

Why Suffolk is one of the best places for uni students this year

University of Suffolk is 'wholly committed' to making student life as enjoyable and safe as possible for learners. By **Danielle Lett**



With many new university starters up and down the country placed under lockdown in their halls of residence, in Suffolk the return to campus has been somewhat smooth sailing, thanks to a blend of in-person and distance learning, alongside socially-distanced and virtual events.

University of Suffolk's chief operating officer and secretary to the board Tim Greenacre says students have been enjoying campus so far in a Covid-world – even though it hasn't been the typical freshers' life most were expecting.

"It's [the beginning of term] been really well-received, which is a relief because it's been operating under different circumstances. One of the things we've found is more people who find participating difficult, for one reason or another, are finding it easier to take part in social events now. The feedback from those attending has also been very positive, which is pleasing, because we didn't know what to expect."

With Suffolk currently having one of the country's lowest rates of coronavirus, students are currently able to mix safely across campus buildings – giving them a somewhat more normal studying environment compared to peers in other parts of the UK.

"There's no restrictions on movement here at the university, other than it must be done in a socially distant way," says Tim.

"Luckily in Suffolk, we're in a generally low-case environment and that applies to the university too. The university also doesn't own any student accommodation, but the accommodation providers we work with have issued pretty clear rules and standards of behaviour for their tenants, in order to ensure they keep as safe

possible. In terms of our own campus, we've also got increased cleaning rotas across our premises."

Once teaching officially commences, students will be able to access a mix of online and in-person learning, giving them the chance to meet in a safe and distanced setting.

"We're operating what we call a blended approach, which will be roughly 50/50, in terms of online and face-to-face activities. Large lectures are going to be conducted online, but there will be some on-campus support available, in much smaller groups," Tim adds.

The university's library is currently open, alongside a number of socially-distanced study areas students can book in advance. They are also able to access materials electronically.

Working closely with Suffolk's Public Health, the University of Suffolk has implemented a number of measures across its campus to ensure it is keeping track of who has been where, in the potential event of an outbreak.

"In addition to promoting the NHS Track and Trace app, we also have QR codes in all of our buildings. Because of the way we're managing how our staff and students come onto campus at any one time, we will know who should be attending and where they will have been. Just in case the technology fails, and we will always have a way of knowing who they were in close contact with. If and when an infection does happen, we will be prepared to respond effectively. All of the plans are in place, but it's good to know Suffolk has a generally low infection rate anyway."

In terms of support for students during such an unprecedented time, the university has made sure a number of its self-help and mental health services are



available remotely. "We've subscribed to a number of different services now, many of them online, to ensure students can access them in any scenario they may find themselves in," Tim says. "There's also always the overall university support service that's available for those who need it - and I expect we will need to respond to those demands as the academic year progresses."

What about making friends - an important and vital part of university life?

The university's Students' Union - which had spent months organising a mix of online or outdoors events before September - is looking to rerun some freshers' events held over recent weeks.

"Having some of the events again over a longer period, rather than being compressed into a

single week or two, will help the students settle in. So those who are starting later will be able to join in as well - but also people will be able to attend more social events that they would've done previously," Tim says.

With many students across the country having been told they may not be able to return home for Christmas, University of Suffolk is unable to say what the case will be during December - but it is committed to ensuring whatever the situation is, learners can still access their materials.

"That's unfortunately not down to the university, but is a question for the government. As I said, most of the university's students are not in residences anyway and are members of the local community - many of ours may be commuting in, or living at home.

"For those who are at residences, they're with private landlords, and it's not the university's call if they need to stay there, but it will be down to the government and public health agencies to judge the situation at the time. The sector is quite a diverse one, and one answer won't fit every university setting, simply because not all have large halls of residence."

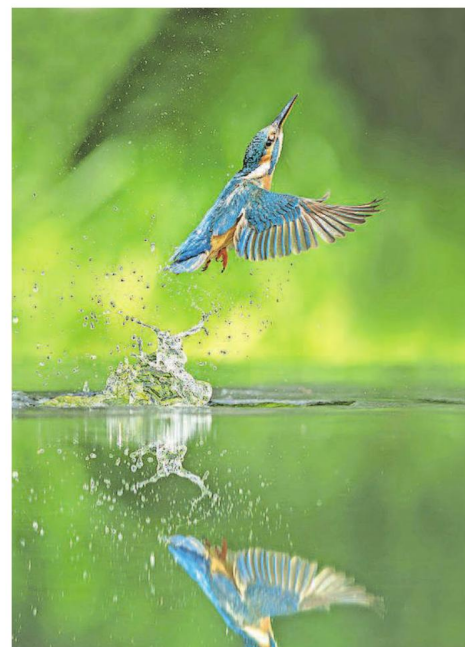
Whatever the outcome may be at the end of term, Tim is certain that the students at University of Suffolk will be guaranteed a top-class learning experience, and is dedicated to ensuring it can handle whatever Covid throws at them. "Whatever the scenario, whether its online or face-to-face, if there's an outbreak or not - we've still got to give them an education, and we're wholly committed to doing that."

Feature



Ipswich's University of Suffolk has commenced its 2020 academic year
 Pictures: UNIVERSITY OF SUFFOLK/ DAVID VINCENT

Below, Tim Greenacre, chief operating officer and secretary to the board for the University of Suffolk
 Picture: JAMES FLETCHER



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