



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

23rd September 2020

Welcome to the new academic year

To: all students

Dear student,

Since March we have been planning for Semester 1, which is now upon us: my sincere thanks for all the hard work by huge numbers of people to make those preparations, taking as many steps as possible to ensure everyone's safety and wellbeing. A warm welcome to all new and returning students and a fervent wish that those that have not already been able to join us here in Scotland's capital will soon be able to do so. This Semester will be different from any before, and I recognise that for our first year students it follows a hugely disrupted last year at secondary school and a summer of uncertainty. Regrettably the uncertainty is not over: new restrictions have been introduced today by the Scottish Government and by the time you read this, government guidelines might have altered again because the situation is ever-changing. We all realise that this pandemic is going to be with us for some considerable time to come.

My colleagues and I are committed to providing the best possible student and staff experience that we can, whilst prioritising everyone's health and safety. Our plan, as we have been saying since March and now borne out by timetabling and the latest information from our Schools, is to provide a "hybrid" mixture of online and in person teaching, with the proportion of the latter as high as allowed by the combination of safety considerations, availability of suitable rooms and results of consultation with staff and students. There will be variation across Schools, subjects and year groups but the mission is unified: an Edinburgh degree will be as valuable as it has been for over four centuries.

The start of the new academic year is a cause for celebration. Our world class teachers and researchers have adapted magnificently to the changed circumstances and are ready to maintain the standards of excellence that we all cherish. The University of Edinburgh's core mission of excellence in learning, teaching and research will never be blown off course by external events. We have navigated many challenges during our history, and we will adapt to this one and emerge even stronger.

Our University has made [huge contributions](#) in recent months to the understanding and management of the pandemic and its consequences. Our researchers have contributed to the development of new treatments; led studies to understand why some people are much more severely affected than others; worked on the social and economic consequences of the pandemic; some have switched laboratory function to provide viral testing, develop personal protective equipment, novel hand sanitisers etc; our final year medical students graduated early so that they could fulfil their desire to join the healthcare workforce combatting the virus in our hospitals and clinics; several of our academic staff have been providing high-level advice to governments and the World Health Organisation. We all have much to be proud of in the many ways that our University has responded to the unprecedented challenges posed by the pandemic.

There are so many reasons to be in Edinburgh. We sincerely hope that further lockdowns will not prevent those of you new to Edinburgh, and those that haven't had time in previous years to sample all of the delights of the city and the surrounding region, the countryside and our beautiful clean air; the history of the city; the cultural excellence of our museums and galleries etc. There are also many parts/functions of the University itself that you might wish to explore:

- Visit [St Cecilia's Hall music museum](#) - Scotland's oldest concert hall - or [Talbot Rice Gallery](#) (which will reopen in autumn);
- Engage in interesting lecture series or discussions that will take place online: e.g. the [Andrew Carnegie Lecture Series](#)
- See students' wonderful creations at [ECA's online Degree Show](#)
- Explore the University's incredible [digital archive](#) of its collections, which can enhance studies and can unearth previously unknown stories from history
- Read books hand-chosen by University staff and students as part of the UK's oldest literary awards, the [James Tait Black Prizes](#).

Stay safe whilst being here; take care of yourself and of others; be responsible citizens. Please do observe the [latest guidance](#) and recognise that this is everyone's problem. By working together and respecting one another's needs and wishes, our University community can be stronger than ever.

Welcome to Edinburgh those of you that are new; welcome back to those that are returning. This is one of the world's great universities in one of the world's great cities. We are all still wondering what the next twists and turns of the pandemic will be, but major efforts have been made in the last six months by large numbers of dedicated and committed people to maximise your opportunities to flourish here, to enjoy yourselves and to continue to make the world a better place. My very best personal wishes to you all,

Peter