

Three ways to support your students during the Covid-19 pandemic

Curriculum 2025, Coventry University

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted all aspects of society, including the higher education sector. Staff are doing an amazing job getting their teaching and learning online and looking after their students. As you know, for some students, this transition can be harder than for others. And because we know how busy you are, we've collated these ideas from colleagues and want to share them with everyone.

Three areas that we have focused on are:

- 1. Financial Hardship**
- 2. Mental Health and Wellbeing**
- 3. Discrimination**

We recognise and celebrate our diverse student population here at Coventry University, and we understand that during the pandemic each student may find themselves experiencing different circumstances and therefore will have individual needs and requirements to enable them to reach their full potential during their studies. Some under-represented and disadvantaged groups may be at risk of being even further disadvantaged or left behind as a result of some of the actions we take to try to support all students at this time, and it is important to be aware of this.

This guide is designed to support staff to provide inclusive responses. It is not designed to be prescriptive, but to encourage reflective thinking and action.

1. Financial hardship

Many of our students are likely to be vulnerable to the ongoing economic fallout triggered by the pandemic. Many students depend on part-time work to supplement their student loan. These jobs have gone – either temporarily or maybe permanently, leaving some students in immediate crisis now, and some anxious about how they will find work again post-pandemic. Some students during this time will have difficulties affording food and those who can't cook will be driven to spend more on expensive supermarket ready meals. Some students face difficulties due to their living situation that they find themselves in, for example lack of access to home IT equipment, internet, or lack of study space at home. Financial hardship has the potential to adversely impact upon their ability to engage with and complete coursework and assessment tasks, and this may cause additional anxiety and worry for students.

How you can help

Within the agreed interim arrangements, staff should be as flexible and sympathetic as possible to students. Moreover, staff should be both aware of relevant institutional initiatives and provide relevant information on support services to students. Innovation Way, York Science Park, Heslington, York YO10 5BR First Floor, Napier House, 24 High Holborn, London, WC1V 6AZ Holyrood Park House, 106 Holyrood Road, Edinburgh, EH8 8AS Advance HE is a company limited by guarantee registered in England and Wales no. 04931031. Registered as a charity in England and Wales no. 1101607. Registered as a charity in Scotland no. SC043946. Advance HE words and logo should not be used without our permission. VAT registered no. GB 152 1219 50.

2. Mental health and wellbeing:

During the Covid-19 pandemic and subsequent social restrictions, everyone is vulnerable to stress and anxiety. Some students may have additional caring responsibilities, dependants e.g. home schooling/shopping and caring for elderly relatives or managing their own health conditions. This stress, compounded by the stress of academic studies could adversely affect a student's ability to engage in learning and assessment, meet deadlines or keep up with scheduled sessions and this may lead to worrying about falling further behind in their studies or dropping out.

How you can help

The key thing is to be as supportive and sensitive to difficulties, which may not be disclosed, that a student may experience. Here are some tips to support students and promote positive mental health:

- + encourage students to seek support to manage their mental health and wellbeing by signposting them to support services
- + encourage students to check in regularly with academic personal tutors
- + offer asynchronous learning opportunities so that students can access online learning material flexibly and at a time that is convenient to them
- + encourage social connectivity amongst their peers by creating small group work opportunities, learning partners and synchronous 'check in' sessions for students to come together and feel connected to each other and to the tutor
- + be clear when communicating with students information about the university or their course, any changes and how it will impact them.

Further information and signposting is available here: [Student minds](#)

3. Discrimination

There is emerging evidence that the reporting and misinformation surrounding the Coronavirus outbreak is compounding existing racial stereotypes, especially against those students who may be perceived to be 'outsiders' such as some international students. Racial harassment can be distressing and have lasting effects for students who have experienced it. Some students may also experience other difficulties such as domestic violence during the pandemic possibly due to increased tensions within households, close living circumstances and lack of personal space.

How you can help

Ensuring safe learning spaces is one of the responsibilities of teaching and tutoring staff, and, just like a classroom, when organising on-line discussion groups. Staff need to be vigilant about hate speech and aggressive behaviour and apply commensurate sanctions. Setting and agreeing ground rules from the start will allow students to feel safe, and alleviate any concerns or worries. It will encourage students to share the responsibility to create and sustain a safe learning environment. During one-to-one tutorials/supervision sessions, staff should build trust and confidence with students to enable them to express how they are feeling generally, and to share any experiences of race hate. Useful resources at Coventry University: [reporting racial hate](#) [useful contacts](#)



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