Written evidence from Dr Michelle Morgan

Overview -Proposal for a staggered return to HE for new and returning students

An alternative plan to maximise recruitment, progression, retention and the success of students

We cannot assume that university life will be back to normal this autumn. This proposal provides an alternative approach in helping maximise recruitment, progression, retention, and the success of students across the sector by having a staggered return to study in 2020/21 for new and returning students. A staggered start will create confidence amongst applicants, students and staff. It is important to acknowledge that applicants and students hold the power because they can decide whether to defer or intermit- they are the lifeblood of universities. The current 'business as normal model' is unlikely to work because of the lack of clarity about the coming year, the concerns about the cost of studying online (but still having to pay full fees and accommodation costs), and whether campuses are safe. The student voice is currently not being put at the heart of strategy and policy making. This approach does.

In these uncertain times, having a sector wide agreement and a clear pragmatic plan of action that provides stability and confidence, could help all higher education establishments in the coming academic year. Consensus and consistency, collaboration and cooperation, competitive recruitment set aside in 2020/21 and compliance flexibility will all be important.

A financial package of support by Government to help deliver a staggered return between October and January could include an interest free or low interest loan (paid back over a number of years). In return, universities could provide an evidence based plan showing the practical steps they are taking to support learning delivery, and the wellbeing and safety of students and staff. It will be essential to keep support services maintained so that the advances made in mental health and wellbeing are not lost.

Core issues for consideration in this document for a staggered return include:

1. Obtaining the confidence of applicants, students, and staff that our campuses are 'safe' in teaching and study space, social areas and accommodation.
2. Planning for continuation of restricted or closed borders preventing international student travel.
3. Accommodation and financial loss for students and universities.
4. Supporting transitions and identifying skill and confidence gaps.
5. Continuation and development of online learning including the collection of 'engagement' data.
6. Maintaining support and wellbeing provision.
7. Effective space planning for curriculum delivery in the event of continuing social distancing.
8. The development of effective communication strategies to keep applicants and students regularly updated, informed, engaged and connected to their studies.
9. Ensuring the student voice is heard and that concerns, and worries are addressed, and appropriate support mechanisms developed and provided.

10. Harnessing the 'learnings' from the lockdown across the sector in helping shape the future of higher education.

Rationale for staggered return to HE for new entrants and returners

Dr Michelle Morgan 3 May 2020

Introduction

Covid19 has created an environment that is unprecedented. Universities are working extremely hard to respond to the immediate needs of students and staff.

The impact on higher education is going to be phenomenal, both in the short and long term. This will require us to think differently in order to look after the wellbeing of our students and staff, as well as sector survival through taking action to maximise recruitment, progression, retention and the success of students. We cannot assume that university life will be back to normal this autumn so we need alternative plans to consider.

This proposal provides an alternative plan that includes a rationale for a staggered return to HE for new entrants and returners, core issues that may need to be considered, and some overarching activities that could support this course of action.

The next academic year

We do not know when self-isolating and social distancing measures will start to be lifted, but it is clear that social mixing will not resume for a long time and when it does, it will take a while to adjust. More than ever, this is the time when the HE sector needs to come to a consensus, and agree a pragmatic plan of action that provides stability and confidence in helping HEIs move forward together in these uncertain times.

Paul Ashwin, Professor of Education at Lancaster University argues a sectorwide approach is essential saying *'You can't leave this to the market. You can't leave it to the interests of individual institutions. You have to have some coordination by policy makers that actually looks out for the health of the sector as a whole rather than letting the strongest and most dominant voices, which tend to be prestigious institutions, fight for a system that suits them, but severely hurts other institutions'*.[1]

The concern is that applicants and students who are advantaged because they have access to economic, social and cultural capital will be more likely to succeed than those that don't. A

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[1] Ashwin, P. (2020) *Wonkhe PODCAST: Bailouts, admissions, September*, 23 April 2020 available by going to: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/wonkhe-show-s06e01/

disaster due to Covid19, would be for the widening participation agenda that areas of the sector have worked so hard to achieve, would suffer and this will be damaging for society. Allowing universities to fail, especially those that have a high proportion of widening participation students who are pivotal to local and regional economies, would be damaging for the national economy.[2]

We also need to be mindful that in 2020/21, the population under 18 years of age will decline by a further 2%, so recruitment will be even more challenging across all domiciled groups.[3]

To help applicants and students, and universities reduce inequalities and inequities, policy makers and universities adopting a 6 C's approach could help achieve a more stable HE environment and continue to deliver in uncertain circumstances. They are:

- Consensus and consistency on approach
- Collaboration and cooperation
- Competitive recruitment set aside in 2020/21
- Compliance flexibility.

Universities are under huge financial pressure as highlighted in the recent UUK proposal.[4] The financial year will remain unchanged, but a staggered start will impact on cashflow. So could a balanced package of financial support include a free or low interest loan to help fund the staggered return between October to January, which universities could pay back over a few years as suggested by David Kernohan, Associate Editor of Wonkhe?[5] Could the profile of payments from the Student Loan Company be changed? For example, the first two terms for returning students could be paid in the first term and the necessary adjustments made in the third?

A requirement could be an evidence based plan showing the practical steps universities are taking to support their students and staff? In the panic and scramble to keep everything moving, it will be essential to keep support services maintained so that the advances made in mental health and wellbeing are not lost.

There are a number of core issues to be addressed to enable the HE sector to put in place a meaningful and pragmatic plan for a staggered return to study in 2020/21.

Core issues to consider

- **Obtaining the confidence of applicants, students and staff that our campuses are 'safe' in our teaching and study space, social areas and accommodation, will be critical**. To do this, it will be important to encompass the different perceptions of what 'safe' constitutes to different stakeholders. The NUS Covid19 Survey highlighted the concerns and worries of current students at the start of the closure of universities.[6] As the lockdown and social

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[2] Hardy, E. (2020) *Regional universities in the UK cannot be allowed to fail*, 30 April, Available: https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/regional-universities-uk-cannot-be-allowed-fail
[3] Curnock-Cook, M. (2020) *A student-centric bailout for universities*, 15 April, Available: https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/04/15/a-student-centric-bailout-for-universities/
[4] Universities UK 92020) Achieving stability in the higher education sector following Covid19, 10 April. Available https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Documents/uuk_achieving-stability-higher-education-april-2020.pdf#search=Achieving%20stability
[5] Kernohan, D. (2020) *How do we get a loan?* 2 May, Available: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/how-do-we-get-to-a-loan/

distancing continues, these fears could escalate. A clear strategy from Government would be helpful along with a sector-wide plan of action that includes information and guidance, on the steps being taken to safe guard the university community through creating safe spaces.

- **Assumptions cannot be made that all borders will be open by September and that Governments across the world will permit international travel in and out of their country.** The UK's largest European market is Italy, and internationally, it is China. Both countries have suffered extensively as a result of Covid19 so applicants may decide to, or be required by their government, to defer this year as part of their national strategy to deal with Covid19. Being able to provide assurances to family members who are often heavily involved in the decision making process will be essential. With airlines in lockdown across the world, it is uncertain when normal flights resume and how costly the flights will be. A finding from the Postgraduate Experience Project was that it was not uncommon for airlines to raise the cost of European and International flights to the UK over the 'arrival' period, which impacted on the arrival date of some international students.[7]

- **Accommodation provision and financial loss needs to be explored and decisions made.** Will students be expected to pay for year long contracts if they have a delayed start? Thousands of students will have already signed year long contracts for next year. What will universities do financially if new entrants who live in their halls don't start until January? If the start of the academic year is staggered, could conferences and events that have been postponed in July and August, which use university accommodation, be rescheduled in late September/October to help with the financial loss? How do we support new and existing care leavers and estranged students expecting to arrive in September with accommodation as they will no longer be in the care system? And lastly, will universities be allowed to fill their halls of residence to maximum capcity under any future distancing measures?

- **Supporting transitions and identifying skill and confidence gaps**. Level 4 and 5 students will have undertaken in-person university study for less than two terms/just over one semester this academic year, and completed alternative assessment. This potentially means they will enter 2020/21 under-skilled and under-prepared for the next level of study, and as a result, could experience increased anxiety and apprehension. So how can time be built in to the academic year for students and staff to have the time to re-visit and engage with the previous year's skills before embarking on the next level of study, which will be critical for success?

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[6] National Union of Students (2020) NUS Coronavirus Survey, Available**:** https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/nus-uk/coronavirus-covid-19-hub/student-safety-net

[7] Morgan, M. and Direito, I. (2016) Widening and sustaining postgraduate taught (PGT) STEM study in the UK: a collaborative project. Creating change through understanding expectations and attitudes towards PGT study, experiences and post-study outcomes from the perspective of applicants, students, universities and employers. Available at: http://www.postgradexperience.org/project-docs/

- **Continuation and development of online learning**. It may be tempting for universities to rush to move courses, which are usually face to face or blended, to being fully online for new UG and PGT students in September for financial reasons. The stress and pressure on staff to evolve and develop online learning in a short space of time without testing prior to implementation is fraught with difficulties. We need to be mindful that the current move to online learning this semester has been an emergency response and is not the same as a new academic year that is 'designed' to be online. The third semester in the academic year for many universities, is also a terribly busy time when exam boards, resits and confirmation and clearing take place. Although technology is developing fast, there will be skills that cannot be achieved through online study alone and for some courses, it will not be possible or appropriate. Importantly, we cannot make assumptions about undergraduate entrants learning digital capacity because a large proportion of students at secondary school do not access learning materials digitally but through hard copy books and by taking handwritten notes.[8] We also cannot assume that all entrants will have the resources or appropriate home study environments to engage online.

- **Maintaining support and wellbeing provision** With reduced funding, it may be tempting to slim down this area of support for students and staff. However, if this occurs, the advances made in the past few years of providing support and well-being provision could be lost and the sector will be set back. We will not know for a while the impact that Covid19 and the lockdown has had on the mental health of the nation. The educational disruption across all levels of study has been extensive, creating much stress and anxiety amongst students and staff. When studies resume, it is highly likely that staff will be faced with increased questions and requests for support from students. This will require more resource allocation than normal. Many new and returning students, as well as staff, may have had Covid19 or lost close family members and be experiencing delayed bereavement. How can we as a sector work with the NHS and organisation's, such as Student Minds, to put in place consistent advice, support, and guidance on how to identify specific mental health issues as a result of Covid19?

- **Effective space planning for curriculum delivery** In the event of continuing social distancing and large final year cohorts due to students unable to undertake placements, effective space planning is going to be essential. Space-limited campuses may have to operate on only 50% capacity. As a result, the consequences on timetabling could be huge. If the teaching day lengthens with more 8am and 6/7pm lectures to deal with capacity, this will impact on student parents and carers disproportionately. Also, for students and staff who rely on public and university transport to get to university, will more services need to be provided to deal with social distancing measures? The impact on attendance could be dramatic. By adopting a staggered return, it should be less challenging for planners to manage the population on

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[8] Morgan, M. (2020 *Bridging the gap between secondary and tertiary education.* Available online at: http://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/library/UG_documents/Bridging_the_gap_between_secondary_and_tertiary_education -Morgan_2020.pdf

campus, and support staff delivery and student learning. Should Covid 19 health and safety training be developed for all students and staff with their local hospitals to reduce risk and provide information on how to seek advice if they exhibit any symptoms? There will be students who feel uncomfortable physically being on campus even if guidance permits it, so how will universities cater to those students as well?

- **Effective communication strategies** These need to be developed to keep applicants and students regularly updated, informed, engaged and connected to their studies. Just putting information on a university website is unlikely to be effective so using social media channels, and particular WeChat for those who aren't on mainstream social media channels like Facebook, will be advisable. Many universities have been developing communication strategies to deal with the Covid19 situation here and now, but ideally, they need to continue well beyond the final phase of bringing students onto campus because some may decide to intermit from their studies for a year. Student attitudes and judgements about 'value for money' this year need to be considered and dealt with sensitively.

- **Listening to and hearing the student voice** This will be paramount so that concerns and worries are addressed and appropriate support mechanisms developed and provided. The NUS Covid19 Report highlights concerns at the start of lockdown in the UK. However, we will need to understand how students are feeling about this year of study and concerns about their upcoming year so we can identify the support they need as a cohort. There will also be a need to not just respond to concerns and worries but actively seek input into decision making from student representatives via the SU and students. Collaboration and partnership will help avoid poor decisions being made and enable students to have a degree of control over how they engage going forward in their studies.

- **Harnessing the 'learnings' from the lockdown** By putting in place mechanisms for staff to 'come together' nationally and across institutions will be beneficial in helping shape the future of higher education. Could AdvanceHE be the hub that collates this activity?

The staggered academic year

To maximise recruitment, progression, retention and the success of our students, they could be phased back to HE over a term. Many universities have two or three intakes a year at undergraduate and postgraduate taught level (Sept/Oct, Jan and Apr), but the last two (winter and spring intake) generally are much smaller in number. Commonly, the different entry cohorts are taught together. For many universities, combining the September/October and January intakes for new Level 4 and PGT students could be very possible. Importantly, we will need to support our returning students and put in place a learning 'scaffolded' return to university.

Detailed examples of suggested structures of the academic year for new UG and PGT in January, and returners in October can be found in appendix 1. No approach will be perfect so a

compromise by all stakeholders will be required with everyone's expectations and aspirations being carefully managed.

- **The staggered year for Levels 5 and 6 returners and direct entrants**

Returning students (including students on placement 19/20) and direct entry applicants going into Levels 5 and 6 could start in mid to late October.

  o Some of their learning, where appropriate, could be adapted for online delivery alongside face to face such as recording lectures and undertaking seminars by webinar. This could help with social distancing.

  o Direct entrants will need to undertake an 'arrival and introduction to study' activity before the returners come back as these students will join their year cohort. It could be delivered as an online module as long as students have access and relevant skills.

  o All returners will need an effective reorientation where they revisit and are reminded of the knowledge and skills acquired the previous year, and reinduction where they are introduced to the learning and skills they will be required to accrue in their upcoming year.[9] This could be a mix of in-person and online activities.

  o Where possible, laboratory and workshop courses could be phased back first then classroom based ones. This will allow students who may not have had the chance to develop the hands on pre-requisite skills required to progress because of the shut down, time to do so. They would need to be weaved into the upcoming course delivery. This approach provides staff with adequate time to concentrate on each level and get students engaged and embedded back into their studies.

  o It will be essential to keep communication channels open with our current students. Usual communication mechanisms such a university email and the VLE out of term time are unlikely to work as students generally don't look at them. Using mobile phone messaging could be adopted to check on how students are doing along with putting in place a dedicated team to respond to any queries, questions and concerns. Extending good practice undertaken during term time such as keeping course Facebook community pages active over the summer period could be advantageous to keep support and discussion going. It will also be important to adopt other forms of communication for those not on social media. It will be important to encourage students to look out for one another in their study and social groups. However, all communications will require consistency and a dedicated team could ensure this happens.

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[9] Information on The Student Experience Transitions Model, Available: http://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/student-practitioner-model/SET-stages/

- **The staggered year for new Level 3 and 4 undergraduate and PGT entrants**

New Level 3 and 4 undergraduate and PGT entrants could start mid January. However, it may be that an October start is required for some courses such as nursing especially if a university doesn't have a January intake. This staggered approach provides potential numerous benefits.

- o It allows the admissions process for UG and PGT to continue through to late November 2020. This provides space and time for A-Level appeals to take place and any opportunity, if offered, for an applicant to undertake the examination in the Autumn, as has been promised by the Department of Education and OfQual, or a university entry exam.

- o A January start also provides breathing space for individuals who had not thought about further study at UG or PGT level to think about their options. This could be an attractive opportunity for those unable to find employment between qualification confirmation and Christmas (which we know is going to be challenging) to consider further study. At PGT level, the grants the NUS have suggested be made available in their Covid19 Report could help participation at this level.

- o If the universities want a September online start for all courses, they need to consider the following challenges; for example will our current final year UG students, who had their last year of study disrupted, really want to invest more costly fees and living expenses on a course where they cannot use campus facilities or have a 'normal' postgraduate student experience? Will this group without incentives such as dramatically reduced fees or grants engage? They may prefer to defer until the following year when they hope more certainty will be evident? And what of the power of family and social/friendship groups on an individual's decision on whether or not to go this year? Universities starting new Level 3/4 and PGTs at different times, could create not only financial complexity in terms of obtaining funding , but also disruption to the assessment structure which could lead to mistakes, stress and confusion.

- o If international movement is not fully lifted across the world by September, but there is some movement (which is looking increasingly likely), it still provides time for international applicants to make arrangements to come in January. For universities who rely on international recruitment, this could be far more financially beneficial than having entrants defer for a year.

- o If international travel is not lifted then a January start may be required for everyone. It may be worth universities considering how 'in-country- support' to keep applicants warm could be provided.

- o If the academic year for new entrants is started in January, they may find it more intense as there will be less breaks than normal. Although Level 4, often doesn't contribute to an individual's qualification, we still have to be mindful of potential stress and burnout.

o Fresher's Week in January, which is a seminal activity in welcoming students, will need to be adapted and factors such as weather and space availability considered. An advantage of having the staggered start is that returners will come back at the same time new students start in January so they will also potentially be able to participate. With a normal September intake, returners often arrive after this week has taken place. However, outbreaks of flu in the first few weeks of starting is common, and the spread of diseases such as meningitis and mumps is easy across university communities so we need to be mindful of how Covid19 it is identified and managed.

Understanding current students concerns and those of entry and re-entry students 20/21

Students will understand why schools and universities had to close in March and for alternative assessments to be put in place this academic year. However, they may be less understanding if universities do not listen to their learning, support and mental health concerns this coming academic year. Students are making a huge financial investment in their education and if it appears that mechanisms are not being put in place to support their interests, they may decide to intermit, change universities (especially to ones nearer to home) or withdraw from university study altogether. This will further increase the financial burden on universities.

We will need to consider what data should be collected to help inform our work over and above what is already collected. However, the data needs to be meaningful.[10] Data could include how students engaged with the emergency online learning and assessment, and how they fared in terms of assessment outcome in compariosn to their other assessments.

Understanding new entrants' and returners' concerns about their prior learning experience and upcoming study before they make the transition, will also be critical. A Pre-arrival Academic Questionnaire (PAQ) could assist with this. Like a lot of pre-arrival work, it will be voluntary but an explanation of how it will help them, their course leaders and the university will be provided.[11]

- The PAQ provides staff with a snap shot of the prior learning experience of their students and how they are feeling so it can inform their approach in the first few weeks of starting or returning to university.
- It provides a meaningful pre-arrival activity taking students through a range of questions to get them to start thinking about their upcoming studies.
- Students get the headline findings via a self help sheet with signposting to support within three weeks of the start of the academic year, and it helps them understand that their prior experiences are similar to other students, and if they are struggling , that they are not alone!
- This activity can feed into academic adviser or personal tutoring support processes which help identify students who are struggling. A holistic approach is vital.

Activities to help the staggered return

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[10] Kernohan, D. (2020) *Covid-19 will last a long time in regulatory data*, 26 March, https://wonkhe.com/blogs/covid-19-will-last-a-long-time-in-regulatory-data/
[11] Information on the PAQ is available by going to: http://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/essential-information/useful-resources/

Below is a list of activities that could be undertaken and why. Hopefully, they will help instill confidence in students and staff that their campus is safe, and that social distancing is being respected and delivered, and slowly phased out when appropriate. The five key areas below that interlink are all critical in delivering a high-quality student experience.[12] Could AdvanceHE be the hub that collates examples of good practice across these key areas?

- **Support and wellbeing**

We need to be mindful of the emotional and mental health impact of lockdown and Covid19 on our applicants, students, 2019/20 graduates and staff. The NUS Covid19 report undertaken at the start of April 2020 highlights the concerns and stresses of current students. Working in collaboration with NUS, Student Minds and the NHS, guidance, advice and support that is already being created could be collated for distribution across the sector. With potentially more students and staff being exposed to grief and bereavement due to Covid19, increasing provision for support may be prudent. Adopting a variety of mechanisms to distribute information will be helpful (e.g. VLE, email, text, hardcopy, social media platforms). Assumptions cannot be made that all students will have easy access to resources, and it is important to recognise that a distressed student may not have the mental capacity to access information online. The University Mental Health Charter launched by Student Minds last December would be an excellent framework to use in the development of support, advice and information.[13] Thinking about and addressing the implications of support and wellbeing in the key areas below will be critical.

- **Learning, teaching, assessment and pedagogy**

When considering whether to continue with online learning or alternative assessments, it will be advisable to collect and analyse data regarding student engagement in these emergency activities this academic year and note the gaps.[14] Moving to online provision in a hurry and using digital tools will not necessarily equate to a quality assured, high quality, engaging, and inclusive experience for our diverse student body.

Due to exams being cancelled in 2019/20 for secondary and university students and alternative assessments put in place, we may see an increase in failure rates at the next level of study when it comes to examinations. For many courses, examinations are either the main form of assessment (e.g. most A-Levels) or a significant part of it. Introducing summative assessments that account for a small percentage of the overall grade could therefore help with their main exam preparation. Reviewing the assessment structure rather than just rolling over the previous year's will be essential in ensuring they are fit for purpose for these cohorts. Additional support may be needed during the run up to exam period from tutors and professional service colleagues. The returners could be looked at early September and Level 4 and PGTs during the Autumn term. Covid19 has required us to quickly become innovative in evolving traditional methods of assessment and the provision of support, some of which may

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[12] Key themes/areas http://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/student-practitioner-model/themes-in-the-set/

[13] Student Minds University Mental Health Charter https://www.studentminds.org.uk/charter.html and Student Minds Covid19 advice https://www.studentminds.org.uk/coronavirus.html

[14] Krohn, A (2020) Remote learning will expose gaps in digital learning experiences, 26 April 2020. Available at: https://wonkhe.com/blogs/remote-learning-will-expose-gaps-in-digital-learning-experiences

continue. Brown and Sambell's Covid19 Guides entitled *'Fifty tips for replacements for time-constrained, invigilated on-site exams'* [15] and *'Contingency planning exploring rapid alternatives to face-to-face assessment'* [16] provide a range of suggestions.

In the coming year, central university academic support units will be essential in supporting and enabling staff to progress their online learning and support provision. Continuing professional development in this area will become even more important and will require investment in technology for staff and students both on and off campus. Pulling together good learning, teaching and assessment activities that worked, will be valuable.

- **Employability for 2019/20 graduands and final year graduates 20/21**

We will have final year undergraduate and postgraduate taught cohorts who will get a non-traditional degree. They will become Covid19 graduates and it will be a unique club. Preparing current students and final year students in 20/21 to complete their studies and leave university (Outduction) [17] is going to be more important than ever especially as the employment market, due to Covid19, is expected to dramatically reduce.[18]

For current students, the activities and information that would ordinarily take place face to face, such as revision and supervision activities and career and employment and advice, can no longer happen. Also putting effective Outduction support mechanisms in place for students who withdraw or decide to intermit will help them make informed choices.

Universities across the sector are putting in place 'no detriment' policies also known as the 'safety net' to support students and to allay their fears about their qualification outcome and future employment opportunities. But how will our graduates (both UG and PGT) come to terms with the emergency assessment put in place which they may feel does not reflect their true potential? How do we prevent them experiencing Imposter Syndrome on completion because they haven't graduated in the traditional way?

We don't know how employers will view our 2020 graduates as their transcripts will be very different to the norm, but including an explanation with the transcript explaining how the classification was calculated could help employers. This would give the graduate the choice of including it in a job application. This year, the Higher Educational Achievement Record could prove particularly beneficial for many undergraduate students as it will provide a full record of a student's academic and extra-curricular learning and experience achievements. Careers services are already being creative by moving support online through the use of vlogs, podcasts, online chats and virtual workshops to help students adapt their career plans.[19] Employability advice could include highlighting the extra skills this cohort may have achieved as

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[15] Sambell, K. and Brown, S. (2020) *Fifty tips for replacements for time-constrained, invigilated on-site exams*, March 2020, Available: Kay-Sambell-Sally-Brown-Coronavirus-Contingency-Suggestions-for-replacing-on-site-exams-w.docx (353 downloads)

[16] Sambell, K. and Brown, S. (2020) *Contingency planning: exploring rapid alternatives to face-to-face assessment*, Available: https://sally-brown.net/download/3122/

[17] Information on The Student Experience Transitions Model, Available: http://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/student-practitioner-model/SET-stages/

[18] Hooley, T. (2020) Redefining the employability agenda in the age of Covid-19, 11 April, Available: https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/04/11/redefining-the-employability-agenda-in-the-age-of-covid-19/

[19] Binnie, G. (2020) *Resilience in adversity: supporting graduate careers during Covid-19*, 7 April, https://wonkhe.com/blogs/resilience-in-adversity-supporting-graduate-careers-during-covid-19/

a result of Covid19 such as resilience, dealing with uncertainty and ability to adapt. These are all skills employers want and need! By providing examples of how they can demonstrate this in a supporting statement would be invaluable.

However, the challenge is ensuring all students have access to these resources which means we cannot rely solely on online support. Could we utilise/extend our Alumni networks and other peer to peer support groups in providing support and mentoring? A range of information, advice and support could be included in a 'What Next – Preparing to leave' handbook that is saved as a word document or PDF and placed on the VLE, sent via university and personal email to all students, and where requested, a hard copy posted.[20] As well as employability advice, it can include a farewell message, re-entry support and information, useful 'personal' and 'leaving university' checklists, mental health and wellbeing guidance, and graduation information.

Alumni

Universities all have Alumni departments, and Alumnus are usually allowed to use careers and sports facilities for up to three years after graduation. But what can we do about supporting the mental health and wellbeing of this cohort post study? In the last year, universities have been working hard on developing wellbeing and mental health support, but it is generally for their current students and only applicable during term time . We have no idea the impact the decisions made regarding final classifications will have on our students nor how they will respond once the current crisis has passed and they adjust to a 'new' normal. We will have graduates, especially young people, who are hurtling towards a labour market cliff due to a scaling back of graduate programmes. We will have graduating nurses and doctors who are being released early from their studies to support the pandemic crisis and are entering an environment that is like a battlefield.   We will have care leavers and estranged graduates who have no networks to support them. We have a moral imperative to support our graduates.

Working with the NHS and mental health charities such as Student Minds, wellbeing and mental health advice with relevant signposting could be put on Alumni sites. This could include information on how to identify mental health issues and access support. There could be generic advice which all university alumni sites post, and bespoke which covers specific information on the local or regional support available.

Conclusion

None of us can predict what the new academic year will hold for us, for our students and for all other stakeholders. However, we are doing ourselves a major disservice if we don't explore pragmatic solutions to maximise the opportunities for student learning and particularly retention. Only in this way will we keep universities viable and effective environments.

Acknowledgments

Many thanks to the following colleagues for their thoughts and comments in the production of this proposal.

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[20] Examples are available: http://www.improvingthestudentexperience.com/essential-information/useful-resources/

Special thanks to Professor Sally Brown, Eve Alcock and Dr Diane Nutt.

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Mike Grey (Head of University Partnerships, Gradconsult)

Professor Debbie Holley (Professor of Learning Innovation, Bournemouth University)

Gareth Hughes (Mental Health and Transitions Specialist)

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Appendix 1   Covid Academic year 2020.21

The timeline below enables a staggered start for returners and new students. By staggering the examination periods for each group, it should enable a faster turn around of results. The timeline provides time for holiday and marking. Resit assessments could be more creative such as reworking the exam paper as coursework and setting a 60% plus pass mark.

For all UGs, the academic year will be complete by the end of Aug/start of Sept 2021. This allows all new and returning UGs in 2021/22 to return in the first to second week of Oct. This will almost be a return to the standard academic year. For all PGTs, their academic year will officially end in December. However, new PGTs can start in Oct which will be a return to the standard academic year.
Ordinarily, Sept PGT starters finish in a year but January starter's take approximately 18 months. For this cohort, it will be important to complete them in a year so the normal 2 cycle approach can resume in October. As January PGTs will be working on their final project in a variety of places, hopefully library spaces and general study spaces will cope. This schedule can be tweaked by institution.

Level 5 and 6 returners and direct entry students Oct start

W/S		
Monday	**Friday**	
05-Oct	09-Oct	
12-Oct	**16-Oct**	**week1**
19-Oct	23-Oct	week2
26-Oct	30-Oct	week3
02-Nov	06-Nov	week4
09-Nov	13-Nov	week5

16-Nov	20-Nov	week6
23-Nov	27-Nov	week7
30-Nov	04-Dec	week8
07-Dec	11-Dec	week9
14-Dec	18-Dec	week10
21-Dec	08-Jan	Xmas Break
11-Jan	15-Jan	week 11 Revision classes
18-Jan	22-Jan	week 12 Revision classes
25-Jan	29-Jan	Exams
01-Feb	05-Feb	Exams
08-Feb	12-Feb	week 1 Online classes
15-Feb	19-Feb	week 2 plus sem 1 exam boards
22-Feb	26-Feb	week 3
01-Mar	05-Mar	week 4
08-Mar	12-Mar	week 5
15-Mar	19-Mar	week 6
22-Mar	26-Mar	week 7
29-Mar	02-Apr	Easter break
06-Apr	09-Apr	Easter break
12-Apr	16-Apr	week 8
19-Apr	23-Apr	week 9
26-Apr	30-Apr	week 10
03-May	07-May	week 11
10-May	14-May	week 12 Revision classes
17-May	21-May	Independent revision
24-May	28-May	Exams
31-May	04-Jun	Exams
07-Jun	11-Jun	
14-Jun	18-Jun	
21-Jun	25-Jun	Exam boards
28-Jun	02-Jul	
05-Jul	09-Jul	
12-Jul	16-Jul	
19-Jul	23-Jul	Resits
26-Jul	30-Jul	
02-Aug	06-Aug	
09-Aug	13-Aug	
16-Aug	20-Aug	
23-Aug	27-Aug	
30-Aug	03-Sep	Resit Exam boards
06-Sep	10-Sep	
13-Sep	17-Sep	
20-Sep	24-Sep	
27-Sep	01-Oct	
04-Oct	08-Oct	**Start of new academic year**
11-Oct	15-Oct	

Level 3 and 4 new Sept entrants (January start)

W/S Monday	Friday	
05-Oct	09-Oct	
12-Oct	16-Oct	
19-Oct	23-Oct	
26-Oct	30-Oct	
02-Nov	06-Nov	
09-Nov	13-Nov	
16-Nov	20-Nov	
23-Nov	27-Nov	
30-Nov	04-Dec	
07-Dec	11-Dec	Pre-arrival preparation and welcome online
14-Dec	18-Dec	Pre-arrival preparation- reading and online lectures
21-Dec	08-Jan	Pre-arrival preparation- reading and online lectures
11-Jan	**15-Jan**	**Arrival week on campus including Freshers wk**
18-Jan	22-Jan	week 1 Face to face teaching
25-Jan	29-Jan	week 2
01-Feb	05-Feb	week 3
08-Feb	12-Feb	week 4
15-Feb	19-Feb	week 5
22-Feb	26-Feb	week 6
01-Mar	05-Mar	week 7
08-Mar	12-Mar	week 8
15-Mar	19-Mar	week 9
22-Mar	26-Mar	week 10 Revision classes
29-Mar	02-Apr	Easter break/ independent revision
06-Apr	09-Apr	Easter break/ independent revision
12-Apr	16-Apr	Exams
19-Apr	23-Apr	Exams
26-Apr	30-Apr	Week 1 Online classes
03-May	07-May	week 2 plus sem 1 exam boards
10-May	14-May	week 3
17-May	21-May	week 4
24-May	28-May	week 5
31-May	04-Jun	week 6
07-Jun	11-Jun	week 7
14-Jun	18-Jun	week 8
21-Jun	25-Jun	week 9
28-Jun	02-Jul	week 10
05-Jul	09-Jul	week 11 Revision classes
12-Jul	16-Jul	Exams
19-Jul	23-Jul	
26-Jul	30-Jul	Exam board sem 2 and progression
02-Aug	06-Aug	
09-Aug	13-Aug	Resit students rework exam paper
16-Aug	20-Aug	as C/W/ other alternative assess
23-Aug	27-Aug	
30-Aug	03-Sep	
06-Sep	10-Sep	Resit Exam board
13-Sep	17-Sep	

20-Sep	24-Sep	
27-Sep	01-Oct	
04-Oct	08-Oct	**Start of new academic year**
11-Oct	15-Oct	

Postgraduate Taught Sept entrants (January start inclusive of the normal 'January' intake)

W/S Monday	Friday	
05-Oct	09-Oct	
12-Oct	16-Oct	
19-Oct	23-Oct	
26-Oct	30-Oct	
02-Nov	06-Nov	
09-Nov	13-Nov	
16-Nov	20-Nov	
23-Nov	27-Nov	
30-Nov	04-Dec	
07-Dec	11-Dec	Pre-arrival preparation and welcome online
14-Dec	18-Dec	Pre-arrival preparation- reading and online lectures
21-Dec	08-Jan	Pre-arrival preparation- reading and online lectures
11-Jan	**15-Jan**	**Arrival week on campus including Freshers wk**
18-Jan	22-Jan	week 1 Face to face teaching
25-Jan	29-Jan	week 2
01-Feb	05-Feb	week 3
08-Feb	12-Feb	week 4
15-Feb	19-Feb	week 5
22-Feb	26-Feb	week 6
01-Mar	05-Mar	week 7
08-Mar	12-Mar	week 8
15-Mar	19-Mar	week 9
22-Mar	26-Mar	week 10 Revision classes
29-Mar	02-Apr	Easter break/ independent revision
06-Apr	09-Apr	Easter break/ independent revision
12-Apr	16-Apr	Exams
19-Apr	23-Apr	Exams
26-Apr	30-Apr	Week 1 Online classes
03-May	07-May	week 2 plus sem 1 exam boards
10-May	14-May	week 3
17-May	21-May	week 4
24-May	28-May	week 5
31-May	04-Jun	week 6
07-Jun	11-Jun	week 7
14-Jun	18-Jun	week 8
21-Jun	25-Jun	week 9
28-Jun	02-Jul	week 10
05-Jul	09-Jul	week 11 Revision classes
12-Jul	16-Jul	Independent revision
19-Jul	23-Jul	Independent revision

26-Jul	30-Jul	Exams
02-Aug	06-Aug	Exams
09-Aug	13-Aug	
16-Aug	20-Aug	
23-Aug	27-Aug	
30-Aug	03-Sep	Exam board
06-Sep	10-Sep	Final project
13-Sep	17-Sep	Final project
20-Sep	24-Sep	Final project
27-Sep	01-Oct	Final project
04-Oct	08-Oct	Final project
11-Oct	15-Oct	Final project
18-Oct	22-Oct	Final project
25-Oct	29-Oct	Final project
01-Nov	05-Nov	Final project
08-Nov	12-Nov	Final project
15-Nov	19-Nov	Final project
22-Nov	26-Nov	Final project
29-Nov	03-Dec	Final project submission
06-Dec	10-Dec	Marking of final project
13-Dec	17-Dec	Marking of final project
20-Dec	24-Dec	
27-Dec	31-Dec	
03-Jan-22	07-Jan-22	
10-Jan	14-Jan	Exam boards
17-Jan	21-Jan	
24-Jan	28-Jan	
31-Jan	04-Feb	
07-Feb	11-Feb	Retake period (comes after UG)
14-Feb	18-Feb	
21-Feb	25-Feb	
28-Feb	04-Mar	Resit exam boards

May 2020