Course Rep Forum Question and Answer Session

# Tuesday 27th October 2020 (13:15 – 14:45 via Microsoft Teams)

# Attendance:

Harry South, VP Education (HS), Sarah Greer, Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost (SG), Ross Renton, Senior Pro Vice Chancellor (Students) (RR), Tim Hewes-Belton, Student Engagement Manager (THB), Abbie Banner, Student Voice Assistant (AB) and 51 Course Reps.

# Notes:

These notes cover the Q&A session with Harry South (Vice President Education), Sarah Greer (Deputy Vice Chancellor and Provost) and Ross Renton (Senior Pro-Vice Chancellor-Students). Course Reps received a separate update on the second section of the forum which focused on the proposed Course Rep pledge and its implementation

# Question & Answer Session

THB chaired the question and answer session. Questions and responses were as follows.

## Further restrictions

**If we move up in the COVID tier system over the next few months, how do you plan on supporting those who live with vulnerable people and can't attend face-to-face lectures?**

Alongside the wider three tier structure of restrictions, the Government has put in place a four-tier structure that outlines guidelines for educational settings which allow universities to access levels of risk - – we are currently in tier 1 which allows us to continue with the current blend of online and virtual learning and teaching.

The tier level is regularly being reviewed.

If we reached tier 4 – the university will prioritise clinical skills teaching. The university recognised that some courses are more difficult to do online.

The University will continue to work with public health in Worcestershire, creating plans for our response, as a University, if local lockdown/tiers changed. Public Health England have stressed the importance of students accessing education.

It was highlighted that the University will continue to share guidance with students as things change.

**Will students be reimbursed for expenses such as parking permits if face to face teaching is reduced? Are they going to be reduced in response to reduced face to face teaching?**

Thewider experience of students is important, therefore we have ensured campus facilities remain open and accessible for students. For example, the University has faced several challenges, including an unexpected need to change catering provider just before the start of term. Colleagues worked hard to get a new provider and ensure that this vital service is delivered, an example of how the university can be flexible and adapt to changing circumstances.

Accommodation – if we are put in a full lockdown for a prolonged period of time (beyond 28 days) there is a clause in the contract for University managed accommodation which outlines what would happen.

We were one of first universities to reimburse students at the start of the first lockdown for their accommodation.

**Food on campus – is the click and collect app available for campus based food outlets?**

Yes, it is called Time2Eat and can be downloaded on the app store. It is available at both City campus and St Johns.

**Is this available at City Campus?**

Yes, the food application is available at City Campus.

**Will food be diversified taking into account dietary requirements?**

The University and the Students’ Union is having regular meetings with the new catering provider to ensure that changes are being made to ensure the food offering takes into account a range of dietary requirements. They are still in the early stages of the contract and have been working hard to take on feedback and adapt their offering accordingly.

**Is there anything that the University are doing to ensure grades are not affected by the covid-19 situation**?

In the first lockdown the University recognised a set of unexpected circumstances and adapted accordingly.

During this period the University put in place a highly generous deferral system which allowed all students to defer all or any assessment from May until July and additional resit attempts in August, where appropriate.

The situation will be reviewed if and when the position on the tier system changes.

If they feel they are being negatively affected, students are encouraged to apply for mitigating circumstances which take into account individual circumstances.

**Are there plans for third year students with lab-based dissertations**

Government guidance does not include lab based work specifically. The university will support students completing this important laboratory-based work, particularly where it is difficult to replicate in any other way

In these circumstances the Head of School will be working on contingency planning for all potential situations. For example, if there is an exam, the course team would look to deliver an alternative assessment if appropriate and possible to ensure students still meet the required learning outcomes.

**What are the University’s plans to connect students during the pandemic?** Initiatives are being put in place across different Schools. For example, in the School of Psychology virtual coffee mornings and wellbeing workshops have been set up for students. The move into a virtual world has brought with it lots of potential new ways to engage with students.

Students also play a role in building this sense of community, throughout the first lockdown various groups came together to organise volunteering, community support, sports and societies online events etc. These helped students connect with others at the university. Both the University and the Students’ Union will continue to look at ways we can engage and connect students with consideration of restrictions which may be put in place.

Mental health support is important. Students services have a range of support on offer including: Have-a-Cuppa service, Call My App, 24/7 text counselling service, counselling and mental health support.

For international students who may be self-isolating the international team have been working to ensure they are still able to connect with others eg virtual bingo with the SU.

**How to keep the community supported.**

We held a community forum recently, there was a lot of praise for students for helping neighbours, the community, volunteering, supporting NHS etc. The University will continue to work alongside the community with the view that students are a part of it.

**A lot of the commuters are feeling left out of events/university life: quite a few of us are having to come into campus for online lectures just in order to be in time to an in-person seminar, e.g. Is there any way to include commuters more?**

The SU have a Commuter Students’ Network that you can now join, it's a great community of commuters - <https://www.worcsu.com/yourvoice/networks/>

We are also running more online events for students to meet others. The SU is always open to ideas on how we can better include these students.

**Can students who are still in isolation be brought into the classroom virtually in real time?**

The University does not currently have capabilities to effectively do this. However, they are increasingly improving their facilities to do this using Panopto, lecture recording and data storage package.

Some lecturers have been using a hybrid approach to teaching, however, it is difficult to teach this way as lecturers have to focus attention on those being taught face to face, those online and the chat function which can be a challenge.

The University are continuously exploring different options and areas of good practice to evaluate what works well.

**How are students informed about changes to their courses?**

With the ever-changing situation, the University and SU cannot guarantee that no more changes will happen. We need to be able to respond to rapidly changing situation, however, we are trying to keep changes to a minimum.

As we move into Semester 2, we are hopeful that changes should be minimised and we will ensure that changes are communicated to students.

**What is being done to deal with overcrowding in between lectures?**

Every day Sarah does a tour of the campus and from what Sarah has seen things are generally working well in lecture theatres. In first week of teaching there seemed to be some crowding in corridors, however, Sarah has not seen this happening since.

Students and staff are being responsible and careful.

If particular incidences occur in certain modules, please do raise this with your course team through the Rep System. Academics can then speak to timetabling.

The signage around the University is changing to ensure people on campus continue to notice the signs and aren't missing important messages.

The senior team believe that the University and the students should take joint responsibility for being safe on campus. We continue to adapt, so please do feedback if there are issues as colleagues are quick at responding to these.

## Placements/ work experience

**Our placement has been cancelled. How will I meet the requirements for placement hours? What effect will this have on our graduation?**

This is a difficult question to answer generally as each individual situation will be different and may be subject to course specific issues such as external providers and the requirements of professional regulatory bodies.

Some placements have been cancelled for reasons beyond the control of the University

Course teams and Head of Schools are working closely with placement providers to ensure every student meets competencies by the end of their course

Where students have concerns, they should be raised with the Reps who can feedback to the University. Communication is key, the more information students have, the better.

Every course is different. The partnership working between Reps and University staff is important to ensure that the best solution, given the circumstances, is reached.

Where a placement provider has very suddenly withdrawn placements, the University is doing its best to manage those situations, but this is often out of their control. It is really important that students continue to check university email accounts for communications.

**Is there plans to offer additional work experience to students**?

The University senior management team are working closely with Worcestershire Chamber of Commerce and other organisations.

The University was recognised as a UK business champion, for working over COVID-19 to support the community, including providing students with opportunities to gain work experience

My Career – 20 new jobs went on today, keen to get students involved and engaged in various schemes.

Still employing students on campus, student ambassadors, residential assistants etc.

## Accessibility

**What do I do if I cannot access material on blackboard?**

**What do I do if I have limited access to the internet at home?**

Students will have differing levels of internet access at home. University is open and there are opportunities to book PCs on campus for a fixed time to engage with online lecture at certain times.

Where students have difficulties with Blackboard the first port of call is their PAT, module leader or course leader.

The IT team worked hard over summer to ensure students have access to the resources required to complete their course. There are lots of laptops available to be borrowed.

There are spaces on campus for students to work in, social learning space, Pierson available for students to utilise spaces.

Where students require support, it is important they are signposted to Student Services and/or Kate who provides the Help and Advice at SU.

The University also have the Access to Learning Fund, which is there to ensure that students aren’t disadvantaged as a result of economic challenges.

We have a new provider for student halls Wifi but this may not affect those living in University managed accommodation offsite– however if you live in one of these University managed houses and the broadband is not fast enough please do contact the accommodation team.

There is support for students who need financial support to access technology. University Money Advisors can talk through how to apply. Appointments can be held virtually and can be booked via FirstPoint.

**Is the University Wifi secure?**

We used Jnet network which is secure and used across many universities. Eduroam is also a secured network. As always avoid clicking on emails or links you are unsure of online. There are sophisticated attempts at attacking are used, so students need to be cautious. There isadvice on IT pages to download antivirus software.The IT team there to help and work with you on these things

**I am unable to take part in my lectures at home but there are limited quiet areas on campus. What can the university do to help?**

SG – if students are having issues accessing resources from home, they should contact the University IT team who will be able to support them with this.

It is important to share with students where these spaces are available – social learning spaces. Librarian compiling this list. This will be disseminated to students.

**Students can only use PCs in the Hive for 1.5 hours. Can this be extended as it isn’t enough time.**

They clean the PCs after 2 hours; however, students aren’t restricted to two hours. They simply need to allow the space to be cleaned.

If taking own devices into Hive, there is no time limit.

# Chat Questions

**Please find below questions received in the chat function during the meeting with answers to each question.**

**Is the menu going to be made better, in terms of diversity?**

Thank you for the submission on the idea’s forum - we are working with the new catering company on how they can better diversify their provision, to accommodate for more food requirements

**What will be put in place for year three students who are doing lab-based dissertations if we go back into lockdown, is there things being put into place to assist with this?**

Each module team should have a plan for going into lockdown again - the University is still open and maintaining a blended approach but there should be mitigations to support any research projects etc.

**Mitigating circumstances, what if you are unable to get evidence due to not being able to get into your GP?**

Mitigating circumstances are considered on an individual basis. If you have any questions about the process it is worth speaking to your PAT, first point or Kate in the SU Help and Advice service who can help provide clarity on the evidence required.

**For my degree I have to do placement for a certain number of hours each year. If we go back into lockdown and the provider closes what happens to my hours?**

This is something that we are raised with the University and will be largely based on what is required from the awarding body - if you would like support with this please contact our advisor at the SU, Kate who should be able to advise you on a personal basis. It would also be helpful to direct students to their PAT. It is likely to be a wider issue across a cohort, and the University will always make arrangements by working with the accrediting professional body or enabling students to do more placement hours the next year etc.

**Some people on my course are wondering when some sport clubs at the university will be able to restart, such as jiujitsu and other contact sports due to Covid.**

We are currently following the government guidelines, followed by an additional information from National Governing Bodies - sports will return when possible.

**As Course Reps would we have any responsibility with direct student complaints, or would they be better directed to the lecturers themselves?**

Dependent on the nature of the complaint you can either raise this with the course leader (if it's a wider issue) or direct the student to our SU advisor Kate.

**How is Uni planning to support students who live together in a house and their internet is not capable of handling such pressure? As technology awards are for IT equipment not services.**

We will raise this with the IT team at the University. If you live in a university managed house, it is worth raising this with the Accommodation team who will be able to offer additional support. If students are in private accommodation it is advised that they speak to their landlord to see if WIFI improvements can be made. They can also contact our SU advisor, Kate, who can support them with accommodation issues.

**A lot of commuter students are feeling left out of events/university life: quite a few of us are having to come into campus for online lectures just in order to be on time to an in-person seminar - is there a way to include commuters more?**

We have a Commuter Students’ Network that you can now join, it's a great community of commuters - https://www.worcsu.com/yourvoice/networks/

We are also running more online events for students to meet others. The SU is always open to ideas on how we can better include these students.

**I have noticed that there are one or two rooms that haven’t got the full Panopto system in there, I think one of the Cotswold Suites doesn’t have the camera on the ceiling**

It is coming! It's a massive job for IT to equip the rooms - particularly if they are all timetabled to be taught in

**Not sure if this is appropriate for here, but I have heard that the City Campus windows are difficult to open making Covid Security difficult.**

This has been raised with the University. There has been a range of improvements to the widows on City and there should be openable windows in each room. Some will be restricted due to the height etc.

**Some lecturers/students aren't always wearing face coverings on campus - a few vulnerable students are anxious about this. Can the University send out another reminder about face coverings?**

We can raise this with the University communications team. They are refreshing the information resources to ensure that students are reminded how they can keep others safe.

**Most of my lectures are in person which most course members really like however, these are not normally recorded and some people on my course who cannot get into Uni due to self-isolating or other reasons feel like they are being left out as they aren't getting the information that everyone else is.**

As Course Reps it would be helpful, in the first instance, to have a conversation with module/ course leaders to see what can be done to help students who feel they are missing information.

**Will the University have a secured internet connection? An open internet connection puts all data from our PC, documents, personal information etc at high risk of hacking, I feel this to be unfair given the cost to be here.**

On site at the University students typically connect to the international eduroam service which is the standard service provided by most higher and further education providers in the UK and Europe.

The University employs enterprise protection and encryption of our wireless services on eduroam. This is the WPA2/WPA3 Enterprise protocol and the data encryption method used is AES.

This handles the encryption key exchange as part of the user authentication so does not require users to add them like a home connection.

**Some students with DAS laptops are having trouble connecting to the internet, have visited IT and it is still broken and are having to use their 4G - is there a way to fix this?**

We will raise this with IT

**I think it helps those who are not course reps to further understand our roles and how we can help.**

We will be promoting the role of Course Reps throughout the year - but will make sure we highlight some of the great work you are all doing through Rep of the Month. Also, we strongly encourage Reps to update students throughout the year on what they are doing. You can always ask your course or module leader if you can do regular shout outs to students about your role. There are resources available on the Rep Resources Hub on the SU website.

**I would like to have that list for my colleagues about study places. Through email?**

There are study spaces both on St John's campus - Peirson building, The Hangar and the canteen as well as City Campus Café (Riverside study space is being reviewed)

**What is the Uni doing about the sunflower lanyards?**

The SU are in process of buying some for students who would like them. This is in response to an idea that was upvoted on the Students’ Union ideas forum.

## Other Feedback / Comments

* All of my lectures have the option to attend online and it works great. They are also recorded. This should be universal across the university.
* In person lectures are great. We would really like to implement recorded lectures.
* There are no childcare options for me in the half term and I was still able to attend lectures virtually this week.
* Most of my modules have done an either/or approach, having both face to face but also doing it over collaborate which is really helpful. Speaking as a commuter, I don’t feel I’m getting my money’s worth if I'm learning fully online, whereas having the option feels a bit better a gives student that option.
* Personally, I believe that if it is possible, for some circumstances, online lectures are valuable and no different. I'm in a cohort of only 6 using collaborate on blackboard. We are all working healthcare professionals, who need not to be further increasing risks to ourselves or others.
* One of my lessons we have some online and classroom-based learning at the same time. We used the online classroom on blackboard, and it worked really well.
* Blackboard works well in my experience so far.
* 3/4 of my lectures are online this year, all of them on Collaborate which works well. One is in person, but that is still done over Collaborate as well for those online. Our class works for that method quite well.
* For our course it is a good balance between online and face to face teaching. I would just say on online lectures make them more interactive with questions for example.
* It shouldn't be a course lottery - all recorded and all face to face lectures should be online too.
* My lectures have all been online, blackboard has worked well most of the time for me.
* I have definitely noticed over-crowding, with people not wearing masks.
* I've seen groups larger than 6 often gather in the main canteen on St John's Campus and no one really breaks these groups up.
* All online lectures are through virtual classroom and recorded, but there is a lot of us that then have to commute in for lab based practical’s, however we all feel that it is become rather overwhelming as all deadlines are close together and we are having to try and get the dissertations signed off or fit in time to book lab time, but they are all very spread out over the week giving us not much time to fit in assignments around this and a lot of people have to fit work in with this too. So, the blended learning is good, but I think as year three students it is very different to normal and overwhelming this year.
* We had some of our lectures planned to be in person, but as a cohort we felt that it was not in our interest to be in University as opposed to those who need to be, thus reducing capacity at university, if only by 6 of us. Collaborate has worked extremely well and the lectures have taken our concerns into due considerations.
* In classrooms we only have 7 people in class. We keep our distance unless we have to do group tasks.
* I do think rooms should be disinfected between classes. I know this is really difficult to roll out across the university, but I think it should be done to help keep UW Covid-secure.
* Online lectures have worked really well for that teaching materials are well designed as well as lecture structures. I will work for that our MBA students will have possibility gather together in online like we are doing here. It will take some pressures away for that studying from home in online can feel lonely like said.
* We have a group assignment, where 5 of us are in one group. It was really hard to meet. In the Hive there can be no groups bigger than 3 and the same is in the Pierson. So, it is a little bit hard to work everything online.
* There is quite a few that had that happen in our cohort, they decided it was best to change to a different module, or they were doing an online placement that they could answer questions on. A lot of them said it was very useful and helpful.
* The cohort was informed quickly and was able to sort it out quickly, most of the cohort went straight to their PAT so that may be a good idea first.
* On our course, both the students and module leaders have been very cooperative regarding the cleaning down of equipment, sanitising workspaces etc. It's become the new normal and I think I speak for everyone in my course in that we've adapted very well.
* We have glide in our rooms and that is fast but is not secure, therefore I cannot set up my printer, things like Alexa and I was told that eduroam is being phased out leaving us with an insecure network.
* Eduroam is very slow in rooms across the board.
* I believe, due to Covid the communication is lacking due to it taking so long for responses as it is all through teams or email.
* For getting feedback from students, sending out a short survey to the whole module group normally gets back a good amount of responses
* Our module leaders have been issuing students questionaries to have an opportunity to offer feedback on the course anonymously. I think this is great, but I also agree with Kate here in that the university must pledge to feed this up on our behalf
* I also use Facebook chats to get student feedback. I also make sure that everything that students want is addressed in an email or noted in course committee meetings
* This is my second year of being student rep and my PAT always introduces us every year either in person or virtually maybe ask your PAT to help
* I use Survey Monkey which is 100% anonymous and find that gives back more answers because of the anonymity
* I just find I don't feel I know anybody on my course really and no-one seems willing to feed back to me, which is frustrating
* The Networks are a really great way of getting voice heard to the student council. All the chairs are really approachable, just say hi (smile)
* I love the networks 🙂