



To: Rent Justice Edinburgh
11th March 2021

We know that this year has been extremely difficult and we thank our students for their patience. We understand that for some, their experience in our University accommodation might not have been as we had intended it to be. We are doing our best to adapt and create an environment where students feel safe and happy, as they have done in previous years – and we know that there will be instances where we have got things wrong. We have listened to student feedback and have fixed a number of issues with our WiFi, as well as the teething problems we had with food packs for those self-isolating.

Listening to you, we have accelerated the work to replace and significantly upgrade the Wifi and internet in all of our halls of residence. We have invested considerable money and resources to ensure this work is done swiftly. We've installed new wireless access points and upgraded the switches and internet bandwidth. We are now $\frac{2}{3}$ complete, with the remaining halls due to be upgraded by the first week of April. Following the one-day outage required to conduct the work, we have seen a doubling of speed and a very significant increase in reliability in the upgraded Halls.

We have also adjusted our Library services with the introduction of Scan & Deliver and our Click and Collect services to allow access to printed Library material. We have consulted with students about study spaces. As of 8th March, we have – in consultation with the Scottish Government – opened 40 George Square with an additional 200 bookable study spaces. We have also raised the cap on booking study space from 20 hours a week to 30 hours a week. We must however continue to adhere to the government's guidance which means all spaces remain restricted to absolutely essential use only.

Staff across the University have worked incredibly hard to enable us to keep our accommodation open – and safe – throughout the pandemic. This included the winter break, which saw hundreds of our students stay on campus. We are not making a profit from our accommodation and this service is in fact costing more to run than previous years, as a result of additional requirements and staffing to ensure all facilities remain Covid-19 compliant.

We respect the right for students to campaign, however we must also reiterate the terms in our accommodation contracts. Withholding rent payments is a break of contract and the University does reserve the right to recover any outstanding debt such as late payments or penalties.

I also wanted to reiterate the different options we have had in place for students who are contracted with University-managed accommodation:

- For students who needed to return to campus during this Semester for in-person teaching activities or other significant extenuating circumstances, we have been offering rent pauses between 11 January and 8 February. Students whose applications are successful will receive a rebate for this period soon.
- For all other students, we have actively promoted the guidance that students should not return to our campuses during Semester Two. Travel, other than for a limited list of essential reasons outlined by the Scottish Government, remains against the law.

We have therefore offered lease breaks to students who aren't staying in their

University-managed term-time accommodation and continue to waive the 28-day notice period. We have also recently confirmed to students by email that those with a current University lease who have not returned to their accommodation and requested a lease break before 28th February, will have the break in their lease and the rebate backdated to 11th January.

We continue to strongly encourage students who do not wish to pay for rent to apply for a lease break. While we know that many students might be holding off in anticipation that they can return to Edinburgh once restrictions ease, the University is happy to reinstate any contracts if students wish to return to their accommodation at a later date and guidance allows— either to their original room or a room of a similar standard and price.

For those who are currently staying in our accommodation, we ask students to get in touch if they are unhappy. Your feedback is needed so that we know if we are getting things right, or where we need to look to make improvements.

Michelle Christian
Accommodation, Catering and Events