

Induction - Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project

Leadership Intelligence Report

The induction, socialisation and engagement of students, particularly new student cohorts, but also student transitions

—

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The Advance HE Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project – a welcome from the Chief Executive Officer of Advance HE

Following upon the exigencies of the initial COVID-19 crisis, and the unprecedentedly rapid move to on-line teaching and assessment, the next big question for higher education institutions is ‘*when we open our campuses, HOW are we going to do that?*’. The forces for doing so are great, yet the uncertainties around how to do so are extraordinary, and the risks involved profound. The whole higher education community is, therefore, now looking ahead to what is really a very complex set of questions, with whatever decisions institutions make being open to further change as the social, economic, policy and health landscape goes on transforming in response to the pandemic.

The Advance HE Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education (SDCE) project offers an opportunity to engage with key facets of this question through collaborative and generative thinking and dialogue, focusing on the priority area of *student education and experience*. Student interests must be at the heart of every part of our conversations, along with their need to be valued and part of a community in which they belong.

At this critical and precarious stage in the COVID-19 response journey, there has never been a greater need for collective learning, sharing and planning. The five SDCE workshops that took place recently, facilitated by Advance HE with nearly three-hundred senior educational leaders from the UK and around the World, were an extraordinary example of this. Our thanks to everyone involved for the tremendous levels of engagement, openness and creative thinking that characterised the workshops and for the high-quality discussions that took place. I hope these publications, direct and rapid outputs from those workshops, will help to provide the support and stimulus you need to work through the important planning and decision making, working collaboratively with others and tailored for your context, that lies ahead over the next few months.

Alison Johns
Chief Executive, Advance HE

Introduction to the Advance HE Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education project

The COVID-19 (coronavirus) pandemic has led to a seismic shift in higher education. Following the initial outbreak, we are now transitioning from an emergency move to online teaching, learning and assessment (to facilitate campus closures, social lockdowns and in some contexts the conclusion of the academic year/session, including ensuring students graduate without detriment), to planning for the next session or semester which may look very different to the last. Further, the social and educational landscape will not only be different, but is currently unknown as the crisis evolves, and this presents a vast array of challenges for prospective and returning students, academic and professional services staff, institutions and individual disciplines. *The stakes are very high.*

In support of this unique and rapidly evolving educational landscape, Advance HE's Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education (SDCE) project aims to facilitate collective learning for member institutions across the globe. This is a rapid, generative project set up to collaboratively explore the key question '*when we open our campuses, HOW are we going to do that?*'. Driven at pace to match the swiftly unfolding situation that surrounds higher education, and targeted at senior colleagues with responsibility for planning, leading and managing educational programmes, its purpose is threefold:

- + To enable high quality conversations;
- + To share information, inspiration and intelligence; and
- + To co-create solutions to specific aspects of the challenge.

Student interests must be at the heart of every part of our conversations, along with their need to be valued and part of a community to which they belong. Following a series of international workshops, facilitated online for conversation, challenge and co-creation and with a clear focus on student education and experience, this publication forms one of a series of six Advance HE Leadership Intelligence Reports. The first five will cover the five key topics that were the focus areas for discussion during the workshops: Induction, Space and Place, Design and Delivery, Quality, and Inclusion. The sixth will be a capstone publication drawing together the project overall and reflecting on the four overarching themes of wellbeing, communication, leadership and partnership.

Importantly, the SDCE project is based on the approach of collaborative enquiry rather than advocacy or advice. To enable this, the following key principles underpin the project:

- + The challenge is about people first, not technology;
- + Good practice is good practice;

- + Well intended measures may have unintended consequences;
- + Differentiated approaches will be needed, along with continuous reassessment;
- + Balance is key to decision making – balancing the needs of students with the needs and responsibilities of the institution and the needs of society;
- + Project participants are experts in their own context; and
- + *Learning is above all else a human relationship* (after Rogers, 1983).

Achieving a ‘socially distanced’ inclusive campus will involve the efforts and incredible ingenuity of you all as we move not towards a ‘*new*’ normal but the ‘*next*’ normal, reflecting the ongoing fluidity of the world we are currently working in. We hope these publications, along with the accompanying [Advance HE Connect group](#), provide an important resource to support you in achieving this.

Finally, three important thoughts for you, the reader:

- + None of the topics covered by the reports stand in isolation as there is overlap between them all, and so for greatest value we recommend that they are read in combination with one another;
- + These are deliberately ‘rapid’ reports rather than ‘polished’ reports. Given the nature of the challenge and the rapid, generative nature of the project we wanted to get the Leadership Intelligence back to you quickly whilst it still has timely relevance and value; and
- + Every action we take has to be differentiated by context, whether at a national level, an institutional level or a subject level, and as one of the principles above sets out, *you are the experts in your own context*.

1. Introduction

Induction is a key juncture in the student lifecycle, bridging the transition from school/further education to higher education (HE), or from undergraduate to postgraduate study, and provides students with the knowledge to navigate the academic landscape and journey from arrival to graduation at their institution of choice. It is also an important rite of passage, not only in terms of learning, but also in terms of identity, extra-curricular opportunities and relationship building, all of which provide the foundation necessary to identify aspirations, achieve goals and contribute to society.

Induction is about belonging, connecting with people, beginning a new experience

Traditionally, university induction has followed a well-worn formula, with set-pieces delivered at institutional, faculty/departmental and Students' Union levels to a fixed, reliable, calendar. The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted this certainty. Prospective students in many national contexts have seen their schooling conclude abruptly, depriving them of key milestones both academically (e.g. examinations) and socially (e.g. the end-of-year prom), and resulting in an extended period of time away from their studies. They are now being asked to make decisions about the next stage in their studies in an educational environment which is hugely uncertain and absolutely unprecedented, and asking questions such as:

Will I actually be able to attend my chosen institution physically?

What will the nature of my HE experience actually be like?

How will the extra-curricular activities which form a key component of my HE experience be delivered (if at all; what if contact sports are my thing?)

What will the social opportunities be?

How will my particular circumstances be accommodated in terms of inclusion and equity?

Should I defer for a year (and if so, what certainty is there of a 'new' normal even then)?

Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project: Induction

Giles Brown and Doug Parkin

Why is my chosen university doing x in terms of physical distancing whereas my second-choice institution is doing y?

At the time of writing there is a very mixed picture across HE institutions, both in the UK and internationally; some institutions are well advanced in their decision making and preparations, and have made public announcements, whereas others appear less well advanced. (The latter may of course simply be due to capacity since staff are still heavily involved in developing policies to deal with bringing the 2019-20 academic year/session to a conclusion). In the meantime, prospective students we have spoken to appear deflated, casting their HE aspirations in the past tense and seeing the start of their time at university as something they *were* looking forward to.

In light of this, the induction, socialisation and engagement topic area of the Advance HE Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education (SDCE) project looked at these issues through a series of five workshops, engaging professional services and academic staff from a wide range of institutions from the UK and internationally. These workshops were structured around four key discussion areas: pre-arrival student engagement, becoming part of the institution/welcome to the new year, fostering relationships with fellow students and staff, and getting a positive early experience of what learning is like and exploring motivation. These form the main sections in this report, underpinned by the following stimulus models:

Stimulus Models	
Induction principles <i>(A model developed in consultation with students)</i>	Nurturing belonging <i>Student belonging is achieved through:</i>
To have opportunities to start making friends & building support networks;	Supportive peer relations;
To understand what learning is like in university;	Meaningful interaction between staff and students;
To experience authentic learning and have some reassurance that they can cope;	Developing knowledge, confidence and identity as successful HE learners; and
To be reminded how their course will benefit their future plans; and	An HE experience that is relevant to interests and future goals
To have a course induction that allows time for other commitments (NTU, 2017).	(Thomas, 2012: 14-15)

The aim of this publication is to draw together the high-quality conversations which emerged from the five SDCE workshops, to share information, inspiration and intelligence, and co-create solutions to specific aspects of the challenge from the discussions through enquiry rather than advocacy.

2. Pre-arrival student engagement

A number of key points emerged from the discussions surrounding how we engage with students, both pre-application and post-acceptance, and many of these are common to both stages of the induction process. The radical disruption and uncertainty caused by COVID-19 is however unique, and means our pre-application activities are more important this year than ever before. They require new ways of thinking, innovative practices and earlier interventions, and the use of a wide range of communication channels. Prospective students are anxious and dispirited and their parents fearful, and in some contexts, such as the UK, the timing of the national lockdown (Wikipedia, 2020) means institutions have been deprived of both some of their normal open days and the opportunity to provide face-to-face crisis-related reassurance. Further, prospective students may have had little or no educational structure since the lockdown was introduced; universities need to re-establish that structure early on.

We need to rejuvenate their enthusiasm through innovative induction, not just for the discipline but also for HE more generally.

Given the uncertainties, and the likelihood of phased returns, induction will undoubtedly need to become a long thin process this year, with more interventions and dispersed milestones. We need to deliver what would usually be separate events in innovative ways in order to share information and bring people together virtually and, if possible, physically. We also need to put mechanisms in place to ensure those relationships and connections are then carried forward. Can we innovate and start task-based connectivities before students actually begin, and make these engagements productive? For example, providing the same book to all incoming students which can be discussed by inter-disciplinary teams through inclusive questions and group work. Or replicate the new and different ways of working to be found in other high-participation events outside of HE, for example this year's Virtual National Eisteddfod for the people of Wales (Nation Cymru, 2020)? What about the use of virtual conference technology?

It will also be necessary to think creatively and differently about timings if students are physically remote and online, since this potentially disrupts engagement opportunities in a diverse student body (for example, those with parenting or caring needs or work commitments, or international students unable to travel and in different time zones). Events may need to run for 24 hours with activities on offer at a variety of times and with participants dropping in and out dependent on their availability, commitments and locale.

Communication is, therefore, of paramount importance. However, this requires careful implementation and a close understanding of how students communicate.

“Whilst it was great that such direct communication was being sent out, most of it was either written in painfully purple prose or was unnecessarily vague. Universities could improve many aspects of daily student life with more frequent and clear comms with regards to important matts that affect students”

“It would be helpful to have some way of keeping students in the loop beyond the copious amounts of wordy emails”

“Even just regular updates that said “we’re still discussing this...” rather than nothing at all. Also better timed communications because people felt they were always sent last thing in the day or just before a weekend so it meant they couldn’t contact their relevant department for days which just adds unneeded stress”

There is clearly a tension between the amount and frequency of communication – lots of communication is generally seen as good, particularly in a time of uncertainty, but we need to be mindful of information fatigue. Some pre-application observations, challenges and solutions currently being considered and implemented across the sector include:

- + small chunks of communication using different channels to engender and maintain student engagement;
- + use of both online and traditional (e.g. letter post/mail) methods;
- + Using different platforms for communicating which cater for the diversity of online platforms used by our students (AULA, 2020). There is a need to recognise the power of visual communication too;
- + Contact all new students to provide reassurance and build confidence, and acknowledging their concerns about September (or other enrolment date) and demonstrate we are mindful of these; where solutions have yet to be found say so;
- + Don't over-promise and be realistic and honest;
- + Students coming into HE may not have had the usual rite of passage at the end of their time at school or college, and therefore may be questioning whether they have a right to be at university. Managing this disappointment, and acknowledging the anxieties that students are currently feeling, is paramount – they need reassurance that it is OK to not be OK at the moment, but we are here to listen and help;
- + Virtual Open Days using appropriate platforms and technology (as examples only, LiveChat [2020] and iverent [2020]);
- + Implement 'keep warm' days, with current students (with training support) and staff regularly contacting/offering contact with prospective students.

Induction is a process not an event

Post-acceptance, there is a clear need for HE providers to differentiate between institutional-level and subject-level communications, and ensure these are appropriate and targeted. What emerged clearly from the SDCE workshop is that induction is a process not an event, and a student's sense of belonging to an institution is engendered over time; more than ever we need to be very mindful of how we foster a sense of belonging and build relationships (see Box 1). If the start of session is delayed, and/or phased for different cohorts, then we will need to lengthen the induction process, and ensure it is fit for (new) purpose. For example, new students may need to be kept engaged for longer to establish their sense of belonging and maintain their anticipation and excitement. We also need to spend time finding out what students need, be they new students or returners, without making assumptions based on the pre-COVID-19 past – are we really sure we know how a specific age group, or atypical learner, wants to access things?

To find out what students think, feel or desire, the best approach is to ask them.

Examples of post-acceptance ideas and approaches currently being considered and implemented across the sector include:

- + A conscious effort by universities to boost students' positive emotions, as they may be disappointed that their university experience is now going to be different (different need not mean worse). We need to manage expectations, and in order to do this we need to establish what our student's *value* and understand *why* they are coming to university;
- + Using a wide variety of online and physical channels of communication to keep in touch with students;
- + Using current students to buddy up with incoming students to keep them engaged, excited and integrated;
- + Actively working with Students' Unions/similar representative student bodies, and rethinking/reinvigorating the role of student ambassadors, pre-arrival (working with students as partners throughout);
- + Ensuring we don't forget the value students place on the social and extra-curricular aspects of HE life. Staff may, understandably, be more focused on the course, but new student rituals, clubs and societies, sports etc. are an important part of a student's HE experience (and portfolio of graduation attributes).

"It's important to provide a space for people to rant/ complain/ just be cross. I think if Universities try to be overly optimistic it will be seen as fake"

"Honesty is needed from lecturers about how they are finding it and that will encourage students to be honest and build meaningful working relationships. People respond to vulnerable humanity and will be much more understanding when it comes to any issues along the way"

At the subject-level:

- + There is an additional need this year to induct students into a discipline with reading lists, webinars, meet your tutor etc. virtually given uncertainties regarding whether we will be able to do this face to face. We need to think more broadly to ensure alternative modes of communication are adopted which provide the same outcomes as those which would have been delivered in previous years. For example, facilitating horizontal mixing (as you would get typically in a student accommodation block) by setting multi-disciplinary challenges (such as an interdisciplinary cohort working on a world problem or challenge);
- + Establishing social media groups for different programmes and post regular updates for students (and check we are maximising the effectiveness of our use of social media). This also allows a cohort of students to interact with one another under a prescribed 'umbrella';
- + We need to explicitly address student anxieties about access to proximity-reliant facilities (such as laboratories, dance studios, theatre stages, computing rooms etc.) and interactions (e.g. other musicians and performers, laboratory technicians, life models etc.). Can these aspects of a course be delayed (and what are the risks? – if a public lockdown were to be reinstated, would this lead to inescapable 'bunching' at the end of the academic year? Would it impact disproportionately on the linear acquisition of skills and knowledge?)? Can the same outcomes be delivered with innovative online alternatives?
- + Keep students up-to-date about what is being done to prepare for their arrival (and being honest when we don't know). This has the additional benefit of establishing dialogue between students and their department, tutor etc. and is especially important when it comes to online provision where students feel they are getting a lesser offering and will have had mixed experiences regarding online teaching and learning from school/college. How will this mode of learning achieve the same learning outcomes? What are the *advantages* of online learning over more traditional methods (face to face isn't always best!)? Overall how will a programme be delivered to their capabilities and expectations;
- + Consider using some of your current final year students to review the revised materials for new students;
- + Send them something through the post rather than electronically. This can be a very welcome and positive experience for today's students;
- + Setting up student groups prior to starting and facilitate interactions between them;
- + Introduce peer support;

- + Get tutors to send out welcome messages to students prior to starting and set some positive pre-university tasks;
- + One institution has repurposed their welcome/revision packs into lockdown kits, enclosing tea, coffee, and biscuits;
- + Use webinars rather than static webpages;
- + Facilitate buddying up and create links which allow student-led support for pre-arrival students;
- + Communicate with students but do not overpromise – be honest if you don't know.

Box 1. Identity, Community and Social Capital

(after Eve Alcock, Students' Union President, University of Bath, UK)

There are three constituent parts of the student experience (Figure 1):

- Learning and Teaching (the academic content of the student experience);
- Services and Facilities (the physical infrastructure and support); and
- The Formation of Identity, Community and Social Capital.

The latter is made up of friends, social networks, personal development opportunities, a sense of place and community etc. and this mustn't get lost even though it is sometimes difficult to see.

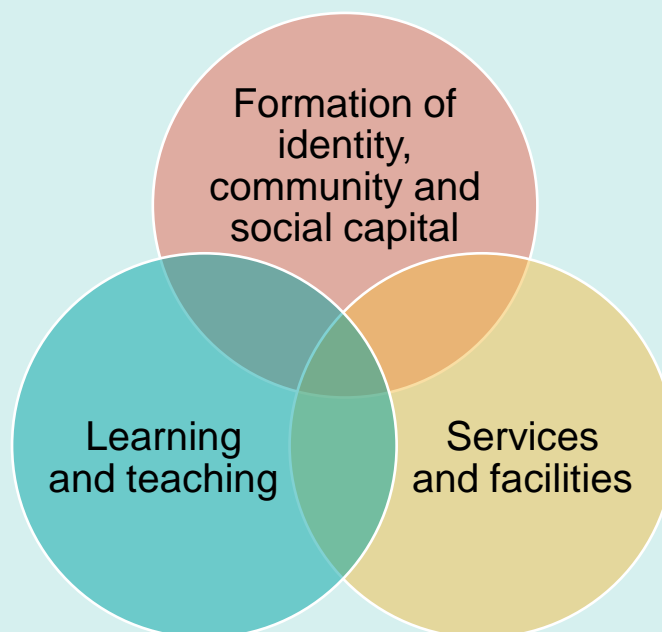


Figure 1. Constituent parts of the student experience (version 1).

Identity, culture and social capital runs all the way through the student lifecycle, and in relation to induction, impacts on pre-induction, stand-alone induction, acclimatisation and bedding in and the 'November blues'. Thus, rather than three separate entities, these constituent parts are perhaps better represented in Figure 2, with Learning and Teaching and Services and Facilities encompassed within Identity, Community and Social Capital.

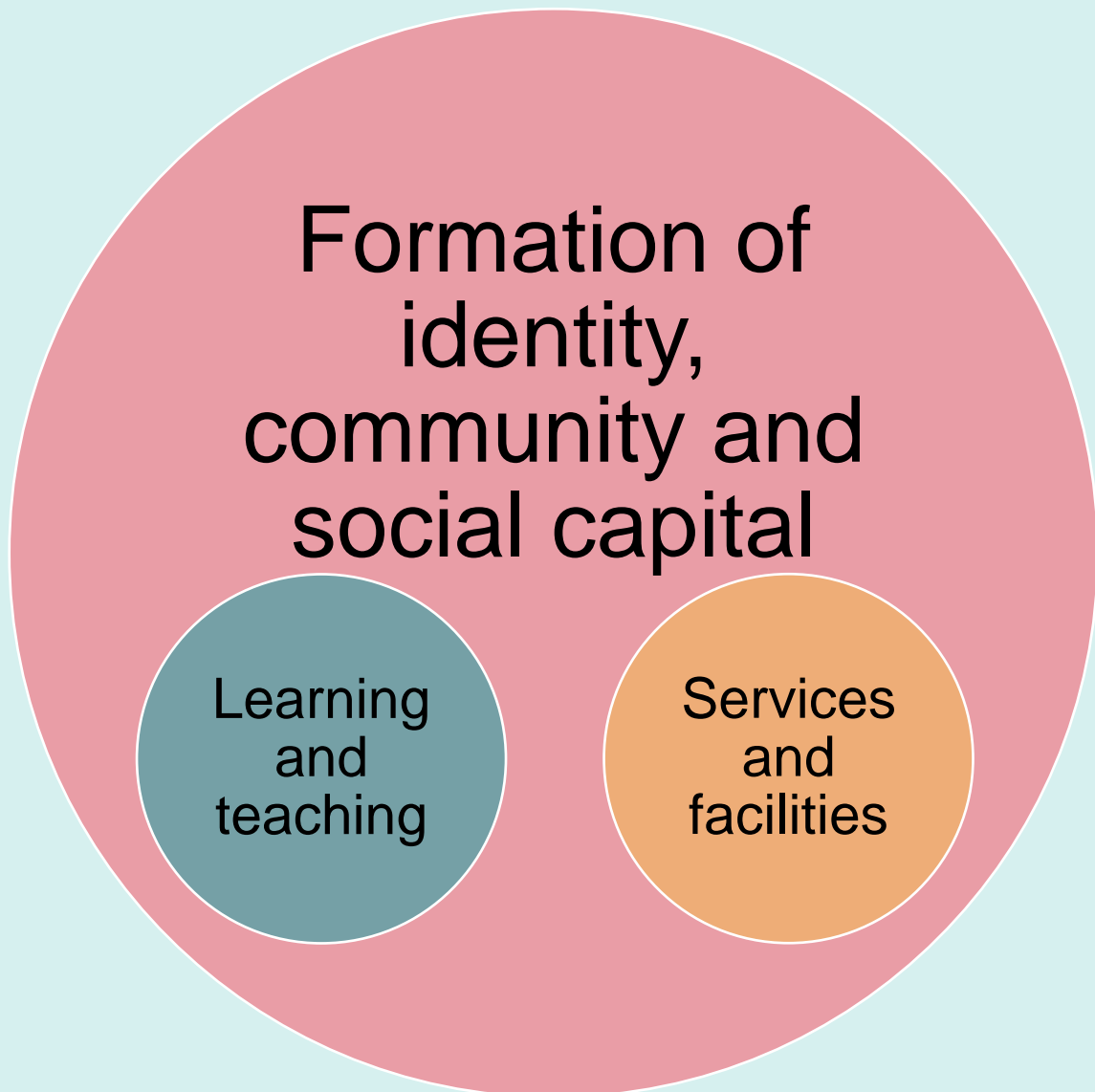


Figure 2. Constituent parts of the student experience (version 2).

There is therefore a need to ask how our learning and teaching and facilities and services delivery will foster this on a socially distanced campus, and what the threats are. For example:

Learning and teaching	
<i>Pre-COVID-19</i>	<i>Risk/Threat</i>
Learning communities	Isolated learning
Opportunities to build social networks	No pre-existing relationships with peers
Change to engage with content	Primarily receiving content
Clear structure	Learning time largely self-regulated

Services and facilities	
<i>Pre-COVID-19</i>	<i>Risk/Threat</i>
Able to drop in to any service and facility	Students might not be able to drop in
Extra-curricular activities rely on access to facilities	Reduced extra-curricular activities due to reduced facilities
Overwhelmed support services	Support services overwhelmed with new or more serious issues
Spaces that allow serendipity and planned happenstance	'Meetings' will be intentional; less chance for 'chance'

An overarching and essential consideration here is one of inclusion. Issues of digital poverty and connectivity at this stage of the student lifecycle, and for returning students, must be identified at a very early stage if we are to succeed in terms of student engagement. Is a 100% digital approach really inclusive? If not, what must be put in place to ensure equity? The best way to achieve this is to *listen* to our students and not make any assumptions about connectivity, capability and ownership of digital technology. Remember an online audit may miss the students you are trying hardest to identify; for example, does low uptake of an emergency laptop fund indicate high laptop ownership amongst a student cohort, or the fact that the digitally-disadvantaged in that student cohort simply didn't receive the e-mail offering support! Further, it is essential that we establish at the outset what motivates our students, building up a picture of who our students *are* and what they *need*; it is undoubtedly going to be even more challenging to do this from a distance.

Finally, we need to be aware that there is a danger of HE institutions designing virtual events for another generation which may not match their ways of interacting and working; ask your students how they want to access things and when. Further, it is *essential* we effectively manage expectations and be honest; telling our students (and staff) "*we don't know*" or "*we are unable to do that (and [importantly] why)*" is essential. Students and staff want to know what's coming, much of which unfortunately we simply don't know at the moment. However, we can plan, innovate and communicate in *partnership* with our students to deliver effective results for all.

3. Welcome – becoming part of the institution/ welcome to the new year (information, support and advice)

HE institutions are having to plan and make decisions for an uncertain and unpredictable start of the 2020-21 academic year/next semester. While many HEIs are still exploring options, a range of strategies and approaches have been announced. Some institutions are making plans for their students being on campus at the start of the next academic session, whereas others are indicating they will be largely engaging online; many are looking at hybrid models, blending online and face to face approaches. Whichever approach is deemed most appropriate for your institution, a longer, thinner induction for both new students and returners is likely to be the norm, with 'carousel' models favoured by many. Here, the start dates for different cohorts, and/or disciplines within cohorts, will be different. So, for example, new students will arrive on a particular date to be inducted (constrained to varying degrees by an institution's COVID-19 policies on physical distancing, space utilisation, course design and delivery, quality and inclusion), and they will then move to online teaching, allowing other cohorts/years to return for their inductions. Thus, start dates will be asynchronous both between and within institutions.

While the basic information which needs to be imparted to new students is fairly 'standard', albeit to be delivered in innovative and/or alternative ways this year, there is an increasing awareness that returning students, who in a normal year would largely simply slot back into place at the start of session, may need radically different (re)induction/reorientation programmes; the university environment they will be returning to will undoubtedly be different, and certainly not the familiar one they left when their studies last ended or were curtailed (pre-lockdown in March in the case of the UK). Thus, we will be dealing with new students and new student-like cohorts, both of whom will need to know new things and do things differently, with induction programmes running either concurrently or (more likely?) consecutively. Clearly, supporting returning students is critical, and here again diversity amongst and between cohorts needs to be considered carefully. For example, how will your institution deal with returning students whose work placements have been cut short?

In many instances the current physical set-up for mass induction events cannot be easily transferred to online delivery in the formats used previously, and significant work will need to be undertaken to redesign induction materials and their mode and sequencing of delivery. This will increase staff workloads, since new induction materials for a socially distanced campus will need to be developed and new platforms exploited, both at speed. This pressure will be increased further as effective, timely and appropriate communication will be crucial to socially distanced student groups, resulting in more work for academic and professional services staff at a time when some HE institutions are not recruiting or even potentially looking to reduce staff numbers. There are also significant staff and academic development implications that will need to be addressed, also at speed.

However, strategies are being proposed, discussed and developed for welcoming students to the new academic year, including:

- + Partnering with the Students' Union, or similar representative student bodies, is seen as key to successful online welcome events; it is very important to engage and solicit the student view in order to understand what our students value, and why are they coming to university;
 - + If a return to campus is planned, ask those who have graduated to come back as 'testers'. They can then form part of the welcome/induction process, and also indicate the positive benefits of them trialling things to ensure everything is working and ready for the start of term. This also has the added benefit of providing access to facilities that graduates might have missed at the end of the previous session/semester;
 - + Good online events software is available, but expensive;
 - + A few big events, as well as smaller ones, should also be considered;
 - + Online virtual interactions and events, including live chats, meet the tutors, podcasts, competitions, online projects they can do in groups etc. engender a sense of belonging;
 - + Incorporating both academic and social/extracurricular elements is essential to provide a holistic experience (see Box 1). Social aspects are as important as the academic aspects of university to students (and may in fact be *more* important to some). They can also boost learning as you develop bonds with other students and develop confidence to contribute and engage with learning. Therefore, social events need to be incorporated into welcome induction planning (as an aside, the curtailing of access to clubs and societies may have affected marketing and institutional appeal pre-application);
 - + Remembering that induction is a process and not an event is key. Induction will happen at different times for students this year, not all at once;
 - + A virtual 'Glastonbury' (the contemporary performing music and arts festival) might offer a good visual tool with a series of headline stages as well as smaller stages, stalls and venues;
 - + The length and timing of welcome events is crucial for inclusivity. Online delivery is often better in this regard, delivering key information and promoting interactions in accessible, synchronous and asynchronous, short chunks rather than requiring students to travel onto campus;
 - + Online welcome events also mean students can avoid, or significantly reduce, the need to use public transport;
 - + Events need to be fun, irrespective of how they are delivered;
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- + The choice of city/town is often as important to student choice as the course. Collaboration with the local council or other regional authority in providing an online experience of the city/town is paramount this year;
- + We need to be innovative with space utilisation for welcome events - it may be possible to have students on campus but in different ways;
- + Events will need to be staggered so we are not dealing with all students at the same time;
- + If an institution is planning for an online only welcome, can they revert back to physical welcome if possible (and vice versa)?;
- + How will we include overseas students in our welcome activities when they either may not be able to return, or will be in quarantine on campus or elsewhere? We perhaps need to think separately about international induction and what specific anxieties they may have about study in a COVID-19 world;
- + Ensure you utilise online spaces that students already inhabit to support engagement.

"Students felt that induction lectures during the first few weeks were repetitive, boring and in groups which were too big. Students wanted more interactive and fun induction tasks and favoured activities which involved them trying something out rather than hearing about how something worked. They also appreciated more informal ways of receiving information, through social activities and peer support initiatives" (NUS, 2012)

What is clear is that these discussions are currently very difficult as we are still dealing with so many unknowns. We simply don't know what the best student induction may look like in the autumn when the next session or semester starts, and it will certainly and legitimately vary between different institutions. However, the decisions made will determine the initial student experience at the start of the coming session, and therefore maintaining communications with prospective and returning students is extremely important. Reassurance is needed that if students do return to a campus-based experience this will not be a worse experience than if it was delivered online; conversely an online experience won't be worse than a campus one and that while many social events might not be happening, they will be scheduled later or alternatives arranged. Different does not mean worse. In fact, as the quote above suggests, this might be an opportunity to improve and enhance some student induction practices that we know, from both formal and informal feedback, has been less effective than we would wish.

4. Fostering relationships with fellow students and staff

Learning is above all else a human relationship (after Rogers, 1983). A relationship with staff, fellow students, the institution, the community within which it is based, and the materials. While there is a lot of activity focused on building relationships with prospective students, induction is where these relationships really start to get traction. This year, perhaps more than any other, institutions will need to ensure these relationships are nurtured and fostered by embracing change and implementing innovative methods and invoking new techniques and platforms. However, we must remember that, despite the inevitable implementation of technological solutions to physical distancing problems, the human dimension must underpin every decision. Inclusive induction, and the early establishment of relationships, enables academic success, enhances well-being, and promotes partnership. As Rogers (1983) tells us, so much of learning is a social process, based on high quality conversations, debate, argumentation and a number of other fundamentally human interactions.

“There’s a huge wellbeing need for student societies to be supported to function remotely and deliver their usual activity”

“This crisis has really highlighted how poorly important issues are often discussed with students”

“This pandemic has put student co-production into the limelight. Many important decisions with regards to exams and such have been taken at an executive level with very little thought for student consultation even when it would make perfect sense”

“We need to foster a sense of place and community, even if provision is partially or wholly remote”

We also need to be mindful that students choose university for the social and community experience as much as they do for the learning experience, and these too will be impacted if social distancing is in place. Social belonging associated with the experience of travelling to and discovering a new destination is, for some students, key. Managing student expectations in a COVID-19 university or college setting, and **communicating** how these expectations and desires will be accessed and met, is extremely important.

So how do we build the wide range of relationships which structure our offerings in a physically-distanced HE setting? Examples of include:

- + Recognising the importance of engaging and listening to the student voice (or probably more appropriately, student voices plural). Establish effective partnerships with Students' Unions (or similar representative student bodies), student ambassadors, year representatives etc. Decision makers in institutions are unlikely to have all the solutions, and these may come from the students/non-standard sources. Remember that students are partners in the HE experience, listen and allow them the space to challenge you;
 - + Developing a social connections framework in collaboration with student support. These teams already work with students through existing networks and can help with developing content which captures the student voice (for example, *BEconnected* at Stirling [University of Stirling, 2020]);
 - + Identify the key points where relationships develop with university staff, fellow students, accommodation groups, personal tutors and academic advisers, and target these when developing new strategies;
 - + Starting university should be as fun and engaging as possible; as non-traditional induction strategies are developed, this year in particular they should be as personalised an experience as possible, and directly targeted at students' individual needs where possible;
 - + Intensive transition work needs to be concentrated at key points of the year to coincide with 'wobble' moments in the academic calendar (for example, where withdrawals traditionally peak in the UK in November and February);
 - + Recognise that belonging is essential, and that students are emotional beings;
 - + *Creating the chance for chance* – there is a great deal of chance and serendipity in how a lot of interactions occur and relationships are formed;
 - + Provide students with a sense of closure relating to their A-levels or other previous studies, since these, and the end of their school/college level education more generally, may not have been finished off fully;
 - + Open up virtual spaces for students and staff to come together;
 - + Make it fun. Induction activities need to be lively and engaging;
-

- + Be aware of the isolating aspects of COVID-19 strategies, which may be an unintended consequence of other management decisions. Students need to get together in some form to avoid some or all ending up trapped in their rooms or at home interacting only with their laptops;
- + We also need to ensure, where online provision is more pervasive, students remain physically active;
- + Where social distancing is necessary, create virtual households of students to encourage and nurture the formation of social groups. Alternatively, create local pockets of student communities based on where students are living. Support for students who commute is essential;
- + Be aware that students from different cultures operate differently in a social distancing environment, and have different expectations and preferences;
- + Be mindful of integrating students from different backgrounds, and how access to digital provision may vary within and between cohorts;
- + Clearly signpost student support provision, and how this can be accessed on a physically-distanced campus;
- + It is important to remember that not all students are 18-21 years old. We need to think out of the box as to how we support the diversity of our student bodies; for example, providing online activities for children whilst students are in learning sessions;
- + How do we mix cultural as well as subject groups in an online environment? There are still silos in a virtual world, so thought needs to be given to ensuring this is possible; for example, cross disciplinary projects to encourage virtual mixing;
- + Get staff producing videos to engage with their students, and give these a human dimension (rather than a corporate marketing gloss). Recent experience suggests students feel more connected/engaged with online lectures when, for example, the tutor's cat crosses the screen or a car alarm goes off outside. This has an added benefit of illustrating that the pandemic is affecting everyone, and that staff are being impacted too;
- + Introducing the concept of the learning community which enables large groups to be broken down into smaller ones. Such learning communities, which include both an academic- and wellbeing-lead, can be established before arrival (and indeed before application), and continue when students arrive at university/college. It also has the advantage of matching up tutors and tutees much earlier on and provides a sense of identity;
- + New materials and be fun *and* purposeful;

- + Online has positive benefits for small group interactions – the basis is the same as in previous years, just delivered in a different way, and can embolden more reserved students who might be less likely to contribute in a face-to-face setting.

Establishing and sustaining relationships between fellow students and staff has always been integral to our induction processes; their importance for academic and personal success and wellbeing is clear. Identity, belonging and engagement must be addressed regardless of what type of induction model is adopted, and it must foster a sense of community at a variety of scales – students must feel they are a valued and integral part of small groups, courses/programmes, and the wider university and local community. This requires ongoing induction, incrementally building on the first intense week(s) over the first semester, to enable a sense of identity and build confidence. We will clearly have to innovate this year, and in all likelihood beyond, to both establish these relationships, and provide the tools and settings to nurture and sustain them in an inclusive way.

This requires acknowledging that academic staff may not have the capacity and/or capability to deliver the online experience necessary to achieve this themselves. Institutions need to provide personal tutors with help, training and development in the 'new world', both in terms of teaching and learning provision, but also to ensure tutors have the empathy skills, and signposting knowledge, to support students entering a changed and potentially highly changeable HE environment. HE leaders and managers also need to be very mindful of the additional work involved in developing provision. Workload allocation models have been ruptured by the COVID-19 crisis and the demands this has placed on university staff, and increased stress levels and burnout, is a real wellbeing issue. So, whilst we might have great ideas about induction on a socially distanced campus, we have to acknowledge that staff resources are limited, and staff are already anxious and undertaking additional work related to finalising the outcomes of the last session/academic year.

5. Getting a positive early experience of what learning is like and exploring motivation

Concern has already been expressed that incoming students are not only anxious about what awaits them at a socially distanced university/college, but have also had their enthusiasm dampened for what should be the next exciting phase of their lives. This highlights the importance of ensuring a positive early experience of teaching and learning at university-level, whatever form that may now take.

“In China, the students wanted to return to campus, but their parents did not want them to”¹

What is clear is that induction to higher-level learning is not going to be a single event this year, but rather a dynamic process delivered between September and November (or equivalent timings based on the nature and location of the institution). Given this extended timeframe, and the importance of November, for example, in the UK in terms of student retention and withdrawals, what we do in the first 12 weeks to provide a high-quality, fit-for-purpose, agile and innovative induction is crucial. This will ensure not only a strong foundation on which to foster academic opportunity and excellence, but also get incoming students back in the right place mentally. However, it will also require the implementation of new, perhaps online, indicators so students at risk of leaving can be identified and appropriate action taken.

In order to achieve this, a range of options are at our disposal, including:

- + Posting online lockdown lectures to maintain interest in the discipline;
- + Using technology and software to develop creative and engaging induction;
- + Putting in place activities which demonstrate early achievement, and which build confidence and academic resilience;
- + Addressing inclusivity;
- + Repurposing our facilities to create new learning areas (such as expanding library spaces into social spaces);
- + Re-evaluating the duration of lectures and seminars, and offering more bite-sized offerings which can be accessed at different times asynchronously. Additionally, consider short fat modules rather than long thin ones which build resilience into teaching programmes where there are many unknowns;
- + Personalise learning;
- + Incorporate the student voice in how we plan learning on socially distanced campuses (and work closely with Students' Unions or other similar representative student bodies to create the social student experience in parallel to the academic one);

¹ At Ningbo campus, where the academic session has recently been resumed, the student return rate has been 85%. A further 8% are international students who cannot return at the moment, leaving only 7% who didn't return as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic (SDCE Guest Speaker, 22 May 2020. Professor May Tan-Mullins, Vice Provost (Teaching and Learning) EDI and Sustainability, University of Nottingham Ningbo China – UNNC Ningbo, China).

- + We need to actively work on breaking down the preconception that online learning is a lesser form of delivery, and is somehow boring and exhausting;
- + Need to enable students to develop an academic routine in a teaching and learning environment where the academic calendar is different from before. Alternative arrangements do not mean unstructured arrangements;
- + Setting challenges for students that can be completed in groups;
- + Keep the communications momentum going throughout the year, not just during the traditional induction period;
- + Communication is not just between the institution and its students, but also between an institution and its staff;
- + It is essential to establish what motivates our students from the start. Do we really know who our students are, what they need etc.? This is more challenging from a distance and requires new ways of working;
- + The role of personal/academic tutor will become paramount; what support will be provided to them? Staff development is absolutely essential as many tutors are not experienced with online learning;
- + Successful induction needs to highlight the positive aspects of the students chosen course;
- + How confident are we that the induction we deliver isn't boring? Variety is essential for induction, and it increases the chance of your net capturing everyone;
- + Some students will have no experience or knowledge of the subject they are coming to study. This requires early intervention in terms of online activities to introduce the discipline and engage and inspire and build learner confidence;
- + It is a good idea to have an overview document for each period of induction, outlining what students need to do, when it should be done, and how long it should take. This provides clarification and focus; knowing where to start, and what to do during the induction process (and why it is important) is key to a positive induction experience.

“How do we know online provision is going well and that our students are engaging with it? How do we establish what the difficulties and barriers are? We need to know what is happening” (Professor May Tan-Mullins, 2020)

Achieving a positive experience of university-level learning at the outset is paramount, and managing student expectations about what a university/college education is, how it will be delivered, and what the expectations are on all sides is part of the normal induction agenda. So, in many ways the underlying principles remain the same. However, what is clear is that

that landscape will be very different this year. Further, there will be a very short window in which to assess students' IT skills, access to digital technology and connectivity, and experience of online learning, and to then provide them with the skills they need to have a positive early experience of higher-level learning. If we are socially distanced, developing and keeping track of the success (or otherwise) of our relationships with students is undoubtedly more challenging. However, managing expectations is a key part of this, and being honest about what we don't know, or what we can't do (and why) is, perhaps counterintuitively, likely to result in a more positive experience than silence or bluster.

What has emerged from the SDCE project workshops is that sharing experiences, ideas and good practice is both beneficial and supportive, raising confidence and enthusiasm for the challenge. So, what can we learn from universities/colleges already delivering successful online courses, both in the UK and internationally? Can we learn anything from how conferences have moved to being online or the way careers services have offered in the past virtual fairs? The current, unprecedented situation means we need to be prepared to experiment and not be fearful of failure – we are all in this together, whether we are students, academic staff, professional services staff or members of a Students' Union (or similar representative student body).

6. Key induction principles

The following key principles relating to induction emerged from the discussions and interaction during this collaborative enquiry:

- + Induction is not an event but an on-going extended process.
- + One size does not fit all. The student body is diverse, and modes of delivery will need to be innovative and varied this year. Induction needs to adopt a variety of approaches, platforms and timeframes to allow students to pick and choose, and accommodate what suits them best.
- + Partnering with students, and engaging the student voice (and/or voices) in decision making, is essential.
- + Student support needs to be embedded in everything we do. While considering 18 – 20 year olds often dominates the discussion, we must be inclusive, and also ensure postgraduate students are included.
- + Communication is key at all stages of the induction process, and requires the implementation of new and innovative approaches to engage both prospective and returning students. Communications should be honest and human.

- + Creating student ‘tribes’ (in the positive sense of the word) of varying sizes, both online and physically and at discipline and interdisciplinary levels, engenders a sense of belonging, overcomes isolation and promotes engagement.

7. Conclusions

Induction serves four main purposes (Gosling, 2009):

- + *Social*: to provide a welcoming environment which facilitates students' social interaction between themselves and with the staff teaching on the programme of study on which they are embarking;
- + *Orientation to the university*: to provide students with necessary information, advice and guidance about the university, its facilities, services and regulations;
- + *Registration and enrolment*: to carry out the necessary administrative procedures to ensure all students are correctly enrolled on their course of study; and
- + *Supporting learning*: to provide an introduction to a programme of study at the university and to lay the foundations for successful learning in higher education.

While the *purposes* of induction remain the same, how we *deliver* it this year will not. Innovative and flexible solutions are required which achieve the same outcomes either online, face to face on a socially distance campus, or a blend of the two, and will need to be delivered over an extended period in an inclusive way. It takes a lot of planning, resource and imagination to run an effective and well-received student induction in normal circumstances, and the Advance HE SDCE induction workshops highlighted the myriad of challenges we face in delivering these outcomes in what is, without overstatement, an exceptional year. However, possible solutions and the sharing of good practice during the workshops highlights the ability of the sector to respond, with a focus on the education and wellbeing of both prospective and returning students. There may even be an opportunity to enhance and improve upon aspects of ‘what we normally do’.

What is clear is that listening to our students, and being receptive to their concerns, needs and preferences, is good practice, and that planning in partnership with them is crucial to ensure our induction processes are fit for the new COVID-19 landscape, and ensure student engagement. Further, inclusion must be to the fore in our induction planning; digital and connectivity poverty, widening participation and non-‘standard’ student considerations, and the plight of international students need to be pervasive in our thinking if we are to engender strong relationships, ensure a sense of belonging, and enable equality of access to materials. The challenges and demands faced by staff also need to be fully considered,

since implementing radical change in a climate of uncertainty and crisis may have a significant impact on wellbeing and morale.

“There needs to be greater considerations for disabled students who may require something more tailored than the generic offer”

“I am deeply concerned that, in the current climate, it is only a matter of time before EDI conveniently slips off agendas because there are ‘more pressing issues to deal with’ and that any work on the ‘BAME experience’ no longer becomes relevant or a priority”

We need to focus on where our endeavours can have the biggest impact as we can't do everything.

Finally, communication: using honest messaging across a variety of channels, emerged from the workshop as absolutely vital to successfully inducting students into what is a new academic landscape. What have we done and why we have done it? How will we deliver the stated outcomes equitably and inclusively? This is as important for returning cohorts, who knew a ‘normal’ but are now returning to at best the ‘new normal’ but in all likelihood the ‘next normal’ as it is for new students. Reflecting on the journey in China, where students have already returned, Professor Tan-Mullins identified the one thing she wishes she had done better: *“Better communications and better consultation with students and staff”*.

Induction should never stop; in 2020 it will be a process not an event, and one size will not fit all.

8. Facilitator's reflections

Kathy Wright, Assistant Director, Knowledge, Innovation and Delivery, Advance HE

(During the workshops Kathy facilitated the breakout discussions focussed on the Induction topic area).

Over one week five 'Team Inductions' assembled to confront the impact of COVID-19 on the early experiences of potential new and continuing students.

Each team member brought their special talents and superpowers to the situation we find ourselves in – creativity, empathy, strategy, communication, understanding and energy are our weapons.

Across the five different teams at the workshops, we saw the knowledge, experience and skills that the sector is already bringing together to address the issues. The varied contexts, the varied roles enriched the discussions and made us consider the transfer of relevant ideas and strategies to our own institutions. This induction process is not 'one size fits all'. Together through generous sharing we began to imagine what might be possible. Through the harnessing of all stakeholders in this endeavour, there is hope that we can offer to our students, new and old, a positive and affirming experience.

We imagined long timelines of communications, from email to snail mail, from Instagram to telegram, from e-books to real books, inclusive of all students. We envisaged activities and tasks, collaborative and individual, synchronous and asynchronous, fun and not so fun to prepare students for what lies ahead – all with the aim of re-igniting passion for their chosen course and their desire to meet new people, to make new connections, before the start of their course. We saw that the old ways of 'doing induction' were already being transformed but what would have taken years to change is now being achieved in weeks.

We looked to the creativity being shown in other sectors from which we can draw inspiration. How is that festival or concert or sports event being run now and in the immediate future? Our timeline needs to be punctuated by happenings and celebrations. Can we imagine an expansive virtual campus with stages and tents where students could meet, learn and play? Could we explore the potential of different video conferencing tools to organise synchronous events? A 24-hour festival with different activities in different virtual locations to meet other students and staff - a non-stop 'festival' inclusive of all students wherever they are in the world?

So many ideas were shared! Ambitious? Certainly. Possible? Maybe. But my big take-away from the SDCE Induction workshops was that there is a will to make things happen and if we can bring together everyone in the whole institution – future and current students, students' unions, support services, leaders, academics, tutors, site managers, catering staff, cleaners and the community – we could emerge from this with a better induction experience for our students and stronger partnerships within the university. It's time for our Avengers to assemble!

9. Resources

There is an Advance HE Connect group for members who participated in the SDCE workshops. This can be accessed via <https://connect.advance-he.ac.uk>.

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Guest speakers

Vicki Stott, Executive Director of Operations and Deputy CEO, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA), UK.

Eve Alcock, Students' Union President, University of Bath, UK.

Dr Helen Galbraith, Academic Registrar and Director of Student and Academic Services, Keele University, UK.

Professor May Tan-Mullins, Vice Provost (Teaching and Learning) EDI and Sustainability, University of Nottingham Ningbo China – UNNC Ningbo, China.

Facilitation teams

(All Advance HE staff)

Induction topic area

- Facilitator – Kathy Wright
- Moderator – Lucy Madahar

Quality topic area

- Facilitator – Becky Smith
- Moderators – Raj Dhimar and Celia Brigg

Inclusion topic area

- Facilitators – Gary Loke and Clare Pavitt
- Moderator – Jenny Tester

Design and delivery topic area

- Facilitator – Cindy Vallance
- Moderators – Steve Lloyd and Tim Whittlesea

Space and place topic area

- Facilitator – Barbara Bassa
- Moderator – Dan Tinkler

Project manager – Jenny Tester

Project leader and lead facilitator – Doug Parkin, Principal Adviser for Leadership and Management, Advance HE

Executive Group support – Tracy Bell-Reeves, Director of Programmes and Events

Programme and Events team support – Sarah Cutforth, Janine Scheepers, Robyn Clark, Adele Gallagher and Laura Ingham

List of participating institutions

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| + Abertay University | + Cranfield University |
| + Aberystwyth University | + Curtin University |
| + AECC University College | + Defence Academy of the United Kingdom |
| + Anglia Ruskin University | + Derby College |
| + Arden University, RDI | + Dublin City University |
| + Aston University | + Durham University |
| + Australian Institute of Business | + European College of Chiropractic |
| + Bangor University | + Futureworks Training Ltd |
| + Bedford College Group | + Glasgow Caledonian University |
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| + Bridgend College | + Guildhall School of Music and Drama |
| + Brighton University | + Hartpury College |
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Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education Project: Induction

Giles Brown and Doug Parkin

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| + London School of Management Education | + Royal Holloway, University of London |
| + London School of Science and Technology | + Royal Northern College of Music |
| + London South Bank University | + Scotland's Rural College |
| + Majan University College | + Sheffield Hallam University |
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| + Military Technological College | + St George's, University of London |
| + Mont Rose College of Management & Sciences | + St Mary's University, Twickenham |
| + Mountview Academy of Theatre Arts | + Staffordshire University |
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| + Neath Port Talbot College Group | + The Aga Khan University |
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