

SEVERE WEATHER POLICY

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The current version is available on the Health, Safety and Wellbeing website at:
[Health, Safety and Wellbeing Policies and Procedures](#)

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1. Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to protect and safeguard staff, students, and visitors on or travelling to, or from, campuses during periods of severe or adverse weather. The policy outlines the University's response to severe weather conditions as notified through the UK Meteorological Office ("Met Office") by assessing the risk and implementing appropriate actions. Severe weather may affect normal operations or in extreme cases result in the closure of all (or some) campuses and move activity online.

2. Scope and Commencement

Severe weather can have health and safety implications and can cause significant disruption to public transportation and general services (e.g. water, electric, phone services). The University recognises that adverse weather conditions can cause staff and students to experience extremely hazardous commuting difficulties, and this can potentially be localised. The safety of our University community remains the top priority, and it is important that weather warnings are heeded and acted upon in a timely manner.

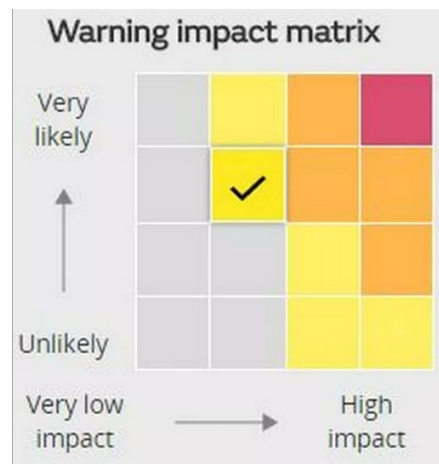
Staff and students must ensure that they do not put themselves at risk and should exercise their own judgement when making decisions to travel to and from campuses for localised yellow weather warnings. There must be regular contact with their line managers/ course directors to discuss individualised plans and implement reasonable accommodations where there may be difficulties attending campus.

This procedure outlines the University's actions in response to weather warnings and is effective from May 2025.

3. Background

The types of weather conditions giving rise to warnings that would impact on safe campus operations includes wind, rain, snow, ice, extreme heat, fog, thunderstorms, and coastal wind warnings.

The Met Office issues weather warnings with the potential to cause safety risks (risks to people, buildings, and/or infrastructure) for Northern Ireland. These warnings have a colour rating (yellow, amber, or red) based on the likelihood and severity of weather impacts. Definitions are outlined in section 4.



[What are the National Severe Weather Warning Service Impact tables? - Met Office](#)

Additional and up-to-date information for weather warnings can be obtained at:

[Weather warnings guide - Met Office](#)

[Northern Ireland weather - Met Office](#)

The University acknowledges that staff and/or students travel from the Republic of Ireland to Ulster University campus(es), and the appropriate advice from [Met Éireann - The Irish Meteorological Service](#) will be considered.

4. Definitions

Yellow Weather Warning 	‘Yellow warnings can be issued for a range of weather situations. Many are issued when it is likely that the weather will cause some low-level impacts, including some disruption to travel in a few places. Many people may be able to continue with their daily routine, but there will be some that will be directly impacted and so it is important to assess if you could be affected. Other yellow warnings are issued when the weather could bring much more severe impacts to most people but the certainty of those impacts occurring is much lower. It is important to read the content of yellow warnings to determine which weather situation is being covered by the yellow warning.’ Weather warnings guide - Met Office
Amber Weather	‘There is an increased likelihood of impacts from severe weather, which could potentially disrupt your plans. This means there is the possibility of travel delays, road and rail closures, power cuts and the potential risk to

Warning 	life and property. You should think about changing your plans and taking action to protect yourself and your property. You may want to consider the impact of the weather on your family and your community and whether there is anything you need to do ahead of the severe weather to minimise the impact.' Weather warnings guide - Met Office
Red Weather Warning 	'Dangerous weather is expected and, if you haven't already done so, you should take action now to keep yourself and others safe from the impact of the severe weather. It is very likely that there will be a risk to life, with substantial disruption to travel, energy supplies and possibly widespread damage to property and infrastructure. You should avoid travelling, where possible, and follow the advice of the emergency services and local authorities' Weather warnings guide - Met Office

5. Key Legal Requirement

The Health and Safety at Work (NI) Order 1978 (HSAWO) requires employers to fulfil their legal obligation to protect, so far as is reasonably practicable the health, safety, and welfare of their employees and those not in their employment.

The Management of Health and Safety at Work (NI) Regulations 2000 (MHSAWR) requires employers to assess risk levels and implement reasonably practicable controls.

6. Responsibilities

Please refer to the main Health, Safety and Wellbeing policy on the University's website for further details on roles and levels of responsibility using the link below:

https://www.ulster.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/125647/Health-Safety-and-Wellbeing-Policy.pdf

In the event of a weather warning being issued by the Met Office, it is the responsibility of each individual staff member, student, contractor, supplier,

or visitor to the campus to assess their safety of travelling to and from campuses. This applies to all three warning types.

Management should:

1. Ensure that their teams are familiar with this policy;
2. Inform and keep their teams updated on communication issued on behalf of the senior leadership team (“SLT”) regarding adverse weather events;
3. Treat employees in a fair, consistent manner taking account of the individual’s circumstances in a discrete manner to ensure that the safety of their employees is not compromised in any way. Managers should be mindful of disabled people, those with medical conditions, pregnant workers or those with additional caring responsibilities that may cause additional barriers to attendance at work in bad weather conditions;
4. Dependent on the weather warning and University-wide arrangements, it is important that heads of departments/faculties/schools make reasonable and proportionate risk-based decisions specific to their course/work activities to ensure the health, safety and welfare of staff and students.

As the University operates multiple, geographically dispersed campuses, this assessment relates to the campus in which an individual is, or will be, based at the time of the weather alert. If travel is planned, then the assessment should consider weather warnings on the planned route and at the planned destination. If travel is planned between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, then guidance should be sought from both the Met Office and Met Eireann.

Special considerations for all campuses are detailed in section 9.

7. University Arrangements

The below arrangements should be considered in conjunction with the guidance provided by the Met Office(s), Local Authorities and the University’s Crisis Management Plan.

Yellow Weather Warnings

In the event of a yellow warning being issued for an area based on one or more of the University campuses, Estates Services will monitor the situation, assess the safety risks and act accordingly. Schools/ Faculties and departments may also need to incorporate and communicate plans at a local level. This should continue until the warning has been lifted.

It is unlikely that a yellow warning would lead to a full closure. However some examples of reasonable adjustments to be considered for yellow weather warnings may include:

1. Relevant departments initiating salting protocols to reduce ice and remove snow;
2. All personnel using the cleared walkways and pavements, increasing their personal vigilance. Avoid areas with increased levels of ice, water, or snow;
3. Increased cleaning controls internally at entry/ exit points to reduce slip, trip and fall injuries;
4. Removing loose/ unsecure, or tying down, materials externally that can potentially blow away resulting in injuries to staff or others;
5. Permitting flexible meeting start/ end times;
6. Informing and encouraging team members, in advance of meetings, to plan their travel arrangements to reduce disruptions by taking alternative routes or alternative means of transport;
7. Assessing individual/ area-specific circumstances and if necessary, implementing appropriate local arrangements such as moving meetings/ teaching online, only where appropriate and in line with SLT advice;
8. Continuing to monitor weather warnings and being ready to implement any changes if the weather warnings are upgraded.

It may be appropriate to review relevant policies such as the hybrid and flexible working arrangements and driving for work arrangements.

Amber Weather Warnings

In the event of an amber warning being issued for an area based on one or more of the University campuses, the Vice-Chancellor or other member of the Executive Team will convene discussions to assess risks and review the advice being provided by the local authorities and the Met Office(s). Appropriate means of communication will be sent on the agreed actions as detailed in section 8 and the weather warning will continue to be assessed.

Estates Services will monitor the situation, assess the safety risks and act accordingly. Schools/ Faculties and departments may also need to incorporate and communicate additional plans at a local level following the advice being provided by the SLT.

Red Weather Warnings

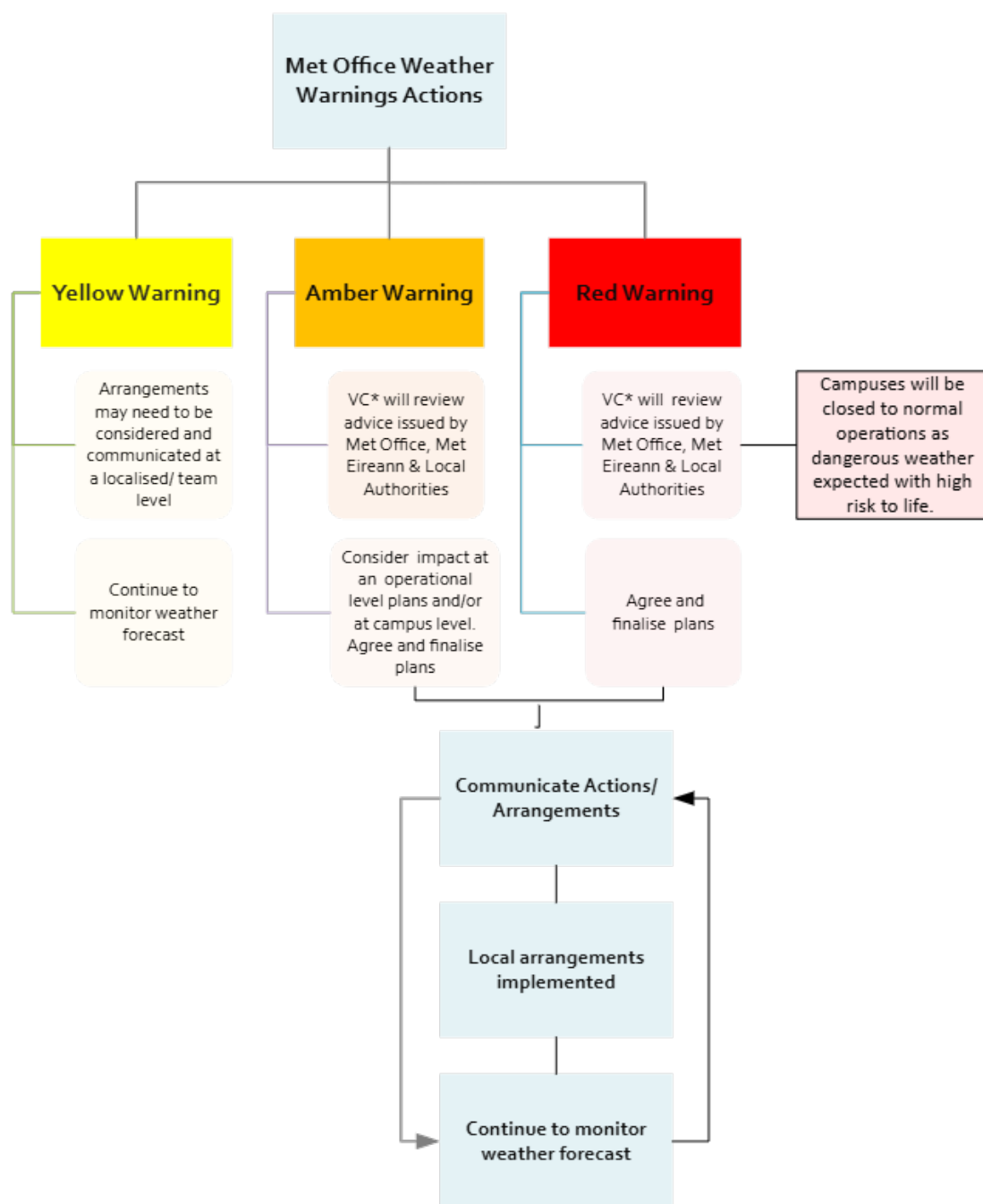
In the event of a red warning being issued for an area in which a University campus is located, the Vice-Chancellor or other member of the Executive Team will review and advise accordingly. The default position is that the campus will be closed until the warning has been lifted or downgraded to an amber or yellow weather warning, however this will be confirmed by the Vice-Chancellor or other member of the Executive Team.

Closed means that normal campus-based operations will cease and only the minimum number of staff required to safeguard the campus or maintain

critical operations and systems will be allowed access to the campus. Any essential workers remaining on campus should have management pre-approval and a comprehensive work environment risk assessment which accounts for severe weather. Essential workers should be trained on the risk assessment process and be able to undertake a dynamic risk assessment. All other non-essential work and study arrangements should remain online.

No one who is subject to the provisions of this policy should attempt to travel to, or through, any area in which a red warning applies. This may require the development and implementation of local management arrangements and procedures e.g. in the case of on-campus residences where students/guests may already be in residence when an event occurs.

These arrangements based on the weather warning issued can be summarised in the below diagram:



*Vice-Chancellor or other member of the Executive Team

8. Communication

The Met Office normally advise of warnings in advance; this may be at short notice, or the warning could be subject to change as the situation remains fluid and will need to be continually observed. The University's Executive Team will aim to provide advance notice, although employees should be mindful that communication may be at short notice due to changes provided by the Met Office.

In the unlikely event of severe weather conditions arising without a pre-warning from the Met Office, or worsening throughout the working day, the University will respond to the situation as it evolves/develops, in line with the principles of this policy, and will communicate accordingly. The normal health and safety duty of care responsibilities will continue to apply.

Internal communications will be made through a range of different platforms to include:

- Digital display screens, (where available on campuses);
- Staff and student emails;
- Insight articles and banners;
- Blackboard;
- Manager Cascades.

External communications through social media platforms will be utilised mainly for significant and/or red weather warnings.

9. Special Considerations

Dependent on the weather warning issued, special consideration should be given to high-risk areas/activities to include, but not limited to:

1. All outdoor working at height activities should be ceased in high winds. All work areas and equipment are subjected to an inspection prior to re-use by a competent person.
2. All outdoor activities need to be reviewed and possibly may need to be cancelled.
3. On the Belfast campus, access to the balconies and roof terraces should be closed.
4. For flood warnings, on the Belfast campus the flood defenses may need to be employed and in Coleraine outdoor activities near the River Bann may need to be postponed.

10. Recovery/ Aftermath Process

Once the weather warning has ended, estates service teams on each campus will conduct inspections to establish the damage to the campuses infrastructure (buildings, roads, trees, power, water, heat etc) prior to resuming full operations.

These inspections may vary in detail depending on the severity of the weather warning. For red and/or amber weather warnings appropriate action to include short – medium term repairs or ongoing closure of some areas may be required, as works may require a specialist competent contractor.

The team undertaking the inspections will be competent and trained on the risk assessment process; will be aware of the risk assessment control measures for undertaking this task; and have working knowledge of the completion of a dynamic risk assessment.

The Risk Assessment procedure can be found at: [Risk Assessment](#).

Severe weather can cause significant damage, and although the storm warning will have ended, it remains everyone's responsibility to ensure their health, safety and welfare before leaving their home, whilst travelling and arriving onto the campuses. Any unsafe conditions on campus should be reported via the Invida portal.

[Post storm advice - working with fallen or damaged trees | Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland](#)

11. Useful tips and external contacts

The Met office has issued helpful advice to help everyone be prepared for the weather. This can be found at:

[Top tips to be WeatherReady - Met Office](#)

[WeatherReady - Met Office](#)

[How to get your home and property winter ready - Met Office](#)

[Driving safely in winter weather - Met Office](#)

[Carbon Monoxide Dangers from heating appliances and generators used indoors | Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland](#)

[Safety Tips – Using a portable generator in an emergency | Health and Safety Executive for Northern Ireland](#)

Take note of the below emergency contact details and save these in your phone.

Emergency numbers

Emergency services 999 or 112	NI Gas emergency service 0800 002 001
Flooding Incident Line 0300 2000 100	NI Water 03457 440 088
NI Electricity Networks 03457 643 643	Housing Executive 03448 920 901

nidirect.gov.uk

Republic of Ireland Emergency contact can be found at: [gov.ie -
Emergency contacts](https://gov.ie/emergency-contacts)

12. Questions and Answers (Q&A)

There are external communications from MET office/local authorities in advance of a weather warning, as a manager what are my responsibilities?

1. Communicate the weather warning to everyone in your team;
2. Review the advice being provided by the MET office and/ or local authorities;
3. Consider the local impact on your team;
4. Review meetings/events that have been arranged on this day.
Implement appropriate control measures to ensure the safety of team members.

It is important to remember that internal communications for weather warnings will only be announced for higher risk weather warnings (amber or red warnings). Localised departmental planning is still required for yellow weather warnings.

For higher risk weather warnings, management should continue to engage with their teams and follow the advice/ announcement provided by local authorities and through the SLT.

What if an employee has reported to their manager that, due to weather conditions, they are unable to travel to campus?

Managers should be familiar, and remain updated, with the weather warning information, including the safety advice issued by the local authorities and/ or the SLT, where applicable, and the affected locations of the weather warning. Managers are advised to consider individual circumstances, be consistent in how they treat everyone, explaining reasons behind their decisions and keeping in communication with their teams.

Internal Communication Contacts

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