KEY MESSAGES AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Universities face a challenge in planning for uncertainty in the coming months.** It is encouraging that institutions are sharing good practice, and collaborating across the sector on student welfare issues, rather than seeing this as an area of competition. In England, the Office for Students (OfS) should facilitate further collaboration.

- **Covid-19 is exacerbating many issues usually faced by disabled students** such as isolation and loneliness, mental health difficulties and access to learning support. It is essential that universities work with their disabled students to ensure they can access any learning and mental health support they are entitled to remotely.

- **In some cases, disabled students are adapting well to university life under lockdown.** The transition to digital learning and online assessments are alleviating some of the barriers disabled students faced prior to the pandemic. Accessible resources should be provided as standard for the benefit of all students and it is important that positive developments are embedded longer term as core pedagogy.

- **It is essential that institutions are flexible and communicative with disabled students and staff,** enabling reassurance and forward planning as much as possible. Disabled students and staff should be involved in planning for the upcoming academic year. Any changes to teaching, extra-curricular and social provisions should consider and mitigate for potential unintended consequences for disabled students.

- **There is a risk that disabled students will not be able to participate in virtual/online social and extra-curricular activities** due to Disabled Students’ Allowance DSA (DSA) funding limitations. This is a particular concern
for deaf or blind students, or those with hearing or sight loss. Universities and students’ unions should work together to make sure extra-curricular activities are accessible and share experiences of doing so. Although universities in England can use their student and disabled student premium funding to bolster their mental health support services and hardship funding, we expect the OfS to anticipate that additional funding and/or support is likely to be needed to prevent the isolation of disabled students.

- **Mitigating measures for the pandemic such as mask wearing, new signage and routes around campuses, can also create challenges for disabled students** which should be considered prior to implementation. Students with underlying health conditions who are shielding themselves, or family members could become isolated as campuses reopen, and many students will need individualised plans for accessing campus and university life.

- **Careers advice needs to understand the specific issues disabled students face entering the job market.** Careers advice now plays a particularly important role in disabled students’ lives as we enter a time of economic instability and uncertainty. Institutions need to ensure they are assisting students with job applications and helping them see what their unique, marketable skills are. Careers services need to be provided with the funding and training to assist disabled students. It is important to highlight employers with a good track record of providing an accessible and inclusive working environment.

### CASE STUDIES

**University of Kent** – The award winning OPERA project encouraged a whole-institution focus on accessibility, aiming to shift cultures from individual adjustments to anticipatory reasonable adjustments and inclusive practice by design. Several open access training materials have been created.

**University of Wolverhampton** – Considering adding a tick box and free text box at the end of all online learning experiences to allow students to report whether it was accessible or not. This allows for tracking accessibility and gathering rich textual detail on any issues experienced. Contact: Dr Lucy Poole, lucy@wlv.ac.uk / ssw@wlv.ac.uk or visit the website.

**The Open University** – Tutors have access to student disability profiles and a wide range of study skills support. The Students’ Association is already based online with a podcast and social media presence. Find out more: [http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/do-it/disability](http://www.open.ac.uk/courses/do-it/disability)

**Staffordshire University** – Staffordshire University have shared resources for students and staff about how to cope with the complexities of Covid-19 while studying and teaching. All resources available here:
RESOURCES

Employability resources
– My Plus Students Club

Learning resources
– My Study My Way

Provider resources
– Diversity and Ability - Delivering meaningful student support remotely
– Diversity and Ability - Online Open-Book Exam Guide
– Diversity and Ability - Assistive Technology Free Trials
– Lexdis - Digital Accessibility
– Ability Net - HE and FE Accessibility Maturity Model

Blogs/Articles
– Life is wiggly: Themes to help young people navigate COVID-19
– How Architecture Could Help Us Adapt to the Pandemic

Reports
– NADP COVID-19 Resource Hub