



23 October 2020

Response to student protest taking place on Saturday 24 October 2020

Thank you for taking the time to write to me about these important issues. Before I address your concerns directly, I would like to underline the point that the University of Edinburgh is still providing a world-class education for our students, and a degree from Edinburgh will remain as valuable as it has been for more than 400 years.

I know that your experiences – both on and off campus – will not have been like that of any previous year. However, I want to reassure you that our staff are working tirelessly to give you as much support as possible, and we are constantly looking at ways we can improve.

Hybrid Learning

My colleagues and I are continuing to have productive meetings with student groups, which have included constructive feedback about the way things have gone so far. This feedback is crucial in ensuring we get things right, and we are looking to act upon this as best we can.

Much of the focus of these meetings has been on increasing in-person and digital teaching that is 'synchronous' – meaning it's delivered in real time.

In-person teaching has been taking place on campus, and many of our lecturers have been providing synchronous teaching. We are delivering more than 95,000 hours of teaching this semester and more than 35,000 hours of this is scheduled to be on campus. More than 12,000 synchronous sessions were launched in the first week of teaching, which is an increase of 881 per cent on the same period last year and represents over 90,000 attendees. More than 3 million minutes of content was viewed in the first five days of teaching alone.

However, we recognise that there is variation in the balance of synchronous and asynchronous activity, and variation in the level of in-person teaching across Schools. We have urgently asked Schools to prioritise, for the rest of this semester and for the next semester, their activity in this regard, to focus on where they can increase the engagement that can bring classmates together for teaching, for intellectual interaction and debate.

Rent reimbursement

Throughout the pandemic, we have been working closely with Public Health Scotland and taking advice from the Scottish Government to ensure that all appropriate measures are in place to safeguard our students, this includes those in our student accommodation.

We continue to believe it is important for our students to be in Edinburgh to receive some in-person teaching, make use of our world-class library and resources, meet and make friends with fellow students and enjoy our beautiful, safe, historic city.

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When students are asked to self-isolate due to Scottish Government and NHS advice, we have staff working 24 hours a day to provide those in our catered and self-catering residences with three meals a day – including heated meals – in line with their dietary requirements and preferences, as well as delivering other essential items.

At the beginning of semester, some of the needs of our students in University accommodation were not adequately met, and we have apologised for this. This week, we have also provided all students living in our accommodation a £50 voucher to spend in a range of outlets of their choosing. We do not plan on offering any further reimbursements.

If a student feels they want to leave University accommodation, we are being flexible and are not holding them to their 28 day notice period. However, I would encourage any student considering this to speak with their personal tutor or a member of our team on site before making such a decision.

Student support

We are greatly concerned about the mental impact that the pandemic may have on our students, and want to ensure that they are aware of the range of support available to them.

Our Listening Service is available 24/7 for students who want to talk to someone about any concerns or anxieties. Students in University accommodation are advised to speak with an RA or Warden who can provide face-to-face support in the first instance. More details on the support available to students can be found in our [Mental health and wellbeing support webpages](#).

With regards to your question about hosting in-person events with groups of students – within current Scottish Government guidance, only two households of up to six people can currently meet outside. This means that holding such events would be against this guidance and not something we are able to do.

We appreciate that things are difficult, but we do have a range of events hosted online to help students stay active, connect with fellow students and keep busy. These will be updated and change as Government guidance develops.

I hope this goes some way to address and answer your concerns.

We will continue to listen to our students and keep you up-to-date with any developments. We want to be as open and transparent as possible with all of our students and staff so, given your demands were published online, I will also publish this response on our public webpages here: <https://www.ed.ac.uk/news/covid-19/emails>.

With best regards,
Peter

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