Covid-19 Preventative Emergency Response (PER) Project 2020-2021: Initial Survey Report

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Report

Run jointly with New Media Lincs in the Lincoln School of Film and Media, Digital Education and Student Life, LALT, LHERI and the Students Union, the PER project was funded by the Lincolnshire Community Foundation during the 2020-2021 Covid-19 outbreak and used student-created digital content to encourage students to adhere to all current COVID-related guidelines issued by Government and the University of Lincoln. Students were at the heart of the project, contributing ideas, creating content and carrying out their own research into student attitudes and behaviours towards COVID-19. The project began in the November of 2020 with an overarching aim to keep staff and students at the University and other higher/further education institutions in the area safe and reduce the risk of the virus spreading within the wider Lincolnshire community. Students were invited to take part in the initial survey via Student Life social media channels, banners on School Blackboard pages and the university's home Blackboard page. Schools were also encouraged to promote the survey via College Directors of Education and Student Engagement Leads. Ethical approval for the project was obtained prior to commencement.

The initial survey questionnaire focussing on Covid-19 knowledge, attitudes and student behaviours during the pandemic was formulated in Qualtrics from a review of available research literature (Sharp, 2021) and in consultation with student groups facilitated by the University of Lincoln Students' Union. All subsequent data analysis was undertaken using SPSS. 603 returns were recorded at the closing date specified (14 December 2020) with the sample reduced to 578 after largely incomplete questionnaires were deleted (a 95.8% response rate based on the original return). This was considered entirely satisfactory given that distribution coincided with a university-wide move to blended and online delivery and students returning 'home' where possible at the request of Government. Locally, 55 missing data points from 24 individuals were subsequently inserted using pattern, trend and association analysis representing minor adjustments to 0.21% of the data set among 4.15% of respondents (mostly involving the insertion of 'don't knows' where questionnaire items were left blank). The initial findings presented here are data-driven only and will be supplemented with a second survey phase and final report to follow in due course.

1. *Demographic background*

Summarised as shown (Table 1).

Aspect	Details	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	410	70.9
	Male	155	26.8
	Other	11	1.9
	Prefer not to say	2	0.3
Age	Under 21	409	70.8
	21-24	120	20.8
	Over 24	49	8.5
College	College of Science	265	45.8
	College of Social Science	197	34.1
	College of Arts	92	15.9
	LIBS	24	4.2
Year group	First	185	32.0
	Second	171	29.6
	Third	158	27.3
	Fourth	9	1.6
	Postgraduate	55	9.5
Course	BSc	336	58.1
	BA	128	22.1
	BMBS (Medicine)	28	4.8
	Foundation/CertHE	19	3.3
	BEng	12	2.1
	Master's (all)	44	7.6
	Doctorate (all)	11	1.9
Accommodation	Rented (private)	280	48.4
	Hall of Residence	229	39.6
	Parental or family home	69	11.9
Travel to university	Walk or cycle	487	84.3
	Drive	61	10.6
	Bus or train	30	5.2
Residency	UK	545	94.3
	EU (non-UK)	25	4.3
	International (non-EU)	8	1.4
In paid employment	No	372	64.4
	Yes	206	35.6

Table 1 Demographic background of respondents (n=578)

In summary, almost half of all 578 respondents were drawn from within the College of Science (45.8%) with lower levels of representation from Social Science (24.1%), Arts (15.9%) and LIBS (4.2%). Dominated by undergraduates in the main (90.5%), comprising almost equal numbers from across all three main undergraduate years, this was also reflected in degree type (58.1% BSc, 22.1% BA, 4.8% BMBS, 2.1% BEng and 3.3% Foundation/CertHE). Overall, ages ranged from 18 to 64 with a

mean of 21.0 years (SD 5.46 years). The majority of respondents were also women (70.9%).

Almost half of all respondents (48.4%) lived in rented accommodation within the local community with a substantial number resident in halls (39.6%). Fewer lived in the parental or family home (11.9%). As might have been anticipated, the majority walked or cycled to university (84.3%) with far fewer travelling by car (10.6%) or using public transport (5.2%). At the time of the initial survey about one third of all respondents were supporting themselves in paid employment (35.6%).

2. Sources of information, perceived extent of knowledge and personal risk

Sources of information about Covid-19 are presented a shown (Table 2). Most respondents (282) followed developments on social media (48.8%). While 108 respondents followed the news every day (18.7%), the majority (369) followed the news less avidly but still on a regular basis (62.3%). An appreciable number followed the news less frequently with only 4 (0.7%) not at all.

Source	Frequency	Percent
Social media	282	48.8
TV and radio	187	32.4
Newspapers	55	9.5
The University of Lincoln	23	4.0
Word-of-mouth	31	5.4

Table 2 Sources of information (n=578)

83 (14.4%) respondents claimed an excellent general knowledge of events surrounding the pandemic, 363 (62.8%) good, 130 (22.5%) satisfactory and only 2 (0.3%) poor. These figures are matched by almost equal numbers claiming what they knew about current government restrictions at the time of survey, with 432 respondents indicating an excellent or good knowledge (74.7%) and 146 satisfactory or poor (25.3%).

Before returning to university at the start of the 2020-21 academic year, 206 (35.6%) respondents knew of a family member or friend who had already been diagnosed with or tested positive for Covid-19. 255 respondents (44.1%) considered themselves more vulnerable to contracting Covid-19) as students than others. 399 respondents agreed that the university's response to the Covid-19 pandemic was entirely appropriate (69.0%), 90 disagreed (15.6%) and 89 held no view one way or the other (15.4%). Only 14 respondents were optimistic that government measures in place to restrict the transmission of Covid-19 at the time of the survey would

control its spread (2.4%), 315 remained cautiously optimistic (54.5%) and 249 remained pessimistic and did not agree at all (43.1%).

3. Facts about Covid-19

Typical survey items: 'Covid-19 is thought to have first emerged from within … Brazil, India, China, the United States (select one)' and 'The UK's current lockdown measures are intended to … Reduce the severity of the disease once contracted (yes, no, don't know).' Correct outcomes and commonest alternative responses presented as shown (Table 3).

Summary statement	Frequency	Percentage	Commonest alternative
Thought to originate in China (true)	574	99.3	India
Lockdown reduces infection rate/saves lives (true)	568	98.3	False
Caused by a virus (true)	561	97.1	Bacterium/parasite
Incubation period 2-14 days (average 5 days) (true)	561	97.1	2-14 hours (ave.5)
Caught and transmitted by anyone (true)	565	97.8	Mainly older people
Self-isolation period 14 days* (true)	555	96.0	One week
Asymptomatic carriers can transmit (true)	552	95.5	Don't know
Lockdown enhances immunity/herd immunity (false)	400	69.2	True
Extremely dangerous to public health (true)	324	56.1	Take seriously
Lockdown reduces severity if contracted (false)	342	54.2	True
No approved vaccine** (true)	310	53.6	False

*True at the time of the initial survey - reduced to 10 days shortly after the initial survey closed
**True over the initial survey period with news of the Pfizer/BioNTech vaccine breaking at the end

Table 3 Knowledge of Covid-19: Correctness (n=578)

4. Covid-19 clinical symptoms (common)

Typical survey item: 'The commonest clinical symptoms of Covid-19 include … Loss of sense of taste and/or smell (yes, no, don't know).' Correct outcomes and commonest alternative responses presented as shown (Table 4).

Summary statement	Frequency	Percentage	Commonest alternative
Loss of sense of taste and/or smell (true)	575	99.5	Don't know
New and continuous cough (true)	571	98.8	Don't know
High temperature or fever (true)	557	96.4	False
Blocked nose and sore throat (false)	408	70.6	True

Table 4 Knowledge of Covid-19 symptoms: Correctness (n=578)

5. Protecting self and others from Covid-19

Typical survey item: 'The most effective ways of protecting yourself and others from catching or transmitting Covid-19 are … Avoiding busy, enclosed and unventilated spaces (yes, no, don't know).' Correct outcomes and commonest alternative responses presented as shown (Table 5).

Summary statement	Frequency	Percentage	Commonest alternative
Avoiding busy, enclosed, unventilated spaces (true)	571	98.8	False
Social distancing (true)	570	98.6	False
Self-isolate if infected (true)	568	98.3	False
Washing hands for up to two minutes (true)	567	98.1	False
Avoid shaking hands (true)	566	97.9	False
Wearing a face mask (true)	565	97.8	False
Use disinfectant hand gel regularly (true)	564	97.6	False
Avoid touching nose, eyes, mouth (true)	558	96.5	False
Avoid touching surfaces e.g. lift buttons and doorknobs (true)	540	93.4	False
Avoid people coughing and sneezing (true)	515	89.1	False

Table 5 Knowledge of protection from Covid-19: Correctness (n=578)

6. Student compliance and behaviours

Typical survey item: 'If you found yourself with Covid-19 or in contact with someone infected, would you still consider going out to bars and parties or attending other social events and gatherings if the opportunity arose (yes, no, don't know)?' Appropriate/correct outcomes and alternative responses presented as shown (Table 6). In some instances, 'correct' answers required moral or personal judgement based on situational context and circumstances.

Summary statement	Frequency	Percentage	Commonest alternative
Go to bars, parties, social events if opportunity arose (no)	569	98.4	Yes
Eat out or visit cafes or restaurants (no)	565	97.8	Yes
Visit someone with symptoms/a positive test (no)	564	97.6	Yes
Self-isolate in accordance with guidelines if required (yes)	552	95.5	Don't know
Grocery shop/obtain supplies yourself (no)	535	92.6	Yes
Seek medical advice if experiencing symptoms (yes)	550	95.2	No
Downloaded (or intend to) NHS test and trace App (yes)	498	86.2	No
Exercise (no)	478	82.7	Yes
Report someone for not self-isolating/following guidelines (yes)	185	32.0	Don't know

Table 6 Compliance: Appropriateness/correctness (n=578)

7. Student concerns

Typical survey items: 'Because of Covid-19, I am concerned about the health and wellbeing of my family and friends … (5-point Likert scale)' and 'I think that the move to more blended or fully online teaching and learning will prove far more effective than more traditional and face-to-face methods … (5-point Likert scale)'. Outcomes presented as shown (Table 7).

Summary statement	**Mean score**	**Strongly agree**	**Agree**	**Neither/ Nor**	**Disagree**	**Strongly disagree**
Health and wellbeing of family and friends	4.3	286 (49.5)	229 (39.6)	22 (3.8)	31 (5.4)	10 (1.7)
Repeated lockdowns, ability to socialise and make friends	4.2	286 (49.5)	175 (30.3)	55 (9.5)	50 (8.7)	12 (2.1)
Feel responsible towards those in the local community/where I live	4.1	188 (32.5)	296 (51.2)	71 (12.3)	17 (2.9)	6 (1.0)
Personal health and wellbeing	3.5	127 (22.0)	206 (35.6)	112 19.4	97 (16.8)	36 (6.2)
Personal finances and ability to self-support at university	3.4	143 (24.7)	144 (24.9)	109 (18.9)	150 (26.0)	32 (5.5)
Returning home early to family/friends for Christmas	3.3	92 (15.9)	171 (29.6)	170 (29.4)	107 (18.5)	38 (6.6)
Effect of online/blended teaching/learning better than face-to-face	3.2	145 (25.1)	120 (20.8)	101 (17.5)	108 (18.7)	104 (18.0)
Online/blended teaching/learning improve marks/degree outcome	2.6	57 (9.9)	85 (14.7)	153 (26.5)	151 (26.1)	132 (22.8)

Strongly agree (Score 5) - Strongly disagree (Score 1)

Table 7 Student concerns (frequency and percentage): Relative strength of feeling (n=578)

References

Sharp, J.G. (2021) Covid-19 and the mental health and wellbeing of university students: An annotated bibliography. IMPact: Journal of Higher Education Research (Scholarly research notices), 1-8. [Available at: Dissertation Title (wpmucdn.com)]