

**Arrangements to support students in light of COVID-19**  
***Submission to Senedd's Children, Young People and Education (CYPE) Committee***

On behalf of Swansea University, we would like to thank the Chair and members of the CYPE Committee for providing us with the opportunity to detail our ongoing efforts to support our students during this period.

The health, wellbeing and safety of our students, along with that of our staff and our local community, have been the focus of our operational planning and response since the outbreak of COVID-19 in March 2020. Our University has invested significant resource to ensure that our students continue to receive access to high quality teaching and learning provision, within a safe and COVID-secure environment. In acknowledgement of the challenges presented by ongoing public health measures, we have prioritised student welfare through our existing and enhanced student support mechanisms.

We are also mindful of our responsibilities within our local community, both in terms of modelling acceptable and safe behaviour, and reinforcing the safety regulations and restrictions currently in place within our region. We have worked closely and effectively with public authorities and relevant bodies to enable the appropriate and timely sharing of information, and have sought to adopt a spirit of transparency with both our University community and the general public.

In relation to the specific points raised by the Committee, we are pleased to outline the following:

- 1. The COVID-19 measures you have taken in relation to your own accommodation, and how you have worked with Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSAs) and private landlords (NB please refer to arrangements for both term and vacation periods);**
  - a. We issued detailed communications to students before arrivals commenced, highlighting safety requirements, expectations in terms of behaviour and the support mechanisms currently in place for students via our student support teams;
  - b. All accommodation blocks, buildings and flats were risk assessed prior to student arrivals;
  - c. The arrivals period was extended to ensure adherence to social distancing and safety measures;
  - d. We have installed clear signposting, via posters and other media, within accommodation blocks to inform students of guidelines, social distancing and hygiene measures in place;
  - e. A quarantine block has been established for any international students arriving from quarantine-designated countries, with immediate needs supported through the provision of essential food packs, free bedding and kitchen packs in advance of arrival;
  - f. We have implemented processes to ensure ongoing access to food/provision purchasing on both of our campuses (please see Appendix 1: Catering Service Plan: Oct-Dec 2020)
  - g. We have established direct links between the primary PBSAs and our University welfare and support mechanisms;
  - h. We have maintained a direct link with City and County of Swansea Council Housing and Environment colleagues, for issues relating to the private rental sector;
  - i. We continue to liaise with our counterparts in University of Wales, Trinity St David in relation to accommodation within the community;
  - j. For University-owned accommodation, planning is underway to prepare for the possibility of Christmas lockdown measures. We continue to liaise with PBSAs although to date have not received information on their own planning.

**2. How you intend to support – or have been supporting – all students (on and off-campus) who have needed to self-isolate, including how you would support large numbers self-isolating at the same time in a dignified manner (i.e. the provision of food and drink that meets dietary requirements, medicine, mental health support and other essentials);**

**On campus**

- a. All students are required to inform the University via our MyUniHub (Academic Services) address of all changes to circumstances, including self-isolation or COVID positive post-test;
- b. For all campus students, upon notification of a self-isolation requirement from Test Trace Protect, a gratis 3-day food hamper is initially provided by the University;
- c. Our Chief Operating Officer, Director of Student Services and Director of Academic Services are meeting remotely with students self-isolating in flats, to discuss welfare and highlight the support available to them;
- d. Support is in place for click and collect deliveries from external organisations;
- e. Our Catering Services' COVID Isolation Plan is in place for multiple scenarios and scales. The plan enables the standing up of kitchen facilities on both campuses to deliver a menu of meals into student residences, in the event of a significant lockdown or mass-isolation of halls of residence.

**Off campus, private rented accommodation**

- f. Plans are in place to support students within private rented accommodation, including a student volunteer scheme via the HEFCW-funded CONNECT Programme, our Discovery Volunteering Service, and the City and Council of Swansea Local Area Coordinator network and Street Champion Scheme;
- g. No specific support has been requested from this community at this time;
- h. Regular check-ins and interventions are being delivered to support welfare needs. All households impacted by self-isolation requirements are proactively contacted and offered support;
- i. Students in local accommodation are not currently experiencing issues with shopping deliveries and are able to request assistance from the University via MyUniSupport should it be required.
- j. To note, at present it would not be possible for the University to deliver up to 20,000 meals three times a day into accommodation, should it become necessary.

**Welfare/ Wellbeing Support**

- a. MyUniHub (Academic Services) is the main point of contact for initial pastoral support queries, with further escalation to centralised specialist teams as required. This is in line with our pre-COVID processes;
- b. Academic College Student Experience Teams have access to the database of self-isolating students and are supporting with academic and low-level pastoral challenges, with escalation to central student support services where required. Again, this is in line with our pre-COVID processes;
- c. All centralised student support continues to be delivered online (as from March 2020) via Zoom appointments, phone calls and email.
- d. An additional £170,000 has already been ring-fenced for mental health and welfare support in the 2020/21 academic year, and we have experienced an increase in referrals of 16% thus far. To note, demand for mental health and welfare support has been increasing by c.30-50% year on year since records began, and we therefore expect the 16% growth in demand experienced to date to further increase.

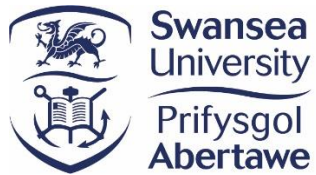
3. **The provision you have in place for identifying and addressing student hardship;**
  - a. We have made a £70,000 investment into our Digital Hardship Fund, to support the purchase of Loan Laptops for students;
  - b. We have also increased our investment into the Student Hardship Fund since March. Grants and support are delivered via our [Money@CampusLife](#) Team.
  
4. **Your approach to working with students on COVID-19 measures and actions, including self-isolation;**
  - a. We have issued comprehensive pre-arrival comms and follow-up comms to students regarding current guidelines, and regularly update our FAQs for students and parents, available on the [MyUniHub webpage](#);
  - b. Students are required to inform the University via the MyUniHub email address, of all changes of circumstances including self-isolating or COVID positive post-test (see guidelines [here](#)). This service is working very well and has even enabled us to identify positive cases within the University population which, to date, have still have not been notified by TTP in England;
  - c. Incoming information on positive cases from TTP and Public Health Wales is relayed to MyUniSupport, who then contact students proactively to ensure self-isolation guidance is followed and to offer support;
  - d. Upon notification of a positive test result, we have been able to put flats and floors on campus, when necessary, into isolation within 45 minutes and deliver essential supplies shortly afterwards.
  
5. **How you are working and integrating with the public health and civil contingencies machinery within your local authorities and local resilience fora (to include confirmation of whether you have on-campus testing facilities for students)**
  - a. Our Director of Student Services is the designated Single Point of Contact for local and regional TTP teams and Public Health Wales;
  - b. Our Chief Operating Officer and our Director of Student Services meet regularly with the Director of Public Health Swansea Bay University Health Board, as well as senior officials from the City and County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils;
  - c. The Director of Student Services hold regular meetings with City and County of Swansea and Neath Port Talbot Councils' Housing and Environment Directorates, along with local official representatives;
  - d. To note, the University does not have on-campus testing facilities at this time and will be guided by Public Health Wales and Local TTP as to when a need may arise. In June 2020, we held discussions with Swansea Bay University Health Board regarding the potential for the University to run its own proactive/reactive test scheme. We were very clearly advised this would not be supported by the Health Board, due to poor effectiveness as a control function and a number of other risks. There are also concerns from the Health Board in relation to the placing of a testing site within the University, as this could result in potentially COVID-positive people from the local community accessing our densely-populated campuses.
  
6. **How you have engaged – and are engaging – with the local population, in particular where you have campuses in rural local authorities;**
  - a. Our Director of Student Services meets regularly with local elected representatives, who report back directly to the local community via community Facebook and social media groups;
  - b. The Director of Student Services also actively engages with local community Facebook/social media groups, to address community issues and concerns;

- c. Our Students Services Community Liaison Team, in conjunction with South Wales Police Campus Police Officers, conduct walkarounds of the local communities on a weekly basis, calling in on local and student residents;
- d. We issue regular updates in paid-for editorial pages in Evening Post and Wales Online;
- e. Our University Communications Team, along with our Student Communications Team, post regular updates on social media platforms, directly into community resources;
- f. Where there are alleged issues with noise or potential breaches on campus or in the local community, students in that household are warned by the Director of Student Services that future infractions will lead to disciplinary action.
- g. Where further infractions occur, households are required to attend a disciplinary meeting with the Registrar where they will be subject to formal disciplinary action. At this point, students are informed that any further cause to contact them in relation to COVID breaches or anti-social behaviour will result in immediate suspension or other higher penalties, up to and including possible removal from the University.
- h. Students are also encouraged to immediately make amends with any affected neighbours and all have been proactively keen to do so thus far;
- i. The University has been transparent with its own staff, students and the local community regarding positive results and what steps are being taken. At Swansea University, we are being open and candid and are able to demonstrate that, at the present time, infection levels are considerably lower than within the local area environs and also at a number of other universities.

**7. Any recommendations you believe the Committee could helpfully make to the Welsh Government to improve support for universities, staff and students.**

- a. A specific and significant issue we are currently facing at Swansea University is in relation to cross-campus access restrictions, and the attendant impact on student health and wellbeing:
- b. Our Singleton Park campus is situated within the Swansea Health Protection Area, while our Bay Campus lies just within the boundaries of the Neath Port Talbot HPA. Although student travel between the two HPAs and campuses is permitted for educational purposes (such as to attend in-person teaching on site), we have been advised by the relevant Local Authorities that travel between the two sites for the purposes of accessing sports facilities is not permissible under the regulations, except where the student in question is classed as an elite sportsperson.
- c. Our Singleton Park campus houses the vast majority of our sports facilities and societies, and these facilities are a key reason that many of our students opt to study with us. For students currently housed within our Bay Campus accommodation, this lack of access to our Singleton facilities means that students' expectations are not being met and we are concerned about the deleterious effect of this restriction upon the physical and mental wellbeing of students residing on our Bay Campus site.
- d. We have liaised with relevant local authorities, who have confirmed that they are unable to derogate from this regulation at local level. We have since raised the issue with the First Minister's office for further guidance.
- e. Any possible mitigation for this rule would provide significant positive impact for students based on our Bay Campus and would ensure that we are able to support their health and wellbeing, while continuing to reinforce and adhere to the public safety measures currently in place.

We hope that the above is helpful to the Committee and we are willing to provide any further detail required at this stage. We also note the Committee's request to receive further updates on developments as appropriate.



## Estates and Facilities Management Ystadau a Rheoli Cyfleusterau

### Appendix One: Catering and Services Plan: Oct-Dec 2020

#### Service overview

The following services are currently in operation. To note, these do not include emergency provision in response to a major lockdown of accommodation, for which separate provision exists:

#### **Singleton Campus**

Outlet	Service description	Opening times
Callaghan's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hot beverages; Starbucks branded</li> <li>▪ Pre-packaged food               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Homemade sandwiches, Cake selection, Crisps, Cold Drinks</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Mon - Fri 08:00 – 18:00
The Kitchen (Formerly Fusion)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hot food counter serving breakfast and lunch (up to 5 options per day)</li> </ul>	Mon - Fri 08:00 – 18:00
The Kitchen – Click and Collect (Refectory, Fulton House)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New Click and Collect service serving breakfast and lunch (30+ options everyday)</li> </ul>	Mon - Fri 08:00 – 15:00
Costcutter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ General groceries – Fresh, chilled and frozen.</li> <li>▪ Hot food – Pasties etc.</li> </ul>	Mon – Fri 08:00 – 18:00  Sat & Sun. 10:00- 15:00
Root (Students' Union to review provision 9 <sup>th</sup> October)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Vegan, vegetarian and healthy food options.</li> </ul>	Mon – Fri 10:00 -15:00

Welsh National Pool	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hot beverages - Starbucks branded.</li> <li>▪ Homemade sandwiches, cakes selection, crisps, confectionary, cold drinks</li> </ul>	Mon-Fri 09:00 – 15:00
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**Bay Campus**

Outlet	Service description	Opening times
Costa @ The College	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Hot beverages - Costa branded. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Homemade sandwiches</li> <li>○ Cake selection, Crisps, Cold drinks</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	Mon - Fri 08:00 – 18:00
The Kitchen – Click and Collect (@The Core)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New Click and collect service serving breakfast and lunch (30+ options everyday)</li> </ul>	Mon - Fri 08:00 – 15:00
Tesco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ General groceries – fresh, chilled and frozen</li> </ul>	Mon - Fri

Notes on current operation

- At present, service utilisation is poor. Outlets are trading at -99%+ when compared to the same period last year. Once Click and Collect services are fully launched, we anticipate increased uptake. At this point it may be prudent to consider the closure of hot food counters currently in operation due to extremely low uptake. This will be reviewed between 7<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> October.
- Should overall service utilisation in Callaghan’s & Costa@The College not improve over the week ahead then a consolidation of outlets would release staff resource which could be focussed into supporting other service amendments.
- Both Root and Welsh National Pool will be reviewed by 9<sup>th</sup> October to assess the need for service, based on current trading patterns.