

Severe weather and emergency situations policy and procedure

People Services

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Policy information

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Version history

Version	Date	Details	Who
1.	05/10/2017	New formatting completed	Rob Alexander, Employee Relations and Reward Officer
2.	18/10/2022	Updates include policy name change; links reviewed and added; reference made to physical and virtual sites; Directorate amended to VCE; and reference to death of a Monarch.	Suze Attaway, Policy and Employee Relations Consultant
3.	21/07/2025	Policy rebranded; policy name changed; minor wording amends so in Plain English; removed capitalisation of university were appropriate; reference made to unrest and protests; added links to leave options; made reference to pregnant staff instead of women so more inclusive; colleagues with mobility problems changed to disabled colleagues; 7.2 added reference to option of manager reassigning work of staff with severe safety concerns; added a title to Appendix 1, reworded the description and added reference to unrest and protests.	Suze Attaway, Employee Experience Consultant

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The University operates 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. It is multi-site, covering a wide geographical area, and the conditions that occur on one site may not apply on another.
- 1.2. This policy covers emergency situations and circumstances that may make a university site inaccessible, unusable, unsafe or result in a need to close the university campus. Examples might include, but are not limited to, severe weather; national or regional emergencies and events (e.g. death of a Monarch); a security alert; a prolonged power failure; a critical failure of buildings systems; industrial action on the transport network or any circumstance significantly affecting travel to and from work, including civil unrest and protests. See [Appendix 1](#) for a full list of examples.
- 1.3. The University is committed to maintaining a normal operational service for students and staff even in challenging circumstances and, therefore, it would be rare to have a complete closure of the university.
- 1.4. The University, however, has a general duty under the [Health and Safety at Work etc Act 1974](#) to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees at work. This procedure recognises the University's need to maintain the safety and security of its sites, staff and students at all times.
- 1.5. There will be occasions when, after assessment of the risks, there is a serious risk to the health and safety of university staff and students, and a partial or complete closure needs to be considered. The decision to suspend teaching or close a site entirely will be made by a member of the Vice-Chancellor's Executive (VCE). **Unless specifically communicated via official university communication channels to the contrary, the University will remain open for all staff and students.**
- 1.6. This procedure provides guidance on the practices to be followed in such events and aims to ensure there is effective communication in such circumstances, and that staff are treated fairly and consistently.
- 1.7. For the purposes of this procedure the term 'partial closure' refers to occasions when teaching may be suspended at a site, but the physical and virtual site itself remains open for staff to attend.
- 1.8. For the purpose of this procedure, the term 'closed' refers to a full closure of a physical campus or site. In this event, a physical site will be closed to both staff and students with no in-person teaching taking place. Most staff will not be expected to attend work, with the exception of those staff deemed essential (unless otherwise

advised). See [section 5](#) for details. Staff will be expected to work from home where this is possible and this may include online teaching.

- 1.9. The table in [Appendix 1](#) gives examples of the types of severe weather and emergency situations that could potentially lead to a closure of a site(s).

2. Procedure – site remains open

- 2.1. Where a site is open, staff have a responsibility to attend for work according to the terms of their contract. For example, bad weather can be localised, and this may result in difficult conditions prevailing in the employee's home area that make travel to work dangerous or impossible. Employees are expected to make every effort to attend for work including considering other means of transport even if this may take longer, for example walking, train or bus, even if they would normally drive. Alternatively, where staff can undertake their role from home, they should do so making sure they take laptops etc. home if adverse weather is forecast.
- 2.2. The University recognises that staff may travel to work from a wide geographical area, and the University cannot be expected to meet any loss of time arising from this. Individuals must make a personal decision as to whether it is safe or not for them to travel, or whether it might be appropriate for them to travel later in the day when it is safer to do so.
- 2.3. In the event of an employee being unable to attend for work in such circumstances, and in the event they are unable to work from home, they will be expected to apply for [annual leave](#), utilise [flexible working options](#) (such as discussing with their line manager the ability to make time up where appropriate) or take [unpaid leave](#). Staff unable to work in such circumstances should follow relevant university and localised absence reporting processes. This would normally involve speaking to the relevant line manager to determine what type of absence is appropriate in the circumstance. Absence that has not been reported will be regarded as unauthorised (unless there are extenuating circumstances) and as such pay may be withheld.
- 2.4. When conditions are poor but not adverse enough to require the closure of a site, managers are asked to sympathetically consider requests from staff to leave early e.g. because they have a long journey or have to collect children from a school that has been closed. In such cases, the time should be made up or consideration given to an [appropriate method of leave](#) (for example, annual leave, time off in lieu or carer's leave). In the event of school closures or other disruption to childcare arrangements, staff should note that it is not possible to bring children on to a university site.

- 2.5. Priority consideration should be given to disabled staff, pregnant staff and those with caring responsibilities in respect of requests to work from home or to leave early. In cases where disabled staff are unable to travel to work or use alternative transport modes as a result of their impairment, even though the site remains open, then it could be considered a reasonable adjustment that they are not withheld pay for that time. For example, disabled staff may find it more difficult navigating icy footpaths leading into one of the campuses. Line managers should ensure they discuss the specific circumstances with staff to which this applies.
- 2.6. In accordance with procedures for dealing with academic staff absence, Heads of College (or a senior nominee) are expected to make appropriate local arrangements in the event that a member of academic staff is unable to attend work, even though the site remains open.
- 2.7. In the event of adverse weather conditions, the University reserves the right to reasonably re-allocate staff who work outside or have driving duties to other tasks temporarily, in line with the grade of their post and the training that they have been provided.
- 2.8. Where a site is open, but weather conditions show signs of worsening, the University will obtain detailed reports on road and other conditions before making a decision of whether to allow staff to leave early.
- 2.9. In the event of a national or regional exceptional situation, such as the death of a Monarch (on the day of the state funeral) most staff will not be expected to attend work with the exception of those staff deemed essential (unless otherwise advised). See [section 5](#) for details.

3. Procedure – site is partially closed

- 3.1. There may be occasions where only part of a site is closed or partially operational. This may be due to a heating or water systems failure in a building for instance.
- 3.2. In this instance, unless there is an announcement to the contrary, **the site will remain open** and, wherever possible, students and staff will be relocated to other buildings. Exceptionally it may be necessary to suspend teaching at a site (which may move online or to another location), but the site will itself remain open for staff to attend for work.
- 3.3. Announcements concerning building specific closures, and any associated relocations, will be made via a senior manager and/or official university communication channels (which may be localised to staff affected). However, where

teaching is suspended, a formal university announcement will be made more widely. See [section 6](#) for details.

4. Procedure – site is closed

- 4.1. If a situation occurs where travel to work or the continuation of work at a physical site becomes dangerous or impossible, the decision may be taken by a member of the VCE to close a physical site or sites. In this case, all staff will be made aware of the decision as outlined in [section 6](#). Wherever possible staff will be expected to carry out their work from home.
- 4.2. In the event of the decision being taken to close a physical site outside normal office hours, staff should not attend for work. There is no requirement to telephone to communicate their absence. See [section 6](#) for details.
- 4.3. Where it is necessary to close a physical site during working hours, staff and students should leave as quickly as possible. Staff should ensure that all usual safety and security routines are followed. Staff should take extra care when leaving the site and travelling home in adverse weather conditions. Extra consideration should be given to disabled colleagues, particularly if they are unable to travel by their usual means and require assistance to get home.
- 4.4. There may be some circumstances where a physical site needs to close but staff and students need to remain on the site/s. In such cases the University's Major Incident procedures may be brought into effect. Staff should follow specific instructions provided at the time via a senior manager or official university communication channels.
- 4.5. Should a physical site be closed, or teaching suspended on any given day, staff should assume that it will be open as usual on the following day unless otherwise communicated.

5. Procedure - staff deemed essential during a site closure

- 5.1. In the event of a site being closed or a national or regional exceptional situation (refer to section 2.9), the University will identify staff working across the university community and campuses who could be deemed to be 'essential' to, for instance, maintain the safety and security of the site and provide essential and student services. The Director of the relevant service or Head of College (or a senior

nominee) will co-ordinate communication to all staff within their area to confirm who is deemed 'essential', depending on the particular circumstances of the closure or exceptional situation.

- 5.2. There may also be circumstances when some 'essential' staff need to be on standby to attend work. For example, when snow is forecast or in response to an IT systems issue. Colleges and Services may also need staff to attend work earlier than normal (or when they would not normally be due in) in an attempt to help prevent a site closure. The relevant Senior Manager will identify those staff required to be on standby and ascertain their availability for standby duties. Given the short notice that this may involve, the University would not compel anyone to be on standby.
- 5.3. A degree of flexibility will be required of individuals in what may be deemed to be 'essential' roles, who may be requested to work extended and/or amended hours or at an alternative location, in order to ensure continued cover of their service. Staff should keep a log of their working times and ensure they take adequate rest breaks.
- 5.4. Individuals deemed to be 'essential' should make every effort to attend their usual place of work as requested or in line with their normal working hours, even though the University is closed to all other staff. Individuals must make a personal decision as to whether it is safe or not for them to travel. Should they be prevented from attending they must notify the relevant manager by telephone as soon as is reasonably practicable.
- 5.5. If conditions worsen in an employee's home area and/or they need to leave early they should discuss their specific circumstances with an appropriate manager. If conditions render it impossible for the employee to travel home then support will be provided, appropriate to the particular circumstances, to ensure their safety and welfare.

6. Communication

- 6.1. In the event of any site closures/partial closures or any situation that will affect ability to travel to and from the campuses, the University will communicate with staff at the earliest opportunity as set out in the University's major incident communications plan.
- 6.2. In the event of a major emergency or exceptional weather conditions occurring during normal working hours when staff may be on campus and which requires a site to close, staff will be advised as appropriate to the circumstance via a senior manager or through the official university communication channels.

- 6.3. If a major emergency occurs or there is exceptionally bad weather outside normal working hours, then information about site closures will be available on the [UWE Bristol website homepage](#), usually by 6.30am. Staff due to start work prior to this time should make arrangements with their local line manager.
- 6.4. In the event of a national or regional exceptional situation (refer to section 2.9), the University will communicate as appropriate to the circumstance, via a senior manager and/or through the official university communication channels.
- 6.5. Staff unable to access the internet should contact their line manager or another relevant manager for instructions and avoid calling the University directly to make enquiries.

7. Lateness or absence

- 7.1. In the event of arriving at work late as a result of delays in public transport or poor road conditions, staff should keep their line manager informed of their situation. Staff would be expected to make up time lost or apply for an appropriate [form of leave](#). It could be considered a [reasonable adjustment](#) for disabled staff to be allowed flexibility in their working hours in such circumstances, with no reduction in their pay or annual leave entitlement. Line managers should ensure they discuss the specific circumstances with staff to which this applies.
- 7.2. In the event of an employee not being able to attend work due to a severe safety concern, the manager can use their discretion to reassign the work and agree with the employee how best to manage the situation in collaboration with [People Services](#).
- 7.3. If an employee fails to attend work without any notification due to adverse weather conditions or in the event of a national or regional exceptional situation and the site has remained open for working, the University reserves the right to treat the absence in the same way as any other unauthorised absence (refer to the University's [procedure for dealing with matters of conduct](#)).

8. Payment in the event of site closure

- 8.1. If the University declares the closure of a physical site or sites, pay will not be withheld from staff that were scheduled to attend for work at those sites although wherever possible staff will be expected to carry out their work from home.

- 8.2. Staff deemed to be in 'essential' roles (see [section 5](#)) and who, even in the event of a closure for all other staff groups, are still required to attend work will receive time off in lieu and pay for hours worked, in line with existing terms and conditions for a UWE Bristol closure day.
- 8.3. If a standby situation should be deemed necessary, those 'essential' staff on standby/on call will receive the appropriate payment in line with the relevant standby/on call policy or process.
- 8.4. Staff that are on leave (annual, maternity, sickness etc.) or where it is not their normal working day will not be entitled to additional payment or time off in lieu in the event of a site closure or national or regional exceptional situation.

9. Relevant policies and procedures

9.1. The following policies and guides may also be useful to refer to:

- [Health and Safety policy](#)
- [Carer's leave](#)
- [Annual leave](#)
- [Leave and absence collection](#)
- [Procedure for dealing with matters of conduct](#)
- [Reasonable adjustments - a guide for managers](#)
- [Standby arrangements](#)
- [IT Security Policy](#)

Appendix 1

Examples of severe weather and emergency situations

The following table gives an indication of the types of severe weather and emergency situations, along with the severity that would potentially lead to a closure of a site/s.

This list is not definitive and only acts as guidance for those making such decisions.

Conditions	Characteristics	Severity
High winds	Gale force 8 and above. Potential structural damage. Fallen trees. Flying debris. Vehicles overturned.	Evidence of flying hazards. Risk of injury to people in the open. Posts and signs uprooted. Driving is difficult. Gusts exceeding 60mph.
Heavy Snow	Accumulations on roads not cleared by salt. Visibility reduced. Blizzard rates of fall with wind. Severe wind chill. Freezing temperatures.	Accumulations above 5cm. Risk of freeze over at dusk. Attempts to clear paths not effective. Accidents occurring on site.
Ice	Sub-zero temperatures. Black Ice. Unable to control vehicles. Unable to walk safely. Salt ineffective.	Temperatures below - 8C. Salt less effective below -12C. Diesel solidifies in filters at -9C. Heating systems failing. Offices below 16C
Freezing Rain	Rain turns instantly to ice. Walking is very dangerous. Driving is very dangerous. It appears as black ice everywhere.	Risk of freeze over at dusk. Attempts to clear paths etc. not effective. Accidents occurring on site.

Severe Electrical Storms	<p>Local flooding.</p> <p>Power failures.</p> <p>Lightning strikes.</p> <p>Strong winds.</p> <p>Large hail stones.</p> <p>People at risk in the open.</p>	<p>Damage to buildings.</p> <p>Lightning strikes to people in the open.</p> <p>Flooding, overflowing drains.</p> <p>Risk of explosion.</p>
Flooding	<p>Torrential rain.</p> <p>Fast flowing water.</p> <p>Landslides / mud slides.</p> <p>Basements filling up.</p> <p>Electrical installations exposed.</p>	<p>Water entering buildings.</p> <p>Water above floor level inside.</p> <p>External floods over 6 inches</p>
Security Alerts and National or Regional Emergency Situations	<p>An event or situation which threatens serious damage to human welfare.</p> <p>An event or situation which threatens serious damage to the environment of a place in the United Kingdom</p> <p>War, or terrorism, which threatens serious damage to the security of the United Kingdom</p> <p>Bomb threat or attack</p> <p>Terrorist threat or attack</p> <p>Unrest and protests</p> <p>Death of a Monarch</p>	