17.2.21

Dear HE Students

We are so sorry for the disruption caused by the cyber incident that happened in January. I am writing to update you in relation to how University Centre Somerset is handling both the cyber incident and the pandemic. I hope that the following Frequently Asked Questions will assist you to understand the current situation. Should you have other concerns, please contact your Course Leader or the central HE Team (he@btc.ac.uk) so that we can support and advise. The staff at University Centre Somerset are all committed to supporting you to succeed in your studies.

**What is happening in relation to the cyber incident?**

As soon as the incident was detected, the College took immediate steps to shut down some of our servers, mid-way through the incident which successfully limited the impact. Our IT Team is working extremely hard, with external experts, to recover from the incident. As part of this recovery, servers have been rebuilt from our unaffected back-ups. As you know, email is now working again. Blackboard was disconnected from the College’s main systems so that those who are taught through this system could access it directly online after three and a half days. Teaching and resources through Microsoft Teams, Google Classroom and OneFile continued throughout, for those using these platforms.

The College has commissioned experts to assist with disconnecting the college’s electronic library resources from the internal systems so that access can be regained as quickly as possible. The Heritage Catalogue is up and running again, but it is taking much longer than we anticipated to regain access to the full electronic library resources. It is a top priority for HE students to be able to access all the library resources. For those needing access to CAD, we are also focused on getting Horizon back up and running so that you can use this system again. Please refer to the section below on what library resources are available and how you can access them. (This includes some publicly available resources from The Open University). For those on courses validated by UWE, Oxford Brookes and the University of Plymouth, do not forget that you have direct access to the libraries of those universities. Our librarians can advise you if you need help in accessing those other library resources.

**Will my teaching continue online, or will it move to on-campus delivery?**

* As you know, current Government guidance is that we have to teach remotely with very limited exceptions. Learning will need to continue online in order to cope with the current pandemic threat until we are given different guidance by Government.
* Government have said that they will review the situation on 22nd February 2021. We are therefore awaiting confirmation of whether we will be allowed to offer any on-campus delivery after this date. We hope that this will be possible. We will continue to monitor the situation closely. Your Course Leader will communicate any changes directly to you as and when they might occur.
* University Centre Somerset, as part of Bridgwater & Taunton College is continuing to make decisions in line with Government advice and based on the following guiding principles:
* Student and staff safety and wellbeing
* Supporting students to continue to learn and make progress
* Our approach is still that as and when we are permitted by Government to bring teaching on-campus, that we will prioritise those courses that require practical input in order to meet their learning outcomes.
* In order to minimise the risk to students and staff, we will continue to deliver online where learning outcomes can be met in this way. We are aware that some students would very much like to be back on campus, whilst others do not wish to be on campus at all and feel much happier with online delivery. We will make decisions based on the requirements of individual programmes, in line with our guiding principles and Government advice. Please talk to you tutor/Course Leader about any concerns you may have in relation to online and on-campus delivery so that we can support you as far as possible.

**What is University Centre Somerset doing to help me?**

* Handling requests for Extenuating Circumstances (EC) on an individual case by case basis, in order to gain an understanding of the problems being faced.  This has enabled an individualised problem-solving approach rather than simply offering a standard 10-day extension. EC Panels have been running every day or two days, as soon as requests have been received.
* With Government assistance, we have introduced Hardship Funding for those most in need. Applications should be made by midnight on Sunday 28th February by completing the simple online form which you can find through this link: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=poKfG04M7k2KvWYATRvC6LWobuESrx5PunXVUoe5SZhUODc4T0ZQVE9PMkk0MjdKRjA4NUcyRjFGNy4u> using your UCS / BTC student log in details.
* The Bursaries funding criteria have been reviewed and relaxed.  Application forms for bursaries to obtain financial assistance are available on the UCS website: <https://www.somerset.ac.uk/life/fees-and-funding/> If you experience any difficulties in printing off and completing the bursary form, please make contact with Sue Marson, Student Funding Manager through studentsupport@btc.ac.uk
* Students are being referred to the Wellbeing Team through the EC process and directly by staff.  Students can also access them for mental health and wellbeing support themselves with no need for a referral.
* Course Leaders have been feeding back to the central HE Team about issues their students are facing, such as problems with access to computers/wifi so that these issues could be explored and resolved.
* Students are also receiving advice and support from the IT team through the IT helpdesk: itshelpdesk@btc.ac.uk
* Staff have been working with our different university partners to consider amendments necessary to assessment due to the lockdown and to obtain permission for these changes from our External Examiners and awarding university partners.
* We have written a ‘no detriment’ policy for 2020-21, to replace the one that we wrote for students on OU-validated courses in 2019-20 due to Covid-19. We are awaiting approval by the OU before making this available. We are working with our other university partners to ensure that their decisions in relation to ‘no detriment’ are carried out and notified to relevant students. In line with guidance to the HE Sector, our focus is on enabling students to have the opportunity to succeed.
* CPD sessions have been running to further develop staff skills in online learning in order to support the student learning experience.

**What help is available to me?**

**Extenuating Circumstances and problem solving your issues**

If you are having difficulties, please use the Extenuating Circumstances process so that we can assist you in problem solving and seeing what assistance can be given. This includes if you are struggling with computer equipment, broadband access or other issues.

We urge you to make contact with us if you are having difficulties. We are very aware that simply giving you an extension may not solve your problems, in which case we will consider what else we might be able to do on a case by case basis to help you.

The EC process is there to support you if you are struggling to complete an assessment or a number of assessments due to circumstances that are outside of your control. You can access the EC forms by clicking [Extenuating Circumstances Application 2020-2021 (office.com)](https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=poKfG04M7k2KvWYATRvC6CrIZSTlsM1Kmc-4p5Da55BUMlFISTNPSzdXQ0pFTFpPVFRRVDY5TjhRMSQlQCN0PWcu)

and using your UCS / BTC student log in details.

If this link does not work on your browser then you can access the form by going on Blackboard and then onto the HE Info Hub. Follow these directions by clicking on:

1. Your Guide to Long Term Health and Extenuating Circumstances
2. Extenuating or Mitigating Circumstances
3. Microsoft Office Form for Extenuating Circumstances.

Alternatively, you are able to email the central HE Team directly at he@btc.ac.uk. If you email us directly please can you include: your name, BTC student number, your course, year, the name and module of the assignment, the module tutor, the original deadline and your reasons for requesting a deadline extension or asking for help.

If you are a UWE student, you can request of an extension of up to 5 days using this process. For longer extensions you should submit requests directly to the university in line with their normal process available through their website.

Please note that you cannot apply for an EC if the assignment deadline is more than 6 weeks away. But if you are anticipating problems that we might be able to help you solve, then knowing in advance is helpful.

**HE Bursaries**

If you are struggling financially, please consider applying for one of the HE Bursaries. Application forms are available on the UCS website: <https://www.somerset.ac.uk/life/fees-and-funding/>.

If you are awarded a bursary, it is your money to keep. You do not get asked to pay it back. The maximum payment is £600 over an academic year, by a payment of £200 once a term whilst you continue your studies. We have reviewed the criteria for obtaining a bursary during the pandemic. We are being more flexible and are considering applications on a case by case basis. It would therefore help us to understand why you need the bursary, in case we can meet your needs in an alternative way. We have removed the rule that students can only receive a bursary for one year and cannot re-apply in subsequent years. The policy available on the website will be adjusted to reflect the changes. This process will work alongside the problem-solving approach available through the EC process detailed above, to find different ways to support you during this difficult time so that you can continue your studies effectively.

**Hardship Funding**

This is one-off funding made available by the assistance of the Government this year. It is aimed at those in greatest hardship. Like the bursaries, any money awarded through this scheme is yours to keep and you will not be asked to repay it. Applications should be made by midnight on Sunday 28th February by completing the simple online form which you can find through this link: <https://forms.office.com/Pages/ResponsePage.aspx?id=poKfG04M7k2KvWYATRvC6LWobuESrx5PunXVUoe5SZhUODc4T0ZQVE9PMkk0MjdKRjA4NUcyRjFGNy4u> using your UCS / BTC student log in details. (NB. If you are not already logged in, when logging into Office 365 to access this Form, you need to use your surname and initial(s) followed by ‘bridgwater.ac.uk’, rather than ‘btc.ac.uk’. Eg bloggsj@bridgwater.ac.uk. with your usual college/UCS password.

**IT Support**

If you are having issues with IT, please email the IT helpdesk: itshelpdesk@btc.ac.uk

**Wellbeing and Safeguarding Support**

If you need help from the Wellbeing Team, information to support your mental health, or feel you need a referral to a counsellor, please contact the Wellbeing Team through one of the following emails:

Bridgwaterwellbeing@btc.ac.uk

Tauntonwellbeing@btc.ac.uk

Canningtonwellbeing@btc.ac.uk

For emergency safeguarding or wellbeing support call 01278 441247 in office hours, bear with us if your call is forwarded before connection.

For any Safeguarding matters please email staysafe@btc.ac.uk

If you feel a matter cannot wait until the next office hours, try the Children’s Social Care out of hours line on 0300 123 23 27, or the police on 999, and email staysafe@btc.ac.uk to report what you have done.

**Access to a campus to study**

In line with Government guidance, vulnerable learners, children of critical workers and those otherwise unable to continue with their studies, can make arrangements to access a campus to study. If you are unable to study at home and need access to a computer or somewhere to study, you can email info@btc.ac.uk by mid-afternoon the working day before the day you would like to come in so that we can ensure you are expected. If you wish to take up this option, please inform us of your name, course and which campus (Taunton or Bridgwater) you wish to attend. Can you also please confirm the reason you wish to come on campus, e.g. to access technology / unable to work from home.

**Student Union**

To find out how you can join in with activities organised by the BTC Student Union, have a look at the online activities / societies listed on social media through @btcsu on Instagram. Dates and times of activities are listed.

For online workouts, these are available via @btcactive on Instagram. There is also a weekly timetable released from the BTC Lifestyle Team (@btc.lifestyle on Instagram). This outlines what activities will happen each week.

The SU has been holding Instagram Lives, highlighting opportunities and events in the college which are all recorded and can be watched at any time.

Don’t forget to look for and join the Bridgwater & Taunton College Student Union Facebook group.

If you have other ideas and would like to set up further events /activities /clubs /societies, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please make contact with the Student Union by emailing studentunion@btc.ac.uk or through sending messages on Instagram and Facebook.

Don’t feel alone – join in, or work with us to set up something new.

**How can I access books and journals?**

**Access to Printed Library Resources**

Higher Education (HE) students are able to request and collect printed books during the national lockdown. We have put the necessary health and safety measures in place to issue books in as safe a way as possible. The information below relates to printed book requests and pickups during the national lockdown:

**Reserving Printed Books**

Books can only be collected from the campus at which they are held. Please search the [Heritage library catalogue](http://heritage.bridgwater.ac.uk/) to choose the books you require and contact the library staff to place your reservation:

lrcenquiries@btc.ac.uk (for books held at Bridgwater and Cannington)

tauntonlrc@btc.ac.uk (for books held at Taunton)

MS Teams’ chat line with your campus librarian

You can also use the [Librarian Live Chat via the Heritage Library Catalogue](http://heritage.bridgwater.ac.uk/HeritageScripts/Hapi.dll/search1) for any library-related queries.

The Live Chat service is open **Monday – Friday 8.30 – 4.30pm (closed 12.30 - 1.30pm)**.

Off-line messages can be left with your email address, and library staff will contact you when the Live Chat service resumes.

**Book Pickup Points**

Reserved books will be issued to your library account and library staff will communicate to you via email when books become available for collection.

Books at Bridgwater and Cannington can be collected from trollies located at Reception.

Books at Taunton can be collected from the table located at Reception.

Your books will be identifiable with a unique number – the last 4 digits of your student ID. Please do not touch other users’ books when collecting your books.

**Please note:**  Access to the LRCs and other areas of the campus when collecting books is not permitted, unless students are officially registered to study at the campus during the national lockdown.

**Book Collection Times**

Reserved books can be collected on **Tuesdays** and **Thursdays** **12 - 4pm.**

**Travelling During National Lockdown**

When travelling to campus to collect your books, please retain your email communication from library staff as evidence that your journey is for educational purposes.

**Electronic UCS Library Resources**

Access to UCS e-books and e-journals remotely is currently not available due to the recent cyber incident. Our IT team are working hard on restoring access to these resources and we will update you as soon as these services resume. Instead, we are offering a range of other services to support your study.

**Scanning Service to Support Your Study**

Library staff are providing a book chapter and journal article scanning service in line with copyright regulations. Please contact library staff via email, Librarian Live Chat or MS Teams chat line (as above) with any scanning requests. We will scan the pages and email them to you.

**Inter-Library Loans service**

We also offer an inter-library loans service for electronic journal articles - follow the [link via Blackboard](https://bridgwater.blackboard.com/webapps/blackboard/content/listContentEditable.jsp?content_id=_682096_1&course_id=_11667_1&mode=reset) to place your requests for any resources we might be able to offer via other UK libraries whilst the UCS e-resources are not available.

**Access to Research Portal**

Another solution for accessing electronic journal articles is to contact your public library that provides [Access to Research portal](https://www.somerset.gov.uk/libraries-leisure-and-communities/libraries/library-facilities/free-reference-online/). This portal provides electronic articles from around 8,000 scientific academic journals. Please note that this service is only available on the public library networked computers with your public library membership card and not is accessible remotely from home. The Taunton and Bridgwater public libraries are open Monday-Saturday 9.30 - 1.30pm. Please check with your public library before making the trip, in case of any changes to their opening hours during the national lockdown.

**Public Access to resources provided by The Open University**

There are publicly available resources that any students and staff can access via [this link](https://www.open.ac.uk/library/library-resources/publicly-available?filter=A-Z%3AH&collection=122" \l "resources)

**What happens about assessing my qualification and will this take account of any impact from the pandemic?**

* In line with usual academic practice, your work will be assessed against the learning outcomes of your programme. Work will be moderated/internally verified by another member of staff. A sample will then be reviewed by the External Examiner for the programme to ensure that marks are awarded in line with what is considered appropriate across the sector. The relevant Awarding Organisation/University oversee this process to assure themselves of the maintenance of quality and standards.
* Consideration has been given to whether a ‘no detriment’ or ‘safety net’ policy will be appropriate and if so, how this would work. Each different Awarding Organisation/University have considered what they think is appropriate in line with sector guidance. UCS will continue to liaise with them and consider good practice from across the sector in relation to how this might be handled. Any such policies will be shared with students if and when they are approved.

**What do I do if I feel unwell?**

**If you have any coronavirus symptoms:**

* a high temperature
* a new, continuous cough
* a loss of, or change to, your sense of smell or taste

[**Get a test**](https://www.gov.uk/get-coronavirus-test)**and stay at home**

Please let your Course Leader know if you test positive for COVID-19.

We are doing all we can to support you in your studies and to work closely with our University Partners/Awarding Organisations, so do please make contact through the emails above if you are having any difficulties.

Please stay safe and well.

Kind regards

Pauline

Pauline Osborne

Head of Higher Education

University Centre Somerset