Transcript for Clip 3 of Student Response to the 2019/20 Access and Participation Plan Monitoring Return.

Associated audio file at <https://www.bath.ac.uk/announcements/student-response-to-the-2019-20-access-and-participation-plan-monitoring-return/>

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00:00:06,150 --> 00:00:14,880

As part of this submission, we are also asked to talk about covid and the impact of coronavirus and of course

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00:00:14,880 --> 00:00:21,000

the covid-19 pandemic catalysed a massive shift on the way that we view universities and education as a whole.

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00:00:21,000 --> 00:00:25,230

Of course, this submission deals with the 19/20 period.

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00:00:25,230 --> 00:00:31,710

So we're talking about the first stage of the pandemic when everything started happening, really.

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00:00:31,710 --> 00:00:37,960

And, you know, at the time, our main concern as higher education staff members was the welfare of our students,

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00:00:37,960 --> 00:00:42,630

a majority of which left campus and the city of bath and return home.

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00:00:42,630 --> 00:00:48,690

The 2 main and immediate issues were is the university going to provide a rebate to students in halls?

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00:00:48,690 --> 00:00:55,320

And is the university going to prove a no detriment classification, safety net approach?

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And as an issue, we were heavily lobbying for both of those extremely important issues.

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00:01:00,240 --> 00:01:03,690

Obviously, these are relevant to all students rather than specific groups,

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00:01:03,690 --> 00:01:08,190

but the impacts of the pandemic could be seen clearly for certain demographics.

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00:01:08,190 --> 00:01:15,120

Students that come from less advantaged backgrounds are more likely to take a part on employment, which was lost in the pandemic.

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00:01:15,120 --> 00:01:19,080

A lot of students on casual contracts were not eligible for furlough.

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00:01:19,080 --> 00:01:24,450

Students with certain disabilities, as well as students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds,

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00:01:24,450 --> 00:01:30,150

were likely to struggle more with learning online when the appropriate softwares were just not there yet.

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00:01:30,150 --> 00:01:36,540

And the final semester of learning and exams were going to be hugely compromised, particularly for those students.

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00:01:36,540 --> 00:01:40,260

It was important to put measures in place to support while everyone,

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00:01:40,260 --> 00:01:46,710

but specifically students that were disadvantaged already long before the pandemic began.

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It is really commendable what was done by the university with rebates to all students in those who left.

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00:01:52,140 --> 00:01:59,160

The university also co-authored a letter to private landlords with the SU asking for leniency on private contracts

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given that most of our students live off campus. The university ended up approving a classification safety net as well.

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Although I have to say the lobbying was met with significant resistance at the beginning.

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00:02:10,950 --> 00:02:18,720

But we got there eventually. Then, of course, we had the students who, for a variety of reasons, had to stay at university.

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00:02:18,720 --> 00:02:26,190

A bulk of the activities to keep the community there and engaged was done through the student's union with a support officer,

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00:02:26,190 --> 00:02:33,450

Tom Sawco, leading a virtual community that had over four thousand members and was emulated by many SUs across the country.

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00:02:33,450 --> 00:02:36,810

The university in many ways really did step up.

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00:02:36,810 --> 00:02:45,180

The campus remained open and fully operational and provided three free meals a day to all members of the community who are still living there.

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00:02:45,180 --> 00:02:52,890

Senior staff regularly was present during the food runs to talk directly to students in a period that was frankly just frightening for all of us.

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00:02:52,890 --> 00:02:57,930

So the pastoral support for those of us who were in Bath was genuinely outstanding.

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00:02:57,930 --> 00:03:05,580

Of course, not everything went well, and there are some areas where the university has been less responsive to student needs in those first months.

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00:03:05,580 --> 00:03:10,470

The level of support and attention to students on postgraduate courses, both taught and doctoral,

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00:03:10,470 --> 00:03:13,680

was minimal compared to what was given to undergraduate students,

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00:03:13,680 --> 00:03:18,690

which is something that is cultural and structural and still needs to be properly dealt with.

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00:03:18,690 --> 00:03:26,190

This specifically relates to that room measures for graduates which were not as satisfactory as they were for undergraduates.

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00:03:26,190 --> 00:03:31,200

And the lack of support for doctoral students was a huge source of frustration as well.

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00:03:31,200 --> 00:03:38,490

It is also worth noting that the further support for students on casual contracts with the university has been incredibly patchy,

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00:03:38,490 --> 00:03:49,270

with some students receiving furlough whilst others not receiving it, despite being in similar working arrangements but in different departments.

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00:03:49,270 --> 00:03:53,260

Academic departments also responded differently and more or less effectively,

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00:03:53,260 --> 00:04:01,420

student feedback shows that the situation was similar for personal tutors, which is a bit of a perennial problem that we're trying to tackle now.

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00:04:01,420 --> 00:04:07,780

Individual lecturers respond to the challenges of the pandemic differently with some approach has been better than others.

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00:04:07,780 --> 00:04:11,110

This has been the situation nationally, really.

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00:04:11,110 --> 00:04:19,510

And unfortunately, the level of quality of learning in the first stages of the pandemic, heavily dependent, depended on individual lecturers.

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00:04:19,510 --> 00:04:24,970

Even in the NSS, which does not directly prompt questions on covid,

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00:04:24,970 --> 00:04:30,460

there were a lot of discrepancies in comments on delivery of lectures and timeliness of

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00:04:30,460 --> 00:04:36,190

communications from departments and the timeliness of the assessments schedule as well,

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00:04:36,190 --> 00:04:38,690

looking at specific demographic of students.

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00:04:38,690 --> 00:04:44,320

Then there were some clear impacts that put some students more disadvantaged following the reality that the pandemic

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00:04:44,320 --> 00:04:50,650

has deepened existing inequalities and therefore looking at students with both physical and learning impairments,

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00:04:50,650 --> 00:04:55,270

students with mental health issues, students from disadvantaged economic backgrounds.

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00:04:55,270 --> 00:05:03,310

We must also mention international students, both those who had to rush to their home countries and those who could not and had to stay,

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00:05:03,310 --> 00:05:09,190

resulting in being away from their families, from from their families for significant amount of time.

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00:05:09,190 --> 00:05:16,270

We also need to mention LGBT students and especially trans students who in a lot of cases have to go back to your home context where their

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00:05:16,270 --> 00:05:25,480

identity was less accepted or not accepted at all compared to their situation or university. Looking at students with caring responsibilities,

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00:05:25,480 --> 00:05:33,280

juggling, studying with caring responsibilities and potentially homeschooling must have other huge amounts of stress.

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00:05:33,280 --> 00:05:40,750

Looking at the data sets, it's clear that people from black and minority ethnic communities were disproportionately more likely to contract the virus.

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00:05:40,750 --> 00:05:43,810

Also, none of these identities exist in a vacuum,

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00:05:43,810 --> 00:05:51,040

and we must mention the potential intersection of these identities and the potential impact that they have had on students.

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00:05:51,040 --> 00:05:54,970

Realistically, all the students that would be regarded as underrepresented,

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00:05:54,970 --> 00:06:08,790

underrepresented or disadvantaged in university settings have been affected further by the pandemic, whether in a personal, economic or academic way.

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00:06:08,790 --> 00:06:19,690

So to wrap this submission up. One thing that has been noticed in the sector and and something that I really do

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00:06:19,690 --> 00:06:24,730

want to mention is that attainment has risen across the board in 19/20.

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00:06:24,730 --> 00:06:31,300

However, what's also been identified as being the attainment gaps have actually started closing across the board,

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00:06:31,300 --> 00:06:37,040

meaning that the arrangements in place in the sector have benefitted disadvantaged students more poorly.

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00:06:37,040 --> 00:06:45,190

Of course, this must be due to no detriment policies, but we cannot diminish the benefits of a new set of new arrangements at Bath.

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00:06:45,190 --> 00:06:49,300

They have mainly taken the form, for instance, of 24 hour exams.

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00:06:49,300 --> 00:06:58,300

There is clearly something then about traditional assessments that have always put some students at a disadvantage historically.

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00:06:58,300 --> 00:07:08,500

And given that it's a moral and regulatory imperative for universities to close these gaps, why would we ever roll back on the progress made?

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00:07:08,500 --> 00:07:16,000

I've talked about this to Joel Staley. Yeah, I think the no detriment policy is certainly done that to an extent.

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00:07:16,000 --> 00:07:21,920

So it'll be interesting to see how that continues to impact or not, as the case may be.

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00:07:21,920 --> 00:07:30,520

And I do think that for some students it has hugely benefited them.

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00:07:30,520 --> 00:07:42,160

The fact that they've been able to take their time, take 24 hours to do their to do their exam, that they're in a comfortable environment at home.

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00:07:42,160 --> 00:07:45,730

They're not in an exam hall. They've got the software there.

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00:07:45,730 --> 00:07:50,890

They don't need to have somebody with them to help describe or to help help them with.

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00:07:50,890 --> 00:07:59,830

That has really helped. But for other students, it really hasn't helped at all those students for whom they need the structure,

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00:07:59,830 --> 00:08:08,410

they need the three hours, even if they have a bit of extra time to really focus their efforts on completing the task.

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00:08:08,410 --> 00:08:15,700

And what we've heard anecdotally is students taking 24 hours or at least large

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00:08:15,700 --> 00:08:20,860

chunks of time to complete what is essentially or should be a three hour exam.

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00:08:20,860 --> 00:08:24,440

And that is problematic for a good number of students.

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00:08:24,440 --> 00:08:28,390

So the lack of structure helps some and a lack of time.

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00:08:28,390 --> 00:08:32,650

Pressure helps some. But the but it hinders others.

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00:08:32,650 --> 00:08:37,130

And this is what I mean when I talk about like, what's the next.

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00:08:37,130 --> 00:08:41,860

I'm not saying that's a bad thing. I think we're in a better place now.

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00:08:41,860 --> 00:08:51,340

But what we need to focus on is how do students now develop strategies to be able to cope with 24 hour exams?

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00:08:51,340 --> 00:09:01,450

So to finally wrap up, just like talking about some recommendations that have come up through this research, I'm going to try and keep it brief.

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00:09:01,450 --> 00:09:07,060

One of the main ones is data monitoring. This has come up consistently as an area that the university needs to deal with to

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00:09:07,060 --> 00:09:11,890

ensure effective monitoring of activities related to access and participation.

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00:09:11,890 --> 00:09:17,830

We also need to get senior buy in. Access and participation is not just a regulatory imperative,

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00:09:17,830 --> 00:09:23,050

it should be moral as well. And what has been lacking, although we are clearly on a positive journey,

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00:09:23,050 --> 00:09:30,070

is the institutional strategic approach to access and participation to embed it across the institution.

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00:09:30,070 --> 00:09:31,720

This was mostly visible in the careers,

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00:09:31,720 --> 00:09:39,970

skills and employability area where a state is really needed to avoid duplication of efforts and siloed working.

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00:09:39,970 --> 00:09:43,960

Then we have accessibility and promotion of the app because a lot of our students

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00:09:43,960 --> 00:09:51,940

are not aware of the access and participation activities of the university. And this can easily be rectified by producing more concise and student

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00:09:51,940 --> 00:09:56,910

friendly communications about the university's access and participation activities.

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00:09:56,910 --> 00:10:00,340

Then we have disaggregation, which is quite simple.

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00:10:00,340 --> 00:10:07,990

We must disaggregate our data as much as we can, both to not mislead others or even ourselves when we talk about access and participation.

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00:10:07,990 --> 00:10:13,060

But also aggregating data may show success where there isn't.

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00:10:13,060 --> 00:10:19,090

And it may lead some departments to not change anything because they think that what is being done is enough.

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00:10:19,090 --> 00:10:22,570

And the same should be said about some metrics used,

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00:10:22,570 --> 00:10:28,870

such as the one participation measure in the skills centre, which is misleading and frankly, just not correct.

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00:10:28,870 --> 00:10:32,390

Next, students can and should be more involved.

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00:10:32,390 --> 00:10:37,420

I fully understand that there is already a great deal of actual meaningful engagement with students about this.

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00:10:37,420 --> 00:10:42,910

Unfortunately, so many of them don't know that they've just engaged in participation activities.

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00:10:42,910 --> 00:10:46,120

So more involvement from students, including that feedback loop,

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00:10:46,120 --> 00:10:53,370

will be essential to creating a community where we're all contributing to shaping it for the better.

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00:10:53,370 --> 00:11:03,240

And lastly, as I just mentioned, research into assessments and key target groups, so as I just said,

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00:11:03,240 --> 00:11:09,360

the pandemic has had some unintended positive effects on attainment, particularly for underrepresented groups.

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00:11:09,360 --> 00:11:16,710

This is something the university must capitalise on. We cannot, however, fully understand the extent of it until we research it,

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00:11:16,710 --> 00:11:29,560

which is why I hope the university and the sector as a whole starts looking at what has happened and what we can learn from it.

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00:11:29,560 --> 00:11:34,270

Thank you for listening to the of Bath Access and Participation Plan Students submission.

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00:11:34,270 --> 00:11:41,140

I want to say a huge thank you to all those who have been interviewed in this process to Marian Mackintosh from the APP team for the support given,

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00:11:41,140 --> 00:11:46,900

and particularly for all of the information that was so promptly shared to SU team has worked on this with me.

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00:11:46,900 --> 00:11:54,070

So Ben Palmer, Sam Cooke, Amy Young and Mandy Wilson Garner and to all of the students who have contributed to this research.

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00:11:54,070 --> 00:12:01,044

Thank you.