RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS FROM COURT MEMBERS RECEIVED BY DEADLINE OF 25 NOVEMBER

Question 1.
What measures has the University taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19 amongst students, and how has student and staff welfare been supported throughout the pandemic?

University’s response to reduce spread of Covid 19

In response to national and local guidance the University has taken an institution wide approach to prevent the spread of Covid [http://www.bristol.ac.uk/coronavirus/ including::

- Covid safe campus [https://www.bristol.ac.uk/students/your-studies/study-2020/campus-safety/campus-spaces/]
- Information for staff and students on how to stay safe on campus including implementation of living circles in accommodation, wearing of face covering and observing social distancing and hand hygiene. [https://www.bristol.ac.uk/students/your-studies/study-2020/campus-safety/]

The University continues to work with Bristol City Council's public health team and Public Health England to manage potential infection clusters and outbreaks. Meeting and communicating regularly with:
- Bristol City Council
- University of West England
- local NHS trusts
- other colleagues from across the city to check and review plans.

A University Outbreak Response Team has been set up. This team will coordinate action for clusters or outbreaks of Covid-19 infection. Arrangements are in place for out-of-hours escalation if this is needed.

The Government has introduced a COVID-19 contain framework. This sets out how national and local partners will work with the public at a local level to prevent, contain and manage outbreaks. The Department for Education’s (DfE) Higher Education: reopening buildings and campuses guidance sets out expectations about the implications of different Tiers of Intervention for Higher Education Institutions and the suggested response by institutions. We have developed comprehensive plans to respond to each Tier of Intervention if required. We have shared these plans with local public health colleagues. Our Senior Leadership Team and dedicated response teams consider specific outbreaks or interventions. They assess the circumstances and make changes at the University which adhere to the DfE framework. We tell students and staff quickly if any changes to learning or teaching are required. We provide this information using our official communication channels.
Supporting student welfare

When the possibility of the first lockdown became evident, the Pro Vice-Chancellors for Education and the Student Experience consulted with Sabbatical Officers at Bristol SU agree on planning in advance of government advice. Among the measures taken were the following:

- Student Wellbeing and other support services transitioned to an online and telephone service.
- Residential Life Service supported students who needed to remain in Bristol, including those who self-isolated.
- Accommodation fees were refunded to students who left University residences because of COVID-19.
- Personal Tutors offered support online with additional guidance.
- Nilaari, a culturally appropriate counselling service providing help and support for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic people, was engaged to offer free counselling sessions.

The Student Wellbeing Survey was reframed as a COVID-19 Education and Student Experience Survey to capture broader opinions from students about their experience of the Summer Term with regard to teaching, learning, assessment, wellbeing and support. The results from the survey underwent rapid scrutiny to ensure they could result in actions for 2020/21.

Careful discussions and planning have been conducted throughout the pandemic around how our students should return, including from those overseas. Sabbatical Officers, student networks and focus groups have helped to inform actions to make the campus safer and to consider the concerns of at-risk and vulnerable members of our community.

The health, welfare and best interests of our students and staff remain the University’s top priority. We have been expending every effort to minimise disruption and provide the support self-isolating students need during the COVID-19 pandemic. We have increased wellbeing and other support services in response to the needs of students who are new to Bristol and returning to study with us. This includes increased investment in disability services; provision of additional hardship funding; and support for students who are COVID-19 symptomatic or who are self-isolating, including those in University accommodation who receive deliveries of free essential fresh and long-life food, toiletries and laundry collection services.

Supporting staff welfare

Our Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy acquired a specific focus on physical and mental wellbeing during the pandemic. As part of our response to the pandemic, we developed a range of guidance and support measures for different groups, including a Resources Hub with information for marginalised communities disproportionately affected by the pandemic, largely due to existing inequalities.

Staff Wellbeing continues to be a primary focus for our HR teams particularly in light of COVID-19 restrictions and the continued requirement for the majority of our staff to work remotely. The University has maintained a comprehensive schedule of virtual activities and support for staff wellbeing throughout the last few months. In October we ran a pulse survey inviting feedback from staff on their wellbeing and their experience of the last few months. The survey is now closed and over 2,000 responses were received. We will be analysing this data over the next few weeks and using the feedback to help shape the refresh of the staff mental health and wellbeing strategy early in 2021. We have also launched the recruitment
process for a further 20 Staff Mental Health Champions as part of the MIND pilot for Healthy Universities.

As part of our return to Campus planning we have continued to update and improve our online support and resources for staff to help them adapt to the new circumstances. The HR team produced a managers’ handbook and flowchart to assist our staff with holding conversations about returning to Campus and taking account of the concerns and needs of those who were asked to do so. This was further supported by a series of management surgeries, with HR Business Partnering teams available to assist Faculties and Schools with their return planning. All resources were published alongside the comprehensive guides produced by our Campus team. We also published some additional resources to assist those working from home with advice on how to maintain morale and ‘keep in touch’ with colleagues.