



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

**15<sup>th</sup> January 2021**

## **Supporting you through Covid-19 restrictions**

**To: all on-campus students**

Dear student,

I wrote to you all last Friday about the new [stay at home regulations](#) that came into force across Scotland on Tuesday 5th January and the impact this will have for many of you.

The Principal, and I, and indeed everyone at the University realise how disruptive, frustrating and stressful the ever-changing and more severe restrictions will be for many of you. But I'm sure you will appreciate that we are acting in your best interests at all times, and that the changes are being taken considering the latest Scottish Government guidance to reduce the transmission of the Coronavirus.

What I wanted to say to you first and foremost is that by far the best thing to do, following guidance from government, is to **stay at home**, unless you have to attend campus for critical purposes or activities such as in-person teaching and only when you have been contacted by your School or supervisor. And if you do need to be on-campus, remember that face coverings are now mandatory in many areas, so please see our [Covid-19 webpages](#) for full details and exemptions.

I wanted to take the time to update you on the support that's available to you during this difficult period, no matter where you are currently living – whether it's academic support, mental health and wellbeing, or support for anyone in accommodation. I also wanted to update you on our plans for assessment. Apologies in advance that this is a long email – but I want to be sure that you're aware of everything that you can access. Full details of all of the support mentioned below are available on our website, so please do take a look:

### **[Semester 2 guidance](#)**

#### **Travel and accommodation**

In line with ongoing changes to the [Scottish Government guidance](#), we've already let you know that UG and PGT students – including international students – must **not** return to their term-time accommodation until such time as on-campus teaching resumes, other than in specific special circumstances.

If you are an Undergraduate or Postgraduate Taught student staying in University of Edinburgh accommodation and if you are not currently living there, you won't need to pay rent from 11 January 2021 until either the date you return or the date that your in-person teaching begins, whichever is earlier, and you can apply for a [rent pause](#). A prime reason for us making this concession was to ensure that you were facilitated and encouraged to not return until there is a

reason to do so – primarily that you have campus-based learning activities as permitted by current guidelines. Please read through the full travel guidance that we've posted on our website. All that said, if you are staying in University-managed accommodation then we will fully support you when you are here. To help us do this, please keep your term-time address up-to-date by [updating your details](#).

Despite the clear instruction from Government, we are also aware that some students are still planning to come back to Edinburgh even though their on-campus teaching elements won't be happening for some time. Please help us to keep everyone safe and help stop the spread of the virus by **not returning until you've been given a date by your School which confirms when they are planning to resume campus teaching**.

For this reason, we will shortly be asking students to notify us before you travel and to let us know why you think you should be able to travel back to Edinburgh under the current restrictions. If you do return to campus and if you have no scheduled teaching or no other extenuating circumstances, then you will potentially be in breach of the law. Details of this process will be circulated shortly and I really appeal to you all to work with us on this. If you think you must travel in the next few days, please seek advice for now from the [Covid Contact Centre](#) or call our Hotline on +44 (0)131 370 0494. The hotline will reopen at 10am on Monday morning and we will respond to email and web enquiries after the weekend.

Finally, I have to remind you all that if you are in Edinburgh – wherever you are living – you are subject to the prevailing lockdown. You must stay at home. You must not meet with others outside of your household within the home. And you must not meet with more than one other person from another household outside the home. These rules are true for you, for me, for everyone. Please abide by them.

### **Student services and support**

Your mental health and wellbeing is an absolute priority. A range of support is available to you, no matter where you are currently living.

- [Accessing support](#)
- [Support in a crisis](#)
- [Student counselling](#)
- [The Listening Service](#)
- [Activities and Events](#)

If you're struggling, please do speak to someone – I cannot stress this enough – whether it's to your personal tutor, your School's student support team, or by using one of the services above. You can also use EdHelp to get answers to common questions and for more information on student services:

[EdHelp](#)

If you are worried about your finances, a range of hardship funding is available to support you: [Hardship funding](#)

### **Academic support**

Library and study space facilities are currently restricted, with strict health and safety measures in place for those students who are already on-campus and who need to visit our library sites. However, you must only visit these facilities for **critical or essential reasons** and where online

and digital services don't currently support you. There are exceptions in place to support our most vulnerable students.

Only then, if you do need to visit our library sites or study spaces, please make sure you adhere to face covering and distancing rules at all times. Next week we will introduce a new Scan and Deliver service which will further reduce the need to visit libraries in person – further details are to follow.

Full details on libraries and study spaces are available below:

- [Study space restrictions, guidance and support](#)
- [Library opening hours](#)

We also have a medium and long term laptop loan scheme, available for anyone who doesn't already have a device or if your current device does not support teaching requirements:

[Laptop loan scheme](#)

For any queries regarding the above, please visit [EdHelp](#).

### **Fair assessments**

Many of you have written to me and the Principal and signed the online petition about the academic challenges you are facing and how assessments can be fair, particularly now that the majority of learning and teaching will take place digitally throughout January and February. In particular some of you are keen that we reintroduce so-called “no-detriment” policies, as happened at the end of the last academic year.

This was an emergency measure, and while it is true that we are still in the pandemic, it is also true that we always – always – operate assessments and grading in a way that sets out to maximise the opportunity of all students to demonstrate their knowledge, even where getting that knowledge has been impacted by events. It is also important to me that we do not have special measures in place any longer than we need to – the University has been committed to ensuring the value of your degree is as high as ever, and the best way to do that is to make sure we have things as normal as possible. This is not just us – the [Russell Group](#) has clarified a position around the approach to assessment and we were involved in those discussions.

That said, the current situation isn't ‘normal’ and we have heard your constructive and deeply felt views that you must be assessed in a way that is fair for everyone. Part of that is to ensure that we can provide greater transparency to you about how the assessment process works normally which will, of course, take into account the exceptional circumstances faced by all of our students this year. A working group, including representation from the Students' Association, is already working on this and will report to myself and the Principal, and we will be able to share our approach as openly as possible. Further details on assessment will be made available too through the [Covid-19 FAQ pages](#).

### **Issues We Are Working On**

I hope that this is all helpful. I'll keep contacting you with further information about the support that's on offer once we have further guidance from the Scottish Government. In particular, we are working with our Schools to provide greater clarity on the dates for returning to the campus-based elements of your teaching programme. We will refine our plans in the coming days and I hope to

email you next week with greater detail. But I wanted to end this message by reassuring you that we have your best interests in all of our plans, and if you are anxious about these issues, please bear with us and know that we will do all we can to ensure you have the full information you need to make choices about finishing the Semester.

In the meantime, if you have any questions not covered on our webpages, please feel free to [email us](#) or call our Hotline on +44 (0)131 370 0494. The hotline will reopen at 10am on Monday morning and we will respond to email and web enquiries after the weekend.

Best wishes,

**Professor Colm Harmon**  
**Vice-Principal Students**