

5 June 2020

Dear Parents, Carers and Students

Re-opening of the UTC

I've written previously to let you know that, subject to certain conditions being met, secondary schools are being asked to provide some face-to-face support for **students in years 10 and 12 from Monday 15 June**. This letter explains what this means for the UTC and how we are approaching re-opening. As ever, the information which follows is correct at the time of writing but also remains subject to change.

The principles of re-opening are described below. Although I've shared a good deal of this information with you previously, there are important changes. I'd like to draw your attention especially to the section on travel. This will have significant implications for the majority of our students, so it is the first item covered.

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) can be found at the end of the document.

Travel

Wherever possible, students are encouraged to walk or cycle to the UTC. Safe bicycle storage is available. Some of our post-16 students will be able to drive themselves to the UTC. However, we ask that lift-sharing is avoided, in line with government advice.

UTC buses

It is with regret that we have to inform you that we will not be in a position to run the normal UTC bus services from 15th June. This is largely due to the challenges posed by risk assessing journeys taken by our students and over which we have no direct control. Any students who normally take the BG1, BG2 or BG3 buses will be affected.

We know that for many of you, this will pose enormous logistical difficulties. We would encourage parents, where students are unable to walk or cycle to the UTC, to bring their son or daughter by car. However, we entirely understand that this may not be possible or desirable. Unfortunately, lift-sharing should also be avoided.

This will be enormously disappointing and frustrating to many of you, and I share your feelings along with the staff. However, the safety of the school community must be our priority so I hope you will understand that this decision has not been taken lightly and has been taken with the best of intentions. We will review the situation regularly in the hope of reaching a workable solution.

Public Transport

The government is asking that people avoid public transport wherever possible. If driving your child to the UTC is an option, we would ask that you consider it. However, the decision on whether or not to use public transport must rest at the discretion of parents or carers. You are best-placed to evaluate the risks to your child.

The timing of re-opening

We are intending to invite more students back into college in the **week beginning 15th of June**, in a phased, partial and gradual approach. We envisage year 10s joining us from 15th June, with year 12s joining us from the following week (ie 22nd June onwards).

Provision on-site

Schools have been asked to offer 'some support to supplement pupils' remote education' in the summer term. Our priority is still our 'remote' teaching and learning, and our students' safety and welfare, which we are trying to enhance and improve on at all times. We are acutely conscious of the many normal and valuable school experiences that your children are missing.

We are therefore proposing that provision on site will be in line with the following principles:

1. The time on site will be used to:
 - a. Discuss student wellbeing and emotional health during lockdown, providing strategies and techniques to help them deal with any issues that may have arisen
 - b. Provide guidance and advice to students about home learning including addressing any barriers to learning or providing additional challenge
 - c. Encourage safe social interaction, letting the students enjoy time with their peers and also with staff
 - d. Provide safe physical activity where possible
2. We will be asking students to attend the UTC on one day per week. The day will start at the usual time but will finish at 1.30pm.
3. Students will be in small groups of up to 15, with allocated teaching staff, and they will stay with that group for the whole day. This is so that we can create a protective 'bubble' around each group.
4. We do not envisage having more than one group on site at any time. However, if this becomes necessary, we will ensure that there is no mixing whatsoever between groups.
5. Students will be given a single allocated teaching space or computer room where social distancing measures will be in place.
6. Each student will be given their own desk and a nominated computer and keyboard that will only be used by them for the duration of this academic year.

7. Social distancing measures will be in place at all times during the day.
8. A teaching team will be allocated to each group of students (2 – 3 teachers) and the students will spend their day with that team. They will also have access to a member of the pastoral team for confidential conversations.

Students unable to attend

There may be students who will be unable to attend during this re-opening phase for a number of reasons, or who would prefer not to. I would like to emphasise that a return to the UTC is, at this stage, optional.

While we believe there may be benefits to students in coming into the UTC at this time, we are committed to ensuring that those who are unable to attend are not disadvantaged. All students who do not attend in person will be invited to a one-to-one online conversation with a member of staff on at least a weekly basis.

Frequently asked questions

1. How will students maintain social distancing?

We are only using certain teaching areas on the ground floor to ensure that there is at least a two metre clearance between each individual, including teachers, at all times. This also limits the space that needs a deep clean every evening.

When they enter the UTC, students will be met by a member of staff and taken to their seat. A one-way system has been set up, with barriers and clear signage, and students will be given a briefing on their first day on how to observe the social distancing measures.

Each student will be allocated a named computer desk according to a pre-arranged seating-plan, and this will be used by them alone until the end of the academic year. They will also be given a separate table where they can keep their bag, go for break-out time, have a drink and so on.

Students will be allowed to use the toilet on a one-in-one-out basis. A teacher will always be on hand to make sure clear hygiene protocols followed.

2. What hand-washing facilities are available?

We are setting up hand-washing stations on entry to the UTC and supplies of hand-washing equipment, wipes and hand-sanitiser will be readily available throughout the day. We will insist that students wash their hands on a regular basis and certainly before and after eating, entering or exiting the building, using a keyboard or using a bathroom.

3. How can you be confident that your measures are adequate?

The SGS Academy Trust has a number of health and safety specialists on the staff who have put together a comprehensive risk assessment. In turn, the Trust has commissioned a well-respected external company to scrutinise all aspects of our risk assessment and sign off on the final plans. They have visited the UTC to make sure the measures in place meet the very high standards required.

Of course, we are unable to eliminate risks entirely, but we have taken all reasonable steps to minimise them.

4. Will students be allowed outside?

Yes, we will encourage students to spend time outside. We want them to interact with one another and to enjoy their time on site. As far as we're concerned, the more time outside, the better. Social distancing and hygiene rules will be enforced which means that while we would like the students to participate in physical activity, we will not be using any sports equipment, including footballs and so on, but that still leaves lots of options.

5. Will there be taught lessons?

While they are on site, students in years 10 and 12 will spend at least part of the time continuing with the online learning timetable. This will enable staff to see how well students are able to engage with the work set, whether the level of challenge is appropriate, and to help students manage their workload. Staff will be interacting with a very small number of students during this time, so the level of support they can give will be high.

However, staffing and timetable constraints mean that we will be unable in most instances to offer lessons to students on-site. We will be able to support online learning, help remove any barriers to learning, and help develop independent study skills, but our online study programme will remain our primary method of teaching and learning for the time being.

Depending on logistics, we would like to enable year 12 students to have some face-to-face contact with subject teachers, or at least some one-to-one meetings. Once we know which students will be able to come into the UTC, we will put together an appropriate plan.

6. What are the benefits of coming in?

Many of our students are feeling the strain of home-study. They would like to interact with their peers, speak directly with staff, and feel part of a wider community. They might just want to be somewhere other than home, and some may wish to seek advice about their emotional or physical well-being. Often, we find that young people don't want to worry their parents or carers; they would prefer to speak to somebody 'neutral'. Above all, we want to provide a reassuring, friendly face, and facilitate positive social experiences.

7. Will students be able to choose who they attend with?

We will do our best to ensure that students are put in groups with other people they get along well with. We will aim to avoid those relationships we know are trickier. We can't, however, guarantee that they will be with their friends.

8. Will the UTC be deep-cleaned every day?

Yes – or at least the areas used by staff and students will be. We are closing as many areas of the building as possible in order to minimise risk, and to maximise the time spent cleaning the areas used by students. During the day, our cleaners will be continually wiping and re-wiping surfaces that are in constant use, such as the toilet door handles.

9. What will students wear?

Students will need to wash their clothes when they get home, to prevent any possible cross-contamination. We also want them to feel comfortable, and able to participate in physical activity. The best option is therefore comfortable shorts or trousers with a T-shirt, and trainers. As long as these are appropriate for a college setting (eg not revealing or with offensive lettering), students can choose what to wear. Shoes should be sturdy enough for sport (ie no flip-flops or similar). We want students to feel relaxed.

10. Will students be allowed to wear masks?

Public Health England says that masks are not necessary. However, we want students to feel safe and if wearing a mask helps, students can either bring their own or ask for one on entry to the building. All we ask is that it remains with them at all times.

11. What protective items will staff be wearing?

The same rule applies to staff as students. If a member of staff feels happier wearing a mask or other items of PPE, this option is open to them. There is no expectation however that they will do so.

12. What can students bring with them?

Students can bring a bag with them but we ask that they bring in as little as possible. They could bring in a reading book, and they can have their phones in their bags, though the usual UTC rules about their use will apply (ie they can only be used at break and lunch times). Students will not be allowed to listen to music or wear headphones. On entry to the building, students will be given a specific personal location for their bag and it should remain there.

13. Will food and water be available?

No. We are sorry for any inconvenience this may cause.

Students will need to bring with them two bottles of water (one for while they are in the building and the other for the journey home) and they will not be able to refill these at the water fountains, which will be switched off. They will also need to bring a packed lunch and any snacks they would like for break-time. They will take their own rubbish home with them.

Students who normally receive Free School Meals will continue to receive vouchers to purchase food at the supermarket.

14. What happens if somebody gets ill?

Any student or member of staff showing Covid-like symptoms will be immediately isolated and dealt with by a qualified first-aider wearing PPE equipment. The individual will be sent home and should attend an NHS testing centre, immediately notifying the UTC of the outcome. Specific guidance will be given to the student and family at the time.

Should the test prove positive, we will immediately notify the relevant health authorities. Students and staff in the same 'bubble' will be asked to self-isolate, along with their household members.

Because of the potential consequences for other members of the UTC community and beyond, we cannot stress highly enough the importance of not allowing your son or daughter to attend if they show any Covid-like symptoms.

Please remember – one positive test could result in up to twenty households going into lockdown, yours included. Don't take chances.

15. Given all the changes that will be in place, will this be a distressing experience for my son or daughter?

There is no doubt that the experience at the UTC will feel very different. There will be constraints on student movement, activity and interaction, and they will need to understand the seriousness of complying with new rules.

However, my message to staff is very clear: we want our students to feel welcome, safe and part of a community that values and misses them. In the days to come, it is our job to be a friendly face and a listening ear, available for help and guidance. It is also our job to help students mix with others, supporting them with social interaction and providing safe space for some fun and games.

Again, you know your son or daughter best and you will be in a position to judge whether the benefits of the provision we are able to offer will outweigh any disadvantages.

16. My son or daughter has an EHCP, is a looked-after child or has a social worker – will I get personalised advice?

Yes. Penny, our SENCO, will complete a plan for every student with an EHCP and this will be done in full consultation with parents and carers.

We are already in regular contact with the parents and carers of any looked-after children or those with social a social worker. Again, plans for these students will written in full consultation with parents, carers and any relevant external agencies.

17. How will you deal with students who don't comply with the rules?

Any potential breach of the rules which threatens the health and safety of others will be dealt with immediately and firmly. Where there is deliberate disregard of the rules, the student will be isolated and a parent or carer will need to collect them.

We have a small number of students who, because of their individual learning needs, may not cope well with the new rules. Parents or carers may feel that sending them to the UTC at this time may not be in their best interests. In these instances, we will be in touch with parents to discuss other options.

18. Which staff will be available?

We are yet to draw up a rota of staff. What we do know is that we will limit how often staff come to the UTC and each member of staff will only be assigned to one group in the first instance, so they are part of the same protective 'bubble'. Our aim, staff numbers permitting, is to have one senior leader on site every day, with 2-3 teaching staff and a member of the admin team. There will always be two first-aiders on site. Students will not be able to choose which staff group they work with, though we will aim to have SEND support available for students with the highest learning needs, including those with EHCPs.

19. What happens if my son or daughter is not coming in?

All students will continue to follow the home learning timetable they have been given. We will aim to offer a one-to-one discussion with every student who is not coming into the UTC on at least a fortnightly basis, and we are currently investigating holding some fun group activities to bring students together. We are constantly trying to improve the quality of our online teaching and learning resources and lessons, so we will also shortly be asking for your comments and suggestions.

20. What happens next?

We would like to know whether your child will be attending the UTC from 15 June (for year 10) and from 22 June (for year 12). Please complete, as a matter of urgency, the very short questionnaire below. It includes the opportunity to ask further questions or let us know your thoughts about anything you have read here.

<https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=SpSGECNsxU2zJZ7yTkeOR7pirprqyipDnbzn5vXrHwZUN0NDWjRSMkpHTUoxTzczT1I2QUxDU0VITi4u>

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. I appreciate there is a lot to take in and, in some cases, a general sense of frustration that we can't do more at this time to bring our students back into the UTC and give them the education they deserve.

Please rest assured that during this incredibly difficult time, the well-being of your children is constantly being considered and we are working hard to do our very best on their behalf. We know that you are doing the same and appreciate your ongoing support.

With very best wishes

Louise

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Currently reading: An Officer and A Spy by Robert Harris