HE in a Changing World:
Adapting in a Time of Crisis
October // 2020
When lockdown was announced in March 2020, higher education institutions in Wales were faced with a huge issue - how could they continue to provide high quality education and support, while not being able to open their doors to the majority of students? Universities provide so much more than just teaching, including providing accommodation, social activities and supporting students through difficult times.

Many of those students and colleagues at institutions faced huge obstacles themselves, going through periods of illness, self-isolation, financial pressures or the loss of a loved one.

The case studies in this document are a snapshot of how universities adapted at significant pace, providing innovative ideas for learners based in Wales, the UK and globally. Some of the examples provided sustainable results to a whole variety of problems for other parts of education and society.

Their hard work resulted in significant change for the higher education sector, some of which, I know, are planned to become permanent. I’d like to thank our colleagues at Welsh universities for all the hard work that took place during the initial lockdown period.

These case studies show how adaptable our higher education sector is in overcoming challenges to benefit their staff, students and our wider civic. I’m proud of how our sector in Wales has faced those issues and succeeded.

Kirsty Williams MS
Minister for Education
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Girls into Geoscience is an outreach initiative designed to inspire the next generation of female scientists by showcasing the vast array of careers and further study opportunities in geology, geography, and environmental sciences.

Dr Marie Busfield from the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at Aberystwyth University is the founder of Girls into Geoscience Wales.

The flagship event was launched in 2014 by Dr Sarah Boulton and Dr Jodie Fisher at the University of Plymouth, and has since seen the launch of sister initiatives GiG Scotland led by Dr Amanda Owen at the University of Glasgow, and GiG Ireland led by Elspeth Wallace at the Irish Centre for Research in Applied Geosciences (iCRAG).

All four GiG initiatives were faced with the difficult decision of having to cancel their in-person events this year amidst the pandemic, but this created an exciting new opportunity to work together for the first virtual event of its kind.

As a result, participants this year benefited from talks, workshops, and virtual field trips run by over 45 leading women in geoscience.

Dr Marie Busfield from the Department of Geography and Earth Sciences at Aberystwyth University commented:

“I was really excited to launch GiG Wales in 2020 and showcase our fantastic local geology and geomorphology here in Aberystwyth, but Covid-19 had other ideas. Whilst I was disappointed to cancel the event this year, being able to combine forces with the established sister events in England, Scotland and Ireland means we were able to offer an outstanding and incredibly varied programme, and we’re delighted so many young women attended.”

Dr Busfield added: “The really exciting thing about the virtual event was the sheer number and range of contributions we could offer. We have women in geological engineering and science communication, volcanologists and glaciologists, specialists in earthquakes and green energy solutions. It really gave us a chance to show just how broad this discipline is and introduce participants to experts and study sites from all over the world.”
Promoting student performances with online festivals and platforms

Digital innovation during the lockdown

Using digital platforms, students were able to continue with their studies in the performance arts during the lockdown.

Final year students in the Department of Theatre Film and Television Studies presented the fruits of their creative work in a brand new online two-day festival of original performances and short films. The work of drama and theatre students was shown in the Finals Festival through Facebook Live, Instagram Live and YouTube. The digital event gave students a chance to experiment with new methods and techniques. Creative art students at Aberystwyth University’s School of Art produced a pioneering online ‘Freedom in Isolation’ exhibition of work created in response to the Covid-19 lockdown, including writing, drawing, acting, and object response workshops.

The exhibition was live streamed over 24 hours and included student-to-student interviews, discussions with guests, panel discussions, individual projects including film screenings, performances and student-led workshops.

Dr Louise Ritchie is a Lecturer in Theatre and Performance. She said: “The final year showcase on campus is certainly a highlight in the calendar but the Covid-19 pandemic meant that the event couldn’t go ahead in its usual format this year. Instead, the students experimented with new approaches and ways of sharing their pieces by hosting the Finals Festival online.

“The determination of these students to re-imagine their performances under such difficult circumstances has been remarkable and we are thankful that we have been able to celebrate their achievements despite the impact of the pandemic.”

Miranda Whall, Director of Creative Arts and lecturer in Creative Arts and fine art, explained: “Throughout lockdown, the creative arts students have been leading some amazing online workshops responding to the situation we found ourselves in. These have included a wide range of creative arts, including writing, drawing, acting, and object response workshops.”

“The live streamed ‘Freedom in Isolation’ exhibition marked the culmination of this group work, individual projects by creative arts students, along with two Fine Art students, and my own project.”

The University used digital platforms to ensure that students could continue with their studies in the performance arts. Students of drama and theatre studies were supported with a digital two-day festival of original performances and short films, and art students benefitted from a live streamed online art exhibition.
Promoting women’s development in computer science

Computer science conference for women held during lockdown

The UK’s leading conference for women undergraduates in computing moved its entire programme online due to the coronavirus pandemic.

Organised by staff from the Department of Computer Science at Aberystwyth University working alongside colleagues from other UK universities, the BCS Lovelace Colloquium takes its name from the mathematician Ada King, Countess of Lovelace, who is known as the world’s first computer programmer.

Now in its 12th year, the one-day conference brings together women students, senior women in technology and employers.

This year, facing the rapidly evolving Covid-19 crisis, and just four weeks before the conference was due to be held at Stirling University, the organisers made the decision to instead host a virtual event.

The online conference took place on 8 April 2020, with over 200 people joining the event for part or all of the day. A number of different technologies and platforms were used in order to facilitate talks, chat, networking and posters, and accommodate the large number of participants.

The programme included six technical talks and 45 student poster presentations ranging from “Help, a robot took my job!” to “Next day delivery healthcare”, infectious disease tracking, formal grammars and emotional AI chatbots.

Dr Helen Miles, a lecturer in the Department of Computer Science at Aberystwyth University, and chair of the event said, “Women undergraduates in computing are currently a minority, and we hold this annual event to boost their confidence, build their networks and support their ambitions, and thereby retain their upcoming skills for the future. We were determined to make this year’s event work, despite the challenges we faced. We are so grateful to all those who ‘attended’ and made it such a fantastic event. I think Ada Lovelace, who imagined the future of computers back in 1843, would have been fascinated to see such a gathering take place online.”
As with many universities across the globe, Bangor University has moved from an emergency response to Covid–19 to mobilising high-quality blended learning delivery for September 2020.

In response to the Covid-19 crisis, in early May 2020, a series of six turn-around projects were initiated by Bangor University’s Pro-Vice Chancellor for Learning and Teaching to mobilise and prepare for blended learning delivery in September 2020, with the overarching goal of ensuring continued high-quality curriculum provision and a positive student experience.

The six projects had the cross-cutting themes of: inclusion, equality and diversity, health and well-being, and co-production. The staff and student training project brought together staff from the School, directors of teaching and learning, members of the students’ union, learning technologists, staff from the Centre for Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (CELT), as well as those with responsibility for study skills, disability services, HR, Canolfan Bedwyr and Bangor UCU (University and College Union). This membership allowed both the sharing of expertise and the opportunity for the training to develop organically and become embedded across the University within a bilingual context.

Building from recommendations provided by the other turn-around projects (e.g., research informed pedagogies), external guidance (e.g. QAA Building a Taxonomy for Digital Learning, AdvanceHE workshops), and a staff online teaching and learning survey, the team developed a three themes to inform its strategy and training portal for preparing staff to succeed with blended learning delivery: practical pedagogical (e.g., developing online learning communities) and personal (e.g. well-being).

The innovative portal, which uses intellectual capital rather than off the shelf training, provides thematic guides, for example accessibility, top-tips, learning technology, and draws from a database of resources and provides a flexible structure. The portal allows users to explore the materials through pedagogical themes, to go directly to practical tutorials, or to consider the impact and management of blended learning to enhance both their own and students’ needs and well-being.

In addition, a series of research-informed webinars is broadening the training’s impact and the embedding of blended learning pedagogical principles across the University, with the webinars recorded for wider accessibility.

This collaborative, whole-university approach has helped to develop a training programme that is needs-based, scaled and sustainable, with resources being added regularly, and one that continues to gain momentum.

A webinar attendee said, “These sessions really are immensely useful in helping us get started with what seems to be an overwhelming task.”

Another attendee said, “Generally speaking, I’d like to add a plea to continue this format of webinar and to have more things like this in future summers. All too often we have training at a time we are teaching - this has really allowed us to learn new tools to plan ahead to the next semesters modules. The fact they are recorded means it’s possible to catch up when convenient. Every August we should have a webinar series!”
Staying in touch with students during lockdown

Enlisting staff volunteers to check on students who may have been isolated or alone during the original lockdown period

Cardiff University’s Student Check-In Service was critical to staying in touch with students during social distancing, preventing feelings of loneliness and detachment from the University community. The service is part of the University’s wider response strategy, which is a collaborative effort involving teams from across the University and the students’ union.

Between March and April 2020 a volunteer-led Student Check-in Service was established. Created and launched in less than two weeks, close to 300 staff supported the service in addition to their substantive roles. It allowed Cardiff to let its students know they are there for them by providing a regular friendly call, which has been highly valued.

Staff from all areas of the University, including academic and professional services staff, made 9,000 calls to students who registered with the service and told the University that they were living or staying in Cardiff. Students used online forms to explain their circumstances, any underlying health conditions, any symptoms of coronavirus and where they were. Of those remaining in Cardiff, an estimated 7,500 to 8,000 were initially prioritised by the service.

Volunteer staff called students using Skype, phones and Microsoft Teams to engage students from home. They were supplied with online training and scripts, developed in collaboration with the counselling and crisis intervention teams, to help volunteers recognise and manage students who may have been displaying unusual behaviour.

With its own reporting framework, management information and risk assessment data protection processes, it also allowed the University to monitor and respond to trends in student issues and needs. In developing the service, the change management team highlighted the importance of bringing together a diverse range of skillsets within the team and having an agile approach to the process, while maintaining strong control around governance, risk and consent.

Professor Colin Riordan, Vice-Chancellor, Cardiff University said, “We’ve had a great response. Some of it is really just about showing students there are human beings here and we are doing everything we can to support them.”

Although the Student Check-in Service closed following the end of the academic year, the service may restart should our students be on campus and under another local or national lockdown.
A new self-regulating community commitment for all staff and students

The health, safety, and wellbeing of staff and students are Cardiff University’s priorities.

“It is an unprecedented time to be part of the Cardiff University community. The global coronavirus pandemic means that now, more than ever, we all work to support each other, to behave appropriately and with consideration, and to intervene when we see others failing to uphold the behaviour and standards of the University – respect, courtesy and consideration. Our new community commitment is crucial to this.”

As a University, Cardiff believes that they all have a responsibility to treat one another with respect, courtesy and consideration. The University is committed to offering a welcoming, inclusive and safe environment.

Building on this, Cardiff are asking everyone at the University to adopt its community commitment. It is being widely shared with both staff and students, and features in its new online orientation for new students.

Applying the commitment, the University’s approach will be to ask its staff and student community to self-regulate in a respectful manner and hold each other to account to ensure that all follow the requirements and show respect to those that are exempt (e.g. from wearing a face covering).

The commitment makes clear that concerns should be raised in an open, positive and respectful manner. These principles should be at the core of all interactions. Should it be required, a range of measures are also available to staff and students should they feel they must escalate their concerns.

Simon Wright, Academic Registrar said, “Our new University community commitment is a key part of the measures we are putting in place ahead of the new academic year. We will ask everyone to play their part, to help keep one another safe, and to uphold the behaviour and standards of our University - respect, courtesy and consideration.”

The community commitment was launched in August and is currently being shared with staff, students and the wider community.
A new approach to student orientation, enrolment and induction

Using digital technologies and revising established procedures to reassure and welcome students back to campus

Cardiff University is making a number of key changes to its Student Enrolment process in order to minimise face-to-face contact and support its safety measures including, for the first time, allowing UK students to collect their ID cards at the same time as their room key if they are staying in campus accommodation.

Cardiff’s online dedicated Student Orientation platform provides a consistent, high quality resource for new students using video and other content. It provides capacity to use dedicated information channels for undergraduate and postgraduate students and to monitor and encourage engagement. In addition, Cardiff’s new Student Enquiry Manager, Student Connect, provides easy, remote access to common enquiries. It is powered by bot technology, which learns answers to frequently asked questions and is available to students 24/7. This was prioritised for a rapid release given its utility during social distancing, opening to students in August.

Cardiff have also made changes to their International student UK arrival and ground transfer. To help ensure international students are safely welcomed, the University have expanded their offer of coach collection from major UK airports to all students joining them from overseas. Should students need to quarantine upon their arrival, the University will provide them with welcome packs including bedding, food and kitchen essentials.

The University has not asked international students to arrive early, and will allocate students to the rooms they would usually live in after any required quarantine period has passed.

In recognition of the concerns some students may have prior to arriving on campus, Cardiff University have revised several key processes to ensure they offer greater reassurance, minimise face-to-face contact and support wider safety measures.
Cardiff Met provided safety and home comforts

A home from home

On the front line throughout lockdown, ensuring the safety and well-being of students and emergency service key workers living on campus.

Throughout lockdown, Cardiff Met has supported students who continued to live on campus.

Around 60 students, including international students unable to return home due to travel restrictions and care leavers who consider Cardiff Met to be their home remained on campus, in University residence. Supporting both their physical and emotional well-being needs, the Halls team provided catering services, food supplies from the University store cupboards, and a range of online and socially distant activities through an online spin-off of the award-winning Met Res Life programme.

As well as students, the Halls team provided shelter to local NHS key workers and officers from South Wales Police unable to return home due to shielding and isolation restrictions.

Additionally, the University and Halls team made safe spaces available for staff, students and members of the community facing the threat of domestic abuse exacerbated by lockdown.

It has been vital to continue to provide a safe and secure environment, along with pastoral care, to ensure that peoples well-being is maintained. Regularly communicating with students and dropping off supplies not only enabled the Halls team to check on their welfare, but also provided an opportunity for a socially distanced catch-up which for some was the only interaction they may have had.

Lisa Ah-Mun, Halls Manager said, “It’s the small things that make a big difference - like being gifted Easter eggs to give out at Easter! Students and their parents have been very grateful and happy that the University is looking after them – but for me, it’s this caring attitude that runs throughout our Cardiff Met community and I feel lucky to have been able to come into work and continue with my role”

This service to students and key workers is ongoing throughout the summer and will continue as long as it is required.
Helping the home-schoolers

Cardiff Met student teachers launched a weekly home-school programme to help parents

When 30 PGCE students were told that their placements would end prematurely because of Covid-19, they felt compelled to use their own teaching and learning experiences to do something to help all of those parents who were expected to become teachers overnight.

The group devised an innovative weekly programme of activities designed for Key Stage 3 learners that ranged from English to physics. Learners had the opportunity to conduct experiments using household items as well as a range of weekly activities that could be undertaken by parents with their children.

The group appealed to friends and peers with a view to creating well-rounded tools and resources for parents, including advice on how to make healthy eating choices at home and keep active during lockdown, both of which are crucial to the health and well-being of children and parents.

This easy to access interactive programme was well-received by parents and added an element of fun to learning which helped them keep their children engaged.

Students from Cardiff Met’s School of Education and Social Policy came together to create a free home-school programme for parents affected by the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

Julia Longville, Dean of the School of Education and Social Policy said: “I’m so proud of the initiative shown by this group of students. In these unprecedented times, when our traditional programme has been suspended, it is humbling to see this drive and passion to continue to educate. Teachers are often...”
Physical activity plays an important part in the student experience at Cardiff Met, and when Covid-19 forced facilities to close, the University’s MetActive team rose to the challenge, developing a range of fun and innovative on-line programmes to keep the community active at home during lockdown.

From beginner’s guides to high intensity circuit sessions and mind and body awareness yoga classes, Cardiff Met’s MetActive and Sport Cardiff teams have been helping keep the community active during lockdown – at no cost.

Recognising the importance of physical fitness on emotional health and wellbeing, these two teams quickly moved online to continue to engage in projects that supported people staying active. Classes that were face-to-face were held via Zoom or Twitter enabling the team to reach out further into the community than ever before. The team was constantly looking to revise its offering to give more flexibility and offered live streaming classes as well as on-demand via YouTube.

MetActive and Sport Cardiff’s #INNERSTRENGTH programme that supports inactive teenage girls with their physical and mental well-being moved online with girls accessing weekly classes that included well-being workshops from home.

Working with Tŷ Canna, the ‘Mind the Gap’ project that helps adults with mental health conditions keep active, also moved online and had a “positive impact on users’ health and well-being” at a time when there was a great risk of them becoming disengaged and isolated.

Not forgetting about the importance of family fun, the team developed a series of 30 games that the whole family could play together. The ‘Family Fun at Home’ campaign released on social media showed how games could be played by using everyday household items without the need for specialist sports equipment.

Ben O’Connell, Director of Sport said, “Studies show that there is a significant increase in positive mood and outlook after exercise and very early on in lockdown it became clear that our students, staff and community were in need of some motivation, and I am proud of the way that the MetActive and Sport Cardiff teams rose to the challenge in such an inspiring way.”

It is hoped that the University will be in a position to get back to face-to-face activity soon but until such time as that is possible, MetActive will continue encouraging the community to become active via its online classes.

It’s not just about PE with Joe!

Cardiff Met keeps the community moving during lockdown

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More info
MetActive YouTube channel
Family Fun at Home online
Supporting furloughed workers with free e-learning resources

Providing free online learning to workers on furlough to be able to upskill, reskill, and maintain well-being during lockdown.

The Open University in Wales worked with Welsh Government through Working Wales to provide free e-learning resources for workers who had been placed on furlough. This meant that they were able to keep learning – brushing up on existing skills and knowledge or learning entirely new things – and allowed them to maintain their well-being and good mental health.

When the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme was introduced in March 2020, many businesses in Wales took the opportunity to place workers on furlough, which meant that a large number of people were to be stuck at home during lockdown with little to keep their minds active.

It was at this time that The Open University in Wales began working with Working Wales – part of the Welsh Government’s Economy Department – to provide online learning resources targeted at furloughed workers through free online learning platform, OpenLearn.

In the immediate term, this initiative gave those people a way of using learning to maintain their well-being and mental health and build confidence during what was undoubtedly an extremely challenging and worrying time.

It also gave them the opportunity to upskill and reskill in a wide range of areas. We expected at the time, that the economy would suffer a significant hit as a result of the pandemic, and this would mean job losses. So, in the medium and longer term, the Open University gave people the opportunity to access advice and guidance, enhance their skillset and knowledge, and to be prepared for what may lay ahead.

Louise Casella, Director of The Open University in Wales, said, “Over the past few months, we’ve seen people turning to The Open University’s wide range of online learning resources as a way to brush up old skills, learn new ones, and to maintain their well-being during lockdown.”

Ken Skates MS, Minister for Economy, Transport and North Wales, speaking during the Flexible Essential Skills project celebration event, said, “I would like to particularly thank The Open University for offering such a broad range of free training opportunities during the course of this crisis; working with training and education providers the length and breadth of Wales, and I very much look forward to learning about the fruits of this endeavour.”

Amy James, furloughed audiologist, Cardiff, who used the free e-learning resources while on furlough, said, “There’s so much choice on there. I’ve been thinking about one of the management courses next, but for now I’m focusing on improving my personal finance knowledge. Everyone will find something that they’re interested in. I’ve only been doing this for two weeks now, and I’ve already got one of my friends doing a course on there.”

Although the furlough scheme will come to an end, OpenLearn will continue to act as a hub for free online learning in a wide range of areas and levels. It is hoped that people will continue to access the Open University’s free learning, and more formal learning, in order to continue learning throughout life.
Supporting teachers with the pivot to online teaching

First-of-its-kind partnership with Cardiff Council to help Cardiff’s teachers to continue providing education during school closures

This is the first project of its kind in Wales which saw the OU work in partnership with Cardiff Council to share its expertise in distance and online learning to support teachers to continue teaching despite school closures.

The OU provided support, advice and training to teachers to successfully implement distance learning. Delivered through an online seminar, the University covered a series of areas to help teachers find the most effective ways to approach online learning and deliver the best learning outcomes for primary and secondary age pupils. This partnership was considered to be part of the University’s efforts as a member of The Cardiff Commitment, Cardiff Council’s initiative to bring the public and private sectors together, working to connect young people to the range of opportunities available in the world of work.

The idea of this partnership also extended beyond Cardiff’s teachers, and included work with charities to provide training to volunteers, as well as the University’s support for furloughed workers. Louise Casella, Director of The Open University in Wales said, “The sudden closure of schools across Wales has created an increased demand for online teaching methods, which is why we’re pleased to have been able to put this partnership in place with Cardiff Council so quickly. We’re proud to be a part of The Cardiff Commitment, and we look forward to working with Cardiff Council and employers over the coming months to help more young people in work and show them the benefits of lifelong learning.”

Cllr Sarah Merry, Cabinet Member for Education, Employment and Skills, Cardiff Council: “This is a unique and challenging time for everyone, particularly our children and young people whose lives have changed drastically following the closure of schools.”

“With disruption to routine and the decrease of social interaction with friends, it is even more important that they continue to be provided with education and learning opportunities wherever possible.”

“This latest forward thinking initiative will aim to provide a platform so that the city’s teachers can access the resources and knowledge required, to enable them to continue to teach during the current health crisis.”

The Open University intends to build on this partnership by working to develop a new, Wales-wide peer-to-peer training resource for teachers, to share scholarship in online pedagogy and support their continuous professional development.
Growing Comms Phase 2: Growing Regional Outputs With Innovative Next Generation Communications

HE/FE partnership using next generation communication tools to enhance regional cross-institutional collaboration in a time of crisis.

After a successful first phase, further funding was allocated to continue Growing Comms with a focus on supporting partners through the Covid-19 crisis. This support came in the form of online-based CPD training for staff, equipment to support new teaching approaches, as well as student and industry engagement.

The success of Growing Comms and the need for HE and FE to support each other through the Covid-19 crisis with a necessary shift to online-based teaching approaches and activities were the rationales behind funding this second phase.

• Swansea University’s virtual reality team delivered introductory VR courses (CPD) online to HE/FE staff during lockdown. The courses enabled them to create their own VR material for teaching. Further session(s) are scheduled and will be open to local HE, FE and businesses. These courses enable innovative ways of communication and teaching, improve student engagement, and allow the transfer of technology to businesses.

• Partners have been sharing best practice between FE/HE and are determining and testing optimal equipment setups for each case. This includes consideration of teaching staff creating content from home, streaming from a classroom and streaming practical work. Not only did this support the shift to online learning, but also improved communication between students and teaching staff, and provided a new method of engaging students.

• Swansea will also be distributing a number of University-employer talks to FE colleges across Wales, offering them a first contact with local employers.

Noémi Hilaireau, Growing Comms Project Manager said, “Being a successful HE/FE partnership promoting the use of new communication and collaboration tools, Growing Comms allows to share best practice, trial digital equipment, offer online training and activities to facilitate the shift to online-based learning. This collaboration is providing inspiring solutions and much needed support during the Covid-19 crisis.”

Paul Holland, Dean of Educational Technology at Swansea University said, “Collaborative learning is the future and can lead to more connected communities. It means we can collaborate more effectively with local further education colleges and be more aligned, helping students through their education journey. It also helps them to work in teams with different skillsets – as they will need to in their future careers.”

By December 2020, further sessions of the VR course will have been delivered, guidance about equipment supporting online delivery made available, as well as online taster courses for future undergraduates.

More info
Getting connected for Education 4.0
https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/getting-connected-for-education-40-04-nov-2019

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How lecturers are using multi-format online platforms to maintain interactive classes and learning environments in response to Covid-19

Using online platforms such as Wacom Intuos Tablet, Microsoft OneNote and Zoom, that combine different teaching formats including live streaming, online ‘whiteboard’, presentations and ‘chat’ functions, Dr Salim maintained an interactive learning environment for students during lockdown.

Using interactive learning platforms to ensure continuity of engagement in the visual and hands-on subject of engineering

In response to Covid-19 and the disparate location of students nationally and internationally, Dr Salim used interactive methods to continue teaching important engineering topics to students.

Dr Salim used the Wacom Intuos Tablet, Microsoft One Note and Zoom platforms to enable students to participate while they learn, creating a more engaging environment than a simple web conference style lecture.

The platforms provided tools to annotate, demonstrate mathematic problem solving and electronically record lectures that could be uploaded for students to access later. Meanwhile, text chat plus reactions allowed students to interact and provide feedback throughout the sessions.

The use of online platforms is important to ensure that students can continue their learning, particularly with a visual and hands-on subject such as engineering.

Dr Salim said on delivering lectures online, “It allowed continuity of learning despite the disruptions caused by Covid-19. I don’t see it as a complete substitute for face-to-face learning, but could be a very effective complement.”

This interactive, online style of teaching will be important for non-contact teaching that will continue, alongside face-to-face teaching, in response to the challenges of Covid-19.

More info
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Engineering at Swansea University
On the ground and online:

delivering schools science outreach for widening access, through lockdown

A mixed methods approach to delivering university-led STEM outreach to schools through lockdown.

As Swansea University’s Science for Schools Scheme, S4, was no longer able to deliver hands-on science workshops on campus, the University created a mixed-method way of continuing creative, curiosity-driving STEM outreach using both online and printed resources, delivering through a variety of different platforms.

Tackling digital poverty and maintaining engagement with widening access support programmes were key priorities during lockdown. Swansea University was in constant contact with its partner schools, working with them to deliver continued STEM and HE outreach support.

The University created a mixed-method approach to continue delivery using both online and printed resources, which were distributed to schools and hubs. This mixed method allowed Swansea to maximise the range of learners it was able to communicate with.

Online content in the form of live lessons and hands-on experiments, as well as science classes were produced by outreach tutors and presented by Lizzie Daly and were shared on the University’s website with worksheets, answer sheets and contacts for feedback. Critically, partner schools were able to share this content via their own online class sessions, with S4 set up as a Trusted Partner on the school’s education platform Hwb.

Visitor numbers increased substantially when the University launched online content on its website.

Professor Mary Gagen, co-runner of the S4 programme said: “We knew that lockdown and school closures risked enhancing the education inequalities that learners in Wales face, and we were keen for our STEM outreach programme to work hard to counter that. Our team worked tirelessly to support our partner schools to continue offering university outreach and together we created a brand new way of delivering outreach, in just under 4 weeks from the start of lockdown.”

Swansea University is exploring options for delivering STEM outreach outdoors, looking at delivering sessions at local science and nature sites, and providing Geoscience Trails and live lessons for the Swansea Science Festival this autumn.

More info
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Enabling students to continue to learn by creating access to digital resources via re-purposed kit

Distributing recycled iMacs and loaning laptops to students on a long-term basis

When the University of South Wales moved to remote provision in March 2020, the IT department worked hard to ensure that no student was disadvantaged. Students who had been reliant on University laptops and PCs were provided with recycled and refurbished equipment so that they could continue to work remotely.

The University realised that some students did not have access to devices that they could use to learn and sought to quickly put suitable solutions in place.

With a limited availability of new stock from suppliers and cost implications, purchasing all new devices was not an option. The University of South Wales was creative in looking at recycling pre-used USW iMacs so that students who were working off-campus could easily use them.

This was innovative as they needed to develop a new working image beyond what they had previously used on iMacs. These devices were chosen as they had wifi built in, which meant that they were easy to set up when students received them. Recycling and refurbishing these devices stretched their lifecycle, presenting not only an innovative solution but also a sustainable approach to addressing an unexpected need.

During the initial few weeks of lockdown, almost 200 devices were issued to students, and to some staff, so that they could continue to work and study remotely. The University worked with staff in faculties to help identify which students needed devices and to prioritise those who were most in need.

The logistics and delivery was managed by a small team of staff from across USW, with couriers being used for particularly long distance deliveries.

Megan Elliott, PhD student, said, “The process of organising and delivering was successful and effective, everything that I needed came with the iMac and it was easy to set up. Compared to colleagues in other universities who are all using their personal devices, I am very impressed with USW providing this service.”

USW are looking at how they can support new students who will be starting at the University in September, if they are unable to access suitable devices or internet connection, to help with their approach to blended learning for the next term.
Starting university during lockdown

Supporting a cohort of nursing students who enrolled at USW in March 2020 during the height of the Covid-19 pandemic

Nursing is a profession based upon values of care and compassion, which takes place within a social context. The group of students who started in March 2020 began their course remotely which presented challenges in terms of building a group identity and developing social interaction and communication skills.

The course team and students collectively embraced these challenges and the student group demonstrated a degree of professionalism and empathy which surpassed the levels the University would normally see from new students. These new ways of working developed teaching and learning skills and will become core features of future delivery.

As part of their course, the students learn at the University’s Clinical Simulation Centre, which replicates clinical environments for healthcare education and training. They use the same equipment that would be found in healthcare settings, and work on patient simulators that mimic the body’s reactions to illness, care and treatment.

When the students started their course, the UK was in lockdown and all of the learning needed to be conducted virtually. The course team made sure that they took the time to introduce the students to each other and their lecturers.

They gave a comprehensive overview of the course and what they would be learning, as well as taking the time to explain the comprehensive support that is available to students at the University.

Regular two-way communication was imperative for this to be done successfully with formal delivery as well as informal coffee catch-ups being offered for students to take part in.

As lockdown measures were eased and following a thorough risk assessment by USW, which included students undertaking personal risk assessments, students started skills-based activities within the Simulation Centre in small groups. Safety measures were put in place such as social distancing guidelines, and students and staff were asked to wear masks. Students fed back that they felt safe because of the measures taken by staff.

USW prides itself on the support it provides to students on its nursing degrees, both practically and emotionally. Every student has a personal student and module supervisor, and during clinical placements students are fully supported by a qualified nurse who acts as a mentor.

University of South Wales
Prifysgol De Cymru
First year nursing students who joined USW in March 2020, during lockdown:

Aston Nicholls, said, “The delivery of remote learning has been well organised and thorough and the lecturers have ensured that a wide variety of teaching methods and platforms have been used to ensure a great learning experience and not a ‘send and read’ scenario, that so many of us thought may happen. Some students have found it more challenging than others, being at home and trying to learn. However, support has been on hand from personal tutors and we have been signposted in the right direction if we have needed further support.”

Rosalie Jones, said, “Having set modules and schedules keeps me focused and I feel I have achieved something at the end of each day. The support mechanism from tutors is amazing and in turn they encourage peer support, so you’re not actually ‘alone.’ The willingness to help comes across and you never feel you cannot speak to anyone. The live sessions are the highlight, where we can interact with others and feel as though we are in a lecture room, but in the comfort of our homes with a coffee.”

Kirsty Hughes said, “From day one, we have weekly personal tutor group meetings, live lectures, pre-recorded lectures, even a weekly coffee and catch up with our course leaders to check in on how our week has been and how we are doing. Knowing we are starting our studies in these unprecedented circumstances, I feel, has really pulled us together to ensure this new way of studying not only succeeds for us but potentially for future cohorts.”

Caitlin Richards said, “Studying Nursing at University virtually...my first thought was this cannot be done. How can a practical and people-based course be taught online? USW has made this happen. Where possible, our lectures are live with our professors talking to us from their own homes. I feel we will have a better bond with our professors and other cohorts on the other side of lockdown as we are all helping each other.”

USW will be using what was learned from inducting its March cohort virtually to induct its cohort in September. The first term will consist of a blended approach with the new students attending campus for clinical skills, while the remainder will be a mix of synchronous and asynchronous learning.

The University learned from the March intake that the students liked the live sessions that were provided rather than recorded, and that they also liked the weekly coffee mornings built in as a link to the course team. This helped make USW accessible and approachable.

More info
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Providing consistent high standards of learning for all USW students

The USW DEAL (Digitally Enabled Active Learning) provides a consistent baseline to all its learners to manage expectations, wherever and however they are studying.

A USW DEAL implementation framework and guidance has been helping staff to review their September 2020 provision in the context of an agreed set of principles. A range of resources and staff development support has been complementing implementation activities. This is to ensure that all students are receiving consistent standards of delivery, no matter how they are studying.

USW is offering blended learning for September to December 2020, with a mixture of on-campus and digital learning. This blended learning approach will ensure that students continue to receive good experiences and high-quality education.

The USW DEAL offer provides resilience to courses to accommodate remote learning, on-campus return in some form, and future events that may necessitate the closure or restricted opening of campuses.

The USW DEAL is underpinned by principles for accessible and inclusive learning, including building social learning communities, facilitating enquiry over instruction, supporting high-quality personal interactions, offering challenging active learning opportunities and making progress visible to learners as they develop, as well as working with students as partners.

Staff are adapting their pedagogy, resources, and learning facilitation activities and tools for the digitally enabled environment. Embedding equality, diversity and inclusion into the design and delivery of the curriculum, courses and assessment methods remains at the core of what USW offers. A comprehensive framework has enabled staff to plan for their delivery for the next term in a consistent manner, where students can be assured that they will continue to receive high quality learning interactions, no matter what course they are studying or how they are studying.

While the framework sets out minimum expectations, there is an understanding that some courses have needed to adjust their offer to comply with professional statutory regulator body requirements. A procedure was implemented to enable the decision-making processes for such adjustments to be tracked.

Lyndsey Muir, a member of USW’s Centre for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching and one of the tutor team who has been supporting staff as they plan next academic year’s courses, advised that she has seen how enthused staff have been by the opportunities enabled by the DEAL framework.

Lyndsey said, “The DEAL framework utilises USW’s existing pedagogy, which values social learning and learner sense of identity and belonging in HE. What has been invaluable is how, in the DEAL environment, we can ensure opportunities for tutor presence and for learners to build connections with each other and with their course team.”

The DEAL framework is increasingly being seen by USW staff as a design model that will enable them to deliver creative and quality blended learning opportunities for students beyond the current pandemic as part of the challenge-based curriculum.
Creating digital performances during lockdown

Using digital solutions to allow undergraduate and postgraduate performance students to continue creating, enabling them to showcase their talent online

Students at UWTSD’s Cardiff-based ‘Canolfan Berfformio Cymru’ (CBC) continued their Performance studies during the Covid-19 pandemic by using creative, digital solutions. Final year BA and MA showcases were held online; students presented musical theatre performances via Zoom; individual performances were presented on digital platforms and a complete musical was written, produced and performed digitally.

The BA performio (performance) and BA musical theatre programmes are innovative courses taught intensively over a two year period by a combination of University staff and professionals in the fields of television, dance, entertainment, musicals and theatre.

When Wales entered into lockdown, the team at CBC immediately started looking at the most engaging way to deliver interactive performance sessions for the students. Vocal coaches Ian Nicholas and David Laugharne came up with a system of using both Microsoft Teams and Zoom - with tutors using Teams to deliver their sessions and to play music tracks with the students performing on Zoom. This interactive yet practical method of delivery allowed teaching to continue with a series of musical theatre songs being performed and shared widely through social media within weeks of the lockdown.

Tutors went on to work with BA students to create individual dramatic scenes; an online drama was produced and MA and BA showcases were held online, receiving a greater audience than ever before and resulting in the highest number of enquiries from agents.

The research into online teaching methods and the way the tutors explored digital creativity culminated in a performance of a brand new Welsh language musical called ‘Un’. The entire show was written, performed and produced during the lockdown period with students filming themselves performing resulting in a new, innovative digital musical.

Given the highly practical nature of the degree, students are regularly given a variety of opportunities to perform and show their progress. Faced with the lockdown restrictions, the tutors’ and the students’ creativity prevailed with the students benefiting from interesting and innovative opportunities to perform and develop new digital skills preparing them for the world of work during these ever-changing and unprecedented times.
Emilia Davies, BA performance, said, “Un gave us an opportunity to combine the skills that I’ve learnt over the last two years with new camera skills that I had to learn to create this new piece of work. I have really enjoyed seeing how the piece has developed from a single shot in the house to a finished piece made up of 12 people.”

Lauren Cheshire, BA musical theatre said, “We’d been working so hard on the material before lockdown and were really looking forward to showing it off to people; showing people what we were able to do so it was nice to come together and to produce the material in a different way. David Laugharne has been sending us all of the material via email; we’ve been recording it at home; putting on make-up and putting on costumes as if we’re in the show, and then we’ve been sending it back to him.”

Eilir Owen Griffiths, Programme Director said, “What Elen Bowman, the Director of Un, has managed to create is amazing. When we entered Lockdown, this show didn’t exist but by early May, we had fifteen original songs. The students have been fantastic - preparing diligently, learning their parts, and recording their performances. They have successfully converted rooms in their houses to create sets for their particular pieces; had the help of family to record them performing outside and have been fully committed to this exciting project. I am so proud of the students and what they - along with the creative team - have achieved in such a short time.”

Showcases will continue to be offered online and ‘Un’ will be made available for schools to perform.

More info
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Bringing our learning and teaching community together online to share, collaborate and innovate

Re-imagining the University’s annual learning and teaching conference (Nexus Plus 2020)
The University’s annual learning and teaching conference, usually delivered in a ‘face-to-face’ environment, was delivered online for the first time. The themes (‘looking after our learners’ and ‘looking after you’) were adapted to reflect the important challenges ahead, and were chosen in direct response to a staff pulse survey. The digital format allowed the University to engage with staff from across its campuses, and collaborative partnership increased participation and engagement.

As the world changed around it, the University’s mission ‘transforming education, transforming lives’ had never been more important.

The higher education sector is having to evolve at a rapid pace of change to respond to the current pandemic and is re-evaluating the significant role technology innovation has in effective learning and teaching. The University’s core strength has always been the professional care and support given to its students and this will become increasingly important as it innovates and develops approaches together. The conference, with an opening address from the Vice-Chancellor, was designed to respond to this context.

The question ‘how can we be better at collaborating and learning from each other?’ was an important one. This conference was an opportunity for the University’s learning and teaching community, which also includes professional services staff who contribute in many different ways to the learner experience, to celebrate what the University did well, to learn from and support one another, and to help navigate through the complex period of change and innovation. With a clear emphasis on well-being throughout, UWTSD recognised the challenges ahead and the importance of establishing a supportive, open and collaborative culture. The Conference included a workshop focusing on engaging with the student voice in a Covid-19 context delivered by the students’ union.

The University announced that it would offer a blended learning approach from September. This conference was key to assist staff develop high quality and also served to build their own own confidence and professional development.

Dr Mirjam Plantinga, Associate Pro-Vice-Chancellor, Academic Experience said: “We were delighted with the engagement of staff in the conference and the professional networks that were established as a result. The support for the well-being of students and the staff themselves is so important, particularly as we deal with the impact of Coronavirus. The quality and the range of presentations from colleagues will assist the University to embed the blended learning approach into our curriculum and will enable us to offer a balanced curriculum to students so that they can develop the range of competencies that they will need in their future careers”.

Felicity Healey-Benson from the University’s Institute of Management and Health produced a reflective blog on her experiences as an attendee and presenter at the conference:


The concept of the ‘Learning and Teaching Exchange’ is in development following feedback, bringing members of the University’s learning and teaching community together in smaller groups to have facilitated discussions on key topics, and to share learning and experiences.

More info Dr. Mirjam Plantinga (Associate Pro-Vice Chancellor, Academic Experience) m.plantinga@uwtsd.ac.uk

Documentation NEXUS Plus Conference programme 2020 Descriptions of the conference sessions.
Wrexham Glyndŵr University (WGU) responded with agility and creativity to Covid-19 by developing two interactive online short courses: the ‘confident learner’ supporting learners new to studying in higher education; and WBIACW, a programme exploring health and well-being during the pandemic.

The confident learner module was aimed at Year 13 students who had their education disrupted by the Covid-19 pandemic, and was also available to individuals returning to study. It was designed to increase their confidence as they took the next steps in undergraduate education. The course supported over 200 students in English and Welsh. An asynchronous approach to learning enabled participants to study at a time and place to suit themselves. Participants worked collaboratively on some tasks and had access to a module tutor for support. Participants received regular feedback on the activities and their engagement throughout the module.

During lockdown, the University developed a free and accessible short-course entitled ‘well-being in a changing world’ to help participants break their day, provide helpful information regarding the pandemic, and stimulate their curiosity about other health, mental health and well-being topics, fully aligning with Public Health Wales guidance and the University’s civic mission. The course was capped at 200 places, with the first iteration filling the quota. While the course covered serious issues, it was designed to be uplifting, with opportunities for participants to focus on their interests.

The teaching and learning experience included video clips, articles, and online discussion, with participation in weekly forums forming the assessment.

Student on the ‘confident learner’ module: “This was such an interesting assignment and will be so useful to know once I start university study. It will definitely give me a bit of a head start. The quizzes were also a useful tool to test your knowledge and ensure that you have a good grasp and understanding. Brilliant, really enjoyed it.”

Student on WBIACW: “It has influenced me to do more research - I have been sharing after each session what I have done with my work team... I was still going 1,000 miles per hour and it was affecting my mental health due to having no routine. I found time to reflect and starting to focus on what really matters to me.”

More info
The confident learner - Dr Sue Horder: s.horder@glyndwr.ac.uk
https://www.glyndwr.ac.uk/en/ShortCourses/Confidentlearner/WBIACW-Dr Caroline Hughes c.hughes@glyndwr.ac.uk and Dr Sharon Wheeler sharon.wheeler@glyndwr.ac.uk

The confident learner and well-being in a changing world (WBIACW).
Transition from the whiteboard to online teaching

Using digital solutions for teaching and assessment in engineering courses

Engineering programmes are influenced by professional bodies and have always relied on a physical presence and paper-based examinations. Wrexham Glyndŵr University adapted to use online discussions and digital maths teaching - a significant cultural shift from traditional exams towards more authentic methods of assessment.

Learning and teaching in engineering are influenced by accreditation, the tradition for physical presence and exams. A longer-term plan at the University pre-Covid19 was to improve digital resources and 'authentic' assessment - the restrictions imposed by lockdown accelerated these developments. Support from a senior level included additional resources and effective mechanisms to allow change and ensure academic quality.

One area of good practice was that the engineering team considered the challenges together, and allowed key themes and solutions to emerge. Many staff had relied on using physical whiteboards to explain mathematical concepts, so online whiteboards and digital pads for writing equations helped ease the transition. This enabled staff to share and record these activities, giving students greater flexibility and opportunity for engagement.

Pedagogy and employer feedback stress the importance of 'authentic assessment'. Engineering has typically used exam driven assessment for this reason. The emphasis changed from recall to explanation, justification and presentation, and many exams were adapted into coursework. These skills are more relevant to employers and therefore, more 'authentic'. The tasks were problem-based and this limited the impact of students searching for answers. Students performed well, with no detriment to marks. Finally, it allowed more feed-forward opportunities.
The Active Learning Framework

Designing and delivering accessible, flexible and engaging digitally-enabled learning opportunities

At Wrexham Glyndŵr University, our Strategy for Supporting Student Learning and Achievement (SSSLA) was reviewed during early 2019/2020, leading to a commitment to develop more active, accessible and flexible approaches to learning, teaching and assessment going forwards.

The Active Learning Framework (ALF) is based upon the research-informed principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), an innovative way of thinking about teaching and learning that helps give all students an equal opportunity to succeed.

UDL offers flexibility in the ways students access material, engage with it and show what they know. At the core of ALF is the appropriate use of digital technologies across all aspects of teaching, learning and assessment in order to support active and inclusive practice. ALF implementation was originally planned as a significant but incremental change project over several academic years, but the challenges of operating in a Covid-19 world provided an opportunity for the University to fully roll out ALF from September 2020 onwards.

The initiative is led by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor with the Academic Development Team and Associates’ Network (distributed and embedded across academic and professional areas), working closely with the students’ union.

The following baseline principles of ALF and associated challenge questions are now being applied across all taught programmes:

1. Flexible and accessible learning
   - Can learning activities be appropriately and inclusively accessed anytime, anywhere, by anyone who needs to, including those with specific learning needs?

2. Student engagement
   - Do the learning activities support active and creative student engagement and a sense of belonging?

3. Innovative, flexible and accessible assessment
   - Is there a range of ways for students to demonstrate learning and understanding?

Professor Claire Taylor, Deputy Vice-Chancellor: “Through the Active Learning Framework we are designing into our curriculum optimal engagement, flexibility and accessibility, ensuring the very best opportunities for our students to succeed.”

Ebony Banks, Wrexham Glyndŵr Students’ Union President 2020/21: “The students’ union are excited to be working with the University on this strategic initiative. As Chair of the Student Advisory Group I have been able to gather student feedback around ALF and it is clear that flexible and accessible learning opportunities are now more important than ever.”

ALF is embedded within the University’s Strategy for Supporting Student Learning and Achievement 2020 – 2025 and a related programme of staff development is in place. This includes online short courses, a series of ‘learning lunches’ showcasing good practice, and a growing network of ALF champions willing to support colleagues as we develop new digitally-enabled approaches together.
Enabling final year Music and Drama students to complete their rehearsal and performance elements within a Covid-19 constrained environment

Students at the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama had already progressed academically and were on the verge of completing their courses when lockdown hit. These summer performances offered students the opportunity to complete the performance element of courses, which the college was not able to deliver at the time, but were fundamental to a conservatoire experience.

It is fundamental that final year Conservatoire students are able to prepare, rehearse and perform on stage. To enable that to happen for this year’s cohort, significant challenges had to be overcome. Examples include:

- Cross collaboration and agreement across College departments - academics, finance, estates, health and safety, IT and technology - and with partner organisations
- Regular Teams and Zoom calls with the students were conducted to share plans, discuss risk and ultimately to arrive at a position that the students voted to come back to College after the end of term to complete their work
- Collaboration and consultation with external scientific experts (including colleagues at Cardiff University) to arrive at safe plans for voice/singing and the playing of instruments
- Working with partners in industry (BBC NOW, WNO and Royal Opera House) to establish acceptable best practice in a Covid-19 safe environment
- Engaging and paying experienced freelance industry professionals – at a time when they are being offered little or no work in the arts sector

Some students’ travel and accommodation were supported by the College Hardship fund to enable them to participate. Adjustments were also made to the College buildings to enable social distancing, and Covid-19 training modules were written and completed for all staff and students involved on this work. The introduction of daily temperature checking on entering the College and use of face coverings were made mandatory in all shared/community areas.

This has enabled more detailed planning and testing of systems ahead of the next academic year.

“I’m especially proud that as a conservatoire, we’re the first to be back delivering student-led performances as part of their professional studies, albeit in a socially distanced way and to a limited number of academic staff and students in a socially distanced theatre. Covid-19 has rocked the performance and creative community but it has also been a time when people have once again understood how vital music and the arts are. I’m so proud to be part of an institution that has prioritised the importance of live performance for our students. I’m humbled and amazed by the way our emerging young professionals have taken a whole new way of working in their stride.”

The academic staff and students began preparation and rehearsals online in the Summer term and were able to return to complete the work in a Covid-19-safe College. In just five weeks, students at the RWCMD completed one Musical Theatre and five Opera performances.
Vocal Performance Student, Michael Smith said, “It is an incredible experience. To be honest before coming back I felt a bit nervous. It was a bit strange having to fill in the questionnaire about safety, and interesting to see the new one-way routes and new ways for getting into College for rehearsals. But it was really good to see the College taking it so seriously and thinking everything through so thoroughly, which has given me a lot of confidence to return to performing with my RWCMD Family.”

Tim Rhys Evans, Director of Music at RWCMD said, “This has been vitally important for the graduating students about to embark on their careers in the professions. The adaptations and adjustments made to pull this off is likely to give them an edge as the industry tries to find new ways of working with the covid-19 restrictions. For the College the learnings from this early work ahead of the new term have been significant and enabling us to plan with more confidence and certainty.”

During #MentalHealthAwarenessWeek back in May 2020, the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama’s Students’ Union delivered 25 care packages full of essentials and goodies to its self-isolated students to remind them that the SU and Student Services are there to show their support!
During the Covid-19 pandemic, Bangor’s SU have maintained online communication links remotely with its student members and groups, and have continued to provide services online including academic advice service, and full representation support, including course reps. Many of its student-led groups have continued to engage with each other with regular activities online. The Students’ Union have also created a Bangor Corona Community facebook group for Bangor students as a hub for online engagement and activities to support student welfare during this difficult time.

The SU have a close working relationship with the university, which means that it has been fully involved in all Covid-19 related decision making since March and on any communications going out to students. The SU are also pleased to have been involved in all discussions regarding the next academic year, having had membership on the various planning groups and regularly been asked for its input.

The Student Voice
Bangor’s SU took a lead role in ensuring that students were able to feedback on their experiences of online teaching and academic provision, and produced an online survey for students to feedback on their experiences. It also promoted module evaluation widely; and held various Course Rep Webinars including a PGR and Welsh language webinar. The SU successfully and effectively fed back the student voice to the University regarding online teaching, and other issues students are facing in relation to Covid-19.

Students have also been at the forefront of developing plans for next term in relation to teaching, learning and the wider student experience. To effectively deliver this the SU held focus groups to gather student opinion regarding online teaching after Covid-19 struck, but mainly on what September might look like and how the University, in partnership with the SU, can make it the best it can be, whilst taking the diverse nature of our student body is taken into account. A report of the findings was later presented to the University.

Online engagement and activities
Many student groups have continued to engage with each other with regular activities and challenges online, and many of Bangor’s sports clubs have raised money for charity by taking on various walking and running challenges. Student have made a great effort to keep group activities going remotely. Here you can find a video showcasing this activity.

An online buddy scheme was also set up for volunteers to participate in to help support International students through the ELCOS programme, which consists of volunteers talking to International students to help build their confidence speaking English. This scheme has now been extended over the summer months.

The volunteering project Connect@Bangor is continuing to work in partnership with the University mental health advisors to offer online support drop-ins for students. The SU is also in the process of creating an online safeguarding process which will allow checks to be made online rather than in person from September. The Students’ Union have also continued to run its campaigns around mental health and wellbeing online, aimed at helping students to relax, and prioritise their well-being during these stressful times.
The Covid-19 outbreak shaped the academic year in a way that no one could have predicted, but Cardiff Met’s Students’ Union worked tirelessly to protect the experience of its members. Whether that be moving quickly to implement advanced hygiene routines within offices and venues, donating food from its commercial outlets to students remaining on campus during lockdown, or by spreading messages of positivity on social media channels.

During this time, the SU worked closely with the University to release communications to students highlighting the support in place for Covid-19, including information relating to assessments, exams, wellbeing and mitigating circumstances. It continued to provide support and one-to-one representation to students virtually - a method of support that will continue until social distancing measures have been lifted.

Working with the Presidents of Cardiff University Students’ Union, Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama Students’ Union and University of South Wales Students’ Union, it wrote to over 60 lettings agencies in Cardiff and the surrounding areas requesting information on how they intended to manage student contracts during the Covid-19 outbreak. The SU also created a letter co-signed by the SU President and Vice-President that members could send to their own landlords asking them to be considerate when making decisions that could have a negative impact on members.

A key objective during the lockdown was to continue to keep student communities connected, to bring normality to the year where possible and to be available to members. Many annual events were cancelled due to the lockdown, including Varsity against Bath, Student Achievement Awards and the Cardiff Met Award ceremony. The Students’ Union adapted the delivery of these events, which included working with Bath’s SU to deliver a ‘Virtual Varsity’ and hosting the Student Achievement Awards on our Twitter, with a series of videos to celebrate the work of reps and society members. The Cardiff Met Award ceremony was also delivered online to celebrate the work of students throughout the year, many of whom had stepped up to assist in local Covid-19 support initiatives, working extra hours in retail, health and social care.

“Our student communities have proved their incredible resilience and togetherness during this period with many societies and clubs continuing to meet virtually with Zoom calls and online social events. At this time of year, we support our societies to organise their committee elections and handovers and this has continued to happen remotely. Societies have been creating handover information packs and organising online meetings to discuss the running and transition of the societies, whilst SU Sport clubs have hosted team training sessions to maintain conditioning as well as virtual social nights.”

- Cardiff Met Students’ Union