



Vice-Chancellor's Office
Swyddfa'r Is-Ganghellor

Lynne Neagle MS,
Chair, Children, Young People & Education Committee,
Senedd Cymru,
Cardiff Bay
CF99 1NA

7 October 2020

Ref: CR/

Dear Ms Neagle,

Thank you for your letter of 29 September requesting a range of information to inform the Committee's ongoing scrutiny of the steps being taken to manage the impact of COVID-19 on children and young people, including students in further and higher education. Cardiff University's answers to your specific questions are included overleaf; I would also strongly urge Committee Members to look at the [guide we have produced for students](#) setting out how we will keep them safe on campus amidst the risks of COVID-19.

As always, if you or Members of your Committee have any queries relating to the work of Cardiff University, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

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Vice-Chancellor

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Requested information	Response
<p>The COVID-19 measures taken in relation to our own accommodation, and how we have worked with Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSAs) and private landlords (NB, please refer to arrangements for both term and vacation periods).</p>	<p>Accommodation owned and managed by Cardiff University is primarily used to accommodate new first year undergraduates and postgraduates.</p> <p>Throughout the pandemic, our professional student support services remain accessible to all our students wherever they live, including those who do not live in Cardiff. We moved services to remote working rapidly in March 2020 and continue to operate in this way with good levels of student engagement.</p> <p>We have continued to offer all our students access to Talk Campus. This is a social networking site which offers a safe place to talk anonymously about anything without judgement. Talk Campus is monitored by a professional team as well as student peers who will talk about common issues with each other.</p> <p>In the early stages of the pandemic, during March to June 2020, we released students from their accommodation contracts with us on request and refunded rent accordingly. We liaised with PBSA providers in the city to encourage similar approaches; and sought to ensure they were raising awareness of our student support services.</p> <p>We introduced a temporary student service where 200 staff from across Cardiff University volunteered to check in with students who remained in Cardiff during this period. This was a basic welfare check-in to ensure those students were well, and to refer them to professional support if required.</p> <p>During the summer vacation we made available a Zoom drop-in session, 'Click and Connect' where students could drop-in to a Zoom session where a member of student support staff would be present.</p> <p>In readiness for the new academic year, we introduced an online orientation platform which provides information on support and services across Cardiff University to students before they arrive. This includes specific information for students about COVID-19 safety. This has a completion rate of about 78% and rising. It remains accessible to students who have completed it so they can refer back to it.</p> <p>To help prevent students in residences becoming isolated, we have introduced a larger Residence Life student peer support team. This team is accessible remotely, using a newly acquired online platform. This allows us to deliver a range of social and interactive activities remotely which we can adjust easily based on interest and demand. As of 1 October 2020, over 4,500 individual students (the vast majority of our residents) have engaged with the platform with evidence of sustained and repeat interest.</p>
<p>How we intend to support – or have been supporting – all students (on and off-campus) who have needed to self-isolate, including how we 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).</p>	<p>For students living in Cardiff University halls of residence, the student and their household will be able to access and support on offer through our Residences Life Programme. Any specific issues can be directed to Hall Managers also.</p> <p>We have established a simple reporting process for any student who needs to self-isolate:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. COVID symptoms; 2. A positive or inconclusive result from the Cardiff University Screening Service that requires a confirmatory NHT Test; 3. A positive NHS Test; 4. Been identified as a close contact of someone with COVID-19; or 5. Been identified as living in a household of someone in 1-3 above. <p>This triggers a range of communications from us to the student providing advice, information and support:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Auto-email: On submission of the report students will receive an email relevant to their circumstance that provides advice on what they need to do, relevant Welsh Government guidance, assurance on who will check in with them, advice on food deliveries and referral to sources of advice and support. • University Residence Team: If the student lives in Cardiff University Halls of Residence, the Residence Team will write to those they live with to advise them that they also need to self-isolate. The Residence Team will then send a follow up email to the household to provide practical advice and information relevant to their period of self-isolation. • Student Support and Wellbeing will undertake a welfare check by either phone or email and will follow up as necessary. If they live in our Residences this will be done by our professional Residence Life student support staff. If they live in the private sector,

	<p>including PBSAs, a professional wellbeing practitioner will contact the student. During the welfare check-in calls the staff caller has access to a full set of information to help inform the student who is self-isolating about what they need to do to act in compliance with social distancing during their self-isolation. This includes specific information on shared living in Halls of Residence. This information is also included in the email communication triggered by the declaration.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trace, Test and Protect Service will check in with all those who are self-isolating on a daily basis via text or telephone. They are able to refer any students of concern to Student Support and Wellbeing. • Food delivery: We are promoting the fact that online supermarket and meal deliveries are readily available in Cardiff. However, we recognise the impact of the pandemic means that it can be hard to get a delivery slot from the major supermarkets, so we have set up 'Marketplace', a new Cardiff University grocery delivery for students who live in our residences. They will be able to order basic groceries (e.g. pasta), healthcare (e.g. toothpaste), fresh meat, fruit and vegetables. Students can also order hot meals for delivery to a Cardiff University Residence (or to collect from one of our Restaurants if they are not self-isolating). Students will be able to order online and pay via an app by 1pm for next day delivery. Access to Marketplace opened on 4 October delivering Monday to Friday. We are exploring the possibility of linking hardship awards through the app (if this is of benefit to the student). • Quarantine: Where students have arrived in September with a quarantine requirement, Cardiff University has funded and supplied bedding and food essential packs which were in students' rooms on arrival. These packs included food and drink sensitive to dietary requirements. • Online advice and guidance 24/7: Additional advice and guidance is also available to all our students on our intranet and via our new Student Connect service which includes an online question and answer functionality. The release of this new function was brought forward in part because of the pandemic. This is bot powered and therefore available 24/7 with staff moderation during the working day.
<p>The provision in place for identifying and addressing student hardship.</p>	<p>We have an established approach to student financial support. This has been adapted to circumstances of remote working brought about by the pandemic. Our financial support is prominently advertised across our student intranet and in our new online orientation platform for new students.</p> <p>We make available a discretionary hardship award fund, advertised as our 'Financial Assistance Programme', of £550K per annum. This is managed alongside a range of other financial awards. It is part of the commitments set out in our annual Fee and Access Plan.</p> <p>Access to the fund is means-tested and is managed as part of our integrated Student Advice and Money Service. This also includes money management advice, budgeting and other support in relation to funding. The service offers appointments and daily drop-ins. This is all available online with no requirement any face to face or physical contact through the application process, means-testing and payment processing which can all take place remotely.</p> <p>During the period from March to August 2020 we spent around £80K on COVID-19 related student hardship funding, including digital poverty assistance. This was largely to help students from widening access backgrounds. We continue to assist students from the fund to issues around digital poverty.</p> <p>We are currently exploring ways to enhance our approach to assisting students from lower income backgrounds with issues around access to IT hardware, particularly laptops.</p>
<p>Our approach to working with students on COVID-19 measures and actions, including self-isolation.</p>	<p>We adjusted our governance arrangements at the outset of our pandemic response to include Student Union representation in our COVID Task Force (IMT Gold command) and Student Life Group which has overseen decision making around the key elements of blended online and face to face education and student experience.</p> <p>Our professional student support staff have worked with the Student Union officers to ensure their 'welcome volunteers' have access to PPE (funded by the university) and knowledge of our support services for referral purposes.</p> <p>In partnership with the Student Union, we are developing a function where students who are self-isolating will be able to join for a support and listening online drop-in. This will be led by a trained student volunteer who has links back to our professional student support services if required.</p>

	<p>This is in addition to our existing Residences Life Programme which aims to build a sense of community amongst new students in our halls of residence and help with the transition to university life described above.</p> <p>We have sustained our close working relationship with the elected officer team and senior leadership of the Student Union to support the changes they have made to the full range of their commercial and welfare services. This includes in support of any contact tracing that may be required by the Test, Trace and Protect Service.</p>
<p>How we are working and integrating with the public health and civil contingencies machinery within our local authorities and local resilience fora (to include confirmation of whether we have on-campus testing facilities for students).</p>	<p>We are working closely with Public Health Wales and Cardiff's Test Trace and Protect team. The Academic Registrar meets the TTP Lead for Cardiff and Vale twice a week and is the HE representative on the Cardiff and Vale Incident Management Team, also meeting twice a week and coordinates with other Cardiff HEIs via the weekly HE/FE Sub-Group. The Head of Communications is a member of the HE Communication sub-group. The Academic Registrar is attending the Welsh Government Civil Contingency Meeting on 7 October.</p> <p>Details of Cardiff University's COVID-19 screening service are available on our website where we explain to students how they can access a test and what support is available. In essence, all students and staff who are asymptomatic will have the opportunity to take a saliva antigen test after arriving on campus. The test is free and entirely voluntary. Students are encouraged to book an appointment by e-mail using a dedicated web portal.</p>
<p>How we have engaged – and are engaging – with the local population.</p>	<p>The Vice Chancellor of Cardiff University has written to local residents in areas of Cathays, Plasnewydd and Gabalfa wards in Cardiff where student population density is highest to set out key messages, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reassurance that the health and wellbeing of staff, students and our neighbouring communities is Cardiff University's top priority; • Reiterating the protective measures Cardiff University are undertaking to keep the campus COVID-secure; • Reiterating the importance of our staff and students observing Welsh Government and Public Health Wales guidance; • Setting out how residents with any concerns over the conduct of students can contact Cardiff University's COVID incident reporting email and telephone line, and that issues will be considered by our Student Conduct Panel which will meet on a weekly basis; • Setting out our "Community Commitment" – a pledge for our staff and students to read, follow and support Cardiff University and government guidance and to take personal responsibility for ensuring that the places where they live, work and study are as safe as they can be. <p>The letter is being printed and delivered currently (during w/c 5 October).</p> <p>Furthermore, the Vice-Chancellors of the three Cardiff-based universities issued a joint statement on 16 September, welcoming students back to the city and setting out safety measures on campus – but also emphasising that students are part of the city's wider community and should help protect that community by following relevant PHW and Welsh Government guidance at all times.</p>
<p>Any recommendations we believe the Committee could helpfully make to the Welsh Government to improve support for universities, staff and students.</p>	<p>We welcome the additional funding that is proposed (HEFCW Circular W20/29HE) to be made available in 2020/21 by HEFCW for wellbeing and health in HE. However, the impact of COVID on student mental health and wellbeing will stretch well beyond the 2020/21 academic year and sustained increased funding for HEIs to meet increased demand will be important. This should recognise the increasing pressure on HE providers from a student population that is evidencing a considerable growth in demand and expectation for mental health support. It should encourage other agencies, including NHS Wales, to work in partnership with HEIs to ensure that support is provided in an appropriate and timely way, especially to students in crisis.</p> <p>There are two specific concerns for students as a result of the economic impact of the pandemic we would like to address. Firstly, opportunities for part-time work for students have reduced significantly. This is likely to have a greater impact on students from lower income backgrounds. We would welcome any move to enhance access to part time employment for students. Secondly, it is likely employers will be likely to offer less paid work experience placements for students impacting employability and skills development. Again, we would welcome an opportunity to participate in the establishment of programmes to mitigate this growing concern.</p>