

# Loneliness and Social Isolation during COVID-19: Queen Margaret University Students' Experiences

This study was conducted under the Quality Assurance Agency's (QAA) Enhancement Theme 'Resilient Learning Communities'.

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## International Students

Returning home or remaining in Scotland without certainty of when they can return; regression to a former version of self; forming and losing a second family; lack and loss of control while 'at home' or 'abroad'.

## Shielding Students

Impact on mental health and professional identity when removed from workplace after labelled 'highly vulnerable'; isolating from family; constant worry of catching virus; missing out on limited on-campus interaction.

## Difficult to Build Relationships Online

*"From my perspective I think there is no real camaraderie or social cohesion within my 1st year cohort. It was beginning to develop and then when we went 100% online it vanished. I have felt extremely isolated and detached from university I have no contact at all with anyone else on my course"* (Student - Questionnaire)

## Direct Entrant Students

Entering an already established cohort; uncertain of where to turn, or to whom.

## Student Groups

# Loneliness & social isolation during COVID

## Community

## Informal Interaction

Lack of social micro- and informal interactions student-student and student-staff in both academic, public and liminal spaces.

## Resilience

## Academic Isolation

*"Peers are academically isolated, cannot talk as effectively with other students about university workloads and gain support through people who are experiencing the same things as you are"* (Student - Questionnaire)

## Students Struggling with Mental Health Pre-Pandemic

Experiences of loneliness & social isolation predating COVID significantly predicted the extent of such feelings during the pandemic; mental health got worse; however, also a sense of security that 'things would get better'.

## Level 1 Students

Students in L1 marginally lonelier compared to those in L2, significantly less lonely than L3 & 4, yet significantly more socially isolated than students in L2 & 3.

## Coping with Loneliness & Social Isolation

Coping mechanisms broadly involved either 'keeping busy' (physically, intellectually, socially) and/or 'distractions'; separation between 'good' vs. 'bad' coping; reliance on Personal Academic Tutors and other academic staff; hope.