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The impact of COVID-19 and distance learning on undergraduate students' resilience and psycho-social wellbeing: A three-stage study to explore, implement, and evaluate effective strategies to build student community

Conference or Workshop Item

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The impact of COVID-19 and distance learning on undergraduate students' resilience and psycho-social wellbeing: A three-stage study to explore, implement, and evaluate effective strategies to build student community

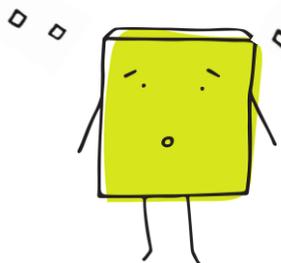
Jake Hilliard, Felicity Sedgewick, Antonia Lythgoe, Charlotte Flothmann, and Trang Tran

Phase 1:
Focus group interviews

The first phase of the project involved conducting online focus groups with existing undergraduate students and recent graduates in the University of Bristol's School of Education (SoE). These aimed to explore students' experiences of community cohesion, mental health, and wellbeing during COVID-19 and the transition to online learning.

A particularly strong theme, generated through qualitative data analysis, was the impact of the transition to online learning on student identity. Students felt a disconnection from the SoE, the University, and Bristol as a city - which were generally interchangeable in their minds.

The geographical separation has reduced my feelings of community



I feel less connected with other students on the course and the teaching staff

Phase 2:
Strategy implementation

In the second phase of that project, four strategies aimed at supporting students and promoting a sense of community were implemented. These were:

Staff support: *two members of teaching staff ran weekly personal tutor sessions in order to provide clear times for students to make contact with staff who they were previously only seeing in lecture time.*

Practical support: *a Monday and Friday session were offered to support students with things like planning their week ahead, discussing assignments, and helping each other with tips or suggestions they have found useful.*

Emotional support: *an online emotional awareness instrument was created which students were encouraged to fill in each week. This asked them to reflect on their emotions around the course and their progress.*

Community connection: *working with the SoE Student Society, a structured programme of events across the term was created. This aimed to provide a greater variety of opportunities for students to socialise together.*

Phase 3:
Strategy evaluation

The third phase of that project will involve undertaking online interviews with first-, second-, and third-year SoE students to understand the effectiveness of the strategies as well as to further explore the impact of COVID-19 and distance learning on students' wellbeing and resilience.

