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impact.

How the pandemic changed everything

Dear reader,

What a whirlwind couple of years.

There is no denying that the pandemic has been, and still continues to be, an extremely difficult time for everyone.

At the time of writing, 158,363 people have died of Covid, according to government figures. Since the first UK case was officially detected on January 29 2020, over 17 million people have tested positive, with the true extent of infections likely to be much higher.

We have grieved, we have craved social contact, and we have clapped for NHS workers. In one way or another, the whole world has felt the impact of Covid - and the KU community is no different.

But there have also been some good things to come out of the pandemic. We have become more resilient, and more willing to help those in need.

While it is important not to forget the difficulties people have faced, it is also good to learn from our experiences. *impact.*, put together by the team at the Kingston Courier, focuses on a range of inspiring stories and people, from local community leaders to fashion students.

Part of a journey is the end. With the worst of the pandemic seemingly over, we hope this can inspire you to reflect on your own pandemic experience.

Yours sincerely,

Kieran Kelly

Editor of *impact.*

KINGSTON COMMUNITY SHINES

Aysha Gilmore spoke to Kingston's community leaders, from doctors to food bank volunteers, to find out how they came together during the pandemic



Paediatric A&E Consultant at RBKares HQ

Photo: BBC One Show

Kingston's community spirit grew during the pandemic as residents rallied to help the most vulnerable people in the borough.

This spirit has been highlighted through the formation of charities, food banks, community groups, and volunteering.

The Cambridge Road Estate community group (CREst) set up a food bank in response to the first lockdown for local residents who were unable to buy essential food items.

"It was everyone mucking in together," said Jill Preston, chair of CREst. "Someone's telly broke down the other day and in our group there was a telly going. It is all a bit hit miss at times, but we get there."

Preston said the Kingston community had always been generous. She said that last Christmas, when a box of donations left aside for presents was stolen, the community's reaction had been brilliant. Many pitched in to make up for the loss.

"The bricklayers, the residents... they all turned up with bits and pieces. We probably got more than we had in

the first place," she said.

There is also the Kingston Food Bank. This currently has 70 volunteers, taking between 800kg-1000kg of food every week.

Ian Jacobs, director of the Kingston

“

Volunteering is helping me to be a better person

Food Bank, said: "In the pandemic, people had the opportunity to give their time because they were furloughed or working from home. They can actually get involved in the community and it really changes their perspective on what is going on in the community."

It has not just been those who visit the food bank who have benefited, either, with volunteers also getting something out of their work.

Naomi Foster has volunteered at the food bank since the start of the pandemic. She joined the food

bank to help with her anxiety and the friendships she developed with volunteers at the food bank have improved her mental health drastically.

"Volunteering is helping me be a better person and know where I fit in

because I really didn't know where I did before," she said.

Dr Kate Kenyon co-founded Sewing4Kingston in April 2020, also in the midst of lockdown. The group sewed around 5,000 items, including scrub masks and wash bags for hospital workers and carers.

"The community is made up of older people who felt quite useless, didn't feel they served a function in society anymore, so getting them to sew and help people, made them feel really good," she said.

The community has 1,500 members

on Facebook and was created to help front-line workers during the various lockdowns.

After witnessing the struggle in care homes and for carers in the first wave, Dr Kenyon also set up RBKares which creates kindness kits for carers and care home residents.

In addition they run projects with Kingston Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS).

"The pandemic made people a lot more interested in volunteering and being more aware of everyone around," said Dr Kenyon.

Kenyon said that Sewing4Kingston and RBKares gave all members a sense of community and friendship.

"They are so kind. What is so nice, is some people have never met. We have people who are deaf, disabled... but people who also feel very low and it gives them something to do," she said.

With Covid restrictions easing once again, Kenyon said she remained hopeful. She said: "I think the community spirit and checking on your neighbours will be here to stay."

Unsung heroes

Ciaran Nerval spoke to the key workers who kept their communities going through the various lockdowns, from shop assistants to delivery drivers

For nearly two years, thousands of nurses and doctors have been putting their health on the line to fight and eradicate the spread of the virus. Where their hard work and effort has been greatly appreciated by public, they were not the only workers putting themselves forward to help keep the nation alive.

For many people, going to the shops to buy essential items was too dangerous. Many relied on deliveries to keep them fed. Gemma Rathmell, 23, worked as a food delivery driver for Co-op Food throughout the lockdown, delivering to primarily vulnerable customers.

Rathmell said she felt proud of the number of people she had helped, despite the longer hours and increased pressure. "I knew I was helping everyone in need, especially the elderly ones who struggled to get out and about," she said.

"It was [very] different, a lot of new things to take in and adapt to. Some days were harder than others.

Due to Covid, you'd have to work extra hard." Regarding the public



opinion towards essential workers, Rathmell said: "I wouldn't say their opinion has majorly changed, half of the public still treat you as they used to but then others have become more understanding."

Ruairi Quinn, 23, spent the lockdown as a retail assistant for Spar and Sainsbury's, a job he said was important for his psychological well-being. He said: "I was, and still am, very proud to be an essential worker.

I was able to leave the house and it relieved the boredom". Quinn described one of the most comforting elements as the growing respect from customers. He said: "Public opinion changed quite a lot. Customers were saying 'thank you' more often, they spoke to us like normal people. They started being a lot kinder and generous, some of them even brought chocolates for staff.

"All essential workers deserve more respect because I believe

we kept the country running."

One food delivery driver, "privileged" to be supporting his community, was William Byrne, 61.

Bounaourara, who also manages a large store, said Byrne had felt a great pride in helping people, taking deliveries to vulnerable households and even

Kingston Hospital. "He loved it. He has a passion for delivering to, especially the vulnerable, customers. And every Saturday morning he would cook for the team," she said.

"It was that privilege of being able to leave the house every day and actually being able to serve the community. It felt for him like he was doing something exceptional."

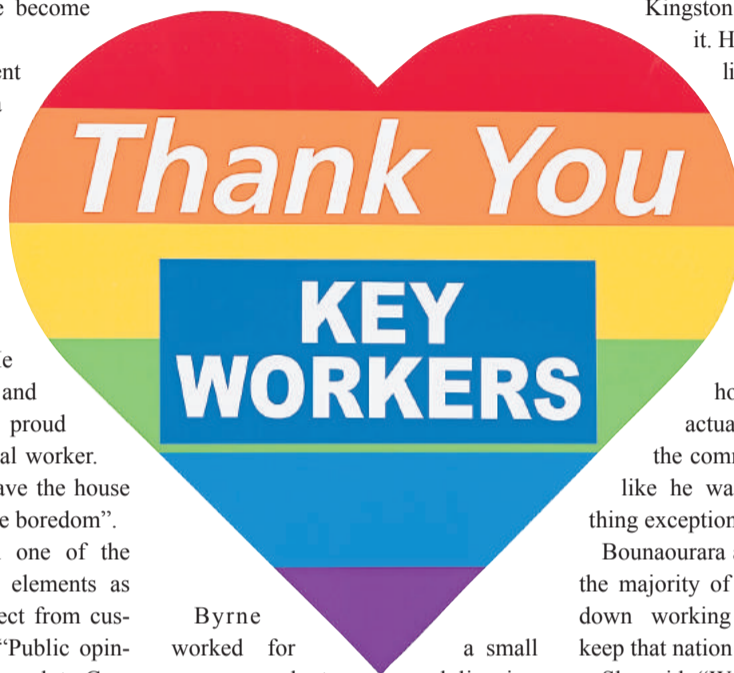
Bounaourara also spent the majority of the lockdown working hard to keep that nation running.

She said: "We both put in long hours. After lockdown I did six day weeks sometimes fourteen hour shifts. But we knew that we were providing a service that was essential. At no point did either of us think 'we can't face it.'"

What Bounaourara was not aware of was the extent of customers' appreciation - something she learned when several came to Byrne's funeral.

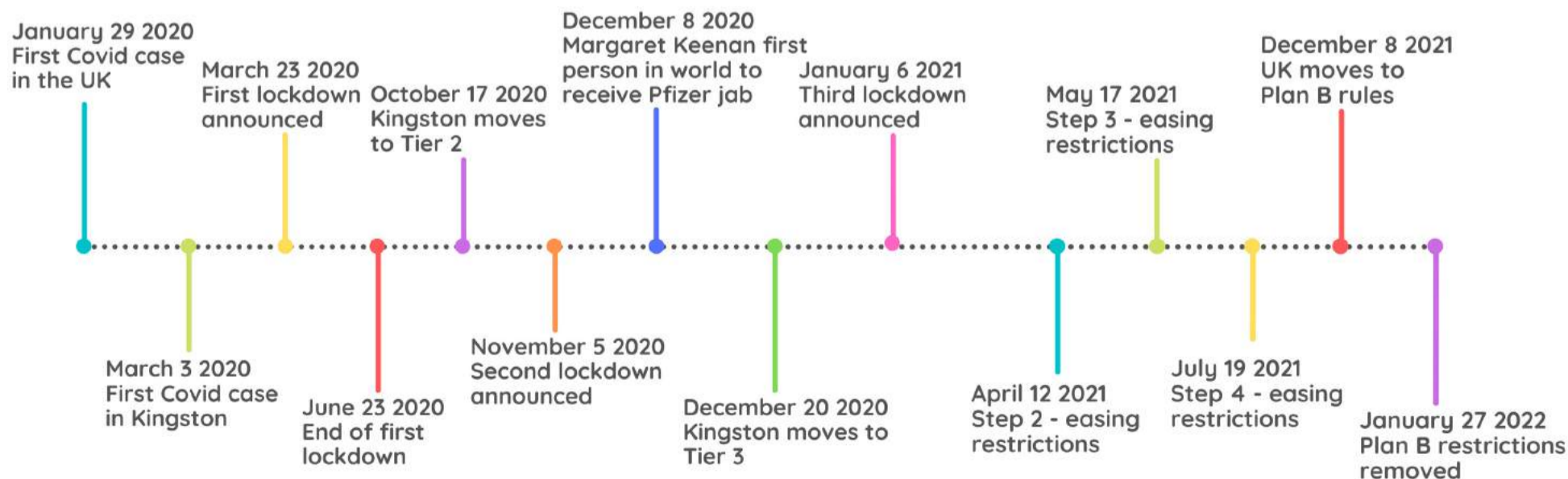
She said: "They were grateful for the service that he had provided to them that they felt that they needed to come and pay their respects."

"He was obviously providing a service that they probably appreciated more than he was even aware of. I can't understate the hard work he put into serving that customer base, and how much he loved it."



Images L to R: William Byrne Photo: Anna Bounaouara; Photo: Maureen McClean/Shutterstock; NHS worker Photo: Vickie Flores/Shutterstock

HOW DID WE GET HERE?



KU societies back with a bang

By **SASHA BAINS**

Many people have joined Kingston University's societies, hoping to chase passions and be a part of a community with people who share their interests. However, when Covid hit, societies were forced to move online.

Steve Kent, president of the Creative Writing Society, said: "The transition to Teams worked quite well in terms of students being able to present their work via a shared screen.

"The downside was we struggled to recruit a large volume of students and operated with a core group of two to eight students per meeting."

Going back to in-person teaching received mixed reviews from the society, with many not missing the long commute onto campus.

One of KU's biggest societies for geek culture is the Video Gaming, Anime, Sci-Fi/Fantasy, and Tabletop Gaming Society (VAST). This society already had an online element, though it did have some struggles adapting.

Hamdi Tajeddin, head of VAST, said: "It was hard to do board games, which ideally should be done in



BOUNCING BACK: American Football and Rocket Engineering at the societies fair Photos: **Sasha Bains**

person, and so we were missing some of the interaction that you get from board games. It was good to be back to playing in person.

"We can rebuild our community because it was difficult for freshers last year who really wanted to join."

In academic clubs like the Rocket Engineering Society, the team's aim is to be able to draw attention to projects relating to space for students.

During lockdown members of the team like Jeznol Woo and Erika

McDowell were still able to teach online for students who wanted to learn about future engineering projects.

In March, the team is looking forward to taking part in a competition for UK Students for the Exploration and Development of Space.

For Kingston's sports societies, moving online and motivating students to keep up with their training was a challenging task.

The men's basketball team proved how out of sync their daily routine

became during lockdown because of their inability to train.

Their president Dan Sherlock said: "Our club was quite quiet during the lockdown, with a few playing NBA 2K20 on PS4.

"Many of our senior players considered not even playing their final year for Kingston."

The club still managed to put on 3v3 and recreational sessions - more than most clubs could offer.

The KU cheerleading squad was

still able to keep up with learning its routine and formations online.

The squad's vice-president Camilla Karlsen said: "This year, we have been able to train normally. It has been great to be able to have a full season of training. We are super excited to finally get to do showcases and competitions as normal."

Lockdown took a toll on student's mental health. Moving to online sessions and not being able to play the sports they loved was hard for two American Football Society students, Edison Smith and Andrew Ash.

Smith, a first-year student, said: "It took a massive toll on me with my mental health and so going into university and joining societies is very healthy for you."

Ash added: "Especially a physical sport, it helps get the anger and frustration out of you and is a really good distraction."

Currently the university is aiming to get back to normality. On January 25 there was a freshers event where societies were encouraging students to get involved in their club.

Introducing golf's latest rising star

By **JAMES HOGG**

Cuddington Golf Club's youngest ever member has announced himself in the world of golf having achieved greatness on the course and notoriety on social media platforms.

Leo Boniface, eight, started playing golf at the age of three and has already won a number of accolades and earned respect in the sport.

Following the easing of Covid restrictions, Leo has had the pleasure of meeting and playing with stars in and outside the golfing world.

His father Lester Boniface said: "He's played with James Phelps, who played Fred Weasley in Harry Potter, and he's played with Ben Shephard quite a few times.

"We're going to be playing with Declan Rice soon and we're supposed to be playing golf with Paul Scholes."

Leo has also teamed up with YouTube golf sensations Rick Shiels and Me and My Golf, and TV presenter Peter 'Tubes' Dale to create some amazing golf content since Covid restrictions were eased in the UK.

As well as meeting and playing with such people, Leo has received encouraging messages from the likes of boxing heavyweight Anthony Joshua, European Tour golfer Andrew 'Beef' Johnston and actor Chris Tucker.

Leo's father said: "Last year he won the Wee Wonders British Championship.

"He also won the under 11s Clutch Tour Championship and various British Junior Tour events.

"He is American Golf's only and first ever junior ambassador and he's

sponsored by Cobra Puma."

The Surrey born golfer - who does not even have a coach - got his first club membership at Cuddington Golf Club in Banstead when he was five years old, making him the youngest member the club has ever had.

Golf has always been Leo's sport of choice and he has quickly improved his skills since he began playing.

His current handicap is 18 and his goal is to be a 10 handicap by the age of 10 - something which seems extremely achievable for the talented golfer.

"He's got so much passion for it," said Leo's father.

He added that Leo holds himself to very high standards and always wears his heart on his sleeve.

Leo has also played on some courses most golfers can only aspire to.

The best course he has golfed at, according to his father, is Carnoustie in Scotland, where he played in the Ladies Open pro-am event.

Another pro-am Leo played in was at Galgorm Castle in Northern Ireland, for a European Tour event.

Boniface said: "He isn't having any lessons - we just play. Leo's got a very natural swing.

He's had two putting lessons from the pro at Cuddington [Golf Club] and that's it."

Whether it be making birdies from the men's tees or playing flop shots over his dad's head in his back garden, Leo is getting recognised globally as a rising talent within the sport.

Remember the name Leo Boniface, because he could very well be a star in the making.



Leo Boniface holding the U11 Clutch Tour trophy

Photo: **Lester Boniface**

End of Covid rules splits opinion



Restrictions are ending soon, what do Kingston students think? Photo: Jon Santa Cruz, Shutterstock

By **NAVEEN GHARYAL**

Kingston University students have conflicting thoughts about Covid restrictions coming to an end.

Economics student Harry Marlow said it was “about time” restrictions were lifted.

But Alex Barnes, a second-year history student, sees the move by Johnson as “ridiculous.” He said: “It’s wrong. We still have a high number of Covid cases and it’s too soon to say if things are going to get better.”

Soraya Reema, a 21-year-old master’s student, said: “It’s too soon. Some restrictions like self-isolation if you have Covid should remain to keep other people safe.”

Some students expressed a sense of confusion at what current restrictions actually are.

“It feels like the Covid restrictions, about what we can and can’t do, are constantly changing,” said Tarah

Jackson, a second-year English student.

“I don’t really know what restrictions there are right now apart from wearing masks in shops. The rules don’t seem clear so I don’t think removing them will make much difference to what people want to do at this point,” added Jackson.

Recent revelations emerging of Johnson’s own personal and illegal activities during a period when the country was under strict lockdown measures have left some KU students questioning the point of rules.

Surinder Chana believes lifting restrictions “makes sense” and thinks people don’t want to follow any more rules when “Boris was having garden parties”.

This view was shared by a number of Kingston students who now believe it is the right time to lift Covid restrictions and get back to normal.

“Boris was having garden parties”

WHAT WORKS BEST FOR YOU?

*Pandemic restrictions forced thousands of students to experience university online. With the return of face-to-face lessons, **Naveen Gharyal** asked Kingston students about the benefits of remote learning*

The arrival of the Covid pandemic in 2019 led to the introduction of online, or ‘remote’ learning in schools and universities across the UK.

Face-to-face learning was abandoned, and students everywhere were required to study and attend classes from home.

Learning remotely took something away from the student experience, but there could also be some positive aspects to remote learning.

In an online survey, including 160 students, 89 per cent said they would still like to see online learning remain an option, alongside face-to-face classes, post-pandemic.

Selina Hansa, a commuting student, said she saw online learning as a benefit. This was a view reflected by many of the commuting students interviewed by impact.

Hansa said: “My daily commute to Kingston is long so I find it difficult to come in if I’ve only got a single one-hour class. If remote learning remains an option, I would use it on certain days when I have one class, so I don’t have to make such a long journey unnecessarily.”

Adam Gridley, a commuting student from Watford, said having the option to study online from home would help him get more work done as he would spend far less time commuting to and from university.

He said: “On particularly bad days, it can take me over two hours to get to uni or back home and that’s so much time lost when I could be studying.”

“At least with the option of remote learning I’d be able to go in when it suits me and yet still not miss out on anything.”

“I’d most likely end up being more engaged and efficient with my learning and assignments.”

The option to take online lessons from home could also be beneficial for those who are unable to attend class in person due to illness or other complications.

Rather than miss an entire class, students would be able to attend online from their homes if they chose.

Geography student Amanda Linn said she hoped universities would see the benefit of keeping remote learning available in the future, describing it as a “positive force” in making sure that some students do not fall too far behind.

She continued: “It’s one of the positive things that came out of having to deal with Covid.”

“Even though it may not be the same experience as face-to-face learning, it’s definitely something worth having even if not everyone finds it useful. I think it should still be an option for university students post-pandemic.”



How do Kingston students prefer to learn? Photo: Chris Montgomery

Activists adapt to new normal



Protests after the police cleared Sarah Everard's vigil on Clapham Common

Photo: Guy Bell

By HANNAH GRAVETT

With the eyes of the world watching the impact of Covid unfold, activists needed to adapt to ensure their voices were heard.

Just months into the first wave of restrictions in 2020, African American George Floyd was murdered by a police officer in the US State of Minneapolis. Fears that physical protests would spread the virus meant some protesters turned to social media to voice their outrage.

Millions joined in. On June 2, #blackouttuesday - a single black square posted online, in support of Black Lives Matter (BLM) - dominated the internet. That day, 14.6 million black squares were posted on Instagram alone.

Online protesting was criticised by some as performative and 'visual

signalling' - a term coined to describe a person boasting of their good character, particularly on social media.

Despite ongoing restrictions, in June 2020, thousands of activists attended in-person Black Lives Matter demonstrations in cities including London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool.

However, persisting with protests caused legal problems for many. In March 2021, four people were controversially arrested for breaching the 2020 Coronavirus Act after police intervened at a vigil for 33-year-old Sarah Everard, murdered by a Metropolitan police officer.

The Met, along with commissioner Cressida Dick, was accused of using the virus as an excuse to break up a peaceful protest.

In November that year, the Guardian reported that 22 members of Scientist Rebellion were arrested for blocking a bridge in Glasgow during demonstrations at the COP26 climate summit. The protesters were later released with no further consequences.

Pressure group Insulate Britain also made headlines for obstructive means of activism in recent months.

Many activists believe Covid restrictions have greatly encouraged politicians to silence protesters across the UK.

Second year KU Drama and English student Elizabeth Sims said: "Young people [are] getting into activism because we've had the time to educate ourselves, and maybe that's why we're being oppressed more. People in power don't like young people having a voice."

In March 2021, home secretary Priti Patel proposed the Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts (PCSC) Bill which would allow law enforcement to criminalise 'disruptive' protesters. Following the introduction of the bill, critics fought to '#KillTheBill' to protect protester rights and the democratic process.

“People in power don't like young people having a voice

Protesters' persistence throughout the pandemic has proven effective. Despite Covid dominating public

discourse, climate activism remained a hot topic in the UK, with 75 per cent of adults worried about climate change in 2021, according to the Office for National Statistics. Increased participation in climate activism, with 100,000 protesters taking to the streets of Glasgow during COP26, could be linked to increased concern during the pandemic.

Emily Masters of Teach the Future praised the successes of activism throughout the pandemic in 2021. "Despite the lockdowns, activism still made it to news headlines and was highly prominent on various social media platforms," she said, noting that civic engagement remained high in the UK.

"Whilst it was not possible to have mass protests...many campaigns still managed...to make a difference."

Pandemic causes stark increase in poaching

By JOE QUIRUGA

A lack of tourism in Africa has cut funding to global conservation services and contributed to an increase in poaching.

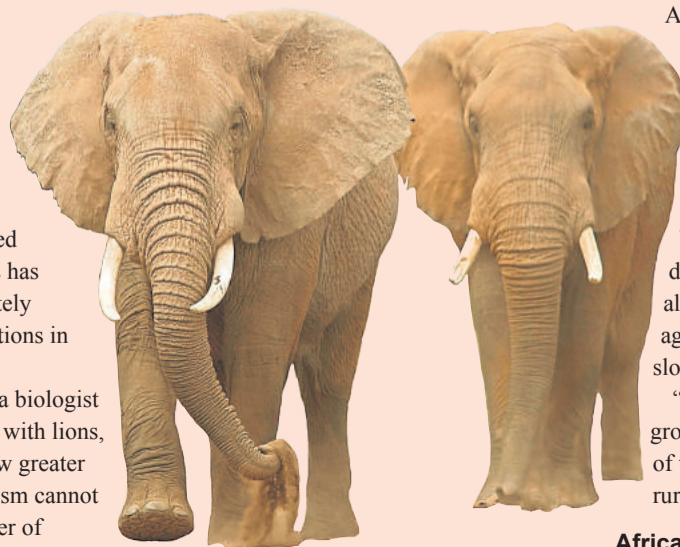
A spokesperson for the charity Born Free said pandemic travel restrictions led to a drop in income for many in rural communities. This resulted in "wild animal poaching for subsistence purposes".

They said: "Rangers and others working to protect wildlife may also have lost income or employment, reducing the protection available for wild animals and making it easier for the poachers."

They also said conservation efforts were hampered by funding being diverted to health.

However, the extent to which poaching has affected wildlife populations has been hard to accurately gauge due to disruptions in data collection.

Dr Craig Packer, a biologist known for his work with lions, said that there is now greater awareness that tourism cannot be the sole bankroller of



African conservation efforts.

"The most important way to support wildlife conservation in Africa would be to provide meaningful assistance towards the continent's rapid achievement of the United Nations 'sustainable development goals'. This would alleviate poverty, increase agricultural productivity and slow population growth," he said. "Otherwise, Africa's population growth will quadruple by the end of the century, and widespread rural poverty and subsistence

farming would likely overwhelm any efforts to protect the national parks."

Measures announced by the UK government in December are set to ban the import of game trophies as part of their animal welfare plan, which Born Free called "long overdue".

Packer said: "Trophy hunting is a dying industry; the majority of hunting blocks in Tanzania, for example, have been abandoned.

"What's needed instead is large-scale funding that would help conserve [the animals in] the many abandoned hunting blocks."

African elephants, Amboseli National Park

Photo: Martina Katz

Vaccine hesitancy places relationships under strain



By **JASMIN JAMES**

Personal relationships have been put to the test by disagreements about the Covid vaccine.

According to gov.uk, over 84 per cent of over-12s have had both doses of the vaccine. But, there still remains a portion of people who haven't had the dose at all, with vaccine hesitancy continuing to be an issue.

Jacob Stevenson, 26, met his partner during the pandemic. His partner's reluctance to get vaccinated caused problems when contemplating big life decisions such as starting a family.

He said: "We have had friction in our relationship regarding vaccination. Our viewpoints are different which makes discussion very difficult.

"The question of vaccination weighs heavily on both our minds if

we were to have a child. We'd both have to plan carefully how we'd approach things."

Clinical psychologist Dr Laura Keyes offered advice on how to approach those with opposing viewpoints to achieve the best outcome.

She said: "Try to maintain a position of being curious and listen with empathy and patience. All concerns can be addressed with evidence. So, offer evidence-based responses and stories to challenge misconceptions."

Amandeep Kaur, 25, said her sister's decision not to get the second dose of the vaccine added tension to an already strained relationship, since their mother was clinically vulnerable.

She said: "She was concerned that

she may get a blood clot because of the vaccine but was not making any changes in her everyday life to prevent this from occurring. This frustrated me as it felt like this was a poor excuse and she had no regard for anyone else, including my mum."

Robert Wratten, 55, opted not to get the vaccine right away, resulting in a conflict with his wife. He said: "My wife works in a care home, so it was hard for her to be married to someone unvaccinated, she worried about putting the residents at risk.

"She also had family back home in Thailand that we had to delay visiting. We argued and sniped for months. I am fully vaccinated now but I think there's still some resentment."

There are several reasons why people might not want to get

vaccinated. A primary reason behind vaccine hesitancy is a lack of confidence about the vaccine's safety.

This is just one factor in the so-called 5Cs model, compiled by the University of Erfurt in Germany. The model considers five psychological factors determining the choice to get vaccinated: confidence, complacency, calculation, constraints (convenience) and collective responsibility.

When addressing a person who lacks confidence in vaccine safety, Keyes said: "Try to understand their perspective - what are their fears about the vaccine? Perhaps they are trying to control their health outcome in an unpredictable world.

"Remember that shaming or shouting won't make them want to do it more, but space and understanding."

COMMENT: Toxic FOMO is a thing of the past

By **KATE BYNG-HALL**

In March 2020, we were told to stay at home and only go out for one stroll a day. It was the beginning of a long stretch of loneliness and isolation for many.

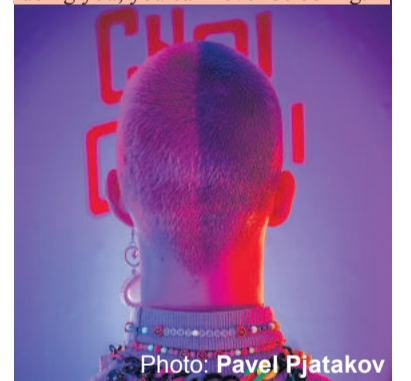
But for introverts like me, it provided a convenient excuse not to give in to peer pressure to attend every social occasion going on around us.

Obviously, I would have preferred not to have been trapped without my friends for months, but all the time at home did make me realise that it's okay not to be a social butterfly.

It's okay not to want to go to every party. It's okay not to want to get hammered every weekend. It's okay not to make friends with everyone you meet. It's okay to have a smaller circle of mates who know you inside out.

It's definitely okay to prefer a movie marathon with a takeaway to a night on the lash.

The pandemic has proved that this idea that you're 'boring' if you don't spend all your time out and about is a complete myth. As long as you're doing you, you can never be boring.



Networking or not working? Digital tech's impact on relationships

By **MIRANDA DUNNE**

Social media is a double-edged sword. It has revolutionised relationships by enabling us to stay in better touch with friends and loved ones across the globe but has also been credited by psychologists with contributing to feelings of isolation and comparison.

The number of Zoom users increased by 2,900 per cent according to Business of Apps. Digital technology has enabled us to stay in touch with loved ones and has been credited with enabling more flexible working.

Financial planner Phoebe Tokarski, 25, said that during the height of the lockdown, using digital technology to communicate with her friends became a huge comfort.

"A few of my mates banded together and we would hold these Zoom calls to do quizzes and played online games. Even though we couldn't be in the same room, they still made the effort. It made me feel really connected to them," she said.

As a working parent, Tokarski said



that online working has made it easier to spend time with her young child.

"It's also cut having to travel around as much - meetings and job interviews can be done via Zoom and if it doesn't work out, I haven't wasted my time

and money. My experiences of communication as an anxiety sufferer were improved," she said.

"Being in a familiar place when experiencing these situations makes me feel more at ease."

Julia Szofridt, a media graduate based in Munich, said: "It's a lot more common now to have video calls on Zoom - it's almost become a habit now. Also, the games that one can play while on a call are truly

revolutionary to me!"

Dani Marshall, a 25-year-old anthropology student agreed: "My friends and I video call way more than we ever did before," she said. "There's so much discourse online about healthy relationships, and boundaries at the moment on TikTok - and I'm here for it!"

Videos on social media platform TikTok under the hashtag #boundaries boast a total of 811.4 million views, with content-creators sharing helpful tips and advice on how to set and assert boundaries across a range of relationships.

Music graduate Vincent Salgueiro, 23, took a less optimistic perspective. "There are friends I have seen less after they were relegated to online relationships. It's remained that way even after restrictions were lifted," he said.

"I think easy access in communicating with people gives the impression that it doesn't require effort to maintain any kind of relationship. In the end, it feels mostly counterproductive, unless it's a relation who is so far away, that you're unable to communicate in person."

Shhhh... Can you hear nature calling?



Long-eared bat in flight
Photo: Malcolm Schuyf Flipa

By **FRANCES STEBBING**

Covid forced people to adapt to working life in different ways. Gardens and bedrooms became the new office, and strolls through the park became the new gym.

According to the Natural History Museum, working from home also led to a drop in noise pollution, with sensors detecting a 50 per cent drop in sound in some areas of the UK during lockdown.

Many people enjoyed the peace and quiet, and birds appeared to sing more loudly as competing urban noise decreased by five decibels. Birdsong, which serves to find mates and defend territory, is vital for birds' survival.

There were also more than double the usual sightings of bats, who rely on echolocation and benefit from the sound of silence.

More time at home gave people more time to be aware of the environment around them.

"We saw a clear increase in wildlife sightings during the lockdown period, as people enjoyed the sunny weather and had more time to notice wildlife and connect with nature," said David Roy, Head of the Biological Records Centre at the UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology.



A Eurasian blue tit
Photo: Steve Douglas, Unsplash

PUPPY LOVE



Millions of British people got new dogs during the pandemic

Photo: imageBROKER

By **SAM GROVES**

Lockdown was hard for many people, but dogs loved the extra time spent with their owners.

Now that people are spending less time at home, however, dogs are becoming increasingly distressed as they are not accustomed to spending so much time on their own.

The UK's leading dog welfare charity, Dogs Trust, has reported an increase in anxious behaviour among the pets since the end of lockdown. The reason for this anxiety is biological.

The charity said: "Dogs are a naturally social species and it's normal for them to stay close to their social group which is why they can become anxious when left alone."

The absence of their owners can cause dogs to become fearful, frustrated or simply bored which can lead to them acting out. Symptoms of anxiety in dogs vary widely, but changes in behaviour will most likely be apparent.

Simon Hayes, primary medical director at Linnaeus Veterinary, said: "Your pet may exhibit behaviour such

as howling and crying when you leave. House-trained dogs may start having accidents in the home or display destructive behaviour."

Some 3.2 million Britons bought dogs during the pandemic, according to the Pet Food Manufacturing Association. There was also a 250 per cent increase in puppy smuggling to the UK between 2019 and 2020.

Anxiety is generally worse among recently rehomed dogs as they have experienced the stress of living in a kennel without the benefit of a daily routine to make them feel relaxed when they are home alone.

How to help

There are many practical steps owners can take to reduce their pets' stress levels. Hayes said: "Preparing time alone is key to preventing separation anxiety in our dogs, whether they are young, old or rescued."

The RSPCA recommends leaving a special toy, encouraging your pet to relax before leaving and minimising disturbances. Battersea Dogs Home

advises building your dog's confidence with training and praise, encouraging independence by teaching them to settle on their own and giving them an enclosed space where they feel safe.

It is vital for pets' well-being that owners take responsibility for giving their dogs enough stimulation and attention every day.

Hayes said: "Ideally, dogs shouldn't be left alone for any more than six to eight hours. Dogs really benefit from one to two hours of direct contact a day such as walks, training and playtime.

"Identify triggers and incorporate them into your routine throughout the day. If your dog shows signs of distress when you grab your bag or keys, try doing this in front of him/her while making a cup of coffee to communicate these actions as normal and routine."

According to Blue Cross guidance, punishment should not be used as the dog will not associate it with their earlier actions, adding to their distress.

Older dogs will take longer to unlearn behaviours, but it is possible. "It is certainly not true that you can't

teach a dog new tricks! With time and care, dogs will readjust to their new circumstances," said Hayes.

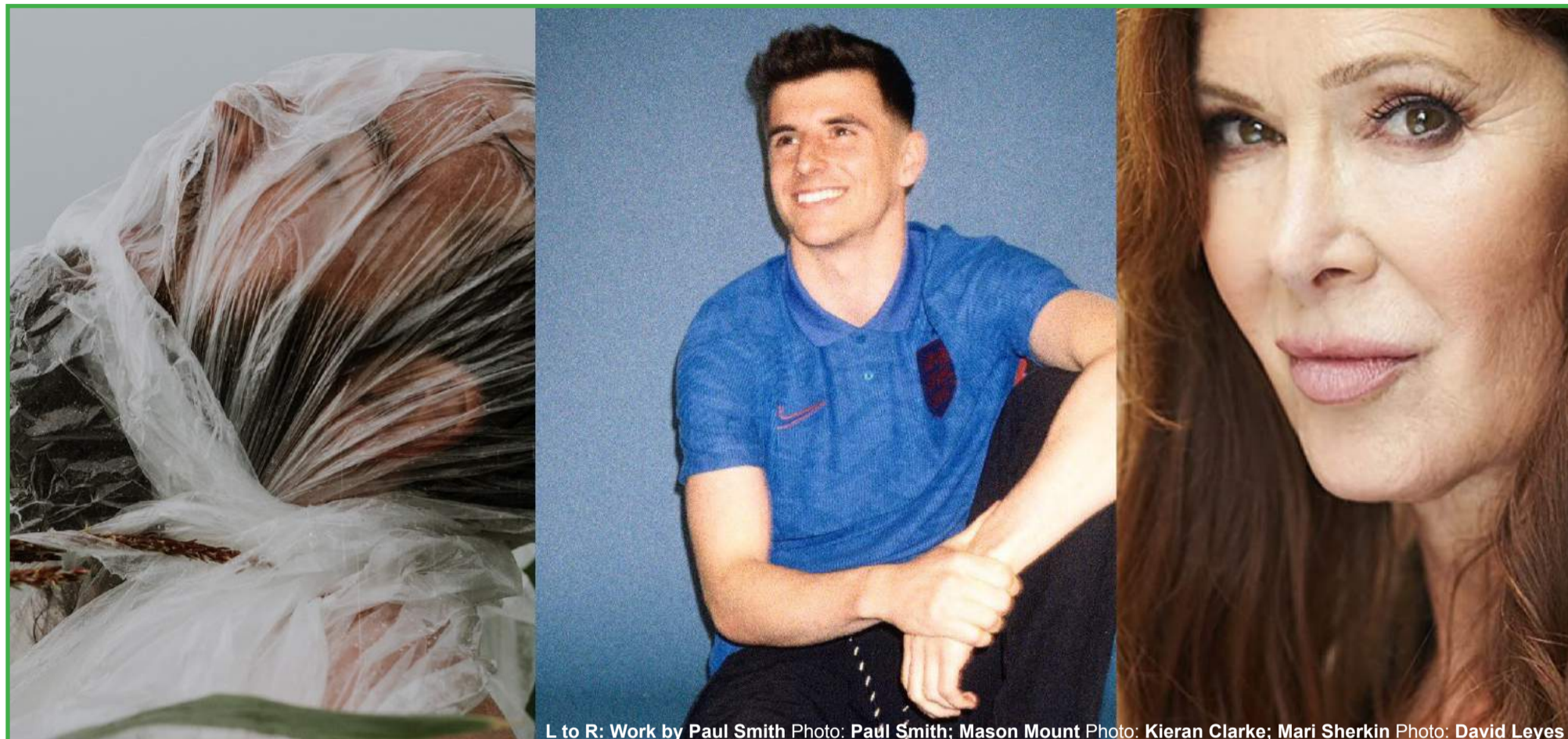
Owners of anxious pets should resist the temptation to get another dog, according to researchers for Animal Naturopathy in Dürnten, Switzerland. Lead researcher Gerrit Stepham told *New Scientist*: "We observed more separation-related behaviour in multi-dog households."

While all these approaches should help to reduce pets' symptoms of stress, every dog and home is different and some approaches will work better than others.

Ryan Neile, head of behaviour service operations at Blue Cross, said: "We could see behaviour problems with our pets exacerbated as lockdown is lifted, so we are helping owners to prepare their pets for the new normal."

If your dog is still suffering from separation anxiety, there are professional helplines you can call such as the OSCAR Helpline. Available on 0800 195 8000, it is a free service for all pet behaviour, nutritional help and advice.

Creatives think outside the box



L to R: Work by Paul Smith Photo: Paul Smith; Mason Mount Photo: Kieran Clarke; Mari Sherkin Photo: David Leyes

By ZORA-HANNAH BANSAH

For those who work in the creative industries, from film to photography, lockdown required a different way of thinking.

Work slowed down and after much reflection, many were forced to rethink their enterprise.

Prior to Covid, photographer Paul Smith specialised in wedding photos, products and portraits.

When restrictions came into force, more than 22 weddings he had been booked for were either cancelled or rearranged.

He said: "Businesses didn't want

product photography... and portraits were non-existent [because] people couldn't leave their homes or be with people outside their families.

"It was looking bleak, so it left me no other choice but to get creative."

Smith said he was able to do things he had previously not had time for, like environmental photography.

He even started doing virtual shoots – a process where he asked clients to hook cameras up to their laptops and take control of their cameras using online software.

He said: "I could get great images

of people without needing to be in the same room as them.

"Whilst it was super scary to watch my business grind to a halt overnight, building it back up has been a challenge I've relished."

Like Smith, actress Mari Sherkin, known for her work in 'Pineboxfast' (2017), was forced to think outside the box.

When it came to finding inspiration, she took advantage of being stuck at home. She decided to create a chicken-themed movie.

Sherkin and her husband moved to the country about ten years ago.

She had always wanted chickens, but hadn't found the time for them within her busy lifestyle.

She said: "When the pandemic started, we were forced to stay at home. It was a perfect opportunity to build a coop and get some chickens."

The film, 'Miss Shaguna's Chickens' (2021), centres around an eccentric old lady who lives on a mountain and raises chickens.

Throughout the film, we learn about Miss Shaguna's life and friends – both chicken and human.

Sherkin said that while she missed acting classes, lockdown gave her

an incredible opportunity to study with the Hollywood casting director Michael Testa.

Photographer Kieran Clarke said having fewer deadlines in the pandemic made him less productive, but helped him see how important creativity was to him.

He said: "[It] made me realise how beneficial I find being creative for my sense of worth and day-to-day identity."

Clarke said he took even more pride in his work because he had the chance to spend extra time perfecting it.

Student mum creates online fitness buzz

By LIV JONES

During lockdown, Kingston College student and young mother Rebecca Palfrey set up a community fitness initiative to encourage others to pull themselves out of a slump.

Palfrey, 28, from Hampton Wick, lost both her parents when she was young and suffers from depression and anxiety.

"During lockdown, I really started to get down and felt depressed and just really lacking any hope of the future," she said.

In the hope of helping both herself and other people who were struggling, Palfrey shared her 15-minute fitness workouts on Facebook Live.

Following a positive response to her videos, Palfrey developed this into 'The Better Buzz', a registered community interest company.

Palfrey said that other women were happy to find a place they could exercise without worrying about childcare.

She found her own mental health had improved through daily exercise,

and women and mothers said they loved her workouts.

One participant said: "It is so refreshing to see you with your son hanging round your neck and trying to do a push up."

Palfrey continued: "I do believe what I have done has helped people.

"My mental health has been saved from doing what I do because I found my love for working out.

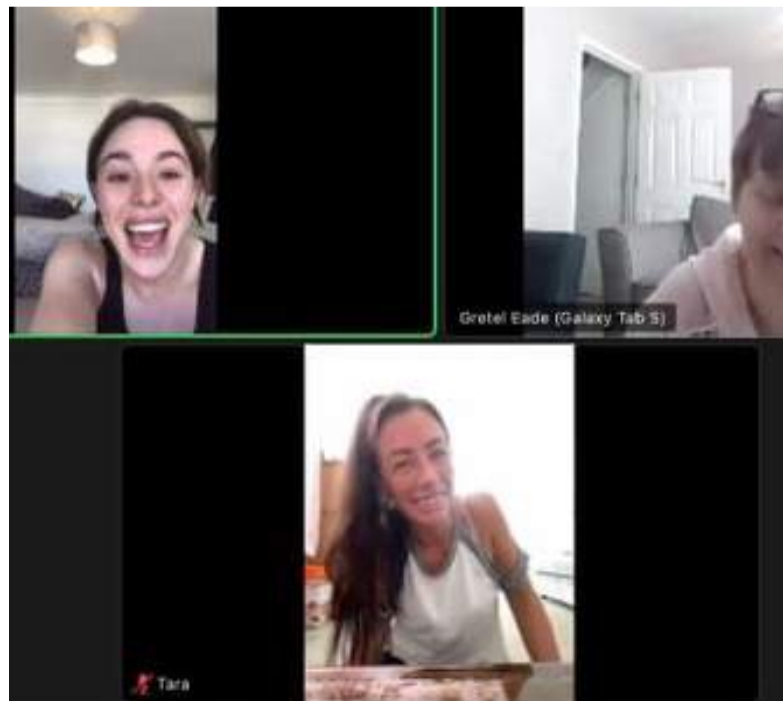
"I really do believe that lockdown blessed me. It gave me this opportunity to find my passion."

Palfrey is now working towards becoming a personal trainer, and also takes a hair and barbering course at Kingston College.

She said that she hopes to grow her company further by inspiring more women to get involved with the initiative as a way to promote their mental well-being.



**THE BETTER BUZZ
C.I.C.**



Better Buzz meet for a workout session Photo: Rebecca Palfrey

LET'S TALK ABOUT...

Self-care
and what it
means to you

Photo: Max van den Oetelaar, Unsplash

By ABBEY BAMFORD

During the pandemic it was necessary for everyone to take more care of themselves, physically and emotionally.

Self-care is the practice of promoting one's health, particularly in times of stress or fatigue.

Intriguingly, a look at Google Trends shows there were spikes in the number of people across the UK googling 'self-care' around the time the prime minister made Covid-related announcements during the first national lockdown in 2020.

impact. asked some Kingston University students how their practice of self-care changed during the pandemic.

Second-year student Elizabeth Sims said: "I focus on mental health self-care a lot more now. I'm more mindful of burnout. I got to know myself as a person more and figured out my identity."

Third-year student Jay Lalli said: "I think it's about being good to yourself. Mental health is a big part of it – people undermined that before."

Second-year student Maheen Afghan said: "I'd say I pace myself with my work more."

Third-year student Matt Beauis said: "Now I'd define self-care as taking care of your health – physical and mental."

Second-year student Caitlin Nugent said: "I do skincare now! I started it as a hobby because I was bored in lockdown and now it's a daily ritual that I do."

Opening up

Lockdowns, social distancing and challenging times have transformed the way we talk about our mental well-being and how we receive support. *Kate Byng-Hall reports*



Many of us needed support from our loved ones during the pandemic.

Photo: Tim Mossholder, Unsplash

The pandemic left us facing countless challenges we've never experienced before, one of the toughest being big knocks to our mental health.

Over the past two years, the number of people in England suffering with their mental health has increased dramatically, with almost one in four adults now experiencing clinically significant psychological distress, according to government research (see statistics, right).

Young people have suffered particularly acutely, with around 130,000 more under-18s seeking help from secondary mental health, learning disabilities and autism services in 2019-20 than the previous year. This is understandable: disruptions to education, friendships, relationships and general growing up took their toll and are still affecting people today.

Social psychologist Sandra Wheatley said she saw levels of anxiety and depression increase "massively" during the pandemic.

"People used to having a very usual social life were impacted when that social life was suddenly not possible," she said.

However, while over 50 per cent of 17 to 23-year-old respondents to a recent NHS survey experienced declining mental health since 2017, 15.2 per cent's mental well-being actually improved.

This could partially be down to decreasing stigma, especially during the pandemic.

Nowadays, there is a bigger conversation than ever about how mental health should be approached in this country, and it started at home.

Messaging, phone calls and even Zoom were a source of comfort for many during lockdown.

Wheatley said chatting to family and friends more during isolation "offered [people] some alleviation from feelings of loneliness" and established mutual support.

"When somebody else shares concerns, instead of being a burden, it shows you that things aren't as lonely as you think – you can contribute to others' lives by helping them out.

"If you've got people you trust that you can confide in, then why wouldn't you?"

Frederika Roberts, speaker, lecturer and author on mental health

and well-being, said the pandemic "opened the door a crack" on conversations about mental health, but it "still needs to be pushed wide open".

She said there is "a lot more openness" about mental health among young people.

Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) practitioner Anna Jackson advocates for CBT as a way to develop healthy coping strategies through reprogramming harmful patterns and habits.

"Younger people are often quite motivated. There are lots of different things they can put in place, and it's quite self-helpy which they often like."

She said struggling with mental health is nothing to be ashamed of.

"The idea of perfection is obviously not achievable, and you'll always feel like you can't get to it. It'll make you feel worse about yourself if you always try and be perfect," she said.

Her main message?

"Don't suffer in silence."

The University has multiple avenues through which you can seek support, including the student well-

being team's counselling and self-help guides, on-campus disability and mental health advisors and an online student group event every Tuesday. Alternatively the NHS provides information and advice.

The number of adults over 18 experiencing clinically significant psychological distress increased from 20.8 per cent in 2019 to 24.5 per cent in late March 2021

The number of adults in contact with secondary mental health, learning disabilities and autism services in 2018-19 stood at 2,726,000, rising to 2,878,000 in 2019-20

Over half of 17-to-23-year-olds have experienced declining mental health since 2017

Rates of probable mental disorders in 17-to-19-year-olds went from one in ten in 2017 to one in six in 2021

MENTAL WELL-BEING

Your voices: lockdown silver linings

“ It made me less precious about life. It makes you see the bigger picture, life is all right. Some of these things are insignificant. It made people less selfish.



George Davis
Fifth year
Architecture

“ You have time to think about what is going on in your life. Going into 2022 I am trying to focus on healing myself in terms of my mental health.



Asher Ibrar
Foundation year
Biomedical Science

“ Learning to spend time alone was very nice. I think I spend more time alone now post-pandemic than before because I've learnt to enjoy it. Give yourself time to relax.



Ella Williams
Foundation year
Visual communication

“ Lockdown allowed me to focus on the things that need to be focused on. It made me think about how to keep myself safe.



Kevissen Venkiah
Second year
Pharmaceutical Science

“ I got to focus more on me and rediscover my art and go outside more, which was really nice. It was nice to not have loads of things expected of me all the time.



Kenzie Rogers
Foundation year
Biomedical Science

Can YOU calm your mind?

By **EMMA CURZON**

A group of Kingston University students have formed a Mindfulness Society which they say could help those facing stress and anxiety in a post-Covid world.

The society's founder and president, MSc Psychology student Emily Watson, says that practising mindfulness helped her get through an extremely difficult time four years ago.

This included the deaths of two close relatives, during which time she was caring for her two young children and immobile grandmother.

“My anxiety trying to cope with everything was drowning me,” said Watson.

She started attending mindfulness classes and using Headspace, an app which provides mindfulness meditation exercises.

Watson said: “It totally transformed me. It taught me how to

stay in the present moment, not dwelling or ruminating on the past and getting stuck in a depressive episode, nor worrying and fretting about the future and experiencing anxiety.

“By staying present in the ‘here and now’, I am able to cope with things life throws at me.”

Mindfulness is based on Buddhist traditions but can be practised by anyone regardless of religious belief.

It involves focusing on the present moment by observing things like your breath, surroundings and thoughts, and can help people cope with difficult feelings and uncomfortable situations.

Since lockdown restrictions were eased, many people have experienced ‘post-covid anxiety’, with the return to things like in-person teaching and social events feeling overwhelming.

Mindfulness, says Watson, can



Meditation can help to process intrusive thoughts

Photo: **Karolina Grabowska**

be a great way to help manage these feelings.

For example, bringing your attention to the present moment (through your breath, the sounds around you, or something else) can help you cope better with anxious

or intrusive thoughts.

Watson suggested that anyone interested in trying mindfulness should join the society and “come to our sessions to practice new skills with a group of friendly, like-minded students!”

Students who are interested in finding out more information about the Mindfulness Society can visit the Kingston Union of Students' website. Alternatively, they can email mindfulnesskingston@gmail.com.

#RoseEndures: Kingston theatre back in business and ready to entertain you

By **CHLOE OLIVIA SLADDEN**

The Rose Theatre thrives on having a full house for its shows. The buzz of the crowd, the gasps mid-show, the roar of applause as the show draws to a close - all of that was gone when Covid struck at the end of 2019.

The theatre, based by the riverside in Kingston, lost 63 weeks of programming between the first lockdown in March 2020 and its reopening in Summer 2021. The theatre's original productions or visiting shows were postponed; the lights were well and truly out.

The theatre's closure meant that there was no income from ticket sales, advertising, merchandise or the bar. The frequent introducing or lifting of restrictions led to Kingston locals being hesitant to return to the theatre.

Robert Dowd, Rose Theatre director, said: "The nervousness in audiences to come back is still there.

"Consumer confidence went down. The government was incapable of communicating [restrictions] properly so there was little faith and trust in communication surrounding Covid."

The theatre's last original production was *Beauty and the Beast*. This show ran from December 2021 to January 2022, and the rise of the Omicron variant led to many challenges for the theatre.

At least nine out of a planned 37 performances were cancelled due to the variant, while four out of five of the show's actors went down with Omicron and were forced to isolate for ten days.

Stand-in actors had to be used for a week of performances, though this did not appear to have prevented the Rose from putting on a show for their audiences.



Rose Theatre, Kingston

Photo: Andrew Fosker/Shutterstock

Dowd said: "It was hectic but a great show in the end.

"Audiences wanted to get out of the house. They wanted to be amused and entertained and to have some fun. There are only so many boxsets on Netflix to watch after all."

Kingston's culture sector has slowly begun to recover since Plan B restrictions were lifted on January 27. That night saw a full house (800+ people) at the Rose for a stand-up performance by noted comedian

Rob Beckett. Dowd said: "This was wonderful to see."

Dowd said he believed it was vital for theatres to reopen in the interests of national culture, particularly in Kingston.

He said: "Theatre has an extraordinary ability to tell stories. It brings cohesion in communities and heals wounds - physical and psychological.

"It helps communities and society to come together. It can help create a healthy community and a healthy economy."

The theatre also received various grants and funds which went towards maintenance.

Dowd said: "We received £850,000 from the government's culture recovery fund, £750,000 in wages paid through the furlough scheme and £400,000 in national money which was given to the borough to manage and distribute to where it was needed.

"Nobody has been made redundant yet either, we want to retain our staff and bring audiences back."

Looking ahead

A full programme of shows and events has been lined up by Dowd and the theatre to bring audiences back.

Dowd said he hoped that the anticipation of the Rose's original productions planned for 2022 would help bring audiences back, and that there was an exciting year ahead.

"We also have an exciting new venture with Paines Ploughs, a national new writers touring arts company. They will be coming to Kingston in July, and we'll have a pop-up tent, which can seat 120, where they will perform three new commissioned plays," he said.

The Rose Theatre's next production will be a musical performance of Jane Austen's romantic comedy, *Persuasion*.

Persuasion follows Anne Elliott who was persuaded by her family to reject Frederick Wentworth's proposal. Elliott never got over losing her first love.

When Wentworth returns to town eight years later, an eligible bachelor and decorated naval Captain, Elliott is forced to face up to her past and the choices she made.

Dowd said: "It's a contemporary take on a modern life Wentworth and Elliott. It has a modern phone party scene and music from Dua Lipa and Cardi B."

The production will be directed by Jeff James, who adapted Austen's novel along with James Yeatman. Sasha Frost (*His Dark Materials*) and Fred Fergus (National Theatre Live: *Julius Caesar*) have been cast as Elliott and Wentworth.

Persuasion will run from February 26 to March 19 2022 at the Rose Theatre, Kingston.

Lockdown inspires new hobbies and opportunities

By **SASHA BAINS**

For some people, lockdown presented an opportunity to pick up new hobbies and discover hidden passions.

Before lockdown, local businessman Ian Turnbull, 62, spent his free time motorbike touring and has ridden all around Europe, from Surbiton to Helsinki - and even to the Sahara.

Yet as lockdown put this hobby to a halt, Turnbull soon found a new one: leather crafting.

He said: "I had to do all the research online and buy all the tools, never having been trained."

Ian is now back to travelling on his motorbike but has still maintained his newfound passion of leather crafting.

Charlotte Lister, 34, started a lockdown blog which soon turned into an online charity magazine. This raised £2,000 for charities like Coppafeel and Samaritans.

Lister, a former pageant queen

and winner of Ms Diamond South Yorkshire 2019-20, kept the blog closely tied to her passion for pageants.

Lister said: "When Covid hit, we couldn't really do much, like everyone, and were stuck inside. To help keep pageants at the forefront of my mind I created a pageant lockdown blog where I could interview pageant queens across the world."

Creating this blog allowed her to continue raising money for charities when not able to help with pageants and fundraising events due to Covid restrictions.

After completing online courses to enhance her digital skills, Lister created a webzine called *Crowns and Sashes*. She also recorded a podcast centred around campaigns organised by pageant queens.

For Melanie Wingfield, a lockdown hobby even turned into a business.

As a pastime, Wingfield started

painting pebbles for fun. Lockdown forced her to reduce her workdays as a professional nanny and so she was left with plenty of spare time.

Wingfield said: "I started painting pebbles a few years ago and was encouraged by the reaction of others, so during the first lockdown I started selling them online."

She sells these pebbles on Facebook, something which continues to bring her joy.

For her, it's not just about the aesthetic of the pebbles, but also the meaning.

One of the pebbles was painted with a design that represented the start of 2022. Choosing the colour yellow, Wingfield wanted to symbolise hope as the country moves forward from Covid.

Other than selling online, Wingfield's pebbles can be found at local markets, including the Tolworth Street Market.



One of Turnbull's handmade leather items Photo: @turnbull_leather

Out with tailoring... in with loungewear

Frances Stebbing looks at the impact of the pandemic on the fashion world, with many brands adapting their designs, going digital and doing their part to spread a bit of joy

Lockdown altered the way we view fashion with pyjamas, joggers, sweat-shirts and gym wear forming the new pillars of our wardrobes.

Before lockdown, spring/summer 2020 trends predicted bright neon colours and tailored suit shorts. However, soon after these live shows took place, the world plunged into a pandemic and fashion was forced to adapt with loungewear as one of the biggest influences.

Will Smith, 19, a fashion promotion and communication student at Kingston University, said: "You saw the fashion industry adapt to the challenges of the pandemic like every other industry. Dior created miniature versions of models because of lockdown regulations preventing models from gathering."

Designers also adapted by showcasing SS21 collections digitally. While some Twitter threads complained about the digital shows not being as good as the real thing, many were pleased to see an industry usually fixated on tradition open to change.

Jeremy Scott, creative director at Moschino, created a full collection of miniature garments which were showcased on a runway by marionette dolls. He also created dolls in the likeness of his regular front row attendees including Anna Wintour.

Prada held a Q&A with co-designers Raf Simons and Miuccia Prada after its virtual runway presentation, answering questions from fans around the world.

Shopping in a digital era

Inevitably, how we shop also changed. The closure of high street shops and changing rooms led to a surge in online shopping.

Smith said: "Online retail grew massively too as people were confined to their homes." Social media also began to play a bigger role in setting trends. Y2K style (late-90s, early-00s fashion) ignited interest, mainly due to the explosion of TikTok, and has continued into SS22. One of the most talked about brands, Blumarine, featured butterfly tops showing maximum midriff, low-rise jeans and body glitter on the runway.

Sofia Rovda, 19, also studying fashion promotion and communication, said: "In terms of social media, fashion trends grew too, especially on TikTok. We were all sat there watching TikTok fashion trends and then we would all buy the same dress."

Smith said: "A lot of brands are getting into using digital and virtual fashion trends.

People are sending photos

of themselves to companies, and you will get a photo back of you wearing a dress or T-shirt.

"But because everyone is so obsessed with social media and being online now, digital channels are starting to take over. I don't know whether it will be that big, but it's a change."

One of the biggest impacts continues to be loungewear, which allowed people to dress more comfortably while sticking to the trends reflected in designer collections.

Prada exhibited tasteful sweatsuits offering forgiveness and hiding away extra lockdown pounds, and stretchy second skins seen at Rick Owens and Thebe Magugu appealed to those who favoured something more fitted. This kind of clothing proved ideal for those who converted their lounges and outdoor spaces into home yoga studios.

The main trends of the current season have continued with this theme. Eighties power pants have made a comeback, meaning long days working from home can be both comfortable but stylish. These easy-to-wear trousers allow for a wide range of movement and look dramatic.

Designers have also wanted to put the fun back into

fashion, spreading joy. This season sees the return of the 60s mini skirt and matching cardigan co-ords. Embellished garments sparkle to celebrate a new era beyond the dark days of lockdown.

Many brands have altered not only their styles but also their ethos. In London, more than 50 professional and amateur sewers formed a group during the first lockdown called the South London Scrubbers.

Ian Costello, 53, worked on Savile Row as a tailor and usually made uniforms, which have featured in films including James Bond and Batman, but when his business closed he swapped to making medical clothing.

"People are banding together and trying to do something. It is a feel-good factor for everyone," he said.

Rovda said: "Luxury brands like LVMH started donating money to charities such as Red Cross China and they also donated medical masks.

"It's positive because they have a lot of money, and they can help people - Prada and Valentino have donated money around the world. It's been really heart-warming to see."



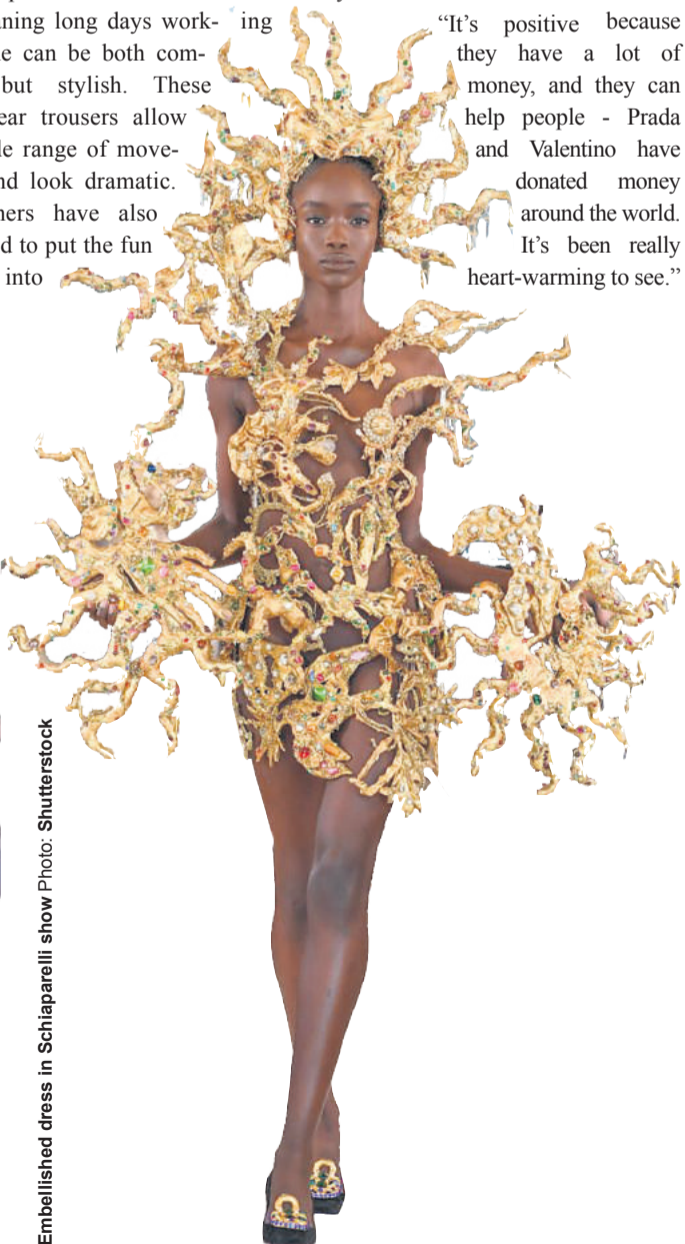
SS20 neon trends Photo: Riccardo Giordano/IFA/Shutterstock



Loungewear Agatha Ruiz de la Prada show Photo: Atlano Garcia/SOPA Images/Shutterstock



Y2K trends in Blumarine show Photo: Shutterstock



Embellished dress in Schiaparelli show Photo: Shutterstock

Best Rated hits of the pandemic

By LIV JONES
Spider-Man: No Way Home
This film could not have been left off the list. Rated five stars by many film critics, this is one of Marvel's biggest hits, ranked sixth in worldwide box office hits of all time. Packed with action, heartbreak and excitement, it is a must watch.



JJWhilden/Columbia/Marvel/Kobal/Shutterstock

No Time to Die
After a much-awaited release, hordes of people flocked to the cinema to see Daniel Craig's final showdown as James Bond. It may have been postponed by lockdowns, but the film did not disappoint, keeping audiences on the edge of their seat throughout.



MGM/Eon/Danjaq/UPI/Kobal/Shutterstock

Tick, Tick... Boom!
Andrew Garfield plays Jonathan Larson, the writer of the musical Rent, in an autobiographical biopic flooded with musical numbers to please theatre goers. To many, Garfield is deserving of an Oscar - he captures Larson's persona to perfection. The songs are catchy too.



Netflix/Moviestore/Shutterstock

Dune
Despite Zendaya only being in about twelve minutes of the film, Dune is a camera work masterpiece. The images are beautiful and haunting, and although the plot is not hugely easy to follow, audiences will feel like they have been taken to another universe.



Warner Bros/Moviestore/Shutterstock

is nominated for three Oscars. With a focus on Colombian culture and myths, combined with Lin Manuel Miranda's genius songwriting, the film will warm you to your core. The song, 'We Don't Talk About Bruno', has hit the charts and is here to stay.



Andy Kropa/Invision/AP/Shutterstock

impact. opinions

The Great Reset: My pandemic epiphany

'The Great Reset' was an appeal for change by the WEF. Melissa Osborne considers how this changed her life

When the World Economic Forum (WEF) announced in 2020 that it was time to make changes, its choice of three little words - The Great Reset - caused a lot of fuss.

At the launch of this big idea, WEF said: "The pandemic represents a rare but narrow window of opportunity to reflect, reimagine, and reset our world to create a healthier, more equitable, and more prosperous future."

While to many this sounded harmless, for conspiracy theorists it sounded alarm bells. Some even claimed it was the WEF that had released Covid into the world.

Initially, I also fell into this trap, ready and willing to believe that the timing of the pandemic and this announcement could not be a coincidence.

But over time, I saw how much life changed from one year to the next. I found myself agreeing with the WEF's proposition, both on a global scale and within my own life.

In the middle of a potentially once-in-a-lifetime pandemic, I decided to go back to university after 13 years away. Looking back, I think the state of the world helped me make that choice.

With so much of society locked away, I finally found time to think



The pandemic gave many the chance to stop and assess their situation

Photo: Javier Allegue Barros

about where I was heading and how I wanted to change my life.

Although The Great Reset was meant to be about world changing ideas, we can all reflect, reimagine

and reset our own lives. This is especially true for students who are constantly on deadlines and may not always feel in control.

Something as simple as accessing

resources for time management, essay writing, or even sticking to a new well-being routine, could bring about positive change and allow students to make the most of their opportunities.

Whether anything will come of The Great Reset on a global level is still to be seen, but maybe the principle of starting again doesn't seem so frightening after all.

Tory spending sprees are a thing of the past

By **JOE QUIRUGA**

The pandemic saw a £20 uplift to Universal Credit, plenty of talk about 'levelling up' and massive stimulus spending sprees on furlough and 'Eat Out to Help Out'.

But as much as prime minister Boris Johnson likes to present himself as a conservative with a strong social conscience, this anti-austerity flirtation won't outlast the pandemic.

According to the Commons Library, spending in 2020/21 was £167 billion higher than forecasted.

This included £47.1 billion of pandemic funding for the NHS and £43.6 billion that was spent on furlough, a scheme which cost around £70 billion in total.

As the NHS was in crisis and all commerce in the UK shut down, the alternative would have been unpalatable. The government felt the need to spend big.

Many of the government's policies

were still distinctly conservative in nature, that is pro-business. However high spending will not be a new norm.

Furlough and the £20 uplift to Universal Credit ended in September and October respectively.

Eat Out to Help Out wasn't a kindly gift from the chancellor, but a calculated way of re-stimulating the hospitality sector when income was low or uncertain.

When national insurance tax rises in April, capital gains tax will stay the same. National insurance is a tax on income, whereas capital gains tax targets investors. The Conservative government wants to encourage investors to buy stocks and stimulate business.

Johnson's 'levelling up' agenda has been criticised by Labour, who claim no new money has been announced.

Whether it will meet the ambitions of moving "money and power into the hands of working people", as Michael Gove said it would on February 2, remains to be seen.



Prime minister Boris Johnson and chancellor Rishi Sunak

Photo: Gareth Fuller/AP/Shutterstock

Kingston hospitality sector endures trials of pandemic

Two years after Covid sent the country into lockdown, employees working in Kingston's hospitality sector talk to *Jacobiën van der Kleij* on the highs and lows of the pandemic



Restaurants struggled to navigate Covid restrictions

Photo: Restaurant Guru

HOSPITALITY: a national view

Hospitality has been one of the worst affected sectors by lockdowns and government restrictions, according to the Office for National Statistics. The sector may have additionally been impacted by Brexit as the transition period coincided with the start of the latest lockdown, though it is difficult to tell. In April 2020, just under 1,650,000 employees in the sector were on furlough as businesses paused trading, according to data from HM Revenue and Customs. The government's Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme allowed employers to claim 80 per cent of an employee's usual salary for hours not worked, to a maximum of £2,500 per month. The scheme was extended four times and officially ended on 30 September 2021. The scheme has cost the government £69 billion.

Vacancies have increased since the onset of the pandemic. In June 2021, the numbers of hospitality employees was 11 per cent lower than in February 2020.

Like all hospitality venues across the country, those in Kingston have struggled to navigate various restrictions over the past two years. *impact.* spoke to employees working across four hospitality venues in Kingston to ask how their workplace navigated the pandemic.

Triple Two Coffee

This speciality coffee shop on Crescent Street serves ice coffee paired with lunches and snacks to-go. The shop had to shut down multiple times during the pandemic because of a shortage of staff and customers. One third-year student at Kingston University is a barista at Triple Two Coffee. She said: "Our shop only opened in April 2021, but we already saw a lot of employees leaving as we couldn't pay them."

"Now, our team consists of just six employees. With such limited staff, you need to adjust quickly. I woke up ill, but there was no backup employee that could take my shift, so I came anyway."

Joe & The Juice

Joe & The Juice in Kingston was opened in May 2021 by manager Syed Hamza Ali before he ran the Wimbledon location. At one point during lockdown, Joe & The Juice on

Wimbledon Hill was the only coffee shop open for takeaways. Even Greggs and Pret a Manger closed down.

He said: "The turnover in suburban places such as Clapham, Chelsea and Wimbledon was going through the roof. I remember one day in Wimbledon that we earned £3,000 pounds in one day, compared to £300 pounds prior to the pandemic."

"The increased turnover helped the company think about setting up new initiatives, such as mobile application."

“ I woke up ill, but there was no backup employee that could take my shift. So I came anyway

The Grey Horse

This long-established whisky and cocktail bar has been a brewery on Richmond Road since 1903. Manager Ionut Bratean said the pandemic was "pretty tough", but that the venue still managed to cope.

He said: "Instead of having less customers when we reopened, we got

more, which is still happening at the moment. It was pretty hard especially for our staff. They only received furlough for a maximum of 40 hours while doing over hours. But eventually, we reported an increase of 30 per cent turnover in 2021 compared to 2018."

Fortunella

Assistant owner of lunchroom Fortunella Marcella Yassine still remembers the shock she went through in March 2020, when the government announced restaurants needed to close down. "We were a very successful business at the time," she said.

"Every year we were growing. Initially, the support from government was really helpful. But compared to what we were usually making, it was absolutely inadequate."

"The furlough, that covered 80 per cent of employee wages, helped us to cope with the financial difficulties."

"We didn't have to make anybody redundant. In hindsight I think we only closed for one month. We changed our menus as well, when indoor dining was not allowed. People could only order sandwiches and coffee to go."

"What worked for us is that we battled through as a team. It was quite challenging, constantly reading upon all the changes on furloughs and adjusting to the ever-changing Covid rules."

Let's fly away: travel to take off in 2022

By **AYSHA GILMORE AND JAMES HOGG**

Almost two thirds of people in Kingston said that they felt confident about travelling abroad now that travel restrictions have started to ease in the UK.

A poll conducted by *impact.* found that over 63 per cent of residents felt more confident about booking a holiday abroad.

Around 35 per cent of people said they felt apprehensive about flying abroad this year, and just one and a half per cent were unsure about flying all together.

It comes as Heathrow said it was expecting some 45 million passengers to travel from the airport this year, up from 19.4 million in 2021.

The government announced in January that it was scrapping testing requirements for fully vaccinated arrivals from February 11, which may impact people's confidence as it makes travelling outside of the UK easier.

Covid had a serious impact on international travel but a successful vaccine uptake combined with reduction of travel restrictions means people can be optimistic about jet setting this year.

"As I am triple vaccinated, I'm not feeling too worried. I'm more excited than nervous as I was supposed to go in 2020 and it got cancelled," said Izzy Schulte, 21, from Weybridge.

Schulte is a third year Sussex University filmmaking student and enjoys travelling when it is safe to do so. This will be her first time travelling abroad since the summer of 2019.

In 2019, before the pandemic, Heathrow welcomed more than 80 million passengers and while this year isn't expected to reach those altitudes, the numbers are on a good trajectory for those who work in the aviation industry and for passengers.



Photo: Chine Nouvelle

Pandemic personalities

Covid has created a new normal for many. Danai Nesta Kupemba spoke to two students, Sasha Buwu and Antonia Thompson, to find out how the pandemic affected their personalities



Personality changes in lockdown Photo: Josph Fuller Unsplash

Overthinking was second nature to recent graduate Sasha Buwu before the pandemic. Intrusive thoughts about his past, present and future played every day on a never-ending loop in the 23-year-old's mind.

It was back in April 2020 (back when people thought the pandemic would last a few months) that Buwu decided he wanted to change.

He said: "I cared heavily about what other people thought and I always compared myself to others and this had a negative impact on me. It led to a lot of self-doubt and I didn't want to feel that way anymore."

Buwu said that, before the lockdown he was very introverted. He said his people skills were not-so great and that he never strayed very far from his comfort zone.

While the pandemic might have been thought of as an introvert's paradise, this wasn't the case for Buwu. Instead of indulging his introversion, he felt a stronger pull to connect and network.

He decided to stop shying away from the spotlight and create a fitness page on Instagram, exposing himself like he had never done before. He began posting images of his journey, tutorials and the workouts he did in the gym.

He said: "This gave me a sense of

new determination that ignited my spirit and spurred me on."

For Buwu, the most important change in his life was the self-love he had felt for himself. "I got to that point where I didn't care what other people thought; the only opinion that mattered to me was mine. When I started focusing on me that's when I found happiness," he said.

“

This gave me a sense of determination that spurred me on

Buwu is not alone in finding new and happier ways to approach his life. A Youth Link survey found that 45 per cent of 16 to 25-year-olds in the UK said that having time in the pandemic to retrain and learn new skills made them more optimistic and confident about the future. In addition, 56 per cent found that as a result of the pandemic they were more grateful for the life they have now.

Like Buwu, Antonia Thompson, 18,

was also introverted, but unlike Buwu she didn't find the extrovert within. During the pandemic, she became even more introverted and re-evaluated the friendships she had.

"I naturally distanced myself from people who weren't on the same journey I was on," Thompson said. She realised that a lot of friendships she had were out of habit, and unfulfilling. "I just wanted everyone in my circle to be meaningful."

Being alone gave her time to think about things more, and because she was an only child, she had a lot of time to herself.

Through social media she was able to create the kind of bonds she had been looking for and find people who understood and saw her for who she was. Social media was a huge tool in helping her find people without leaving her home.

Research by Berkeley University of California suggests that big events can impact personalities greatly such as bereavement, childbirth and, in this case, a global pandemic.

In his book *The Emotional Life of Your Brain* (2012), psychologist Richard Davidson said: "The brain is built to change in response to experience."

Lockdown fuels body insecurities

By EMMA CURZON

"I think it just piled up and eventually I cracked," said entrepreneur and CEO Chad Teixeira. Teixeira, 26, has struggled with his weight for many years and during lockdown his insecurities were amplified.

"It all just built up," he said, "and my mental health really, really, really took a turn for the worse."

He eventually travelled to Turkey for liposuction and 'tummy tuck' surgery. During the joint procedure, which is considered too dangerous in the UK, he needed two full blood transfusions to stay alive.

Teixeira wasn't alone in having negative feelings about his body. A 2020 study by the House of Commons Women and Equalities Select Committee found that 61 per cent of adults have negative feelings about their bodies most of the time.

Fifty three per cent said these feelings got worse during lockdown, with reasons including media discussions of 'lockdown weight gain' and pressure from social media to lose weight.

Yet, for some, the easing of lockdown restrictions seemed to have exacerbated issues with negative body image. Particularly for those gaining weight or whose body image worsened during lockdown. For instance, they might feel



Different women positive body image

Photo: Anna Shvets on Pexels

embarrassed, ashamed, and anxious about going out and socialising again.

Body positivity activist Helene Thyrsted (@_chubbydane on Instagram)

said it was important to question these insecurities. She said: "When I feel like my body looks worse, what does that actually mean?"

"Because it doesn't come from me. It comes from [society teaching me] that bigger bodies are worth less than smaller bodies."

For those who are still struggling, Thyrsted recommends diversifying social media feeds, swapping the Kardashians for more realistic bodies. "Just breathe, and follow real people who don't pretend to be perfect."

Licensed therapist and counsellor Fiona Corbett said we should consider what we like about our friends and loved ones.

"Usually, when I ask people that, they don't say 'I like them because they're slim'. We hang out with people because we get on well, because we connect with them, because we enjoy their company."

"We value people as a whole, not just the outside packaging."

Helene Thyrsted said: "Just being nice to yourself can actually go a long way." That includes everything from positive self-talk to taking time for self-care.

"Be gentle and reward yourself on bad days instead of trying to punish yourself, because you're already doing that enough."

Negative body image can contribute to eating disorders. If you are worried about your own or someone else's health, you can contact eating disorder charity Beat on 08088010677 or at beateatingdisorders.org.uk.

Covid vaccine sparks debate about taking the pill



The contraceptive pill Photo: Reproductive Health Supplies Coalition on Unsplash

The risk of blood clots caused by the AstraZeneca Covid vaccine has prompted an overdue conversation about the side effects of the contraceptive pill. Abbey Bamford investigates

On April 9 2021, the NHS cancelled all first dose appointments of the AstraZeneca vaccine for under 30s because of the risk of blood clots.

Blood clots are also a possible side effect of the contraceptive pill, which is used by more than 3.1 million women in England, according to figures obtained by The Guardian under the Freedom of Information Act.

The NHS was quick to react after concerns about the possible link between the AstraZeneca vaccine and rare blood clots led to a change in advice from Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation (JCVI).

This triggered a discussion about why nothing has been done to reduce the risk for pill-taking women, which is notably higher.

The consensus from women was that they feel a gender bias exists in medicine. impact. asked 60 female students if they thought women's health was a priority in the UK and 72 per cent said no.

First year sociology and criminology student Maisie Miller said: "I feel like because it only affects women there's not much research about it."

The genetic makeup of the pill has changed only slightly in the time that it has been around.

Founder and Editor of health website

The Femic, Monica Karpinski, said: "People say okay, we've been excluded from this for centuries. Why isn't there a better solution for us? Why are you prescribing us something you made in the 60s...why aren't there more options?"

Facts and figures

Oral contraceptives were approved by the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) on 23 June 1960

The Covid vaccine was first deployed in the UK on 8 December 2021

In the UK, blood clots have occurred in people taking the AstraZeneca vaccine at a rate of roughly one in every 250,000

Blood clots caused by the pill are estimated to affect one in every 1,000 women each year

The most common age that women start to take the pill is 16 and the reason for taking it is not always to prevent pregnancy.

Progesterone-only and non-hormonal methods of contraception have been developed, which do not increase the risk of blood clots, so why do women still take a medication which puts them at risk?

Dr Mel Davis-Hall, a GP from The Lowdown, the world's first contraceptive review platform, said: "Combined methods have some significant benefits, so some women choose to use these methods acknowledging the slight increased risks associated with them."

Benefits of combined pills (the most used form) include controlling bleeding, improving symptoms of Polycystic Ovary Syndrome, Premenstrual Syndrome and Endometriosis and treating acne.

What does this mean for the future of contraception?

The discussion about contraceptives triggered by the vaccine seemed to reach a premature and disappointing conclusion, a lose-lose-situation for women.

"It may be that we've done all we can with the combined pill and need to look at new ideas for contraceptives altogether," Dr Davis-Hall said.

First year fashion communications

student Annalise Gill said: "AstraZeneca was banned for certain people so quickly because of the risks however, the pill has been around for years, and nothing has been done."

However, experts in sexual and women's health from The Lowdown are keeping the conversation going and advocating for women everywhere.

Dr Fran Yarlett, a General Practitioner, said: "Undoubtedly throughout the history of medicine, there has been a male bias, especially in medical and pharmaceutical research funding and design.

"However, things are progressing, and we are helping to fight for change."

The 2021 Government Women's Health Strategy has collated ideas and opinions on how this can be improved.

The Lowdown collected responses from two thousand of our community users and have been invited to 10 Downing Street to drive the change.

In the meantime, Dr Yarlett suggested that by increasing education and funding for research, more can be done to ensure that young women are better informed.

"This is why The Lowdown was created," she said, "to allow people choosing contraception to learn from other's experiences alongside the medical and scientific information."

Lonely hearts: young people navigate post-Covid dating

By DANAI NESTA KUPEMBA
Young people are looking for love more than ever before, a new report has shown.

More than a third of young people are hoping to find love in 2022, according to popular dating app Happn. The report found that 37 per cent wanted a relationship and 32 per cent wanted marriage.

Change was an inevitable part of going through a global pandemic, from how we work and exercise to how we date.

During lockdown, 75 per cent of Generation Zs reported that they were single and not actively dating, choosing to use the time to get to know themselves better, a separate study by Vice Media Group found.

Being alone during lockdown made me realise I wanted someone to talk to

It's no surprise that people are looking for a relationship during the pandemic as many suffered from loneliness.

For Zora Kahn, 20, the pandemic changed her perspective on love and relationships. She said: "Being alone during lockdown and not talking to people made me realise I wanted someone to talk to. I just wanted someone to call 'baby'."

Tafara Kurewa, 26, said that loneliness reinvigorated his desire to find love.

He said: "Due to Covid restrictions most people have gone through an unusual period of isolation. It was lonely to be stuck in a house all alone. With the promise and security of vaccines, 2022 has given people hope to reconnect to the social part of humanity that had been lost. What better way to find our social footing once again than through love."

"The Mental Health Foundation reported that 24 per cent of UK adults experienced feelings of isolation and loneliness, especially those who couldn't be with loved ones."



Lockdown dating. Photo: Shingi Rice on Unsplash

KUFC returns to pitch



KUFC players can now resume playing competitive matches

By **CHRISTIAN MAYES**

Kingston University Football Club (KUFC) has begun to return to normality after being left unable to play for long periods of the pandemic.

KUFC president Kevin Gonzalez said he was relieved that the club, which was unfortunately forced to cancel its 2020/21 season, has now returned to training.

Gonzalez said: "As a sports team

during the pandemic, at first restrictions were much tougher on us.

"We were only allowed to take part in our sport after going through many safety precautions and following strict rules set by a newly appointed Covid safety officer at the club, which for many took some of the enjoyment out of playing.

"The fact that all matches were cancelled and then, further down the

line, all training sessions having the same thing happen meant many went months without being able to take part in the activity we enjoy."

Gonzalez said he was excited for the club to resume playing competitive matches when restrictions lifted.

"After the long wait for things to begin reaching normality again we are now starting to see the sport we all enjoy returning to what it once was

after this long wait, with both training and match days beginning to regain that true university football feeling it once had," he said.

KUFC have three men's teams and a women's team that competed in the British Universities and Colleges Sport leagues prior to the pandemic.

The football society holds training sessions and plays home matches at Tolworth Court Sports Ground.

Photo: Courtesy of KUFC

E-sports enjoy lockdown growth

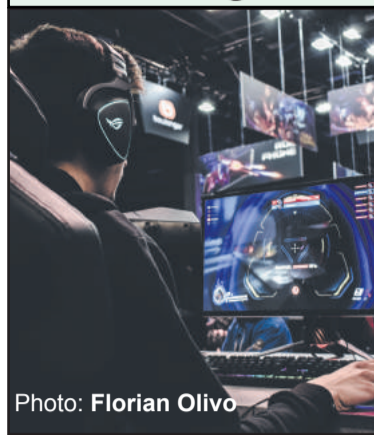


Photo: Florian Olivo

By **CHRIS GOMEZ**

While the world was in lockdown, the popularity of competitive gaming, known as e-sports, skyrocketed.

Manager at Belong Kingston gaming arena Adrian Lee said people needed a competitive outlet after live sports were suspended due to the pandemic.

"Everyone was at home and regular (live) sports were cancelled," he said. "People asked themselves what can we do in these circumstances? E-sports was the only answer because it can be done from home."

According to StreamElements and analytics company Rainmaker.gg, the number of users of streaming platform Twitch increased by over 45 per cent, with over 24 billion hours viewed over the course of 2021.

Lee said that the phenomenon of watching competitive gaming was a major factor in the growth of e-sports.

"Platforms like Twitch are huge. It's one of those things where you never feel like you're watching it alone, you truly feel integrated in the community through the interactive chat.

"I think that in the grassroots is where e-sports will find stability in the future. It all starts with friends wanting to watch their friends."

Fans help Kingstonian FC recover from pandemic

By **SAM GROVES**

Although non-league football clubs were forced to stop playing during lockdown, Kingstonian FC and its fanbase have gone to extraordinary lengths to support each other.

Kingstonian FC did not struggle as much as many other non-professional teams as it does not own its ground, meaning it has few fixed costs.

However, the club's main revenue streams from matchday income and season ticket sales effectively stopped. In spite of this, the club's supporters rose to the occasion to help their team.

John McKormack, chairman of the Kingstonian Supporters Club, said: "During the pandemic, there were very few requests for refunds from supporters. The vast majority of supporters helped the club, despite their own obvious hardship."

The Supporters Club raised over £10,500 for the club during the 2019/20 season.

It has also launched its so-called 12th Man Scheme where the fans' donations contribute directly to the playing budget.



Kingstonian FC fans at King George's Field

While the fans were providing financial support, the football club also helped by reaching out to provide emotional support for fans who needed it the most.

McKormack said: "During the pandemic, the Supporters' Club

reached out to isolated supporters, especially those without technology. The contact made during lockdown provided emotional support to vulnerable individuals."

The club has always been actively engaged in the community. Its

community liaison officer, John Bangs OBE, provides support for many charities in Kingston, notably Kingston Carers Network and MIND.

McKormack is keen to encourage Kingston's residents and student population to start supporting the club

and help support it whilst non-league football tries to get back on its feet.

He said: "Local people could come to a match at King George's Field. We have a good team pushing for promotion this season and a great atmosphere at the ground. Our rainbow flags fly at every home match to show that football at Kingstonian is for everyone."

While the quality of Premier League teams makes them the most watched in the world, McKormack believes that nothing matches the emotional connection between non-league fans and their teams.

He said: "By supporting a non-league team, you have the chance to feel that you are actually making a difference to the club. Success on the field is so much more enjoyable when you feel that you have been directly part of making it all happen."

Anyone can join the 12th Man Scheme by contacting supporters@kingstonian.com. In return, supporters can win prizes and meet fans and the team's manager, Hayden Bird, at monthly Zoom meetings.

Fulham FC Foundation rises to mental health challenge

In March of last year, Fulham FC Foundation set up a campaign to support people through lockdown stress and isolation. **Kieran Kelly** finds out how the supportive programme has helped participants to open up

When Covid struck, Laura Everton, health and development officer at the Fulham Football Club Foundation, was worried. Many of the foundation's participants were shielding and were left without vital support.

The team at the foundation felt forced into action. It already ran several support schemes before it decided to set up its 'More than a Game' programme in March 2021.

Taking place weekly, the programme offers adults the opportunity to play football for around 45 minutes, followed by a participant-led discussion about everyone's mental health experiences.

The need for such a programme was clear. One in four adults experienced mental distress for the first time in the pandemic, and almost 70 per cent of people who already suffered with mental health issues felt that lockdown had a negative impact on their mental wellbeing, according to Mind.

Everton said: "[The programme] is about using football as a hook to get people in to talk about mental health and their own experiences.

"It's a sport which involves lots of exercise and physical activity, which is key for improving your mental health. It's about using those things to open

the conversation a little bit more and bridge the gap in the community and the services that are currently out there.

"The love of the sport bonds people initially... people have that language shared already. It's so easy to have that initial bond and then here you go a bit deeper."

According to Cat Moran, who runs the sessions each week, the response was mixed at first, as people were onboard with the fitness aspect of the sessions but felt uncomfortable opening up afterwards.

She said: "There was a little bit of discomfort around talking about themselves in an organised way. As time has gone on, people have really started to value that time they set aside for themselves every week."

Moran added that in the sessions, there has been a big emphasis on participants supporting each other, with discussions aiming to develop coping mechanisms. In particular, the sessions have focused on positive health behaviours, including exercise.

Tony Saunders has attended the sessions weekly. For him, they were initially about fitness. He told *Impact*: "During the last part, we have the talk. When I first started I didn't really like that, but now I've got used to it and I

It's so heart-warming to see it all come together and see people genuinely enjoying themselves



The foundation has supported participants' well-being during Covid

Photo: Fulham FC Foundation

find it really helpful.

"You can talk about things, talk about yourself... about things you wouldn't talk about with anyone else."

Dave Saunders, Tony's friend, has been on a similar trajectory. He has always played football for its fitness benefits, but has never really considered what the sport could do for his mental health prior to the sessions.

He said: "This is a mental health programme, and I've been able to embrace it a little bit more as it's gone on.

"It wasn't my thing at first, but now I don't mind joining in and listening to a few of the guys."

After hearing the impact of her work with the foundation, Everton struggled to describe how much the programme's

success meant to her.

She said: "It's really hard to encapsulate... what that feels like. You feel so happy for those individuals and so privileged to work with people and be able to make that impact and do the jobs that we do.

"It's just so heart-warming to see it all come together and see people genuinely enjoying themselves... it's so

KU MMA athlete adopts lockdown training regime



Kingston student and MMA star Gita Walkup Photo: Gita Walkup

By **DAN NUTTMAN**

For Kingston University's mixed martial arts athlete Gita Walkup, the pandemic meant not being able to train as normal, forcing her to find ways of evolving her regime.

Walkup is a professional MMA fighter from Indonesia, holding a record of one win and one defeat from two professional fights since turning pro in 2017. She also competes in kickboxing and Muay Thai.

Her training changed dramatically due to Covid. "As my sports relied heavily on cardio, I did my runs in the morning, I utilised the emergency stairs when it was a total lockdown and when it was eased, for an exercise, my team managed to do runs in the park or stair sprints," she said.

Walkup, in her second year

studying Sports Science at Kingston, also said that the university helped her train. She said: "I was enrolled on the Kingston University Performance athlete programme and they have helped me acquire equipment to stay active and continued with my training at home during lockdown.

"I do my own weight programme at home thanks to the weights and equipment I acquired from the university's programme for performance athletes."

Walkup, who fights in the MMA ONE championship, has not been able to fight since the start of the pandemic due to restrictions on travel and the fact that she holds an Indonesian passport, which means needing a visa to fight in different countries.

She said it has been a frustrating

period: "I'm an Indonesian passport holder so that poses a lot of restrictions on travel as it requires a visa for every country, and right now, Indonesian passport requirements to get a visa is almost impossible."

In the meantime, she has remained active on social media, releasing training videos online.

She said: "Other than training, I coped by exploring my other passion which is baking and cooking. Also, I used my free time to connect with my support system, my family and friends."

Walkup has been dividing her time between training and her degree for the past two years. She took some time off from training in order to focus on her studies, but is now back to MMA on a full-time basis.

impact.