

Higher Education: More than a Degree

Academic Communities

Case Study 2: ‘What a Good Place to be!’ – Virtual Scots Contract Law Happy Hour as a Means to Support Social Health of Students (and Staff!)

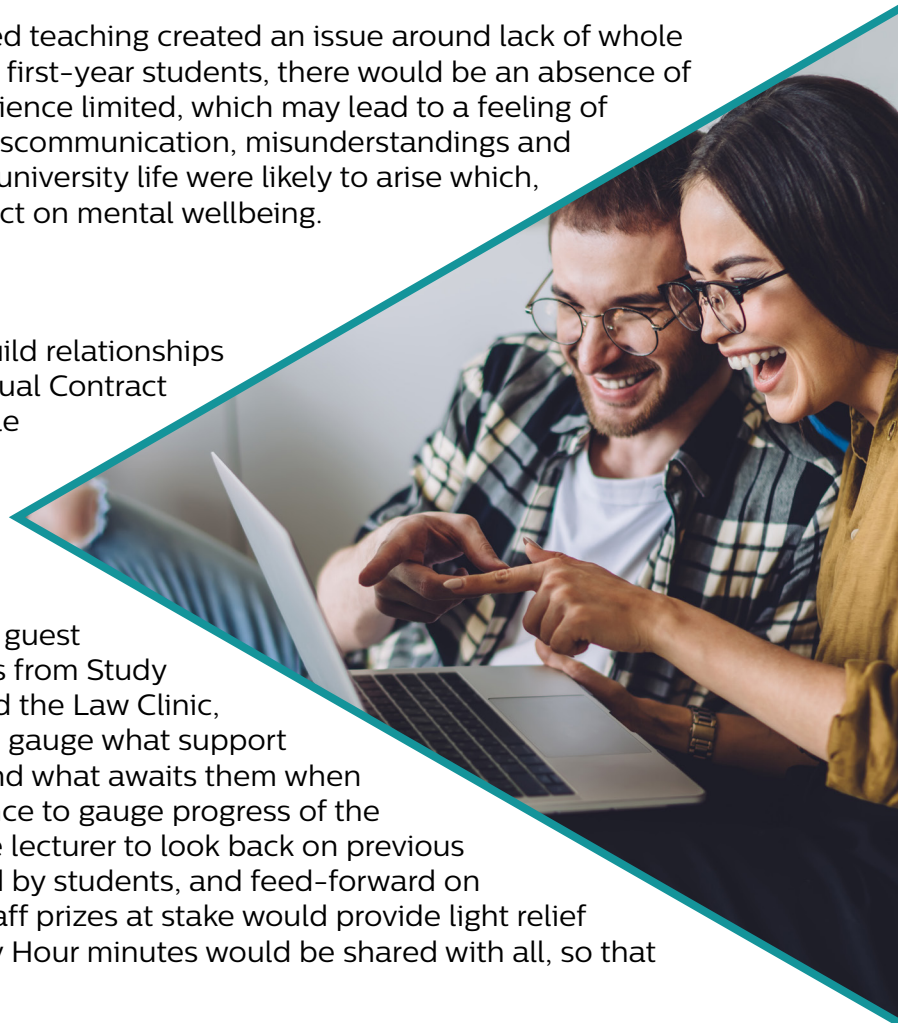
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What was the issue?

The move from in-person to online/blended teaching created an issue around lack of whole cohort student-staff contact. Especially for first-year students, there would be an absence of community and the student learning experience limited, which may lead to a feeling of isolation. In addition, potential issues of miscommunication, misunderstandings and an overall distance between students and university life were likely to arise which, in turn, could have a serious negative impact on mental wellbeing.

How was it solved?

To build the confidence of students and build relationships between students and the lecturer, the Virtual Contract Law Happy Hour was born, where the whole cohort (rather than small seminar groups) would have an opportunity to meet. Timetabled every Friday, it provided protected space for an open conversation on module content, assessment and more generally around studying law. In addition, guest speakers were invited, including colleagues from Study Skills Support, the Student Law Society and the Law Clinic, as well as alumni. This enabled students to gauge what support is available to them within the university and what awaits them when they graduate; it gave the lecturer the chance to gauge progress of the whole cohort. The Happy Hour allowed the lecturer to look back on previous subject matter and clarify any points raised by students, and feed-forward on events in the coming week. Quizzes with naff prizes at stake would provide light relief and add a specific social side. Short Happy Hour minutes would be shared with all, so that everyone was in the loop.



What comes next?

As per survey responses, it can be said that the Contract Law Happy Hour did fulfil its purpose in that it made students feel more confident in their studies for the specific module as well as their overall studies. It had a positive effect on the social health of both students and staff; a prime opportunity to build rapport based on regular and consistent interaction.

This is not just a one-module issue to be solved nor is it merely a law school issue. With continued blended learning inevitable and online courses consistently available, there will be a gap between student and university life and a detachment from everything that would come with being on campus. Therefore, by extending the Happy Hour concept to other modules, courses and schools, we may bridge this gap and create a community with all students regardless of how remote their learning. This may help build individual school communities (which, especially for the law school, is something that is already being aimed for) and will improve the learning experience of remote/blended students who wish to have better communication with their fellow students and staff.



Find out more

This case study is one of 13 published as part of the Student-led Project from the Resilient Learning Communities Enhancement Theme.

The project in year 1 explored issues and themes relevant to how higher education institutions and students' associations/unions have recreated student communities in an online environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, what enablers and barriers this has created, and provides the opportunity to showcase and share examples of practice.

You can find further case studies and resources on the [Enhancement Themes website](#).

