

## University of Winchester Story of 2020: Making a Mark

Providing support to students and the local community during the Covid-19 pandemic



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### The impact of the pandemic on the University of Winchester, our students and stakeholders

As the University for Sustainability and Social Justice, the health, welfare and safety of our students, staff and global community is our number one priority as we continue to tackle the challenges brought about by the global Covid-19 pandemic.

At the start of the first national lockdown in March 2020, more than 8,000 students and almost 1,000 members of staff at the University of Winchester were required to stay at home. For an institution which works, lives and socialises together on campus, this was a huge change and the provision of teaching and specialist support for students had to adapt overnight.

With most students leaving their University halls of residence to return to their family homes, all teaching moved from face-to-face in lecture halls and seminar rooms to online via Microsoft Teams. Support services for students – such as mental health and wellbeing support, advice and academic support – also moved to online provision, with professional services staff offering support from home.

### How the University of Winchester is supporting current students through the pandemic

- We developed a package of no detriment measures for the 2020/21 academic year, designed to help students by ensuring our teaching assessment and progression processes are as fair as possible against the complex context of the pandemic.
- We launched a [£3.4m fund](#) to support students no longer living in University accommodation because of the pandemic. We also launched a rent relief fund for students in private rented accommodation and worked with Winchester Student Union and national bodies to call on private providers help support students with private accommodation contracts.
- We extended our Student Support Fund, which helps students who find themselves in unexpected financial hardship to include those impacted by the pandemic, with funding from the Office for Students. We created four additional funding opportunities for students, open to those in the following categories:
  - Students living in private rented accommodation
  - Students living in University Managed Housing (on top of the rent reductions above)
  - Students who are parents
  - Students who are care leavers

- Our wellbeing provision has evolved to recognise the impacts of this extraordinary year, underlining our commitment to providing a supportive and inclusive environment to help all students flourish. We have seen a 20 per cent increase in student engagement with our support services since we introduced the following measures this year:
  - Mental wellbeing services running online and face-to-face to facilitate engagement in the way that best suits the individual student
  - New wellbeing tools, such as Fika mental fitness programme and Student Space which specifically addresses the pandemic's mental wellbeing impacts
  - Covid Care Groups for students self-isolating to ensure they feel supported and part of our community
  - A Staying in Winchester group on Microsoft Teams for students remaining in the city during lockdown to keep in touch with each other and our friendly team of Wardens
  - Ensured access to high quality remote counselling support for students living outside of the UK through adapting our existing Employee Assistance Programme to meet student need
  - We have worked closely with health and safety colleagues to ensure a Covid-safe environment to enable us to continue to offer face-to-face, in-person support for the small number of students for whom remote support was inappropriate or not an option, and for whom in-person support was a vital part of remaining well, and enabling academic success.
  
- The University's libraries introduced new services this year, including a click and collect service for books; a postal service of books to students based outside Winchester; an increase in the number of books students can borrow and automatic renewals, and access to Gale Reference Complete (8,000 periodicals, 1.5m items of literary criticism and full text literary works, 4,000 e-book volumes and 13m pages of rare primary sources).
  
- We established a new Digital Access Scheme of £100k to ensure all students have the means to access learning and teaching services while delivered digitally. Students who are unable to engage with activities due to lack of digital access and financial hardship may apply for a long-term loan laptop for the whole academic year.
  
- We opened a mass test centre in the Sports Hall on campus to offer free, fast Lateral Flow Device tests to staff and students who need to be on campus, to help protect the whole community.

The University of Winchester's Director of Student Services, Lesley Black, explains our ongoing commitment to supporting students and highlights the impact of some of our new measures in the video below. (Ctrl + click the image below to play the video.)



### **Supporting prospective students through the pandemic**

During national lockdowns, the University has been unable to host our usual suite of Open Days for prospective students and their families on campus, at a crucial time for students deciding which universities to apply to.

- We moved our Open Days online and hosted them live on Microsoft Teams, rather than pre-recording them as at some other higher education institutions.
- Open Days are complemented by live Masterclasses and Meet and Greet sessions where prospective students can engage one-to-one with students, staff and academics across all subject areas.

### **Highlights of our impact supporting the local community**

- We provided over 90 rooms in [vacated campus accommodation](#) situated close to the Royal Hampshire County Hospital (RHCH) to NHS frontline staff who were unable to stay in their own homes, as well as car parking spaces.
- We donated acetate sheets to RHCH which were used to make single-use face guards for Hampshire Hospitals Foundation NHS Trust staff.
- We loaned tablets to residents in local authority care homes to enable them to keep in touch with loved ones while in-person visits were impossible.
- We moved our public events calendar of lectures and talks online and warmly welcomed local people to join us.

- Many of our staff and students continued to volunteer in the local community. Projects included helping with the education and mentorship of primary schools who have been hit hard by school closures and disrupted learning through the Schools Plus initiative and donating knitted octopi to RHCH as comfort toys for babies and patients with dementia through the Woolly Matters project.
- We launched a new, free counselling service for staff in response to the ongoing challenges presented by the pandemic.

The University of Winchester is proud to hold the Social Enterprise Gold Mark as we continue to work to benefit people and the planet, during the pandemic and as we look to the future.

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