The University of Hertfordshire gives students and staff a platform to respond intellectually and creatively to the impact of the current global pandemic.

The University of Hertfordshire took a unique, and forward-thinking approach in response to the pandemic, by launching the project ‘A Changed World’.

‘A Changed World’ provided Herts students and staff with the opportunity to create something creative, considered, and imaginative, which captures their response to the pandemic.

Matthew Weait, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, who joined the University of Hertfordshire just two weeks before England went into its first Lockdown, conceived of the idea during the national spring lockdown. Alongside Jo Ahlberg, Project Coordinator, they worked to create a welcoming space where students and staff could express their experience and views while connecting with one another in a meaningful way.

Wanting to celebrate the university’s achievements while also providing a platform to continue an important community discussion about current global affairs, Matthew Weait said, “there were two things [we wanted to do] one was to create a platform which would enable students and staff to respond based on their personal experience and what mattered to them, creatively, imaginatively, academically.

“And sort of to be able to do that in a way that was safe and exciting and would showcase, if you like, the very qualities I was talking about. About you know, people’s positive response and progressive response to a very challenging situation. But also, to have a platform where they could be honest about the challenges and talk about the difficulties that they had experienced and share those.”

As a part of the project, the university hosted a virtual event, ‘University-Wide Make-Along’ allowing students across the university to participate and learn from creative experts. This event included, a video making session with media lecturer, James Nichols, sketching with a textile artist, Harriet Riddell and a creative writing session with, Stevie Kilgour.

Joanna Ahlberg, who co-ordinated and designed the Make-Along, said, “the scope of the workshop along with the level of interactivity meant that it pushed the boundaries of teaching and learning excellence. It was a privilege to be involved, but more than that, it was humbling to have such a meaningful experience of connectivity with so many from every corner of the Herts community.”

Submissions for the project have been uploaded on to the University’s website, in the hope that future generations of Herts students can reflect on the work their institution undertook during this time with pride.

Matthew Weait said, “[we wanted] to create from that almost like an archive of the universities experience of this time in a digital format that could then be part of the university's history, so that so that it wouldn't be forgotten.”

The collections are available to view on the University of Hertfordshire website, and some pieces are available on their YouTube page, ‘A Changed World’.