

Senedd Cymru
Y Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg

Welsh Parliament
Children, Young People and Education Committee

Ymchwiliad i effaith argyfwng Covid-19 ar blant a phobl ifanc yng Nghymru

Inquiry into the impact of the Covid-19 outbreak on children and young people in Wales

COV 160
Ymateb gan: Undeb Prifysgolion a Cholegau (UCU) Cymru

COV 160
Response from: University and College Union (UCU) Cymru

Additional Information from UCU following the Committee meeting on 23 June:

Question 1a

I have had some feedback from my learners which is quite mixed and I only get feedback from the ones that have engaged with on-line learning, several have not taken part much or at all since March 20.

Comments include "quite good", "more relaxed", "hard to stay motivated", "unable to take part due to no internet at home", sharing 1 PC with 4 brothers", "struggling due to harder to get help face to face with teachers".

A few have reported IT problems, several have had to borrow lap tops from College.

Some learners may have used the lack of face to face teaching as an excuse to take time off from education.

Some have got full time jobs due to pressure to earn money to support their household.

Some learners have responded extremely well, stayed in touch with staff and completed excellent work via remote learning activities.

We have missed practical assessments and activities which would normally be the most enjoyable parts of courses, therefore, some students have commented that they have been disappointed in this.

The main points I would like to raise are that the more motivated and better - resourced learners have been doing fine, less motivated, less well off students have been falling behind - this will widen the gap between the top and bottom by lowering at the bottom.

There needs to be a comprehensive and quick study to find out what resources learners have available for home working and a very quick plan for supporting those learners who do not have adequate broadband/IT equipment/work space to allow them to engage next year. Many learners

will need financial support to allow them to continue effectively with their courses.

What has worked well are staff being very innovative in putting together new types of teaching resources so that students are able to continue to learn and complete courses.

What did not work well was announcing that all grades for (most) vocational subjects would be calculated if not complete by March 20th. This meant that a lot of students decided not to bother completing work in April and May that would have ensured they kept learning and just relied on the fact that staff would have to give them a grade irrespective of whether they had handed anything in or not during this period.

Question 1b

I have lots of concerns about September - despite planning a lot of safe systems, Colleges will be reliant on behaviour of 16-19 year olds to follow social distancing and hygiene guidance. I am not at all confident that this will work given that there has been a noticeable decline in adherence to social distancing rules amongst many young people (and older people) in the last month and I think that by September, our learners will have become used to close social contact amongst their friends and it will be very difficult to enforce rules around a College environment. This puts staff and other learners at risk. Being in a classroom or workshop with a number of students for a prolonged period (even with 2m distancing) is a perfect arena for spreading the virus. I think we need another layer of protection; regular routine testing for staff and students + possibly temperature checks at the door. This would reduce the risk level when we are re-opening in September.

Also, I am not confident that the Government and educational establishments can move quickly enough to ensure that all learners have equal access to home learning by September - this will lead to a widening of the gap and likely increase in drop out rate among students who have unsuitable home working resources/spaces/support etc.

Workloads for staff are likely to be increased if current hours of teaching are maintained. This is not going to be sustainable without some adaptation to contracts. We cannot pretend that a contract and workload agreement based on face to face teaching can be directly transferred to teaching where the majority of work is on-line. In the short term, this will lead to a lot of preparation and conversion of teaching resources as well as time needed for training and practise in using on-line teaching technology. In the medium term, more hours will be required for remote delivery, particularly

when it comes to feed back to students which tends to become a lot more 1:1 rather than in a face to face setting, 1:20 feedback can be used to give messages to the class as a whole.

Working on-line in a home office is also not a particularly healthy way of working as virtually 100% of work time involves being at a computer work station whereas, working normally in a college usually involves a lot more time standing and walking and not looking at a screen.

Delivery of practical sessions will be tricky in many areas and would generally reduce the number of learners one lecturer can teach at a time. This creates problems if there is no increase in the hours allocated for teaching that unit or course.

Some practical sessions require transport to off-site venues - this seems very difficult/impossible if 2m distancing remains in place. (e.g. 2-3 students max. in a minibus).

It is the practical elements that most students enjoy so if this part of the course is cut out or reduced, I would expect an increase in drop out rate.

1.a

The learners have missed the personal classroom contact and find motivation is much more difficult from home.

1.b

It will be very hard if the learners are missing out on frequent practicals (delivering on animal and equine courses) due to more online delivery and limited numbers on campus. In addition with some theory lessons we at times implement practical aspects which will be very difficult to do. It would be a concern with H&S if asking learners to complete any practical aspects from home. As it are vocational qualifications a lot of the learners primarily enjoy the practical aspects. Several assessments are based on the learners undertaking practical activities and they need to be able to have enough experience to allow them to achieve the best grades possible.

In addition if the majority of learning is undertaking online, engagement may be an concern especially for lower level learners.

WE have had good feedback from our learners

they have engaged well up until Whitsun then some started to fall of the radar.

the quality of work produced was of a high standard, in some cases better than they do in class.

they have engaged with west and skills test well many going up levels.

we have been in touch with them every day setting tasks most days 3 tasks.

they generally miss each other and the social interaction

they miss the practical sessions and being with the horses.

access to IT has been problematic

learners have made use of the study zone and mentor team.

Learners have been open in discussing the impact on their mental health and anxiety.

Generally they have pulled together and supported each other.

we have made good use of google meet and hangout

For September I have had no negative thoughts they all very much want to get back and be on the stable yard doing practicals.

They feel disadvantaged by not completing the year.

One learner has thought deeply about her career path and wants to follow a health care pathway now.

Yep, well Bangor Uni are not starting many of their courses until January 2021, which seems sensible. If we could start in October perhaps that would be helpful as getting ready for distance learning is a very time consuming process. Students will be really disadvantaged (on the other hand) by the long absence from academia and so it will take more to get the new cohorts up to speed, a mad dichotomy. I think 2020 will be the year of the lost generation as far as academia is concerned.

1. Experiences of learners has been mixed. Tutors have had to learn new e-skills to teach/assess learners. Learners self-directed learning and motivation is lower for the trades. Lack of IT hardware, software, skills and infrastructure has been an obstacle for some. some learners are apprentices working longer hours with less time for college engagement. Engagement and productivity has been lower, but is better than expected.

2. Overtime may be expected which invariably makes me unwell. Learners completing practical work may not receive all contact hours, with course content diluted. Two year courses may be further behind this time next year. Learners may need to conduct theory remotely with similar issues as IT, in above question.