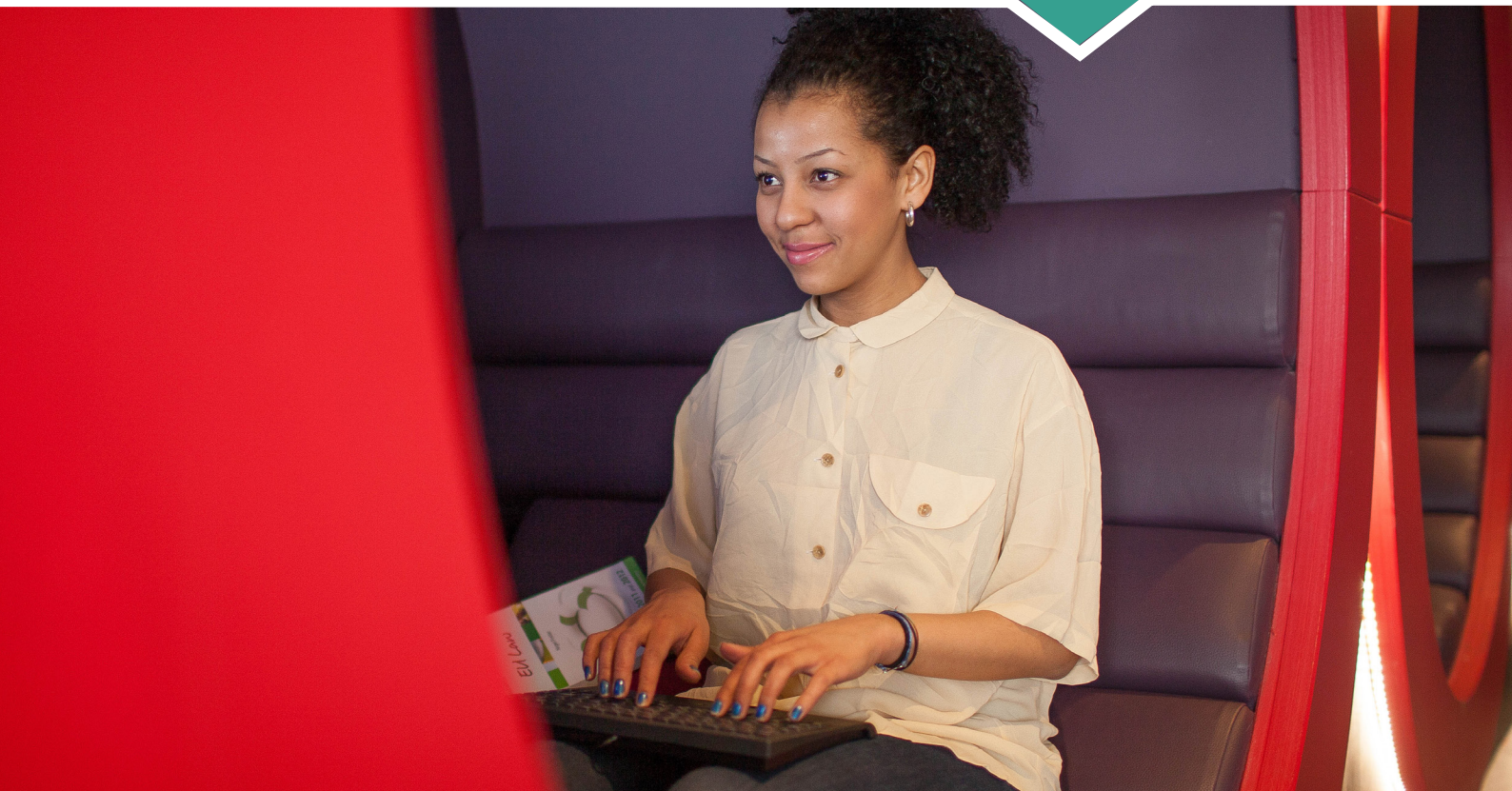


Supporting resource

Adapting to COVID-19: Smaller, Specialist and Newer Providers of Higher Education



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Introduction

Since March 2020, QAA has produced over 30 publications to support providers in adapting their provision as a result of the circumstances presented by COVID-19. While these publications related to the work of the higher education sector in general, the following guidance focuses on providers who, due to their size, their subject specialisms and organisational structures may lack the type of resource and systems that larger higher education providers have been able to utilise in mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on their educational provision.

The pivot to digital teaching and assessment and the need to bring in emergency regulations in March, affected providers from across the sector including the work of comparatively smaller and/or more specialist providers and further education colleges that offer higher education provision. We tend to refer to these providers as 'SSPs' - a general categorisation without a formal, rigid definition or a size criterion. The following guidance and series of case studies examines some of the specific issues that such providers have faced in adapting to the issues caused by COVID-19, and their plans for the next academic year.

This collation of examples of practice, drawn from an intricate and often highly specialised segment of the sector, is divided into two sections: first, a summary of the main issues and considerations with which providers have had to engage. These include: measures taken to plan strategically for the impact of changes to teaching, learning and assessment; how space has been managed for specialist provision; how plans for assessment have been adapted and ratified; how students have been communicated with; and how partnership working has been affected by the changes to teaching and assessment. Finally, the document includes detailed case studies from a range of providers, including: further education colleges that deliver higher education; conservatoires of dance and drama; film, media and music schools; agricultural, theology and counselling colleges; and universities. These providers are not necessarily 'small', as they range in size from those with just over a 100 students to those with several thousand, but their contexts will differ from the UK's largest universities.

Section 1: Summary of main issues

Teaching and learning: The teaching and learning approaches in smaller and specialist institutions are often one of the key reasons why students choose to study there. This can encompass one or more of the following elements: one-to-one or small group teaching, emphasis on group work, use of highly-specialised industry-standard equipment, focus on highly-practical approaches to teaching, and the embedding of field trips, work placements and study abroad. The case studies discuss how small student numbers have enabled a nimbler approach to adjusting aspects of certain programmes, often using government guidance intended for industry, and the development of programme-specific risk assessments. Some providers also discuss the need to purchase additional equipment and resources for the next academic year, or redistribute existing onsite, specialist equipment out to students studying offsite.

The unique approaches of specialist providers reflect their purposes - so students on physically demanding courses such as dance are being brought back early to prepare them for higher-intensity training.

In **small group teaching**, particularly in creative subjects, there are particular challenges including latency in music performance (small delays between when an audio signal enters a system and when it emerges), social distancing requirements for voice projection and singing and close-quarters acting, and the 'hands-on' requirements of some land-based, allied health or events management subjects. There have, however, been the benefits of staff knowing these students well due to the small cohort size and being able to tailor teaching and learning more directly to their needs. The case studies highlight creative ways that institutions are overcoming some of these challenges while ensuring that a comparable and high-quality student experience is key.

Group work: Many SSPs have smaller cohorts than larger providers, with class sizes reduced and more emphasis placed on group work. Some of the published guidance for adapting class cohorts for the upcoming academic year is not feasible with smaller groups and would make much of the provision untenable. The case studies look at how these providers are accommodating smaller groups or students who need to access specialist facilities.

Field trips, work placements and study abroad (as well as lab and other practice-based work) have been a particular challenge for some smaller, specialist institutions which are looking at reprofiling activity later in the academic year - considering virtual options, or, in some cases, suspending this element and deferring completion of learning outcomes relevant to practical experience. Providers have also had to develop alternative assessment strategies for international students unable or reluctant to return to the UK, and special mechanisms for placements that lead to regulated professional qualifications.

Recruitment and enrolment: Smaller providers will often not have the capacity to recruit in the same way as larger providers, may face particular challenges around interviewing and assessing portfolios, and may find enrolment challenging in September. These case studies explore how providers can meet that challenge, such as through remote recruitment activities.

Graduate outcomes: SSPs often have a very particular focus on a subject or vocational training, for example, conservatoires or film schools. Where relevant, SSPs have made use of their validating partners' 'no detriment' policies which affect final classifications for their students. There have been some interesting examples of providers using online platforms such as TikTok and Instagram to see how their industry is adapting and using this to inform their teaching and future-proof their graduates. The case studies explore some of the

priorities of SSPs when it comes to student expectations and how they are supporting them through changes to final assessments and project work. Some also touch upon the differences, or lack of them, in student performance compared to previous years.

Partnership working: Many SSPs and colleges work in partnership with degree-awarding bodies and had to develop robust channels of communication to ensure that changes to delivery followed the awarding body's regulations. The case studies examine how this partnership working supports the student experience and maintains academic standards.

Strategic planning: There can be particular challenges in SSPs for small senior leadership teams to have the space to step back and reflect on changes and be able to take a more strategic approach, and this is where support from governing bodies has been helpful. The case studies explore how SSPs planned a strategic response to the pandemic, including: reflections on how any resulting action plans were put together and approved; the ways in which they resonated with the institutional profile, mission statement or values; and how they are being operationalised and overseen in the face of emerging challenges. The need for a shift in culture to better enable collective wellbeing is also being considered in some institutions. The use of risk registers, mapping templates and the activation of business continuity plans are also explored. Providers are also contingency planning for further lockdowns.

Management of space: The case studies examine how SSPs have planned to maximise the safe use of onsite space in anticipation of a phased return to campus occupancy. This includes reflections on the impact of physical distancing on 'useable' space of all kinds (such as, general purpose, specialist, social, residential) and on the steps taken to mitigate it through a range of controls relevant to circulation and specific facilities.

Management of learning and teaching space: The case studies include reflections on teaching methods that vary according to subject specialism and need, how the academic calendar has been used to support late, staged or staggered starts, 'blocked' approaches, and 'flipped' terms or semesters, and whether to prioritise particular students or year groups at different times. In some cases, lecture theatres are being converted into studio spaces. SSPs have also considered extending the working day/week and using timetabling to reduce movement between classes as well as considering various scenarios for what might happen in the case of second/third waves or local lockdowns

Plans for assessment: The case studies look at how SSPs are planning to approach assessment in 2020-21. They include reflections on what has been learned about the robustness of various assessment methods during the lockdown period, the (in)ability of assessing some practical learning outcomes through remote assessment, and whether these lessons have supported the planned assessment strategies of online variants of existing courses. Some institutions are looking at their assessments for next year, working back from what can be assessed remotely in order to construct learning opportunities appropriately. From our interactions with providers outside of this case study exercise, we understand that others have been looking at the balance of the assessment burden and, in some cases, realising that they may perhaps have been overassessing previously.

Plans for communication: The case studies explore how SSPs are planning to provide clear and consistent information for all their students. They include consideration of the various platforms and media available (for instance, web, virtual learning environment, student management systems, email, mobile apps, phone), possible approaches (including FAQs, call centres, and recorded conversations) and constituencies (such as, institutional, students' union, non-academic services, academic - faculty, department, course, tutor). In smaller providers, the ability to speak more directly to small groups of students has resulted in some good examples of real partnership working with their students to jointly consider

approaches to teaching and learning. Providers are conscious of the need to maintain consistency of established communication methods, while also being responsive to the crisis, and using channels that students prefer.

Section 2: Case studies

We have organised the case studies into broad groups based on their organisational constitution or the type of courses they offer, as follows:

Colleges of higher education:

[Berkshire College of Agriculture](#)

[Bishop Burton College](#)

[The Sheffield College](#)

[Warwickshire College](#)

Art and design:

[City & Guilds of London Art School](#)

[Sotheby's Institute of Art](#)

Performing arts, film and media:

[Backstage Academy: Live Events Management](#)

[Central Film School](#)

[Conservatoire for Dance and Drama](#)

[Institute of Contemporary Music Performance](#)

Theology:

[Newbold College of Higher Education](#)

[St Mellitus College](#)

Specialist or private institutions:

[Harper Adams University](#)

[Matrix College of Counselling & Psychotherapy](#)

Smaller universities:

[Richmond American University](#)

[York St John University](#)

Colleges of higher education

Berkshire College of Agriculture

Berkshire College of Agriculture is a specialist, land-based further education college that has approximately 100 higher education students on four foundation and honours degree programmes. Programmes are validated by the Royal Agricultural University and the University of Reading.

In response to COVID-19, the College established a Strategic Senior Management COVID-19 Group which included the Director of Higher Education. They also established an Operational Group which included the HE Registrar, and weekly course manager meetings to monitor and review the process of delivering teaching and learning to students. The virtual learning environment (VLE) was used and extended to deliver teaching and learning from lockdown onwards. The Principal communicated key information, such as government and health authority guidance, directly to all staff and the Human Resources department communicated weekly with all staff on their working conditions and support requirements.

Due to smaller numbers, that is class sizes of about 10 students, online teaching and learning has been relatively straightforward with good student interaction and engagement. Very few assessments have had changes that would need the approval of the validating partner. The College has been in regular contact with the validating universities who have been very supportive and implemented their 'no detriment' policy so students are not disadvantaged by the pandemic. No practical classes have taken place since the start of the pandemic and these will have to take place when conditions allow. The College has checked that students are able to access learning online and, so far, has not experienced any students with digital poverty. It is expected that student retention and achievement will not be adversely impacted.

Plans for the next academic year are well advanced and teaching and learning will be delivered online, at least for the first term. Due to small numbers, higher education students may be able to attend for enrolment and some teaching activities. When students return physically to the campus, most classes are small enough to fit in the available space while still allowing for physical distance to take place. One programme with higher numbers may require an extended working day to enable the correct physical distancing. The College has plans for the use of shared areas including allowing for physical distancing, one-way system floor markings, the provision of hand gel, and barriers to prevent unwanted movements.

From the next academic year, larger groups will need to be spaced out, for example, a group of 20 will become two groups of 10 and may have to be staggered over the year. Some aspects of course delivery will continue to be online, so this will compensate for the extra time needed. One programme was already being delivered partly online so this will continue with support in person.

Students have adapted very well to learning online and feedback to the course committees has been very positive. Smaller groups have helped with this because tutors get immediate feedback from students on any issues. All communications with students are recorded through email or on the VLE; students who do not engage are quickly followed up by Course Managers. Course Managers are the main staff who communicate frequently with students, but all college-wide communications are delivered centrally. Social media platforms are also used for 'keeping warm' purposes. Student representatives attend college deliberative committees which have continued online during lockdown and they are also able to participate in the Students' Union.

The College has some concerns about student recruitment for 2020-21 but they have ensured that all relevant information about the College and their selected programme has been sent out to applicants and they have been advised regarding the blend between online and on-site learning relevant to their particular programme. Some programmes will be enrolled on site and at least one is planned to be enrolled online.

Bishop Burton College

Bishop Burton College is a specialist, land-based college located in East Yorkshire which has approximately 3,000 further education students and 600 higher education students. The main land-based programmes are in agriculture, animal management, equine, sport and engineering. The degree programmes are validated by the University of Hull, University of Huddersfield and the Royal Agricultural University.

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the College convened a Strategic Planning Group which comprises the Senior Leadership Group plus key people who are leaders in other areas of college life, for example, residential and communications. This group meets weekly and was initially concerned with emergency planning in health and safety and transferring learning to online. Keeping aligned to government advice has been a priority for the Strategic Planning Group but, as time has passed, the group has widened its focus to include issues such as recruitment and planning for the 2020-21 academic year.

University partners have generally been well organised, supportive and have communicated their plans well with the College, in some instances sharing good practice. However, a key issue has been that smaller colleges have less capacity than larger universities to deal with emergency situations.

The College has a separate COVID-19 Group looking at the issue of students and staff returning to campus. They have been measuring and working out how many people can fit into the spaces on the campus. Fortunately, the campus is large and well-spaced out with a number of food outlets, and students will be encouraged to eat outside and stay in one location when on campus. However, shared resources - for example, the equine unit - presents a particular problem. In this case, the inability to work in 'bubbles' and to disinfect tack and the organisation of shared horses poses particular issues.

Higher education students are usually in college for three days a week and the plan is to change this to two days with one day being delivered online. The teaching day for students attending is planned to be the same as previously but online learning can be extended into the evening. All lectures are delivered online and can be accessed synchronously or asynchronously. Seminars, tutorials and practical classes are all planned to be on site. Students have responded positively to the changes with some students performing better in remote learning. A focus of the College has been how to support students with disabilities which are a large proportion of the students on some programmes. Having smaller numbers and ongoing personal contact with individual students are major factors in keeping them engaged.

Many programmes delivered by the College are applied, with placements and practical outcomes being central to foundation degrees and Higher Nationals. Some variation in assessment, such as the use of videos, have been approved by the validating universities but some have had to be postponed. Reduced practical experience at the College and experience in the workplace has been a concern. Many students took the option to extend assessment deadlines offered by the validating universities and there is now a backlog of assessments with staff assessing work during their holidays to determine whether students require resits. This is impacting on preparations for next year.

The College has done a lot of central 'all staff/student' communication since lockdown and has used 'live chat' with existing students as well as applicants. It has tried to centralise all communications and have them signed off by senior management to ensure an accurate record is kept. It has used emails and all guidance has been uploaded to the virtual learning environment. More than one method of communication has been used to try to ensure that

messages have been received. The student representative system has kept going through the pandemic and student satisfaction feedback has remained high.

Open days have gone ahead as planned but have been delivered virtually with presentations from each department. Attendance has been good with over 600 attendees for the first event. The College has now moved on to delivering 'taster days' and 'post-offer days' virtually. All applicants can apply and enrol online. Applications for higher education programmes are under target and there have been a number of deferrals.

Some positive aspects of the pandemic include the ability to think and work differently and more efficiently, enabling recruitment practices to reach a wider geographical audience and accelerating the digital strategy.

The Sheffield College

The Sheffield College is a general further education college with approximately 530 higher education students on programmes validated by three universities and Pearson.

The Vice-Principal for Academic Studies and Higher Education is a member of the College's operations group, which has been coordinating the organisation's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and plans for safe reopening in the next academic year 2020-21. The group, which meets online weekly, comprises members of the executive leadership team and staff from all parts of the organisation including communications, curriculum, estates, exams, health and safety, human resources, IT and student support services, as well as representatives from the recognised trade unions.

A number of task and finish groups have also been set up to focus on specific actions that need to be in place for a safe reopening in September 2020, with plans continually being reviewed in line with public health guidance and the College's risk assessment. All decisions have been guided by ensuring that the College puts student and staff safety first.

The College's boards and committees - for example, the governors, executive and the academic board - have continued to meet regularly and have been kept informed of planning. The College has a higher education academic board and some governors with higher education experience. This provides a good level of support in ensuring higher education has its own identity, and to ensure that processes needed to be put in place for higher education during the pandemic were of high quality and robust. Additionally, the College communicates regularly with its students, staff and external stakeholders, such as the validating bodies, and PSRBs where appropriate.

The College's COVID-19 planning has been divided into three phases: phase 1 being from the start of the pandemic; phase 2 covering actions towards the end of this academic year; and phase 3 covering planning for the first part of the next academic year from September to December 2020.

Phase 1: The College moved to remote learning and working on 20 March 2020 with that approach then being customised to the particular needs of higher education students, apprentices, staff and employers. The College ensured consistent messaging to students as validating partners had different approaches and changes to assessment regulation. The College felt it was important to have a consistent high-quality student experience. All teaching, learning and assessment was moved online, and the College got agreement to make changes, including to assessments, from the validating universities. The universities also invoked their 'no detriment' policies and a fast track mitigating circumstances policy was introduced for student assessments. Having several validating bodies meant that the College needed to undertake additional work to ensure messages to students and staff were timely, consistent and accurate. During this time, the importance of understanding responsibilities and taking clear and timely actions was paramount. The examination boards were delayed to allow for relevant extensions. All assessments expected were completed on time and student performance has been consistent with previous years.

Phase 2: About 20 higher education students needed to attend the College from 23 June 2020 to complete practical assessments to enable them to graduate this year; this was to ensure mandated practical activity could be completed. Therefore, the campus had to be made COVID-19 safe. A raft of safety measures was put in place for the very small number of students who needed to return to campus before the end of this academic year. These measures included: restricting campus visits to only those staff and students who needed to return; introducing one-way systems and two-metre social distancing; providing hand sanitiser dispensers and maintaining rigorous cleaning regimes. The refectories remained

closed and the library was accessible online only. Students were provided with guidance explaining the changes. An enhanced careers service was provided in anticipation of the potential shrinkage in the jobs market and the careers team provided a lot of advice to higher education students.

Phase 3: Planning for phase 3 - from August to December 2020 - includes a blended approach to teaching and learning for the next academic year. Guidelines given to course leaders are that approximately one-third of delivery should be online and two-thirds on campus. This could be divided by module or within module depending on the content to be delivered. The College is continuing to review its plans in line with public health guidance. Course leaders and their teams are responsible for implementing these guidelines at course level. The College believes that, despite the difficulties, the pandemic has offered some real opportunities to develop the higher education teaching community. Academic and support staff have been very responsive in developing blending learning and providing appropriate academic support for these students. In the future, some assessments will need to be revised, probably as part of revalidation activities, and the Learning and Teaching Strategy will need to encompass online learning more prominently.

Effective and consistent communication with students has been, and continues to be, very important. The College has mainly used the virtual learning environment and emails and provided regular website and social media updates since the beginning of the pandemic. Student fora, attended by course representatives, have continued and have been a very useful form of feedback. Students have generally remained engaged and feedback has been positive.

Warwickshire College

Warwickshire College is based in and around Leamington Spa and offers a range of higher education courses validated by the University of Coventry, University of Worcester, University of Gloucestershire and Pearson. The College currently has around 700 higher education students.

The College Leadership Team (CLT), whose remit includes both higher education and further education, commenced detailed planning for the pandemic in March prior to the closure of the College on 23 March. Higher education courses transferred immediately to synchronous digital delivery using existing course timetable slots. The Dean of Higher Education worked with the 10 subject leaders to plan changes to assessment where required, and recommendations were received formally by an emergency meeting of the College's HE Quality and Standards Committee (HEQAS). As it has foundation degree awarding powers (FDAP), the College was able to change Level 4 and 5 assessments internally, while changes at all levels where a validation arrangement is in place were sent to the validating universities' partnership quality officers for agreement. A total of around 250 changes were made, including over 50 examinations which were adapted for digital delivery and completed at home by students as 'live examinations'. As with its teaching timetable, the College was able to continue using its existing examination schedule. Additional changes were made to respect necessary adjustments for 15-20 students, and to meet the invigilation requirement of some PSRBs. All modifications to assessment were emergency, short-term changes. The College created its own 'no detriment' policy which aligned with those of its validating partners, operated a fast-track process to agree extensions for students with extenuating circumstances, and ensured that students remained engaged through regular communication with subject leaders and pastoral tutors.

Some practical assessments could not be assessed online, so subject leaders met in May to plan assessments for Level 6 students in, for example, land-based subjects which have been delayed until August. Other students requiring access to sophisticated computer equipment were allowed access to the campus from 11 May. These 'early returns' have required the writing of risk assessments and guidance for staff and students alike, but they will enable the students concerned to be considered by the September assessment boards, rather than face delays.

Both applicants and returning students were informed in June that the College terms would start on the planned dates in September and that the College would deliver a 'blended learning' approach in a COVID-secure environment. The College anticipates at the time of writing, that roughly one-third of teaching and learning will be conducted digitally and two-thirds in-person, though the precise balance will vary according to advice from the government and health authorities. The College has completed a physical distancing audit for all on-campus teaching and learning spaces to ascertain rooms that can be repurposed, and changes that need to be made to furniture and seating in order to maximise safe usage. Group size was already relatively small and this, plus the space liberated by moving a third of teaching online, means that the College does not at present anticipate problems with a return to campus. It has no plans to extend the working day but could do so if required.

The College feels that its digital strategy has developed very considerably following the shift to delivering teaching digitally. Its staff conference in July focused on learning and teaching, and staff are confident that online pedagogy has been enhanced. The periodic review process now includes plans for blended delivery and, although it has not done so yet, the College may make similar changes to modules in courses not currently being reviewed.

The College has aimed to manage stress levels by regular communications with students. Some policies, such as 'no detriment', have been published on the College website, the

Dean of Higher Education has sent out regular all-student emails, and course leaders have sent students detailed communications about teaching, learning and assessment. A range of communication channels have been used for these purposes, including email, the virtual learning environment and individual letters for students where assessment matters are concerned.

Art and design

City & Guilds of London Art School

Founded in 1854, the City and Guilds of London Art School is a small, specialist art college located in central London. Their undergraduate and postgraduate degree courses are validated by Ravensbourne University London.

The Art School implemented their COVID-19 Precaution Plan at the end of February which included postponing visits and providing additional hand sanitisers, ensuring contact details were up-to-date and communicating COVID-19 arrangements with students and staff. The Governors were kept informed of the changing situation at all times. The Librarian and the Head of Information Technology (IT) were asked to make plans as to how teaching and learning could continue digitally.

It was decided to act in advance of any government guidance and close the Art School on the evening of 16 March. Staff and students were notified over the previous weekend and an orderly removal from the building took place. Senior management spent the Easter break planning what to do next, the Head of IT made significant enhancements to the virtual learning environment (VLE), the academic tutors rethought their teaching, learning and assessment to enable it to be delivered online, and the Librarian set up regular daily online research drop-in sessions for students. They ensured that final-year students, in particular, had somewhere to complete their final projects and had access to research resources. An online questionnaire to students showed good levels of satisfaction with the procedures associated with the closure.

The Art School examined each programme individually and produced a table showing what was in the Programme Specification and what was proposed during the pandemic. Students were consulted and they agreed before it was sent to Ravensbourne University London who validate the undergraduate and postgraduate programmes.

Physical space has not been an issue so far as students were still working online at the end of the academic year. The MA programme being a one-year course, was halfway through and the students are returning in September for an extra term in the studios. There are particular difficulties in converting to online learning with arts subjects, for example, conservation of historical artefacts which cannot be taken home. However, teaching staff have been very innovative in their approach and some projects have demonstrated a high degree of creativity and design skills.

The Art School has just created new studios for a new programme in books and paper conservation and new MA Fine Art studios, therefore they have spare capacity for the next academic year. From September, all theory subjects will be taught online and lecture rooms will be converted to studio spaces. Preparations, such as cutting wood in advance for art students, will be maximised so that time spent in practical classes will be used optimally. In addition, access to studios will be extended for returning students with Saturday opening and longer workshop opening hours, which will mean that students can all be accommodated in the existing space in a socially-distanced manner as well as maximising their access to facilities. The Art School commissioned a web designer to support an online show during lockdown for the Foundation students that was highly successful and may supplement the physical shows of this year's graduating students that will now be happening in the spring of 2021.

For assessments during the lockdown period, the Art School has ensured that no students are disadvantaged. Year 3 students usually have access to the studios over Easter and, as they did not this year, they were given a blanket four-week extension for their final project

work. All other students were given a blanket two-week extension. In addition to this, the Art School implemented a 'special circumstances' assessment policy to cover COVID-specific situations, for example, family illness, home schooling responsibilities and shielding. They also invoked 'no detriment' policies, and compensation was used to a significant extent at the Examination Board. In the case of the Foundation degree, the awarding body decided that a final project unit would not count towards the Diploma. After consultation with students, the Art School decided to continue to support students to complete and offered to award them with a Certificate of Achievement in recognition of the work they had done to supplement their Diploma Award.

The Art School has a commitment to one-to-one support of students and this has continued online during lockdown. Students have said they felt that they have remained part of a community and this helped them get through; this was reflected in a feedback questionnaire in early June. The Art School feels that they need to learn what has worked well in case there is another shorter lockdown in the next academic year. Feedback from students has been important - formally, two students share the role of Chair of Students and one is a member of the Governing Body. Academic Board meetings have gone ahead during lockdown and student representatives have been present. Communication channels to all students have been through the Principal, Heads of Department and tutors.

A major culture shift for returning students is what the building will be like when they return. The Art School is planning to make videos showing how space will be organised and how to use it. They also plan to write an addendum to the Student Charter and Staff Code of Conduct which informs about responsibility for collective wellbeing. The pandemic has given rise to reflection on future practice and what can be taken forward to enhance teaching, learning and assessment in the future.

Sotheby's Institute of Art

Sotheby's Institute of Art has campuses in London and New York and offers a range of professional art history and art business courses of two to 15 weeks in duration, including, in London, semester and summer courses, as well as five master's programmes validated by the University of Manchester. In New York, a Department of Digital Learning has been delivering short online courses for a number of years. The Institute's academic year consists of fall and spring semesters, and trips and excursions to internationally-renowned artistic and cultural venues form an important part of the student experience. Around 60% of MA and semester students are international (non-UK/EU).

Partly because of the experience of its New York campus, the Institute's London centre anticipated lockdown and developed a COVID risk register to manage its initial response to the emergency. This included closing its campus on 17 March to allow students time to travel home before travel restrictions were imposed, and to transfer its courses quickly to online delivery. The Institute's prior experience of online teaching enabled it to effect this transfer swiftly, using existing infrastructure, and to train staff to teach online in a very short period of time. From that point onwards, in-person teaching was replaced by the intensive online delivery of lectures, seminars and tutorials, between March and early May. A number of challenges were confronted and addressed, including time zone differences and technical glitches. Special efforts were made to engage and support students in the online environment, and the emphasis was deliberately placed on continuity of study. The Institute's size helped it to react quickly during the early stages of the pandemic.

Following campus closure, the implementation of the COVID risk register developed into a planning process for the following academic year. The Institute's strategy was to adapt the start dates of its master's course portfolio to provide both a fall semester start point online for students wanting a September start, and a spring semester start point in January 2021 for those wanting a face-to-face experience. Despite the demands of a dual entry model, the Institute has allowed itself more time to manage student enrolment and expectations appropriately, and to plan for social distancing and other coronavirus-related precautions. In the longer term, the Institute feels that the redrafting of boundaries between in-person and online delivery may be one of the pandemic's more beneficial legacies, as it aspires to pioneer a blended model which is designed specifically for its brand of art world teaching.

Sotheby's Institute is currently adapting its premises to comply with social distancing and other government and health authority requirements, and since the Institute's building largely consists of generic teaching, learning and social spaces, courses are more amenable to conversion to remote delivery than might have been the case if the courses were practice-based. The Institute is planning for a longer enrolment and induction period for both its fall and spring semesters. It has no residential accommodation and is planning online activities to promote relationship building among new students, drawing on its previous experience with welcoming international students to London.

Because of the absence of practice-based assessments, Sotheby's Institute was able to adapt relatively easily to online assessment and implemented the University of Manchester's 'no disadvantage' policy. Despite initial concerns, group projects have worked well online, grade distribution is normal, and external examiners have commented positively on student work, remarking that the standard is similar to that of previous years.

Sotheby's Institute learnt quickly that the need for regular communication with continuing and future students was of paramount importance, and issued regular newsletters and other kinds of communications to both groups via its virtual learning environment. Because student numbers are small, and staff and students know each other well, course teams continued to use email with existing students, whose representatives have been supportive and highly

engaged throughout the pandemic. Key communications have been issued centrally via more than one communication channel to ensure they reach students, and they are recorded as necessary.

Performing arts, film and media

Backstage Academy: Live Events Management

Backstage Academy is a specialist provider offering undergraduate degrees, professional short courses and training programmes for the Live Events Industry. It is based at Production Park in Wakefield, Yorkshire, and its awarding body is the University of Bolton.

At the onset of the pandemic, the Academy's Senior Leadership Team (SLT) developed a risk analysis, modelling a number of different scenarios and responding to the challenges identified. These scenarios translated into detailed planning from 17 March when the Academy informed students and staff that the campus would be closing from the end of the week onwards. The Academy brought the Easter holiday forward by two weeks and extended both it and the academic year by two weeks in the hope that restrictions might ease, making it possible to resume the practice-based teaching that is so central to its programmes. By 13 April, however, it was clear that the lockdown would continue and, along with its awarding body, the Academy transferred its teaching online and provided its students with a detailed overview of what this would involve.

A key concern was how to ensure that assessment conducted online could effectively test the types of knowledge and skills that would normally be tested in real-world assessment scenarios using industry-standard equipment. To address this concern, the Academy kept assessment scenarios as realistic as possible and did not routinely replace them with written tasks in all cases. Instead, it used online vivas where possible, to provide opportunities for students to explain to tutors how they would address the challenges posed by assessment scenarios. The time gained by extending the academic year made it possible to stagger assessments and ensure sufficient opportunity for students to consolidate their learning. The July Examinations Boards are also applying the University of Bolton's COVID-19 Assessment Guidelines and blanket mitigation measures to ensure that students are not disadvantaged by the pandemic.

Since May, the Academy has been planning the return to campus. Feedback from students indicated that reinstatement of the practical elements of the course was their main priority. The Academy is addressing this by developing a blended learning approach for the next academic year that builds on the experience gained during lockdown. Lectures will be transferred to online delivery, enabling large lecture spaces to be repurposed as specialist computer rooms fitted out to conform with sector and government guidance on social distancing requirements. The use of these and other spaces will be rendered safer and more efficient by running onsite practical time in intensive blocks in certain weeks throughout the term and keeping students in distinct 'bubbles'.

The Academy feels that these steps will enable it to restore the practical components of its courses and sees them as examples of the 'lateral thinking' in which the pandemic forced it to engage. Student feedback and module reviews over the course of 2020-21 may identify aspects of delivery that should be carried over to future years, not least of which is an improved understanding of the respective merits of online and in-person classes and support tutorials. The Live Events Industry has been hit hard by the pandemic and so the Academy has also created a COVID 'Think Tank' to investigate how events can be run safely in future. Its students will play a role in finding solutions, which will enhance their employability as the industry revives.

With regard to communication, important and official announcements were communicated directly to students and staff and also made available, along with FAQs, on the Academy's website. In response to mental health concerns, blogs were created for student use, and the

Academy has also organised panel discussions about the impact of COVID on mental health in the events industry and other topics.

Other channels of communication include social media and the Backstage mobile app with which all registered students are provided. Applicants and offer-holders have been able to obtain current information from virtual open days and online chats with current students, academic and admissions staff. Concerns from both groups have been followed up by video calls or phone calls and all students remaining in student accommodation over the course of lockdown were offered fortnightly, one-to-one wellbeing check-ins with support staff. The Academy also worked with the main local lettings agent and private landlords to encourage rent relief over the lockdown period for its students.

The Academy's plans for the next academic year involve delaying its start until 5 October to ensure that all necessary steps have been taken to prepare the campus and to give staff a break before the start of teaching. Enrolment and induction activities will adopt a blended approach and include a demonstration of the safe running of a live event in the Academy's large, commercial studio.

Central Film School

The Central Film School has approximately 120 students on programmes validated by the University of Gloucestershire. They started taking action in response to the pandemic in late February because two-thirds of the students are not UK-based, and a growing proportion are from China, and this was a major risk in terms of repatriation. The School used its established committee structure to plan for the pandemic, mainly using the Academic Board which comprises the Chief Executive Officer, the Senior Management Team, tutors and student representatives. The Board of Directors was also kept informed by the Chief Executive Officer.

The first experience of the pandemic directly affecting the School was when one of their Italian students had gone home and was not able to return in early March as the flight was cancelled and then the north of Italy went into lockdown. At that stage, the School created an online package for this student which proved to be helpful as two weeks later it had to be done for everyone. It was decided on Monday 16 March, to close the campus on Friday 20 March with a full lockdown on Monday 23 March. There were then only two weeks of classes until the holiday period which lasted most of April. During the two weeks, the students received a great deal more individual contact than usual and then they moved on to online teaching, using a new virtual learning environment (VLE) - the change in VLE had been planned before the pandemic. The biggest concern was ensuring that the Level 6 students were able to gain their award - for the BA (Hons) Practical Filmmaking students, their final assessment was conducted on the set of the graduation films.

From the end of May, the School started getting guidance from the government and industry about how film sets could work in the current situation and this was regarded as very important in this context and enabled the School to create COVID-19 specific risk assessments for their graduation films. The first students were able to return to the campus in mid-July and the School used health and safety guidance from the government and Public Health England to help produce a Campus Risk Assessment in consultation with staff, which was disseminated to students. The School does not have its own building but uses three floors within a building that has other users and a one-way system was not possible to implement. However, the School was able to set up sanitation systems and screens, and removed some of the seating in communal areas. Classrooms have 'maximum user' numbers on the doors. Film sets are subject to a separate Production Risk Assessment and risk is mitigated by using face coverings, not facing each other, cleaning surfaces and no hot desking. No food is served on campus so that was not a consideration from a health and safety perspective.

Although film sets were allowed to reopen at the end of May, most international students had returned home and were reluctant to return to the UK; this also applied to many domestic students. Therefore, alternative forms of assessment were required. The School consulted with students about alternative methods and agreed, for example, with Level 6 students on a portfolio and video presentation plus a viva to avoid over-reliance on written work. Other assessments were changed to an online presentation rather than face-to-face in the case of Level 4 students and essays remained unchanged. The School consulted and agreed with the University of Gloucestershire over changes to teaching, learning and assessment and their 'no detriment' policy was invoked. All Examination Boards are taking place virtually including external examiners, and student performance is in line with expectations.

Extended deadlines for assessment submission had been agreed during the lockdown period but not from September 2020 onwards due to the threat of resurgence of the pandemic, but extra student support is planned. Some practical modules have been postponed to September in the hope that they can be taken when all students return to

campus. It is planned that these will take place as part of the blended model from September onwards.

Good communication with students during this period has been very important. COVID-specific communications to the whole student body started the week before lockdown and this was followed by advice about the decision to close the campus. The School was concerned about student mental health and so created a 'Wellness Hub' on the VLE. Communications worked well at an individual and teaching team level, but students were concerned about what was going to happen immediately after lockdown. This reflected the lack of guidance nationally but, on reflection, the School acknowledges that they could have kept students better informed during the very early stages of lockdown. Despite this student anxiety in the early stages, they are much more engaged now and completing their learning and assessments successfully.

Recruitment from the UK for the next academic year is on target but the School is expecting a lower recruitment of international students. Recruitment activities are taking place remotely but as spaces open up and events start to take place over the coming weeks, it is hoped that this will help confirm places for September.

Conservatoire for Dance and Drama

The Conservatoire for Dance and Drama (CDD) is a higher education institution consisting of six Member Schools based in Bristol, Leeds and London that provide specialist vocational training in the performing arts. It offers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate courses validated by the University of Kent and the University of the West of England.

At the onset of the pandemic, the CDD set up a Task and Finish group to respond to the COVID-19 crisis in accordance with guidance from the government and the Office for Students (OfS). A key concern in a diverse organisation was to ensure that it spoke cohesively and with one voice, and this was reflected in the group's membership which included the Chair of the Conservatoire Board of Governors, its Senior Management Team, a senior representative from all six Member Schools, an independent governor from the Conservatoire Board of Governors, and an external consultant. The group met on a monthly basis, receiving regular reports on ongoing initiatives and recommendations, and agreed strategic, 'whole institution' responses to the pandemic as it evolved. These responses were received by the CDD Board and its committees, the Conservatoire Executive Committee, and by the Boards of Member Schools.

Continuous consultation with Member Schools leading to centralised oversight, advice and guidance with planning by the CDD's central office, has been a general feature of CDD's collective response to the pandemic, encompassing areas such as guidance, academic quality and standards, the sharing of statutory guidance and information, feedback and ideas, and agreed templates to assist Member Schools 'map' their individual preparations for a return to 'on-site' delivery and the safe use of learning spaces. More recently, an informal 'Cross-CDD Staff Safe Return Group' has been established, meeting fortnightly to continue to share ideas and knowledge as progress is made, more guidance is published, and requirements change.

For example, the Northern School of Contemporary Dance (NSCD) - a CDD Member School - has set out plans to ensure that its protective screening and personal protective equipment, one-way systems, and correlation of timetabling with revised room capacity, work together to create safe working and study settings for onsite working. The NSCD is also planning to use the term-time addresses of new and existing students to facilitate the use of 'bubbles', and to screen private student accommodation to check it contains access to broadband facilities sufficiently robust to support online learning. The NSCD is currently planning for around 50% of classes to be delivered via face-to-face teaching in September, using digital platforms to live-stream or relay formal lectures and independent creative work, as appropriate, and will return to a full timetable of face-to-face teaching if, and when, restrictions are lifted. In the event of a further lockdown, all teaching will be transferred to the School's virtual learning environment (VLE) and delivered online.

With regard to assessment, the CDD's Learning, Teaching and Quality Assurance Committee worked with one of its validating universities in April and May to produce guidance on acceptable emergency measures that could be taken by Member Schools to ensure standards were maintained while delivery and assessments changed. Discipline-specific assessment was helped by the time of year that the lockdown occurred, with most students having completed sufficient assessed work to enable assessment to take place fairly and without detriment. Some Member Schools are adjusting pre-lockdown delivery to implement on a permanent basis, changes made necessary by the emergency which they believe enhance the delivery of the programme. For example, one School has adapted an undergraduate 'research module' to digital delivery because both students and staff prefer it being delivered as an online module.

In line with OfS (and consumer law) requirements, all Member Schools have been asked to inform their new and returning students of the details of programme delivery for the 2020-21 academic year. Some Member Schools allowed small numbers of students to return to physical sites to test social distancing, movement round building, timings of building and studio entry and exit, and simultaneous onsite and online programme delivery. Some Member Schools are also planning to bring students back slightly earlier than the normal start of the academic year in autumn 2020 to 'warm them up' thoroughly and thereby reduce the risk of injury on returning to a higher intensity of study/training.

In its communications with existing students, the Conservatoire has established a consistent message regarding refund/compensation-related queries in accordance with current statutory guidance, which is being kept under review and will be adjusted accordingly in the wake of any statutory changes in this area. A 'fast-track' process for consideration of refund/compensation-related requests will be put in place by the end of the academic year. The Conservatoire both enables Member Schools to respond to individual student requests where appropriate, and also handles such requests on behalf of Schools where an institutional response is required.

The CCD's central office coordinates deadlines for all Member Schools to issue communications to new and returning students. The CCD also publishes 'high-level' information on its website and drafts 'core text' for Schools to use to ensure consistency of institutional messages where necessary. Schools independently determine their most effective communication tools, which include newsletters (via email), information posted on social media, VLEs, and school websites. The choice of communication channels is generally determined by a combination of maintaining consistency with established communication methods with students, combining methods proven to work well with consulting students about how they prefer to receive information. Small student communities mean that Member Schools can track and communicate with all their students, and that individual follow-ups are both possible and manageable. Given the changes to programme delivery as it had been previously advertised, Schools have opened up an exceptional 'cancellation of the contract' period alongside their communications of what the 2020-21 delivery will look like, and have asked current students to reconfirm that they accept the (new) contract with its material changes. In this way, the CCD believes there can be certainty of 'express consent'. Where students do not consent, they may cancel the contract and withdraw from the Conservatoire.

Institute of Contemporary Music Performance

The Institute of Contemporary Music Performance (ICMP) is based in London and offers a range of specialist undergraduate and master's programmes that are aligned to the needs of the music industry and accredited by the University of East London (UEL).

ICMP realised the probable seriousness of the pandemic in February 2020 and convened its Crisis Management Team (CMT) to consider how to respond to the challenge it posed and to the growing concerns of students and staff. The Institute has a well-established planning cycle with clear, short and long-term strategic goals backed up by sound and well-established financial and budgetary practices which enabled the CMT to transition quickly to a pre-rehearsed business continuity plan based on its assessment of the risks the pandemic would pose. Planning was refocused on an emergency, short-term action plan which included making a successful application for a government Business Interruption Loan in May to ensure financial sustainability. Risk assessment practices, sound financial management and detailed action planning enabled ICMP to use its existing infrastructure to maintain activity and quickly deploy additional resources where they were most needed.

Along with the flexibility and capability of its staff, a well-established and efficient committee structure combined with capable management at all levels enabled the Institute to take decisions and implement them quickly, achieving a 'nimbleness' that might not have been possible had it been a larger institution. While it was not an issue on this occasion, the Institute is aware that small staff teams mean that the absence of a single, key individual, through illness or for other reasons, can cause serious problems for small, specialist providers. For this reason, staff flexibility and having a known network of external consultants or specialist support who can be quickly engaged, can be crucial. In this case, specialist online learning support was quickly engaged to ensure the student learning experience was optimised for the remainder of the 2019-20 academic year and as a more planned measure for the start of the 2020-21 period, and certain other planned appointments were brought forward.

Despite reservations about its capacity and capability to switch to online provision, ICMP did so when it became clear that closure for the remainder of the academic year was imminent.

The Senior Leadership Team met on a daily basis for the first six weeks of lockdown, following established Crisis Management and Business Continuity procedures, and both these meetings and the attendant daily action plans and decisions were recorded. Early decisions included increasing the student hardship fund and enhancing communications, with increased engagement with student representatives to ensure students were fully aware of plans and fully engaged in decision making. The role of the Student President was enhanced - for example, by being included in an advisory role on key working groups - and regular 'Town Hall' meetings were held between senior managers and the student body. All deliberative committees continued to meet as per their normally planned schedules, using videoconferencing software, while the Institute's premises were closed. Weekly 'Town Hall' meetings were held online, and are still being held, with all staff to keep the community engaged, informed and coherent, in addition to regular team and functional staff meetings.

ICMP is now turning its attention back towards longer-term, more strategic thinking and to the lessons learned from the pandemic, with a view to increasing future flexibility for staff, improving work-life balance and developing an approach to online provision that can enhance the face-to-face student learning experience and allow the creation of new courses. From a teaching perspective, this has required substantial investment in new technology and training to underwrite the increasing volume of online teaching while, from the learning perspective, the Institute has addressed the issue of digital poverty by supporting students through a laptop computer loan scheme, access to an enhanced hardship fund, enhanced

induction activities, and bespoke individual support packages - for example, for international students and specialist music technology where required. The Institute has dispensation from UEL to deliver its programmes more flexibly in the short term but anticipates the need for more a substantial revalidation of its provision should the blended model become the norm. ICMP have persisted with their ongoing application for degree awarding powers and, after a short delay because of the Office for Students' need to focus on other priorities, this has now been referred to QAA to be progressed. This is a critical part of ICMP's plans since having its own awarding powers will enable more flexible and controlled provision to meet student need in a more agile way, especially in a future that may require managing situations such as the current pandemic more frequently.

With regard to 2020-21, ICMP has now almost completed work on its programme timetables which are being articulated through a dedicated 'Student Hub' which covers website and key social media channels. This approach ensures key student-facing information is clearly available in a timely way, thus enabling students to take informed decisions about starting or continuing their courses from September and ensuring ICMP meets regulatory and Competition and Markets Authority expectations. The Institute has developed a phased model of delivery comprising four stages ranging from complete lockdown to almost normal delivery, where the different stages represent zero, one, two or three days onsite, respectively. This planning will enable the Institute to vary the 'blend' of online or face-to-face provision according to external circumstances. The criteria that will be used to move from phase to phase have also been published, and they include student consultation to ensure students have time to plan any changes to their course activity with sufficient time.

While information-giving or discursive teaching activities such as lectures and seminars adapt relatively easily to digital delivery, the teaching of ensemble performance remains a challenge, whether in-person or online. It is possible onsite in COVID-adapted performance spaces, though singing activity is a particular challenge which requires specialist adaptations, but the latency of online platforms makes synchronous live performance difficult. More broadly, however, the traditional view that live performance has to take place at a single location, at a set time has had to be reassessed, and music education is increasingly able to learn from and replicate the new approaches to live performance pioneered by the music industry during lockdown. This enables learning outcomes to be met by tweaking rather than making major modifications to existing programme and module specifications

Theology

Newbold College of Higher Education

Newbold College is a predominantly residential college that has approximately 100 students studying undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in Biblical and Pastoral Studies and Theology validated by the University of Wales Trinity Saint David (UWTSD), as well as a number of students pursuing Humanities and Business Studies programmes through Andrews University and Washington Adventist University in the USA. It also offers ESOL (English for speakers of other languages) courses through its English Language Centre.

The College set up a COVID-19 Crisis Management Group which met initially on 9 March when the extent of the pandemic became evident. This was set up in line with the Crisis Management Policy which is owned by the Principal and updated annually. The membership comprised the Principal as Chair, two senior staff and other middle managers, and operated as an advisory group. The Group met seven times. On 16 March, the College was just about to start the mid-semester break and the Crisis Management Group decided to extend the break by one week to 30 March and from then, all the teaching and learning was transferred online. Students were from 50-60 countries, and only five asked to stay on in college accommodation, the rest leaving by 26 March in time to get home. Everything was then online until mid-May when the academic year ended. Lectures were delivered online, respecting multiple time zones around the world and the librarians ensured all digital resources were available. The College refunded tuition for language students only, and in addition, refunded 50% of board and lodging fees for students in residence; some staff were furloughed. The Principal has kept the Board of Governors fully informed throughout formally by means of the Executive Committee of the Board of Governors which meets monthly. A full meeting of the Board of Governors also took place in May.

Subsequently, the Senior Leadership Team set up an Academic Planning Group which then starting planning for the next academic year and submitted proposals to the Academic Board. The decisions about planning for the next academic year were made and publicised to staff and students by 19 May to ensure that everyone had plenty of notice. Students have been kept informed throughout by email, and staff by both email and the newsletter 'Newbold Matters' which is a compulsory read for all staff.

The Academic Planning Group recommended through the Academic Board that the 2020-21 academic year would start on the published date of 7 September and would be delivered online until at least January 2021, and longer if necessary. The College has worked with its validating university in the UK and with its partner universities in the USA to ensure delivery and assessment are compliant with regulations. UWTSD has allowed some emergency flexibility to make changes to delivery and assessment as necessary; but module descriptors have not been changed. Examinations were replaced by open book exams, which worked well. There have been some delays in assessments and the graduation ceremony has also been postponed. The College's quinquennial revalidation of its Theology provision has been postponed by a year and this is likely to include more flexibility and blended learning being built into the programmes.

The College has purchased additional resources due to the pandemic. This includes better equipment for sound and vision, and enhanced digital resources for the next academic year. During the lockdown, the College has ensured that students have access to the electronic resource portfolio and, where required, has posted physical books to students doing dissertations or resits.

College buildings are still locked down except for staff who need specialist equipment. Residences have been locked down since the start of the pandemic and the earliest they

are expected to open is the third week in January, but only if it is safe to do so. A risk assessment is to be done in August by an external contractor and buildings will be reopened as and when possible, ensuring that international students are not disadvantaged in comparison with local home students.

Staff have emailed and spoken to all students personally to ensure they all have some physical personal contact. Students love the on-campus experience, but also feel positive about individual attention. The College has communicated with students via the virtual learning environment (VLE) mainly but also via email and social media. The Academic Registrar organised a team to work around the clock to contact students in the early stages of the lockdown. Every Thursday evening for the last six or seven weeks, there has been an evening panel discussion with students to keep them engaged and positive, and feedback from students shows good levels of satisfaction in the circumstances.

Recruitment for the next academic year is likely to be lower than last year but the team are working hard, when physical recruitment visits are not possible, to use social media and the website effectively. It is likely that one residence block will remain closed next year when students return to the campus.

St Mellitus College

St Mellitus College delivers non-residential part-time and full-time training in theology and ministry and is the largest of the Church of England's theological educational institutions. It has over 700 students across five teaching centres in London, Chelmsford, Liverpool, Nottingham and Plymouth.

When the COVID-19 lockdown started in March, all teaching and learning was moved online immediately, although there was only one teaching week left before the Easter holiday. After the final week of the spring term, an intensive week of teaching for students who are not training for ordained ministry took place.

Existing working group structures were used to form the response to the pandemic, which was simple, flexible and agile in response to the risk that many staff and students may get infected with the virus. The existing structure included a Ministry Working Group, an Academic Working Group and an Operations Working Group. The Academic Working Group took the lead on maintaining standards and quality and created two sub-committees, one focused on assessment and the other on learning and teaching. The Learning and Teaching sub-committee undertook contingency planning for different scenarios depending on the course of the pandemic. As it became clear that the implications for the pandemic were going to impact the 2020-21 academic year, a taskforce comprising the Chairs of the Working Groups was created to ensure clear communication and quick decision-making. All other committees - for example, the Management Committee (the College's Staff-Student Consultative Committee) - and staff meetings have continued during the lockdown.

Programmes are validated by the University of Durham and Middlesex University, and they have been clear about respective responsibilities. At the start of the pandemic, they devolved responsibility for assessments to the College and enabled them to make changes as necessary to cope with the lockdown. For example, some written examinations (such as those for language classes) were done orally and rather than giving presentations in person, students were asked to record a video. The College has then reported changes back to their validating institutions and informed them about their plans for the next academic year.

At the start of lockdown, students were given an automatic four-week extension to hand in assessments and both Durham and Middlesex implemented their 'no detriment' policy so no students were disadvantaged in assessments. Students were able to append a cover sheet to their assessments stating any relevant difficulty in accessing learning resources that they might have had; this is felt to be important as many students have children and are trying to balance home schooling and other responsibilities.

The College moved to a simpler, centralised online timetable which was common to all five sites. The virtual learning environment (VLE) that had been developed in recent years was able to support this although the task was simpler than a large university due to the limited range of programmes offered. Initially 'live' sessions were limited to one hour, but because of a change to the technology used for teaching, it is planned to increase this to one and a half hours for the next academic year.

Placements have continued throughout the lockdown period. Most churches have moved to an online means of expression and the pandemic has led to much community work with the elderly and other vulnerable people. The Youth Ministry Programme is also still operating, although with some youth workers on furlough.

The College has planned for occupancy on return to the campuses. Many sites are used by others, for example as churches, and the College does not have complete authority over all spaces and their use. They have therefore had to work alongside the providers of the teaching spaces, although churches have been able to open earlier than other public

buildings which has been helpful. All students travel to teaching, as there is no residential accommodation, so parking and public transport have to be included in space considerations and planning. The College has published on their website the essential and preferable criteria used for decision making about on-site activity. This not only ensures transparent communication to key stakeholders and students but also gives flexibility for some sites to open for on-site activity before others.

Students have been told to plan for online teaching and learning in the Autumn term and timetable adjustments will enable them to continue online for as long as necessary. There will be a blended approach to academic delivery in the Autumn term, including for practical tasks, and this will be reviewed for future terms. Communication with staff and students to enable them to understand why decisions have been made is seen as very important.

Academic Development sessions will continue online, and the pandemic has required staff to reflect on their pedagogical practice. Students have realised that they have to prepare well to get the most out of the online seminars and they need to take more charge of their own learning. The College plans to create a Guide to Learning in a blended context for the Autumn term to help students cope with the changes.

Communication with students has been facilitated by tutorial (Formation) groups of 10-12 students. During term time, Formation Tutors had weekly online meetings with their Formation Group and sent emails when necessary. Key information has been communicated through emails from the Dean, some of which has been replicated on the VLE, and a list of frequently asked questions (FAQs) has been compiled and is accessible on the College website. As well as feedback from students through the Formation Groups, Senior Students meet with the Senior leadership Team every half term and Student Representatives were consulted about plans for Autumn term delivery. More specific feedback is collected from students through module evaluations. Before the College made any decisions about plans for the Autumn term, the Academic Director, Chair of the Academic Working Group and Chair of the Ministry Working Group had a meeting with the Student Representatives. In June, the College communicated its plans for the Autumn term on its website.

Specialist or private institutions

Harper Adams University

Harper Adams University in Shropshire, England provides specialist foundation, undergraduate and postgraduate taught and research degree programmes for the agri-food chain and associated rural industries. In addition to 3,000 full-time students, the University has an onsite working farm.

With two longstanding partnership links with universities in China, from January 2020 the University was alert to the development of a potential worldwide emergency and took steps to support its partners and to start planning for how to manage an outbreak in the UK. The University's existing business continuity plan included provision for responding to infectious and/or zoonotic disease outbreaks which was a useful starting point.

An emergency response team had also already been established and trained over the past five years to further support any need to enact the business continuity plan. This team's work had included scenario planning on how to deliver teaching and learning remotely if any part of the campus (or all of it) were to be unavailable for a period. Alongside this, investment in e-learning and digital library platforms - and support for staff and students to use them - proved to be a helpful foundation for moving learning resources online during the lockdown when it came. IT systems were also tested for increased levels of traffic and mobile devices were provided to help staff and students to work remotely, including where rural broadband connectivity is a challenge.

A COVID response group was established, headed by the Vice-Chancellor and members of the senior team, University Executive and student services managers. The team drew on government advice, as well as that available from a wide range of higher education networks including GuildHE, Advance HE, UWM, AHUA, ARC, AMOSSHE, CUBO, AUDE, Jisc and health and safety networks. Weekly update sessions run by GuildHE for Vice-Chancellors and regular sessions for heads of business continuity were also valuable. A dedicated COVID helpline and email inbox were established as a safety net but, due to engagement by staff and students with email and online platforms such as Microsoft Teams, these have remained relatively unused.

It was agreed that along with responding to immediate issues and ensuring effective decision making and communication as the situation was developing, there was a need to identify a smaller group that could 'reimagine' the future and draw on positive learning emerging from the situation, as well as planning actively for 2020-21 and beyond. Ensuring a high-quality student experience, supporting staff, working to manage communications with all stakeholders, and the future health and sustainability of the institution have been uppermost in this work. Virtual platforms for open days and for continuing to engage with industry events proved to be effective ways to engage externally during lockdown. Close liaison with members of the governing body using remote meetings has also been invaluable and critical to clear decision making.

The University made arrangements to ensure the health and wellbeing of resident students who could not return home and to ensure that the University's animals were cared for during lockdown. More than 80 of the c 550 staff have been working onsite full or part-time during full lockdown to deliver these critical services. A back-up team of staff volunteers for certain roles was also secured.

Assessment regulations were carefully considered, drawing on discussion with external examiners, national guidance and what other providers were doing. All changes were approved by Academic Board and reported to the governing body. Assessment boards were

held successfully on Microsoft Teams, using secure document sharing methods. Overall, student engagement with open book examinations and online submission has been very positive with good outcomes. Where practical examinations are still required by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies to meet professional competency regulations, these have been scheduled for late summer in a socially-distanced and risk-assessed manner. Arrangements to enable students undertaking research projects at undergraduate and postgraduate level were made, so work could continue on literature reviews, or writing up results. Required practical work was rescheduled.

Student feedback, sought through a Students' Union survey and the feedback of student reps on committees such as the Learning, Teaching and Student Experience Committee and Academic Board, has indicated positive feedback in a number of areas such as engagement with asynchronous lectures and interactive Teams sessions. Areas identified as needing further development by students were used as the basis for planning enhancements for remote delivery in the autumn term. There have been no synchronous lectures, but synchronous tutorials and revision sessions have taken place.

Following a staff survey about a possible phased return to campus-based operations from June, government research laboratory advice and working outdoors guidance was used to deliver COVID-secure measures to enable laboratories and other specialist facilities to be reopened for research projects, based on comprehensive risk assessments and induction for staff about the revised working arrangements. Office guidance was also followed, as was the Department for Education guidance for higher education institutions, together with other higher education sector-specific guidance to ensure university campuses are COVID-secure.

Discussion of plans with staff and student representatives has been critical and has helped shape decision making and communications. The University has worked closely with its local Health Protection Hub (HPH) team to ensure that arrangements for Test and Trace and local lockdowns are understood on both sides. A 24/7 helpline has been provided for contacting the HPH and shared with key staff.

In the autumn term, the University aims to deliver lectures asynchronously and practical/tutorial/small group teaching in physically-distanced sessions, after having assessed teaching spaces based on distancing limits. New and continuing students have been informed of these arrangements. Remote placement visiting will take place wherever possible.

The health and safety of staff, students and everyone who accesses the campus remains the key focus with the aim of maintaining a high-quality academic experience, building and maintaining the important sense of community that a small specialist institution offers for its staff as well as returning and new students. Express consent from students to the published arrangements will be gathered via electronic enrolment.

Plans for delivering effective and engaging campus and off-campus living, as well as induction and social programmes that can be socially distanced are also in hand, in partnership with the Students' Union.

Matrix College of Counselling & Psychotherapy

Matrix College of Counselling & Psychotherapy is based in Wymondham in Norfolk. The College offers an undergraduate programme in Integrative Counselling validated by Middlesex University, and its professional standards are overseen by the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP). Historically, its teaching has taken place at weekends (Saturday and Sunday), but from September 2020 it will be offering an additional two-day teaching block during the week (Thursday and Friday).

The College's management team advised its student body on 4 March 2020 that its response to the pandemic would be guided by government advice. It continued in-person teaching until 16 March but decided, the following day, to stop in-person teaching and move entirely to online delivery. As a small institution with a single course and around 100 students, the College was able to train staff to use video-conferencing software and transfer its programme to online delivery by the weekend of 21-22 March. For this inaugural online weekend, contact hours were reduced because of the intensity of the teaching.

These changes were reviewed by staff over the Easter break and the contact hours were increased as a result of student feedback. College staff also considered the transferability to online settings of the types of small group activity that were typically used in face-to-face, secure and supervised settings. One-to-one tutorials with staff and 'Group Process' meetings at which group and individual relationships are discussed, could both be retained but 'Triads' (in which groups of three students practise counselling skills using real, live situations) were discontinued because of the potential threat they posed to confidentiality and security if carried out at home rather than in a controlled environment. Staff decided to replace them after Easter with an online 'listener/talker/observer' exercise which has proved very successful. 'Group Process' was also retained because speaking is not compulsory. Group size was around 13 students in 2019-20 and is expected to be 12 students in 2020-21.

Library books were purchased and posted to students as an emergency measure. Lectures are delivered online and staff make considerable use of breakout rooms to allow students to discuss issues with or without staff being in attendance. Breakout groups are also used to enable students to have coffee and lunch breaks together to promote social interaction.

The transition to online delivery was achieved without changing any module descriptors or assessments and in consultation with Middlesex University. External examiners have been supportive of the standard of student work completed during lockdown, and achievement levels are comparable with those of a 'normal' year.

A key challenge was how to manage student clinical placements either because they had been closed because of the pandemic, leaving students to make up the lost hours at a later stage, or because placement providers had moved their counselling practice online. While the UKCP had approved online counselling, the College was unwilling to allow students to practise online without prior completion of its own extra training and a competency assurance document. In addition, it decided to develop an addendum to its placement management agreement which requires the placement provider to ensure student safety and a COVID-secure working environment if, and when, it decides to revert from online to face-to-face counselling.

Students are required to complete an agreed number of clinical practice placement hours in order to progress and ultimately graduate, so the College responded to the suspension of many of its placements by relaxing the progression rules and deferring the completion of clinical practice hours to a later stage. This is a common practice within the discipline.

The College channels formal communications with continuing students through its virtual learning environment, but backs this up with videoconference meetings led by the Principal

(involving around 100 students) and with group tutorials (involving around 12 students) led by programme leads for each year group. There is a policy requiring staff turnaround of emails within three days. At the end of May, the College conducted a student experience survey which was supportive of the steps taken by the College and requested the group tutorial in addition to the longer working day mentioned above.

Smaller universities

Richmond American University

Richmond, the American International University London is a specialist provider with campuses in Richmond and Kensington, and study centres in Italy. Its specialism lies in the fact all degrees follow the US liberal arts model. The University has achieved taught degree awarding powers (TDAP) and is therefore able to offer its students the opportunity to graduate with a dual award consisting of a UK degree as well as a US degree. The University bases its academic year on the American model, with a fall semester starting in September, and a spring semester starting in January.

The University's student body is highly international with more than 70% of students coming from outside the UK from more than 60 countries. As a consequence, the range of COVID advice received by students from the governments of their home countries represented an immediate challenge in the run-up to lockdown and made it essential for the University to communicate with students and staff alike. At times this meant communicating uncertainty while awaiting guidance from the UK government and health authorities, but the University took the view that the communication of uncertainty was better than silence. Italy, which entered its COVID cycle two or three weeks ahead of the UK, acted as the 'canary in the coalmine', and the University took early action to close its centres there. The University took a decision to suspend all teaching for a week on 13 March in order to 'flip' its programmes to online delivery. Academic staff worked with the Student Government (Students' Union) to decide how learning and teaching could best be continued, and to communicate short-term arrangements for the remainder of the spring semester to the student body as a whole.

Once the immediate emergency had been managed and online delivery was in place for the remainder of the academic year 2019-20, the University turned its attention to planning for the fall 2020 semester. Its initial decision was to split the semester into two parts consisting of fall 1 (1 September until 23 October) and fall 2 (2 November until 18 December), with fall 1 being online only and fall 2 marking the restart of in-person teaching on campus. This decision was facilitated by the American government's decision to waive its prohibition on online teaching during the fall semester. The University further decided that online teaching would continue into fall 2 and beyond, if necessary, and these plans were agreed by the student body. The University mothballed its Kensington campus, making savings on estate costs but also improving the safety of student residences and ending room-sharing for students in residential accommodation. The University surveyed staff and students and made a number of further changes in response to their concerns about an eventual return to in-person teaching and learning. These included lengthening the working day to avoid rush-hour travel, delivering lectures online and reserving in-person tuition for small group teaching. It decided that the nature of its liberal arts curriculum prohibited the creation of 'bubbles'.

The University's assessment regime follows the US model and involves a substantial percentage of in-course assessment which was easily transferred online. End of year examinations were also moved online. The assessment profiles of all students were scrutinised and mitigation agreed, where appropriate - for example, in cases of special educational needs. The University has noted very little difference in overall student achievement this year compared with a normal year and across a student's transcript, and feedback from students has been positive.

Communications were central to the University's response to the pandemic. The University and its Student Government kept in touch with offer-holders, all of whom were telephoned by the admissions team. The decision to split the fall semester into two parts was presented as 'Two-step entry to university', with Step 1 online and Step 2 in-person, and all reasonable

measures have been taken to ensure that applicants know what they can expect. In respect of current students, the University's size means that it knows its students well and was able to deal with concerns on an individual basis. It nonetheless established a list of FAQs to ensure consistent responses to common queries, which were published on the university website and have proved useful for applicants and continuing students alike. The Student Government and its officers provided a great deal of support in all dealings with students. Although it was not an issue on this occasion, the University was conscious at all times that a 'single point of failure', such as the illness of a key member of staff, can have great repercussions for small providers with small staff teams.

York St John University

Founded in 1841, and awarded university title in 2006, York St John University is based in York and has a campus in London.

At the outset of the pandemic, York St John University established a COVID-19 Project Group, led by the Head of the Strategic Projects and Change team, to manage its approach to the pandemic. Teaching ceased once lockdown commenced, and the University's campus closed two weeks before the Easter vacation in order to provide staff with time to plan changes to teaching, learning and assessment. York St John adopted a 'safety net' policy to ensure students were not disadvantaged by the unprecedented circumstances and alternative assessments were signed off by external examiners. Some Year 1 and Year 2 assessments have been postponed until next academic year as they need to take place on campus. There has been a slight delay to completing the Examination Boards, now taking place a little later than planned in August 2020.

Alongside the early 'crisis management' phase of the University's response to the pandemic, the Project Group established five workstreams covering: 'People Return', Estates, IT, Campus Services and Academic/Student Experience. Each workstream had very precise deliverables and was managed by a 'Workstream Lead'. Initially, the workstreams spent much of their time gathering data to inform the University's response to the pandemic and enable data-driven decision making. For 'People Return', this included gathering detailed information about, for example, caring responsibilities that individual staff and students might have accrued because of the pandemic, while for Estates it involved detailed survey and examination of campus space to determine how best to adapt it for the safe return of staff and students on a phased basis.

While the information-gathering phase was taking place, the Project Group turned its attention to scenario planning, designing service changes, ensuring COVID-safe campuses, and understanding the IT provisioning needed in the 'new normal'. This involved consideration of, for example, potential start dates in September, distancing measures in all campus spaces, creating a balance of in-person and online teaching, and a clear view of what types of teaching and learning activity should be prioritised for an eventual return to campus.

Communications were a priority during lockdown, with weekly updates being distributed via a range of channels including the University's website, its student app, email and FAQs (which were used by students and staff alike). Teaching staff managed communications with students on all academic matters. Students and staff surveys about the University's response to the pandemic were supportive but revealed similar concerns about safety when returning to campus, and about increased dependence on IT systems for remote learning.

For the coming academic year, the University will base activity on a number of academic principles. The University will adopt a blended approach to teaching and learning, providing a high-quality, engaging and accessible experience for all students. York St John have responded to the changing external environment by taking a holistic approach to assessment across each programme, ensuring it can be completed at a distance and submitted online wherever appropriate. Key staff have already been back on campus to prepare for its reoccupation and, from 10 August, all staff will be able to return voluntarily.

The University has reflected on what worked well during lockdown and believes that some positives have emerged from the challenge posed by the pandemic. These include a recognition that students and staff can work effectively online, and that tradition 'student-facing' activities work, even when delivered remotely. Both have the potential to advise the future management and utilisation of campus space. New ways of working have

also been found, such as the Library's 'click and collect' service and a number of processes have been streamlined. The University maintains a good relationship with the City of York Council and its local community, working closely to understand and support the implications of students and staff returning to the city.

Annex

QAA is grateful to the following individuals and organisations for their assistance in developing this document:

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