Abbey: What have been the main differences in your experiences of being a university student in 2020 compared to previous years? Well… a lot! Usually I'm doing university and I live right near the uni — five minute walk. I catch up with friends every single day. But then 2020 I had to move 600 kilometres away from university… Very isolated away from everyone.

Jeevan: Having online classes, not physically being at university, missing the social aspect. You're not sitting next to fellow students, instead you're in a Zoom call learning content with them. It feels much more independent in learning.

Ana: I think it's been more stressful this year. I think there've been a lot of outside worries with COVID health concerns and all sorts of other things.

Monica: With the online learning, I found myself less motivated to do work and do my lectures just because you're in the comfort of your own home. As a science student most of the work we do is through performing experiments and doing the work in the lab, so with the online learning we are unable to do that and most of the stuff that we do now is just through worksheets and trying to visualize what the experiments would be like how it will unfold. That's been especially hard for me because I'm a person that needs to do the experiments. Yeah, just not having those study groups, not being able to so easily interact with peers and ask questions even.

Abbey: Yeah, communicating with the lecturers and the tutors — I usually stay back after class and have a chat with them but that didn't happen…

Jeevan: There was some highs. I'm sleeping more… my sleeping patterns. Hours-wise is quite better. I've been able to use the transport time to actually study, so it will be an additional two hours I can study.

Ana: I quite like being involved in a Zoom meeting or a Skype meeting when all of a sudden the dogs are barking like crazy… not mine, I don't have dogs, I have a cat… but you know someone's dogs are just going nuts and you cannot hear a thing because these dogs are going crazy. And I like that side of it — I wouldn't change that. I think that in the absence of face-to-face relationship building within higher education — I think that's as close as we're going to get and sharing, you know, our pets and our studies, our backgrounds… Sharing our bad hair and our dressing gowns, you know, and our fluffy slippers. That’s as human as we can be, and that's good and that's important and I think that's okay. Everyone seems to be a bit embarrassed by their dogs barking or you know the fact that they're wearing fluffy slippers but I love it. I say bring on the fluffy slippers or whatever!

Monica: I've been able to work with the National Centre for Higher Education, which is this, and I think it's a good opportunity because by doing weekly vlogs and recording them I was able to just share and just take time to re-evaluate what I'm doing, and it reminds me that I'm not in this alone and I know that hundreds and hundreds of students out there are experiencing the same thing. That's the new opportunity that has opened for me because of the situation, so there's a good and bad side to it.

Abbey: I really got to know myself a lot more. Even my career aspirations and dreams have really kind of ignited during this time. I spent a lot of time with me, and spending time with me. So really opportunities definitely have come from that in that I really got to know myself more.

Ana: One subject I was doing um it didn't have an online classroom at all until COVID hit and then the tutor started utilising Microsoft Teams and we had a weekly online classroom.

Jeevan: It sounds very scary to do uni online, but it isn't… it isn't. It is a change but it's very manageable. Now if online learning does occur next year, it will definitely take some adjustment for the students and obviously at the start it might be difficult or hard to understand what to do or how to actually learn in that environment, especially when you're transitioning to university where there's a big gap between high school learning and university. In saying that, as time goes on, learning will become easier as the tutors will be more accustomed to assigning work online, with the processes, and the students will also know where to find their resources.

Monica: After COVID-19 is over, I feel like if we just go back to the way we were before there shouldn't be any real problems… it should be okay. But I do believe that more support is required for students, especially students from low socioeconomic areas because I know during this time a lot of them struggled. I know that during this time a lot of students weren't able to access any technology — they were unable to perform any work online and it was just hard for them just to get the work done. Because I know a lot of students would sometimes go to the local library and use the computers and technology there, whereas now, or before when the COVID-19 restrictions were in place, they weren't able to do that, or you know the family environment wasn't suitable for them to do any work. So I think having that extra support for students and just having more areas or places for them to be able to gain access to technology or materials would be very useful for them, especially in the situations like this where you know you can't really do anything about it.

Ana: I feel like universities have discovered just how much they can do online and just how much they don't need to do face-to-face and of course universities can do more online have more staff working from home in the future. You know, you only need one staff member to deliver to record one lecture as opposed to having multiple staff and multiple campuses delivering the same lecture. It's going to save universities a lot of money to move these things online, but I hope they don't. I hope they maintain the face-to-face, particularly with lectures. But I also think that online learning is going to benefit, so those students like myself that have been online the whole time, we're probably going to benefit as universities learn more and more about online delivery. You know, academics out there that have never taught online before have now got some experience with Zoom and Adobe Connect and Microsoft Teams so whatever software it is that they're using they have had that training now… they've got that experience. So I think that is a positive thing for online students everywhere.

Jeevan: Overall, I'd say wait see what happens, but it will be okay and learning will still happen and it will just get better the more you utilise the online space. Learning will become… it might become the new norm but it will definitely become easier and more manageable for students.

Abbey: I think this has taught us a lesson that we really don't know what can happen in a year. As much as we have big plans and big goals, being able to be flexible and adaptable is a really important skill, not only in university but in life. But also to just take every opportunity that comes. So whether that… I don't know… even for me, I wouldn't be speaking to you guys now if I didn't take an opportunity. We don't really, after this year, we just don't know what the next years hold for us, so being flexible but taking every opportunity so that comes to you.