

CYPE(5)-24-20 - Paper to note 3

Response to the Children, Young People and Education Committee, Welsh Parliament

Cardiff Metropolitan University – arrangements to support students in light of Covid 19

Covid-19 measures we have taken in relation to our own accommodation, and how we have worked with Purpose Built Student Accommodation (PBSAs) and private landlords (including arrangements for both term and vacation periods)

1.1 The University's Accommodation team contributed to the development of the Welsh Government's guidance for HE Accommodation. The following procedures are based on this guidance, along with revised local risk assessments, taking into account Covid-19.

1.2 We developed procedures and guidance for the safe re-opening of our buildings (having not been used for a number of weeks). This includes:

- Statutory testing (although this was continued where possible)
- Water testing - Key risk Legionella. All systems flushed and disinfected where required
- Safe restart of all primary systems: Heating & hot water systems, tested prior to restart
- Cleaning: enhanced cleaning undertaken throughout all properties

1.3 Each property has been assessed and the appropriate social distancing signage and advisory signage installed. General COVID-19 information and guidance will be placed in each household area.

1.4 We have taken a staged approach to communication about Accommodation services to both students and their families:

- **Reassure** – provided information highlighting the key areas of change for all prospective students
- **Engage** – developed a document to highlight the specific changes to our normal procedures, and how we will continue to support our students; updated our on-line Halls Induction to include Covid guidance. (All students must complete this induction prior to moving in); developed a new 'Arrivals' video to explain in advance our procedures for moving in; moved our Halls Manager 'Welcome Briefing' to an online version, which will include a tour of the main residential campus facilities
- **Compliance** – monitoring adherence to and effectiveness of procedures and working practices for our community.

1.5 We will be reserving rooms within our smaller residential properties to support late / International arrivals. These students will be required to self-isolate, symptom free, for 2 weeks prior to joining an established household.

1.6 Cleaning and Maintenance services have been revised to ensure the safety of our staff and students at all times. These will include the use of PPE at all times. Cleaning services will prioritise enhanced cleaning of communal areas rather than individual household areas.

1.7 First Aid training has been updated for all staff and Wardens, and will be delivered safely, maintaining social distance wherever possible, and / or the use of appropriate PPE. We are exploring the introduction of a telephone triage service to limit necessary face to face contact.

1.8 We have developed a system for residents to notify us of any guest that will be visiting the household. This will support a coordinated response by the University.

1.9 The University has a well-established programme of social activities for its Residential students. We feel this programme, along with other opportunities, will be an important part in supporting the general wellbeing of our students and contribute to positive behaviour, particularly when 'normal' student social activities will not be available (ie nightclubs, etc). Our events programme has been revised to a mainly online delivery model; although we will aim to safely deliver some outdoor activities (those that can maintain a 2m distance).

1.10 We are following Welsh Government guidance for management of any reported symptoms or confirmed cases. This information was provided to all students on their arrival. These arrangements will feed into the University's corporate oversight 'Hub' for Covid responses. The Accommodation team will provide support to any self-isolating household, ie food boxes, medicines, etc. These students will also be encouraged to engage in the various channels of online support provided by our Student Services and Res Life team.

1.11 If students say they wish to be released from their contracts, we are allowing this for a period, however we are asking them about their reasons and putting them in contact with Student Services to ensure that any welfare issues are being addressed. It is not unusual for students to become homesick in the first few weeks of university and there are always retention issues at this point; we are trying to ascertain whether students might want to leave because they are nervous, concerned about the behaviour of others, feel the online component of their studies does not require them to be in Cardiff all the time, or they are missing home. If they want to leave we are aiming to work with them so that they do not need to leave their academic course if possible.

1.12 With regards to private landlords and PBSAs, we mainly deal with Unite (our nomination properties) who are mirroring our approach when students self-isolate with the exception of providing food boxes. At the moment they are not considering releasing students from their contracts if they wish to leave. We have been in touch with the landlords on our Landlord Register – some are in regular contact with their tenants but really are not providing support services. A small number are being flexible with contracts whilst others will be holding students to their contracts as they feel that unlike any other businesses they have had no support and many have mortgages to pay – they have quoted that students will still be receiving their loans/ grants.

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

2.1 We are communicating with all students in private residences via our student communication channels with detail of how to access the necessary resources. All first year students will have proactive communications from a student 'buddy' checking on how they are coping - with specific questions asked around self-isolating and support.

2.2 In our own residences, we currently have 4 flats that are self-isolating - 3 are pending tests and 1 is as a result of track and trace contacting them as they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive. We have plans in place to support the students with basic food provisions, catered students having meal delivered to their flats, regular phone calls, delivery of medications,

bedding packs if needed for clean linen. We are pulling together a team in case we have to upscale the response so we can continue to support all of the students who may have to self-isolate in Cardiff Met halls. We are also in close contact with Student Services for any mental health or wellbeing support our students may need and we are increasing our virtual res life programme so there are activities available. We are incorporating any SU activities into our calendars and promoting those to ensure a wide range of activities/events are available along with Met Sport activities for those not self-isolating.

The provision we have in place for identifying and addressing student hardship

3.1 Any student can come forward and identify that they are struggling financially. They will usually first be directed to an appointment with a student money adviser, and if they are in urgent immediate need, will be issued with a voucher for groceries, and may receive a same-day payment of up to £300 to meet essential expenditure. If the student is resident in our Halls, or with our nominated partner (Unite Students), then steps will also be taken to avoid any fines for late payment of rent. If the need is more significant and long-standing, then a student can apply for a grant of up to £1500 to cover a shortfall in essential expenditure. This grant typically takes longer to assess and award as a higher level of evidence is required. Typically, awards are between £500-800. Where there are concerns about spending patterns or money management, the student will also be advised to attend a budgeting appointment where further advice can be given. Where suitable, students may also be supported to secure part-time work to supplement their student funding.

3.2 We do not know at this stage how severely the pandemic will affect students' income or ability to manage their money. We are keeping our processes under review, and will adapt them if necessary to try to support students to cope with their essential costs.

Our approach to working with students on COVID-19 measures and actions, including self-isolation

4.1 In addition to actions mentioned above, we have developed a new student intranet site – MetCentral – as the single source of truth for students with regards to our policies and the current situation at the University. We will augment this with communication via social media as well as direct student communications.

4.2 We have also created a Covid Hub, which will act as a single point of contact to co-ordinate our response to cases and suspected outbreaks, as well as manage reporting.

How we are working and integrating with the public health and civil contingencies machinery within local authorities and local resilience fora (to include confirmation of whether we have on-campus testing facilities for students)

5.1 Staff at the University have been working with colleagues in Public Health Wales, South Wales Police, the local Public Health Board, and the Cardiff and the Vale Incident Management Team to ensure there is co-ordination between our activities at the University and what is happening in the local area. We are also working with the other local universities to co-ordinate efforts where possible as well as developing joint communications for our communities and for students.

5.2 We do not have testing facilities on campus, but are working with Public Health Wales to facilitate speedy testing of staff and students to help manage outbreaks.

How we have engaged – and are engaging – with the local population, in particular where we have campuses in rural local authorities

6.1 We have written to all community groups, local councillors and Members of the Senedd setting out our Covid plans, and how we have made the campuses and accommodation safe. We are intending on writing to the local residents near our campuses setting out our policy on student behaviour. We have provided social media content for community groups to inform/disseminate plans. We will continue to do this.

Any recommendations we believe the Committee could helpfully make to the Welsh Government to improve support for universities, staff and students

7.1 One thing we are learning is the speed that students are able to get home testing kits – it can take considerable time, meaning the whole flat is self-isolating; if home testing was faster and students could get a faster negative result, they would not need to continue isolating. We still have the Health Board form to complete but it would be very helpful if we could have a “stock” of kits to speed up the process. The testing centres, including the new one at Museum Place, are too far for the students to walk from Plas Gwyn or Cyncoed so we will rely on home testing kits for some time to come, especially for those who are really unwell with symptoms.

7.2 We are still not clear how we will get information from Public Health Wales in a timely fashion on positive cases. This is vital for us to secure a quick student wellbeing response via our Student Services.

7.3 We are already aware of students who have graduated with no real possibility of a job in their area, and this is likely to happen again in 2021. Lifelong learning support from government would be welcomed to help support those particularly in disadvantaged areas.

7.4 Universities that find themselves having to undertake mass Covid-19 isolation will need support; this will be discussed with the Cardiff and the Vale IMT but it will be important for the area that this is appropriately supported by local authorities, otherwise compliance could be low.

7.5 It would be helpful to understand whether frontline educational staff will be considered a priority in the vaccine programme, after NHS workers and vulnerable groups.