

COVID-19 Resilience Commitment



This document lays out the RVC's institutional commitment to resilience in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Recognising that it will require the efforts of all staff and students, it itemises the expectations placed on all of us, as individuals, as we work together for the common good and the health and wellbeing of the whole RVC community.

The RVC will:

- Prioritise safety and wellbeing
- Use science-based rationale to:
 - Implement risk-based planning and protocols for all aspects of our operations
 - Take all reasonable steps to prevent and control outbreaks of COVID-19 at the RVC
- Continue to deliver high-quality teaching, research, clinical care and professional services
- Meet the accreditation standards in each area of our mission
- Continue to work towards our Strategic Plan

We invite each of you to join us in this commitment to protecting each other.
Stay well.



Stuart Reid
Principal



Quentin Wedmore
President RVCSU



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RVC staff and students are expected to:

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Assume personal responsibility to safeguard the whole RVC community

The RVC is committed to the safety and wellbeing of everyone in the RVC community as well as contributing to broader societal efforts to combat the spread of COVID-19. This requires that we are all informed of, and committed to, the standards and behaviours that will minimise the impact of the pandemic and suppress its further spread. It is a personal obligation as well an institutional undertaking.

Commitment

All staff and students are expected to commit to the issues raised and the standards laid out in this document.

Risk assessment - a personal responsibility

Formal risk assessment will be managed through our departmental structures and institutional health and safety procedures. However, it is also a personal responsibility to consider the risks to ourselves and others as we go about our daily lives both within and outside the RVC. When considering potential impacts of risk arising from any activities, any queries should be raised in the first instance by staff with line managers, and by students with the Advice Centre.

Protection of vulnerable individuals

In putting safety and wellbeing as our top priority, the RVC recognises that some members of our community, or closely linked to our community, may be more vulnerable and at higher risk from COVID-19 than others. In addition to the institutional support for these people, both staff and students are expected to make themselves aware and be respectful of the characteristics of vulnerable groups and act accordingly.



RVC staff and students are expected to:



Implement individual health and safety practices and protocols

Central to the control of the spread of the pandemic is the observance of robust biosecurity protocols. Personal adherence to national and institutional guidelines and rules is an expectation of us all.

Supply and use of RVC face masks and other PPE

The RVC will supply face masks for all staff, students and necessary visitors. The wearing of these masks is mandatory. Where other PPE is required – for example in clinical, laboratory or public facing roles - the RVC will supply appropriate kit as necessary.

Continued observation of handwashing and disinfection

In common with many other pathogens, infection can be acquired by transferring the coronavirus from surfaces to one's mouth, nose or eyes. Strict adherence to handwashing and disinfection minimises this risk. Disinfection points are distributed throughout our campuses and can be found at all points of entry and these should be used regularly. Regular handwashing should be observed.

Observation of social distancing and other behaviours

Throughout the pandemic, reduction in aerosol transfer by maintaining physical distance from others has been of critical importance. The fact that some in our community are required to work at distances less than one metre because of their roles, the RVC requires more stringent measures to remain in place. These are that Face masks/coverings must be worn at all times when on either campus unless:

- In a private office whilst seated and socially distanced from others.
- Eating or drinking (indoors or outdoors) when socially distanced from others.
- Students are in their social accommodation bubble.
- Using the gym, where this would impact on the ability to take part in exercise or strenuous activity

Face masks do not have to be worn when outdoors, but must be worn outside when unable to maintain social distancing in line with Government guidelines e.g. when working with animals, portering, or maintenance duties means that social distancing is impossible.

Compliance with quarantine requirements and self-isolation where required.

In the case of active infection, contact with infected people and some forms of travel, there is a requirement that, in addition to national requirements, RVC staff and students must observe quarantine and self-isolation rules.

Compliance with testing and contact tracing

Where testing and contact tracing are not legally mandated, staff and students are still expected to comply with any RVC-specific requirements deemed necessary to ensure the safety of the broader RVC community. In the event of non-compliance, the RVC reserves the right to refuse entry to its campuses.



RVC staff and students are expected to:



Observe instructions and restrictions in physical spaces

The RVC has taken the difficult decision to phase the return of some student cohorts to our campuses. We are focused on ensuring the population density in our physical facilities is monitored and contained, and that the flow of people in and around our buildings and wider campuses is properly managed. This is complemented by our commitment to all our students that we will continue to deliver a quality education, providing them with all the opportunities needed for them to meet the required learning objectives of their programme. To this end, a major focus will be on a blended approach to teaching.

Campus density restrictions

The RVC will establish protocols for maintaining social distancing within our built environment, ensuring that population densities are controlled and the movement around our internal and sensitive external spaces are managed in line with best available evidence.

Commitment to redesign learning spaces

With social distancing a primary consideration, the RVC is redefining and reconfiguring its learning spaces to ensure that risks to staff and students are managed appropriately. This will entail the repurposing of some larger spaces for smaller group use and increased use of blended delivery of teaching, even for those students on campus.

Prioritisation of practical and clinical sessions

Given the nature of programmes offered by the RVC, inevitably there are aspects of some courses that cannot be delivered as effectively remotely as when on campus or in face-to-face settings. As a consequence, we will be rescheduling some courses to allow those subjects which require face-to-face teaching to take place during the period of phased return to campus. However, this will not prevent our programmes addressing all learning objectives required over the course of the academic year.

Observation of group size and learning bubble requirements

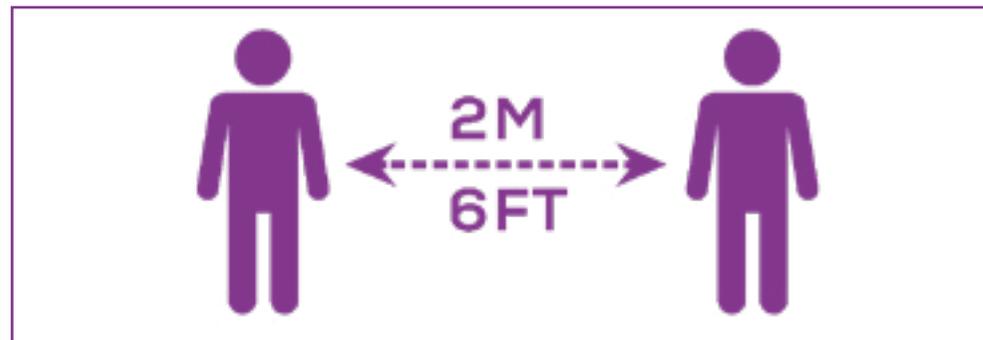
With a change to both environment, scheduling and mode of delivery, and with the safety of both students and teaching staff as a priority, we will be defining group size and learning bubbles, wherever possible. These will be enforced on both campuses.

Reorganisation and re-prioritisation of accommodation provision

In managing the return to campuses and the need to preserve spare capacity as contingency for quarantine and isolation, we will ensure equality of opportunity for all. The provision of RVC accommodation will be tailored to the needs of the whole community allowing for control of population density and maintenance of social bubbles. There will be a phased access to RVC halls which will not place any applicants for accommodation at a disadvantage by being in a later-returning cohort.

Consideration of the needs of others to work in the same/contiguous spaces

Respect for others and flexibility in our working and living environments are paramount. With a commitment to protecting each other and the need to observe social distancing, with or without face coverings depending upon the environment, it may be the case that there will be exceptions to the prescribed requirements. There will be a clear rationale where this is the case.



RVC staff and students are expected to:



Advance our educational, research and clinical missions in a safe and responsible way

Coping with the COVID-19 pandemic means that we must find ways of allowing people to fulfil their working roles, pursue pathways to achieving qualifications and strive towards career aspirations. This will require a considered, balanced approach to the risks and opportunities of our new and changing environment where we ensure the pillars on which we build our mission - discovery, dissemination and delivery - remain protected and at the heart of our strategy. This we must do at the same time as making safety for all a priority.

Safety as a priority over all other considerations

The safety and wellbeing of students, staff and those visiting our campuses will be remain paramount. Whilst maintaining this ethos, we will be flexible and innovative in our approach to the delivery of our core activities to protect the ongoing continuity of our business.

Minimising risk wherever possible, whilst recognising that zero risk is not possible

Life's decisions involve risk, but it is incumbent upon all of us to minimise the negative aspects of risk, wherever we can.

Assessment of critical career, needs-based access to laboratories and clinical caseload

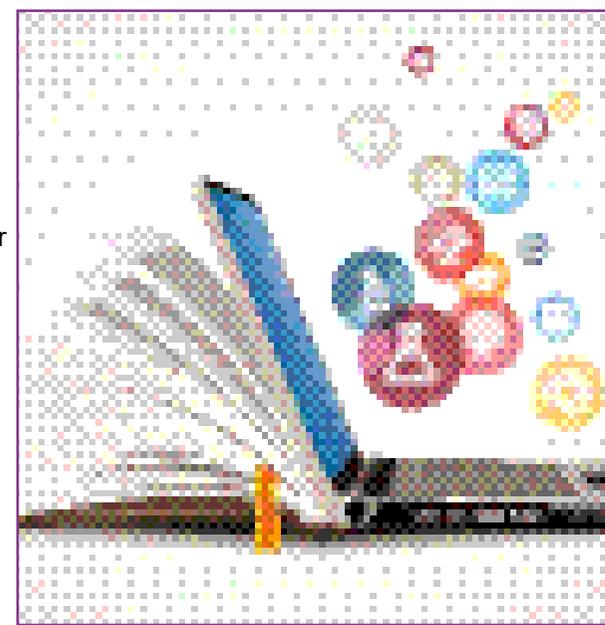
With the multi-faceted nature of business at the RVC and the variety of timelines that apply to those involved in different training programmes and at different career stages, there will be occasions when priority for access to facilities is granted to those on time sensitive schedules ahead of others.

Rescheduling and shift-based approach to all facilities

In order to control population density on both campuses, flexibility will be required in both working and studying timetables. With extended opening hours and the need for repeat sessions due to group sizes, both campuses will see activity taking place outside what were previously considered normal working hours. This will require patience, understanding and flexibility from everybody. Workload will be distributed fairly, but it may be the case that job descriptions and roles are temporarily modified or relaxed for the good of all.

Apply robust safety protocols for dealing with our collaborators, clients and necessary visitors

Visitors to the RVC will be expected to follow our protocols and will be issued with advice regarding appropriate PPE and face masks at the point of entry to each campus. Embedded contractors, such as those working in catering or security together with those working on construction are expected to observe the same standards required of RVC staff and students whilst on our campuses. Within defined working areas, further appropriate, industry-standard measures may be applicable. These stipulations are designed to reduce the likelihood of a visitor introducing infection to our campuses as well as ensuring we discharge our duty of care in protecting them from any risks arising from our environment.





RVC staff and students are expected to:

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Be flexible in expectations and aspirations, recognising the wellbeing of all

Management of the RVC's response to the pandemic has required many changes to the way in which we conduct our business or learning - be that in our teaching, in our research laboratories, in our clinics or in the wide range of our professional services.

In the acute phase of the crisis, flexibility and a willingness to put the common good ahead of individual interests were emblematic of the esprit de corps upon which we were able to call. This selflessness and generosity will be critical as we continue to adjust to the consequences of the pandemic.

Managed return to campuses

With competing curricular priorities and the need to manage population density on both campuses, we must prudently control the return of both staff and students, at least until the start of 2021. There will undoubtedly be frustrations and disappointments for some, but compromise and flexibility are paramount in maintaining the wellbeing of the whole community.

Provision of quality blended learning and teaching options

The RVC is committed to providing all its students with a high-quality education and, to this end, staff are working hard to ensure that existing curricula are delivered effectively through a blended approach.

In some instances, this will require new teaching skills in our staff and new learning skills in our students. We will work to support both staff and students in this transition.

Altered priority for accommodation

Wherever possible, the RVC will seek to meet the needs and wishes of its students with regard to the provision of accommodation. In addition to the assessment of need and the ballot normally in place, consideration will also be given to COVID-19 related priorities when it comes to allocations prior to the new academic session. No student will be disadvantaged in the allocation process by virtue of their on-campus/off-campus status during Term 1.

Phased, flexible and altered timetabling

In keeping with the need to control the number of people on our campuses, the flow of people through facilities, social distancing and defined group sizes, there are planned changes to teaching timetables that will affect both students and staff. These relate to access to physical teaching spaces as well as aspects of blended synchronous and asynchronous delivery. Compromise and flexibility will be required by all involved in our teaching programmes.

Safe scheduling of laboratory access

Throughout the pandemic, the RVC has maintained its core laboratory facilities and services. Since the lifting of national restrictions, we have worked hard to allow a controlled recommencement of our research activities, with phased access to laboratories and equipment and the implementation of prioritised booking systems. This approach will continue into the new academic year and will require the understanding and patience of research staff, technicians and students engaged in research activities. We will be innovative and resourceful in the way in which we provide training in a safe way for those new to certain research techniques.

Working from home and/or on campus

Key to the RVC's approach since the onset of the crisis has been the commitment to ensuring that those who can work remotely do so. The lifting of national restrictions and the encouragement to return to the workplace allows for greater flexibility, but it will be necessary for remote working to continue for some and this will be at the discretion of line managers. In some instances, there may be an absolute need for presence on campus; this too will be at the discretion of line managers, subject to any individual vulnerabilities, shielding or special circumstances. Care will be taken to ensure an appropriate balance is struck between individual needs, preferences and operational requirements.

RVC staff and students are expected to:



Anticipate and plan for emergencies, outbreaks and other contingencies

With the likelihood that, at some point, there will be students or staff who acquire infection, the RVC, besides co-operating with any requirements of the local health services, will have a variety of response plans designed to address situations ranging from individual cases to cluster outbreaks. These contingencies will include a range of options from individual or group self-isolation through closure of one or more facilities, to campus and institutional shutdown. This will require understanding and co-operation from everyone at the RVC.

Pause

Measured responses, based on current scientific evidence, will be central to controlling any suspected outbreak. Initial actions will include options for immediate cessation of movement of people on and off campuses and consultation with local disease outbreak specialists. As has been our approach throughout the pandemic, early action and the precautionary principle will be at the heart of any intervention. Personal readiness will be an important contribution to success.

Contain

Recognising that preventing further dissemination of infection is the top priority in control, early temporary closure of facilities or isolation of individuals, even presumptively, will be initiated in the case of a suspected local breakdown.

Adherence to restrictions will be paramount should they be implemented and planning for such an eventuality, a sensible action to take at a personal level.

Test

The RVC will, wherever appropriate and possible, require the use of testing to confirm the presence or absence of the coronavirus infection, including the testing of in-contacts who may be asymptomatic. In the first instance, this is likely to be PCR testing, but may be extended to other types of tests as they become available and 'the science' supports their use. As far as is possible, compliance in any testing or screening programme is expected from all members of the RVC community.

Control

The RVC, working with Health Protection England and other relevant bodies, will seek to control any outbreaks of COVID-19 that may occur at the RVC. This will include, but not be limited to, requiring enhanced biosecurity and hygiene measures, self-isolation, quarantining of groups of people resident on campus, restricting access to, or closure of, specific facilities and partial or total closure of both campuses. Furthermore, should preventive measures become available, such as vaccines against the coronavirus, the RVC has an expectation that, as far as is possible, all members of the RVC community will engage in any preventive programme.

To protect the RVC community against other infectious disease outbreaks this winter, the RVC will vigorously promote influenza and meningitis vaccination, where appropriate.





Make your own commitment at
rvc.uk/com/pledge

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