Wellbeing Bridging Strategy: COVID-19

Given the circumstances that Higher Education finds itself within, at the mercy of forces beyond the sector’s control, student wellbeing must remain an institutional priority as the Royal Holloway community navigates its way through unchartered waters.

The challenges that coronavirus poses are extensive for students; ranging from the accessibility of learning resources to the uncertainty over housing commitments. As the University carves its path in an immediate post-COVID landscape, it is essential that students don’t simply remain supported, but that this support is intensified, focused and tailored.

Within this longer term strategy, the roadmap for the institution’s wellbeing agenda is categorised into 4 key areas: learning, living, community & support. In order to successfully bridge the institution’s activity into this strategy, we must focus first on guiding students through the immediate challenges that present themselves.

As we adapt to changing circumstances, both in our ability to continue to provide exceptional student experience, and in the way that our students engage academically, we must accept that we must prioritise measures that contribute to adapting to this change. Academically, we know that students will be learning in very different ways in the immediate COVID aftermath, we must be ready to ensure that this is accessible. Experientially, we need to ensure our offering for students is one that enables them to feel a part of the Royal Holloway community, tackling the threat of increased loneliness. It is evident that the support that we offer our students must also adapt to the new ways of living that we will find ourselves in, students will require a change to the support itself, but also the ways in which this support is delivered.

As we plan for how we overcome these challenges together, we must be aware of the strategic priorities and themes to guide these efforts. Throughout the course of the 2020/21 academic year, we must maintain the following areas at the vanguard of support:

- **Accessible Learning** – we must ensure that our academic offering remains accessible and inclusive as we adjust to the new circumstances. This involves adopting accessible, sector leading practices in how our students access their direct teaching, but also how available learning resources are. We must also acknowledge the disruption that both new and returning students have experienced, providing the academic and skills support required to create parity of opportunity and success.

- **Balanced Living** – whilst the COVID crisis has evidenced the ability for individuals to ‘work from home’, it has equally demonstrated that this blurs the line between working and living for others. As our students work in different environments, benefiting from an accessible blended learning offering, we must ensure that students are aware of, and are supported within, a healthy balance between work and relax.

- **Welcoming Community** – the 2019/20 academic year unfortunately brought a swift end to the Royal Holloway experience for finalists. Whilst ensuring our new alumna remain at the heart of our community, we must alter the student experience for all students. Students must have the opportunity to interact with one another, socially and academically, and have the ability to explore new interests and experiences like any other cohort – simply in different ways.

- **Flexible Support** – the direct support that we must provide our students will differ in some respects, and continue in others. What will be different, is how we will have to deliver this support. We must prioritise the adoption of 24/7 support, to support students through
unique situations, and to broaden our support to all students no matter where or what timezone they may be studying with us. We must also be clear and honest, it is only with the value of honesty that we can reassure our students, signposting and supporting appropriately.

Whilst this strategy sets the roadmap for years to come, we must acknowledge that we are operating in very different circumstances – we can only get into a position of implementing this full strategy by continuing to support our students in the unique circumstance we find ourselves in for the immediate future.