



Wellbeing Orientation Welcome -

WOW Transitional Summer School 2020



Background –

The Wellbeing Orientation Welcome, or WOW Summer School held by the Transitional Wellbeing Team, part of the wider Student Wellbeing Team at the University of Lincoln, has recently completed its successful sixth year.

When looking at the complexity of issues that many of the students who access the Student Wellbeing Centre face, some have anxieties about initially beginning University and study. Alongside this, anxieties might also be around social interaction and friendship groups, independent living, ways in which they will study, getting around and familiarity with the campus. This can, at times, lead to students feeling overwhelmed and on occasion, some students have chosen to leave University.

The Student Wellbeing Team offer the summer school to many prospective students who access support through the team, all of which may experience anxieties about beginning university study, such as those on the autism spectrum, those with a diagnosis of mental health and for the first time in 2020, students leaving care. WOW is provided to ease any anxieties students may have about the changes that lie ahead and the transition into university life.



In 2020, WOW provided 42 free places to prospective students, following initial contact with the Student Wellbeing Team, for a 3 day, 2 night stay on campus. Students were provided a room within Cygnet Wharf on campus, living with other students for the duration of the residential. This has proven to give students the ability to engage socially with their peers and it is hoped, as in previous years, build strong relationships that will last through to enrolment and beyond.

A comprehensive programme of workshops, teaching sessions and social events are offered, to give prospective students a taste of University life. Sessions included:

- Welcome and Icebreaker activity session
- Taster sessions from academics in different learning environments
- A walking tour of Lincoln Castle walls
- A walking tour of Lincoln Cathedral
- A talk on fees, funding and budgeting from the Student Support Centre
- A talk from the Students' Union team
- A talk from the Careers and Employability Team
- A talk from the University Health Centre
- Sample lecture from Dr Roger Bretherton
- Library Tour
- One to One meeting with a Wellbeing Advisor

As a part of the WOW residential, Student Wellbeing staff are on site 24/7, to help and support students as needed. Any student under 18 at the time of WOW would stay on campus after signing an agreement by a parent or guardian. No students at the time of the WOW 2020 Summer School were under 18.

In previous years, Student Ambassadors have been employed to assist staff during WOW. All Ambassadors are previous attendees and initially 5 were recruited to support WOW in 2020. However, 2020 presented some challenges during the planning and application stage for WOW students, which is detailed below.



Challenges – Covid-19

Planning for the WOW summer school usually begins in earnest as far back as November the previous year, with many of our attendees being identified through conversations at open days and when potential students begins to think about the support they may require at university.

At the conclusion of the 2019 summer school, our plans for 2020 were to welcome 80 students onto campus for the event, which would have been our highest number so far. The interest in the summer school was high and the team had identified a high number of students through open days where the Transitional Team had delivered talks to parents. The Transitional Team had around 50 names that were interested in the summer school at the end of 2019.

When the Covid-19 pandemic took hold and lockdown was put into place, the Transitional Team (with support from line managers) awaited guidance as we moved through the year. As some restrictions were lifted, a proposal was written and put in for approval by the Senior Leadership Team. This included both a face-to-face WOW and a virtual version. Once approved, the team worked on planning a summer school that could be delivered safely within government and university guidelines.

On approaching the students who had expressed an interest in the summer school, we had 42 confirm they would like to attend a face-to-face on campus version and 11 who chose the virtual option.

On planning the face-to-face WOW, we were faced with a number of challenges. For example, keeping pace with ever changing government guidelines, ensuring students could come onto campus safely within the current restrictions and making sure that all students and staff were aware of these guidelines and how these were to be followed whilst on campus.



The team managed these challenges by splitting the attendees into four different groups, all with a colour and they stayed in these groups both in their accommodation and for the majority of activities during the 3 days. The attendees were reminded regularly the importance of maintaining social distancing and they were also asked to wear face coverings in all communal areas and encouraged to wear them whenever they were inside. Staff wore visors throughout the event whenever they were dealing with students (both inside and outside).

Ordinarily, we would have presentations/sessions delivered by other departments as well as academic members of staff. In order to ensure we delivered the best experience possible for the students whilst adhering to both university and government guidelines, these sessions were delivered either through Microsoft Teams “live” or by pre-recorded sessions.

The event was delivered using as smaller number of staff as possible. This was to keep contact between staff and attendees as low as possible, therefore reducing the risk. This posed a challenge in terms of preparation, as the event would normally be supported by the wider Student Wellbeing Team as well as Student Ambassadors.

As part of the Programme of Events, historically a session has been provided by the Head of Student Wellbeing and the Student Wellbeing Manager for parents and guardians, (separately from students) to answer any queries they may have about WOW or ahead of enrolment. To minimise footfall on campus during the face-to-face WOW, a pre-recorded talk was offered and taken up by all families as their preference.

Virtual WOW

The 11 students who had chosen to be involved with the virtual WOW were invited to join a Facebook group to encourage them to get to know each other. At the beginning of each day they received information such as pre-recorded videos, links and information that would allow them to complete some of the same activities that the face-to-face attendees would complete. The information they received matched the days’ events for the face-to-face attendees.



Applications and Questionnaire -

As part of the application and pre WOW questionnaires, prospective students were asked to score how they might be feeling ahead of University along with their expectations of WOW, their expectations of University life, as well as any coping strategies they currently use.

Questionnaires were also completed by all attendees on their final day at the WOW Summer School, to ask if it had been beneficial, what sessions they have enjoyed most and least, if they feel less anxious about starting University, what the Student Wellbeing Team could have done differently and if they would recommend WOW to another student.

(Sample Application Form – Appendix i)

(Sample Questionnaires pre and post WOW – Appendix ii and iii)

WOW Participants -

In 2020, contact with prospective students was made very early on, from October in the previous year. This ensured that a good dialogue and communication was set up well in advance with both students and their families, to answer queries and reassure in the lead up to WOW 2020.

Prior to WOW, students were invited to join a private group on social media, in order to meet others and chat to WOW attendees, ahead of arriving. This was the first year that a 'private' page had been established and it was great success. 31 students joined and begun conversations, chatting amongst themselves and even creating their own private chat groups. Friendships were established ahead of WOW, providing reassurance about the social element.

42 students applied for the physical, on campus WOW. All students arrived and registered on the first day of WOW, arrivals were staggered and attendees split into groups, to allow for minimal footfall and less 'gathering' in one place.

Emails, information, maps and correspondence were sent to all attendees, informing them of what to expect, what would be provided, FAQ's and numbers to contact if needed.

(WOW Guide – Appendix iv and WOW FAQ's – Appendix v)



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Results and Outcomes –

The Student Wellbeing Team were once again overwhelmed by the group of students who joined us for WOW and the way in which they flourished over the time of the School, particularly with the additional challenges (and at times anxiety) that Covid-19 has presented.

WOW 2020 also provided staff and colleagues the opportunity to help and support students on campus as Students followed guidance and processes exceptionally well, wearing masks in communal areas on campus, following one-way systems through buildings as appropriate and using hand sanitiser as provided when entering and exiting rooms and buildings.

From knowing the individual concerns of the students ahead of them arriving, through meeting and welcoming them, to seeing them slowly overcome their issues to become more socially confident, joining in and making new friends during WOW, was fantastic.

Questionnaires were given to students on their final day, with some very positive comments received, including –

"WOW has allowed me to feel more prepared and excited to start Uni life."

"It has been an amazing experience."

"The social side of WOW really helped."

"It has been very reassuring and a lot of fun."

"Thank you for allowing me to experience this transition – all the people I've met have been so lovely."

Students who attended WOW were asked how confident they felt about managing change. Pre-WOW, on average students scored this at 4 out of 10, however, following WOW the students reported, on average, that their confidence levels were now 7 out of 10.

(WOW 2020 Feedback – Appendix vi)



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Future Plans –

The Transitional Team have already chosen provisional dates for the 2021 WOW Summer School and are looking forward to making plans and welcoming a new group of students.

The team plan to offer 80 places once again for 2021 but will be monitoring government and university guidance in relation to Covid-19, so that changes can be made if necessary.

The team will be able to utilise what we have learned from WOW 2020 in how we can not only be adaptable but also how we can utilise more technology and change how we offer specific sessions, to offer students an experience that is reflective of university life when they arrive. The Transitional Team understand that blended and agile learning will be the “new normal” for our students, so it is important that the summer school is reflective of this.

Students who attended WOW, will be monitored to assess how they are engaging with their studies and to identify if any concerns arise. Previous WOW attendees have engaged better in their courses, with 2019 attendees having an average attendance rate in their first year of 74.54%, against the University average of 72.31% and University Disability Average of 68.62% for 2019.

Appendix –

Sample application Form – Appendix i

Sample questionnaires pre and post – Appendix ii and iii

WOW Guide - Appendix iv

WOW FAQ's – Appendix v

WOW 2020 Feedback – Appendix vi