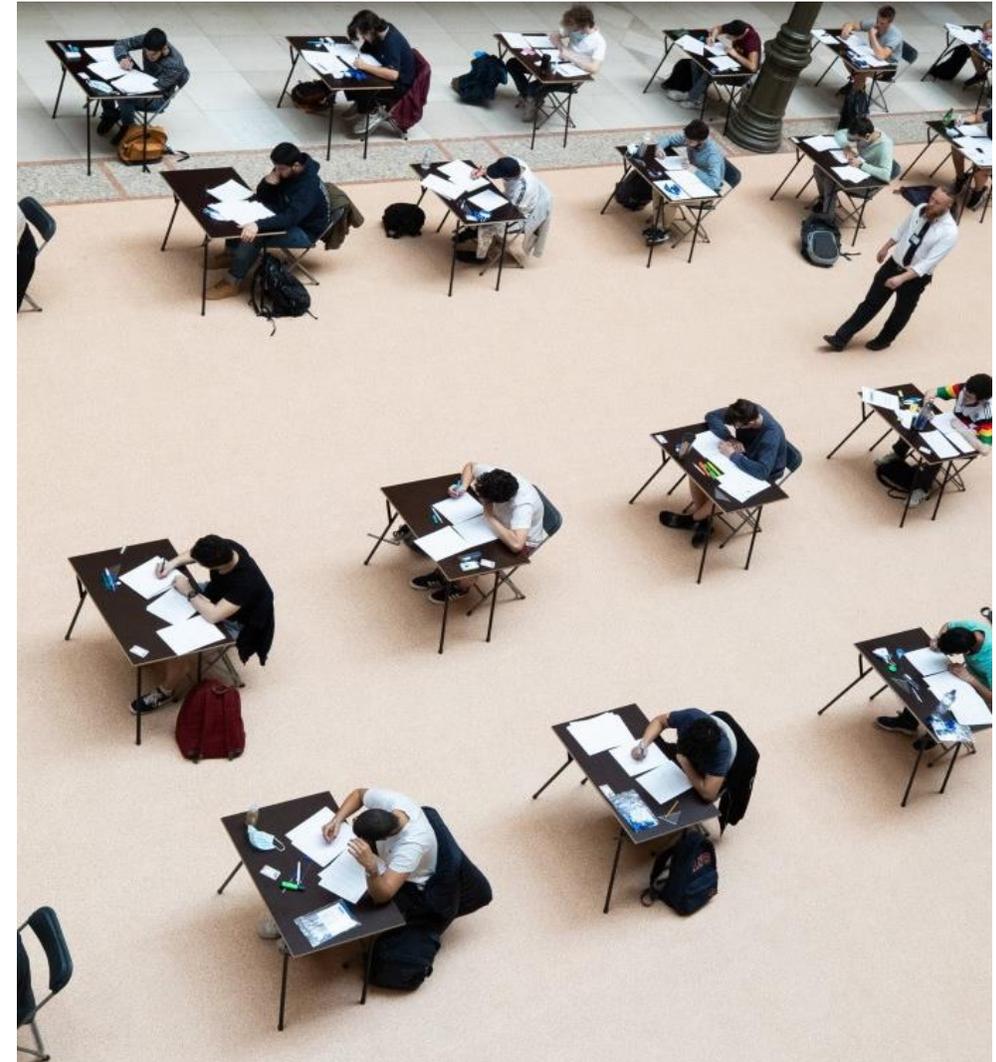
2. Increasing student testing uptake:



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Summary of key approaches:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Demystify testing | Communicate clinical guidance; consistent and clear messaging; meet with students; visual aids to demystify process |
| Firm Approach | Create an expectation of testing; adopt strong measures; consider disciplinary consequences; implement a healthy challenge culture |
| Communicate strategically | Engage students via trusted sources; locally driven communications and peer to peer messaging; adopt segmentation; focus on positive narratives |
| Stakeholder engagement | Develop microsite; targeted messaging; collaborate with local bodies; inform the local community |
| Student support | Ensure testing is hassle free; utilise student Covid-19 ambassadors; reassure students of the isolation support available; listen to concerns |
| Incentivise | Messaging that emphasises both collective responsibility and individual agency; competition and prize draws for completing testing |



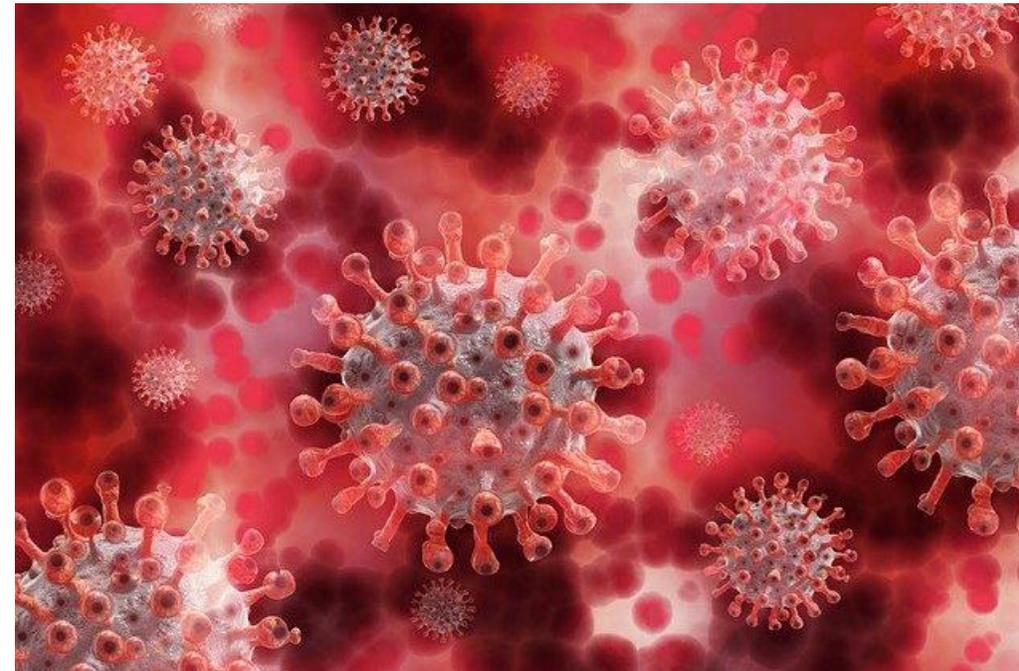
2. Key approaches for increasing student uptake:



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Tackle misinformation and demystify testing:

- **Communicate clinical guidance** - give students a transparent & clear understanding of LFD test accuracy & usefulness (by communicating clinical guidance)
- **Consistent and clear messaging** - mixed messaging and changes in direction reduce confidence. Focus on testing as the only safe and sensible route
- **Meet with students** - show them test kits, equipment and PPE. This helps to demystify testing, demonstrates that test administrators are well trained and promotes confidence in the process.
- **Increase awareness** - use social media posts from the test centre as visual aids, to increase awareness of site location and further demystify process



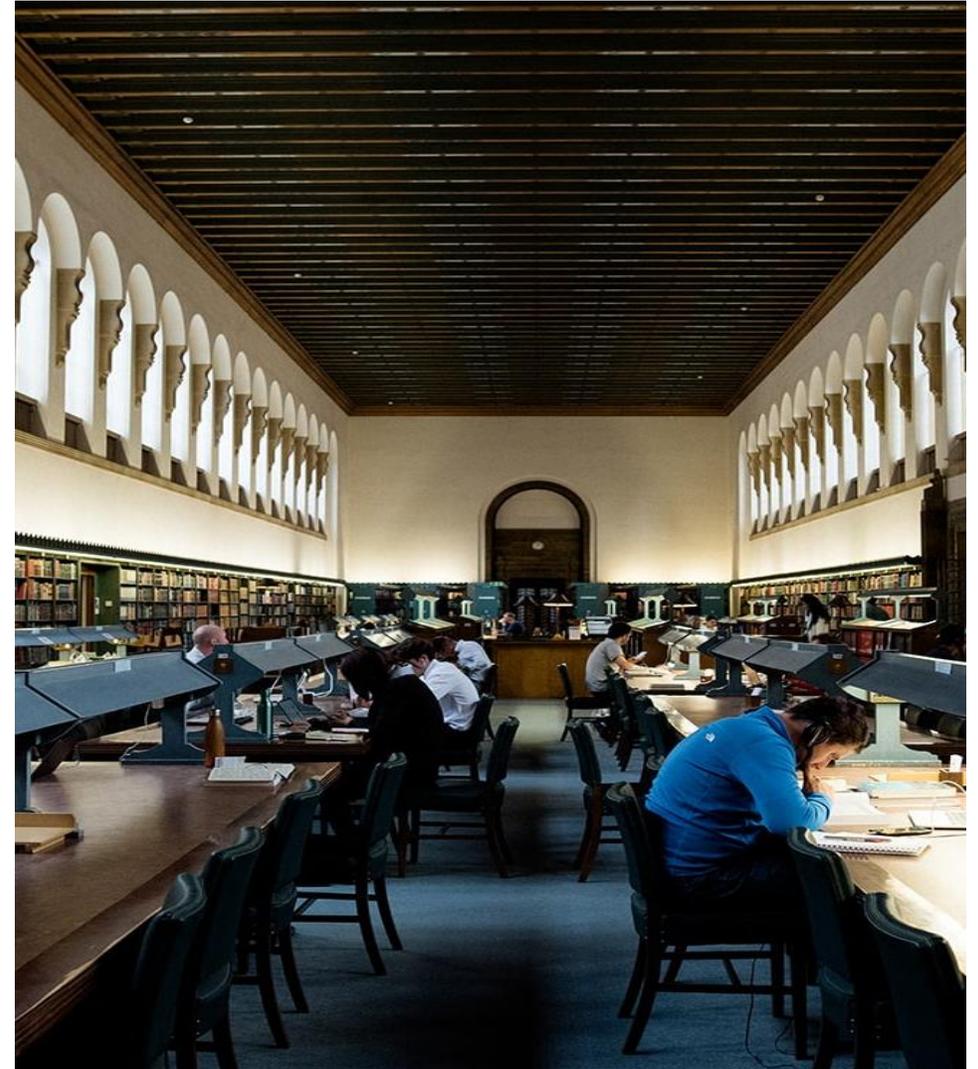
2. Key approaches for increasing student uptake:



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Take a firm approach:

- **Create expectation of testing** - use strong messaging to normalise testing and emphasise that students should self-isolate for 10 days if they don't test
- **Encourage students to keep a record** – e.g. take a photo; this means they could be challenged to provide proof
- **Highlight potential consequences** – consider what disciplinary consequences could be imposed on those attending courses without getting tested (if they were challenged to provide proof)
- **Adopt strong measures** – for example, collection of accommodation keys through proof of registration to test;
- **Implement a healthy challenge culture** – ensure students and staff feel comfortable to say when it's not okay / address poor behaviour



2. Key approaches for increasing student uptake:



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Communicate strategically:

- **Make it timely** – early comms intervention so students understand testing arrangements beforehand and are then targeted as they arrive back
- **Engage students via trusted sources** - utilise HE provider medical staff to reinforce messaging and try to avoid generic admin emails and instead send messages via tutors, lecturers, course leaders etc.
- **Locally driven communications and peer to peer messaging** – encourage use of student voices and blogs and don't underestimate the influence of parents/carers
- **Adopt segmentation** (e.g. for different cohorts, type of accommodation etc.) to avoid messaging fatigue
- **Focus on positive narratives** - include thanks within messaging, for example, 'Thank You' stickers and signage



2. Key approaches for increasing student uptake:



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Engage and inform stakeholders:

- **Develop microsite** – to collate comms, guidance and learning, with dedicated pages for different audiences (parents, community, students, staff)
- **Targeted messaging** - for small and large campus providers, adopt messaging that emphasises campus community; consider using joint messaging from HE providers in multi-university cities
- **Collaborate** - off campus, work closely with local public health bodies, local council, police and community groups
- **Inform the local community** - keep communities up to date on all plans to provide reassurance on HE provider efforts. Consider using specific messaging and press releases in partnership with local bodies, e.g. police, LAs



2. Key approaches for increasing student uptake:



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Support Students:

- **Ensure testing is hassle free** - make the test process sound easy. Inconvenience is a key barrier, so ensure testing fits around student schedules. Accessible test sites, non-business hours testing, and a bespoke booking system to book and receive confirmation of a slot, all help to enable uptake
- **Utilise student Covid-19 ambassadors** - on campus and off campus for way finding, support and to encourage good behaviour
- **Reassure students of the isolation support available** – see slides 11-12 below for further information
- **Listen to concerns** - encourage students who are anxious or concerned to chat with university staff or their HEP doctor/nurse. The use of background music at test centres can help mask coughing etc. and may help nervous students



2. Key approaches for increasing student uptake:



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Incentivise students:

- **Use messaging that combines collective responsibility and individual agency** - for example, emphasise how testing every student is key to creating a safe environment as well as resuming face-to-face teaching and learning
- **Competition and prizes** – enter students into prize draws once they have completed return testing. They can be sponsored by local businesses / suppliers and consider partnering with charities for ‘donation’ incentives / prizes
- **Make it Social** – use a pledge sticker ‘I’ve had my Test’, or a profile picture frame ‘I got my tests’; evidence shows that when individuals tell someone they are going to do something, they are more likely to do it, and if people can see that everyone else is doing something, they are more likely to do it themselves



**KEEP
YOUR EYES
ON
THE
PRIZE**

3. Supporting students in self-isolation



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Every student should be LFD tested twice – immediately upon their return and then again three days later. If they choose not to test then they should self-isolate for 10 days instead. If they test positive then they must self-isolate (legal obligation).

LFDs can help identify people who have a high viral load and who do not have symptoms and would not otherwise take a test. When someone gets the virus, they experience different levels of infectiousness; taking two tests, three days apart will help pick up when a person has high levels of the virus, which may have been missed when the person was less infectious.

Negative test result:

- If the first LFD test result is negative, the student will not need to self-isolate for ten days; they should, however, limit their social contact and interaction with other students until they receive a second negative LFD test result.
- HE providers should continue to encourage students to undertake two LFD tests.

Positive test result:

- Students should either self-isolate after a positive LFD test or arrange for a confirmatory PCR test.
- If the PCR test result is positive, the student is legally required to self-isolate for ten days after they first develop symptoms or, if asymptomatic, after the date of their PCR test. This is a legal requirement for all, from the point of notification from NHS Test and Trace.



4. Additional resources and guidance to support students



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HE providers should review the below resources, alongside the Jan 2021 published Spring Term guidance, when considering how best to support their students, including those arriving from overseas:

- [UUK guidance for safety, health and wellbeing](#)
- [UUK guidance for self-isolation on arrival in the UK](#)
- [Government guidance for isolation in residential educational settings](#)
- [Government guidance for Spring Term 2021](#)
- [Coronavirus Resource Centre](#)
- [Office for Student FAQs](#)



5. Communications: best practice

A recent student survey showed that 92% of students reacted to an email from their institution to find out about testing and then went and got a test. The response rate was even higher when the email came from someone the student knew. So although generic admin emails are effective, you should consider issuing comms from trusted staff, e.g. personal tutors, lecturers, course leaders and medical staff.

Example key communications: ‘why this is happening’

The following example government messages can be used to support your own comms:

“All students should get tested when they return to University. Testing reduces the risk of Covid-19 transmission. The more people that get the test, the better it will be for everyone and the quicker your university experience will improve.”

“Up to 1 in 3 people with Covid-19 don’t have any symptoms but can still spread the virus. Getting quick, free testing when you return next term will allow your university experience to improve and your education to continue.”

“Your university will provide free tests when you return and you’ll usually get the results in under an hour. If your test is negative you’ll need a follow up test 3 days apart. If positive, you’ll need to self-isolate and get a confirmatory PCR test. This will allow your university experience to improve and will help to protect your friends and lecturers.”



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Example key communications: 'addressing misinformation'



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The following example government messages can be used to support your own comms:

- “Lateral flow devices (LFDs) are one of the new tools being used to help us to detect COVID-19 and have been through a rigorous validation programme. Evaluations from Public Health England and the University of Oxford show these tests are accurate and sensitive enough to be used in universities.”
- “Getting tested is quick and free. If your test is negative, there’s a small chance you could still be infectious, so you’ll need a follow up test 3 days later to be safe.”
- “LFD tests allow us to take quick action and prevent the spread of coronavirus by testing lots of people to find positive cases and help break chains of transmission.”
- “Up to 1 in 3 people with COVID-19 have no symptoms. Lateral flow tests can detect the virus in people without symptoms and prevent them unknowingly passing it on to others.”
- “Antigen lateral flow tests are very accurate (highly specific), which means that only a small proportion of people who do not have coronavirus will receive a positive result.”

