Peter Mathieson

I’m Peter Mathieson. I’m the Principal of the University of Edinburgh, and it's great pleasure to welcome you to this meeting of what we called parents and supporters for an information session. This would be a really important time of the year and a time of great uncertainty and concern for parents and supporters of both new and continuing students if it wasn't for the coronavirus pandemic, but obviously in the context of the pandemic everything is magnified.

A number of issues have been highlighted by the pandemic which are new to us and to you and we've been working on developing responses to them. So what we aim to do in the next hour is answers many of your questions as we've obviously had some pre submitted questions. What we've done with those - we've clustered them into areas of relevant expertise and asked our speakers to address particular subject areas around those questions because there are obviously a lot of shared interests among some of the questions that have been submitted.

We also have a facility for you to submit questions live during the meeting and we've got people who are going to be analysing those questions and clustering them and bringing them to us to answer in the second half of the meeting.

So that's the way it's going to work, I'm just going to start with some brief general remarks for myself and then I'll pass on to Gavin Douglas, whose name you see on the screen, Gavin is Deputy Secretary for Student Experience.

So I really wanted to say was two or three things about the sort of general position as I said at the University of Edinburgh right now on this particular day. First of all, I do really want to emphasize the welcome message. I mean, we have throughout the pandemic wished to emphasise that the University is open and ready to receive both new and returning students on schedule and aiming to provide the very best possible experience for them in the safest possible circumstances. And of course, we are also concerned about the safety of our staff and the safety of the broader community in Edinburgh and beyond, so we’ve been aiming to balance those competing requirements and to come up with proposals which will give the best possible outcomes for everybody. But it's a very dynamic process, the situation changes day-to-day, obviously in the last few days we've been very distracted by the admissions issues and the regrading of exams, but throughout all of this, we've been trying to keep our focus on the issues around Semester One which starts very soon and which I think most of the people on this call will be primarily concerned about.

We genuinely believe that a University of Edinburgh degree will be as valuable for our current students and for any new students coming to join us as they have been for the last four centuries, so we don't see any risk that University of Edinburgh will be diminished in any way by what's going on.
We are trying our best to ensure that people have the best quality experience and within the parameters of safety, but the end result which will be in Edinburgh degree, will carry great value for the rest of our graduate’s lives and we don’t think anything that’s happened in recent months will do anything to diminish that - and so that’s a source of great confidence for us.

We’ve tried to be honest through all of our communications. I will try to be honest with you tonight where there is uncertainty. We will tell you that it’s uncertain and we won’t try and pretend that we can be certain about things. For example, I can’t tell you when the next outbreak of Coronavirus will be in Scotland, in Edinburgh, anywhere else in the world, but we can prepare and we’ve got various contingency plans for various eventualities. But we can’t know with any certainty. We’ve talked about a hybrid approach to delivery for the next semester. What we mean by that is that it’ll be a mixture of presentation technologies. There will be some people meeting face to face and some people meeting in small groups. There will be some people meeting predominantly digitally. And that will be true for teaching and assessment and a lot of interactions between students and staff. And indeed between students and other students. The precise proportion that will be online versus face to face is difficult to define.

We’ve got various models as to what we think we can achieve safely with social distancing and with the requirements of protecting everybody’s safety but we can’t be absolutely precise about it. Then we won’t pretend that we can, but we will prioritise safety.

The other thing in my final remarks really is that I genuinely believe that people coming to Edinburgh can have a great time and they can have a great time safely. You’re going to hear about the sports offerings from the university from Katie Macdonald in a moment, you’re going to hear about all the things that the Students’ Association do from Ellen MacRae, and you’re going to hear about the efforts from going on there.

So I’ve already mentioned that from my colleague, Colm Harman about the efforts that we’ve made to adapt offerings and make sure that they’re provided safely too.

We’re doing our best. We will be flexible. We will be reasonable. We will be honest with you if we get something wrong, will apologise and will learn from it. But we can’t pretend that we will get everything right, so on that basis we’re going to move into the next presentation, which will be from Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary of Student Experience whose particular going to address some of the pre submitted questions around aspects of his portfolio. So Gavin, with that I’ll pass over to you.

Gavin Douglas

Thank you very much Peter, and good evening everybody.

I’m Deputy Secretary of Student Experience. That may not mean very much, so I’m responsible for the student services at the University, Counselling, Disability, Careers - these kind of services. I’m also responsible for student administration that includes Student Immigration, so I will be touching on the issue of CAS issuance and Visas which I know is worrying and troubling.

My main focus today is going to be trying to address as many answers as I can on the questions that you submitted before this evening and there will be a strong focus on COVID-19 preparations within the university.

I’m going to start with accommodation and obviously we appreciate there’s a huge amount of uncertainty at the moment with regard to travel with flights either restricted or very difficult to get hold of in many parts of the world at the moment. So one of the key things that we need to stress is
that for those of you applying for University of Edinburgh accommodation, we have introduced considerable flexibility with contracts for those who can't arrive in September and that flexibility is that either we will release your students from their lease if they are unable to travel due to COVID-19 or we will hold that room for them without charge until they are able to arrive in Edinburgh. So that's the flexibility that we've introduced in response to that uncertainty out there. Similar kind of flexibility arriving early is absolutely fine and we would encourage that in many cases.

We recognize that for some of your students, they will be traveling from parts of the world which means they need to self-isolate on arrival for 14 days and there will be support available for those students in University accommodation. That would include meal deliveries for those on catered accommodation, 24/7 online support from Residence Life team and so on. So really we will be looking out for your students, particularly if they need to self-isolate. Of course we look out for all our new students in general anyway. The Residence Life team will be putting on a program of both virtual and face to face activities to encourage students to get to know each other in safe ways on arrival in accommodation and in all parts University. There will be increased cleaning but public areas for high touch points within accommodation. We have of course new physical distancing measures in all public areas. Those physical distancing measures are two metres in Scotland, by the way, so it's still quite strict and not relaxed compared to other parts of the UK.

So I remember 10 years ago dropping my daughter off at Pollock Halls when she started a degree at Edinburgh and there was a huge flurry of students and families all piling into the accommodation at that point that is not going to happen this year. Obviously we are working on staggered arrival times to make sure that the volumes are students arriving in accommodation are manageable and can be kept at a safe distance. We do have Christopher Tucker, Director of our Residence Life team, on the call today so if you have more questions about accommodation, Christopher will be able to answer those later.

I appreciate of course, although many of you will be looking to put your students into university accommodation, some of you may be looking to arrange private accommodation and we are currently finalising our arrangements to support students who need to self-isolate in private accommodation. It won't be quite such a full service as in the University of Edinburgh accommodation but we will be looking to keep an eye on those students to reach out to them on a regular basis. And to help them with any issues, particularly food that might be problematic in the first 14 days. So we'll be publishing details of those plans very shortly.

I want to say a few words about Welcome Week which is from the 14th of September until the 18th; the week before teaching formally starts. Of course, many students may arrive before Welcome Week and some students will out of necessity arrive after Welcome Week. We recognize that and it's not a requirement to be here, but for those who can be here, the key point to make is that there's a huge range of activity being plans and full details are on that website www.ed.ac.uk/new-students and indeed repeated on each of my slides.

Students, of course, need to register when they start their degree at the University. That registration process is live already and your student should be sent a link to allow them to do that.

The Principals Welcome is normally a high point of the Welcome Week with a grand ceremony in the McEwan Hall. We can't do that this year due to social distancing, but we will do equally grand, I'm sure, Welcome video with a number of guest speakers live from 9:30 on Monday the 14th and I would encourage your students and indeed you to tune into that if you can to hear that welcome - a key part of Welcome Week.
For all students making their final course choices (or what we are called the modules in different countries), the ones that make up the degree program we would usually have a face to face Course Options Fair for students to get advice on this, but we are producing a Course Options Hub instead that is live now and will include a combination of live and more recorded resources to help students make their course choice for their first semester.

There is a similar website made available for postgraduate students who will also need to find out about the opportunities available to them.

Individual schools would be making different arrangements for orientating and inducting their new students, and details of those will be provided by the schools. So I'm not going to go into those now.

A number of you have asked about how students will be supported and prepared to take part in this new hybrid world that Peter is just mentioned. We are producing a number of new courses which are available on Learn - which is our virtual learning environment. These will be available from early September and includes two key courses that we've developed from scratch to help students.

One is called Preparing for Study - we take them through all the things that we need to think about in terms of engaging effectively with hybrid education and another is called LibSmart which is to help students understand access to library and resources in the library and how to make best use of those.

Of course, during Welcome Week and beyond, will be a range of hybrid social and sports events most of them organised by Sports Union and our Students’ Association. And you'll hear more about those. I'm sure from Ellen and Katie shortly.

So keeping safe on campus is clearly a critical issue for many of you, and that's absolutely understandable. As I said before, we are in Scotland and this government is responsible for setting its own guidance based on specialist advice on how to manage health and safety during Covid and the rules in Scotland are therefore different from the rules that you may be familiar with, from England, different sides of the border, Wales, Northern Ireland and so on, let alone different from other parts of the world.

So, we will be observing 2 metres physical distancing inside all university buildings, including in all classrooms. If you look at that picture on the right of the screen that some of our Estates colleagues setting up one of our lecture theatres. Those little green dots that you can see on the desks; those are where students will be allowed to sit. There will be nobody sitting in between those dots, so you can see that 2 metres has two effects. Actually, it means that students are kept well apart from each other, enhancing health and safety. It also gives us a real headache in time taken, as you can see how many spaces we now have to contend with. Nonetheless, that's what we're doing. There will be queuing as students arrive for classes - and that would be physically distance queuing. We're all getting used that I think outside shops and stores around the world. It would be physically distanced and will be putting in place a system of queue monitors, certainly in the early days to make sure those queues are safely managed. Inside buildings will have hand sanitizer facilities - again, we’re all getting used to those in all the shops. We will go into teaching spaces will be cleaned twice a day, a deep clean first thing in the morning and a further clean in the middle of the day for those of teaching at that point. The cleaning staff have been trained specially can get in there and clean the spaces. Face coverings at this stage are not compulsory within our buildings but we are strongly encouraging them. We may yet change that guidance based on Scottish Government guidance, I’ll mentioned that in a minute, but the moment we are strongly encouraging students and staff to wear face coverings inside our buildings at all times.
So key points I need to make - we will be issuing a set of guidance, a pledge if you like, to all new students and returning students, setting out our expectations of how they must play their part in helping us combat this pandemic. Sticking to two metres social distancing is not the most natural thing for young adults and we know that as well but we will be stressing to our students. They need to act as responsible adults and play their parts by adhering to these rules that we’re setting out at all times in our accommodation and our buildings, and indeed in the wider community. So that guidance is just being finalised, and we will be asking all your students to adhere to that guidance once they arrive in Edinburgh.

As I said before, it’s Scottish Government has yet actually to produce its finalised guidance for universities. On reopening in September, we await that with great interest - as you can imagine, it is possible that some rules were may change, things like the user face coverings and so on, things may changes and we remain open to that possibility. So that’s the legislative and the service health protection background that we’re working in at the moment.

A lot of you asked about testing. Are we going to test students on arrival? Are we going to give regular testing to students on campus within the Scottish Government guidance? The answer to that is no. The current government guidance is that the only test that are made available are to those with symptoms of COVID-19. So the government is not planning to test new international students on arrival in Edinburgh, in Scotland. Neither is the university and at this stage, we are not planning to carry out routine testing of students without symptoms. Again, that may yet change, we await that Scottish Government guidance. As I said before, but, nonetheless, that’s the current situation. So the guidance remains that if your student does get COVID-19 symptoms, the cough, the regular cough, the heightened temperature, the loss of taste or smell, and so on. Even though these are mild symptoms, they will need to stay at home, wherever home is, in Edinburgh for 10 days from the start of their symptoms and at that point they will need to arrange to be tested. They shouldn’t at that point go to their doctors, to a pharmacy or the hospital. It will be done over the internet or by telephone with them.

Clearly, if there staying in a shared flat, whether that is on our University of Edinburgh campus or not, other household members will need to self-isolate at that point as well. Being symptomatic in a flat of eight people, all of those other seven students will need to self-isolate for a further 14 days. Those are the rules that will be operating to, and those are the rules that will make clear to students on arrival.

Ill students will be primarily reporting their symptoms to the local National Health Service team and that’s done through said telephone or online contacts but we will be asking students to let us know at the same time if they're in our accommodation, the Residence Life team will be the first point of contact for that. If they’re not in University accommodation, we’re setting up a dedicated team to whom they can report this. The reason for us doing that is it allows us to make sure that they are being supported. So our priority in those cases will be to make sure that students are being supported with issues such as food, with mental health and wellbeing, with general concerns and anxiety. And if they let us know, we’ll make sure those services are in place for them, no matter whether they're in our accommodation or outwith.

At the moment there are a number of testing centres set up in Edinburgh, none of which are particularly close to the city centre, University campus, or rather the one that is is not actually a walkthrough centre. It’s a drive through centre. We’re currently expecting to hear more from the Scottish Government about creating more accessible testing centres for students will be producing more information on so that to go where to go if they need to get tested that will follow.
And then finally on this slide a number of people have asked in advance what happens if there is an outbreak so just to put this into context, Edinburgh has in a typical year between 30 and 40,000 students in the city. It’s the size of a small town in its own right. We think it’s highly likely that some of our students will get Covid. When an individual case crops up, then the student will inform NHS, NHS will inform us. Hopefully the student will too. We will focus on supporting the students, and that’s kind of all that needs to happen at that point. We will only start to become more worried about outbreaks if it's two or more connected cases. At that point, we will be following the advice of our local National Health Service. Colleagues will step in and manage that as an incident and is possible at that point that we may see localised lockdowns or parts of buildings, or indeed entire buildings, but I wanted to reassure you we want to reissue in general that even if we have to move into a kind of locked down phase for parts of the campus, it doesn’t mean that students have to leave campus. It doesn’t mean that we will stop supporting students.

If we think about the international students, for example, who got affected by the last UK wide lockdown earlier in the year - many, many hundreds, in fact, I think several thousand of them stayed on campus being supported by us throughout the entire lockdown - and we will have the same approach in any future lockdowns where the local partial small scale or large scale. So I wanted to reassure you about that, but there's no risk to your students in those circumstances.

And of course, because education is being delivered in a hybrid mode, they'll be able to continue accessing lectures, accessing materials online and Colm Harmon will talk more about that shortly.

I need to just highlight the help that is available to students, generally regardless of the COVID-19 situation. Perhaps it's even more important they are aware of this help in the current situation. So every student will have a Personal Tutor that's an academic member of staff who is allocated to them and will support them particularly with academic matters. Some other Personal Tutors will also support students with personal wellbeing issues, but some schools you'll come across student support teams who take on that role instead.

As far as possible, we want our Personal Tutors and our student support teams to meet with students on campus and in person, but we have to recognise that's not always safe or practical to do. Some of our buildings are not well set up to manage that kind of interaction safely, so in those cases, Personal Tutors and students support teams will be available online through MS Teams, through Zoom. The kind of tools that we’re using today. However, they'll still be there and they'll still be having the same number of meetings providing the same ranges supports as in any normal year.

What will definitely be on campuses is the one stop shop, EdHelp. You got a small picture right there on the right. Located both in the Central Campus Library and the Kings Building library and that is the sort of first port of call for any administrative queries that your student may have on arrival at the university. They will triage these enquires and make sure the student gets a rapid and helpful answer.

As I said before, there will be generally a blend of in person versus digital supports across all the student services in the university. And I should have stressed that before that we are producing and publicising lots of skills courses which are digitally available things; How to do succeed in hybrid learning as I mentioned, How to work on employability, How to get to grips, anxiety, stress and on so that digital support. These are just as important as the in person support.

There's obviously a strong focus on health and wellbeing in this year of all years, although it's important for us in every year. Something that we would always stress at this time of the year is that it is really important that your student registers with GP, a general practitioner, (Doctor) as soon as
possible on arrival. In Edinburgh University has a large University Health Centre located on the city centre campus, but many other GP practices are available and will be able to take students as well. The point about registering early is that if your student does get ill if they’re not registered, it can mean a delay in accessing what could be critical medical help, so please do push that message with your students and there’s information about how to register with a GP on the New Students website. I said we have a range of other services; Counselling, Disability, and Chaplaincy and so on, which is there to support the wellbeing of your students. I would stress and urge you to come forward or your student to come forward as quickly as possible if they are disabled so the Disability Service can start to work with them before they start in Edinburgh.

And finally to note that we have a wonderful new health or wellbeing centre opening in the very heart of the campus in the city centre bringing together the University Health Centre, the pharmacy, the Student Disability Services, Counselling Service, and the Chaplaincy all in one convenient area so that’s going to make things a lot easier. I hope for your students to access support should they need it.

Immigration and a cause I need to apologise on behalf of the University for the fact that we have not made to get through the issuing of CAS (Confirmations of Acceptances Studies) as quickly as we should have done. I know that caused stress and worry for you and for your students and I deeply regret and all the team deeply regret that too as well. We are about two thirds of the way through the backlog that has emerged and we are working incredibly hard and throwing more and more resource, at least to get through the rest of the backlog as quickly as possible. We are adding more staff on a daily basis, more staff for working overtime and I think in fact we have increased the number of staff currently working in this area, but appreciate for some of you are still waiting for that.

The other thing I should point out by way of reassurance is that we are now extending the CAS validity date so that they are now valid until February, which means if your student is not able to start until later in the year, the CAS will still cover them. The commitments that I need to make is that we will definitely have cleared all existing CASs and got them out to you no later than the 2nd of September, and we’re busting a gut to do it sooner - by the end of August. So by the end of August at the earliest, 2nd September at the latest. We will have got every CAS that’s currently with us out to you and to your students. And again, I apologise that we have not made to do that quite as speedily as you need us to do. And we’re very sorry for that we’re working hard to get it right.

And to end on perhaps a slightly more upbeat note, the number of you’ve asked about the employment options for students during this time of pandemic. I wanted to stress that we still have lots of things that your students can do to improve their employability, even in the current situation and even though they may be first year undergraduates coming to us for the first time. It’s important to note that this kind of work focusing on employability cannon should start in the first year, not just in the last year. So every school has a Careers Consultant attached to it, which means that they can develop specialist links and specialist advice around the disciplines. The careers advice for a Physicist is very different for a Classicist, for example, we have access through our Careers Service to a huge range of employers; local, national, and global. We’re very accustomed to working with global employees without international student base.

There’s a whole range of things your students can do which are not internships or not employment as such, but fantastic development activities that will enhance your employability. We have a great scheme called Students as Change Agents, which allows students to take part, If you like, as consultants to be parachuted into different parts of the university to help with challenges and in
some cases outside the university, health organisations with challenges that they're facing. We also have to very very successful Edinburgh Award that is a kind of reflective process that gives students recognition and credit for activities they may be doing already, such as volunteering, taking part of running societies, entrepreneurship and so on. Some accreditation, or at the end of this process which they which they can use to show to employees in the future.

As you might expect, lots of online resource is what I want to stress particularly. We replied to the questions you’ve raised about internships, that we have a dedicated work experience and internships team. We do have internal internships - about 100 here which are unique to Edinburgh through Employ.ed. Most of those are on campus or working in the university department, but summer off campus we do now have access to virtual internships as well as traditional models recognising the face to face may not be possible for all students. And we should note that even in the middle of the current economic crisis, we’re already advertising around 300 summer internship opportunities for next summer on My Career Hub, which is the tool that we use to support and let students use to get access to employment information, support and guidance.

So I’ve whistled on as I always do I’m afraid through a huge amount of information. I hope it’s been helpful. We have lots of people here who can answer more detailed questions, and I look forward to it, but I’m going to stop at this point and hand over now to Professor Colm Harmon, Vice-Principal Students who will talk more about the teaching experiences students rather than support experience.

Colm Harmon

Thank you Gavin and hello everyone. It's an absolute joy and pleasure to be with you all this evening, in my case, and wherever you are in the world and also thanks Gavin for a really important and wonderful presentation, rich with information.

That was a detailed whistle stop tour through lots of things that I know the people on this call are concerned about from watching the questions and answers that have been flashing along as we’ve been talking, you been sort of addressing in real time. Many of the questions and queries that are coming through, so I'm grateful to Gavin for that.

I’m sure that we will be able to continue to sort of iron out some of the wrinkles in terms of things that you want to know over the course of the presentations tonight.

I want to say couple of things which I think are important. Firstly, we’re reaching a point that for us which has been planned from the day we’ve had to face up to the pandemic, and gone to lockdown. We had an incredible experience in moving to a digital learning experience at the end in March as things became challenging here and the University has never stopped ever since and we've been really committed really from that time. In the very first presentations that I gave to colleagues about what we’re going to do, we've been committed to this moment to being ready to be open and delivering to your sons and daughters. And when they join us in September, or whenever, we brought together academic professional communities since that time to prepare for this, and in doing so we've also brought together real expertise in delivery of hybrid model teaching - world leading in fact. And I think it’s fair to say, but the approach the entire UK higher education sector is following is very similar to ours for good reason. We've been saying what we were going to do right from the start, with colleagues at the University who are experts in this space - in thinking through all the issues that are involved in addressing a challenge like this, where we have students here and students constrained not to be here.
Lots of the issues that have come up in questions about time differences and so on. We have the expertise here to address those things, and that's been built into the plans that are going on. We've also had a one cohort approach we've been very keen right from the start to say that. All of our students are in one group - we don't have an on-campus and off campus cohort. We have students who are going to be here and indeed very many of this year's cohort will be on campus, and we have students who were constrained for various reasons, often logistics, but perhaps help or other responsibilities who can't be and that has been the vision all along. We don't want to see it as having two or three or four different groups that we need to take care of. We're focused on one cohort, and where one cohort comes together and that informs much of the approach we have to wear, teaching both in terms of digital and non-digital delivery. But also building that sense of community among the student body wherever they happen to be. I think it's actually at every point we followed Scottish Government guidelines as Gavin said, and something that is one of the safest places in the world right now.

Our Covid provision is to ensure that as the city opens and as the country opens so too does the University. So we've worked in lockstep with that process and will continue to do so, because if you been to Edinburgh before, the University is embedded in the city in every sense of the word and is embedded in the region at such a critical part of this region. So we work closely and as one as in one package to sort of be here. We also see our students, your children as our community. In fact, we embed them into our alumni association from the day they join us. It's absolutely critical for us to see students as part of the academic community.

And that's the style and approach this institution wants to bring that education we want to do all we can be as innovative as we can, but do all of that safely right now and particularly this year that community spirit is going to be critical life and the educational experience is going to be a shared experience for all of us. We might get it wrong. As Peter said, I'm sure we will, but we're going to be striving to do the best we can and as individually and creatively as we can, as we can as a Top 50 institution in the world.

And I think students, I think your sons and daughters will value that too. But we want to make sure they share that experience with us. So it’s going to be a journey, to use that probably overused phrase. But it’s going to be one that they’re part of and we will value their feedback along the way, and it’s something that as parents you should tell them they need to tell us when they’re having problems: I need to reach out to the organisations and entities that Gavin talked about and work through.

Finally, let me talk with some specifics on face to face teaching. It's a question that many of you asking, it's going to vary by school.

We're expecting that all lectures will be digital social distancing, and so on. Just makes that too impractical and safety considerations too, and it's Gavin outline. We will use our lecture campuses, lecture rooms and so on for other types of teaching, but we mostly doing lectures digitally. I think not to think in terms of rather boring one hour lectures just transcribed to video - colleagues are thinking of different ways of breaking up their lectures to make it as creative and as interesting as possible, and frankly, I suspect that our students are way ahead of us in terms of being able to absorb digital content. They're doing it all the time and we're mindful of that, so we are trying to be as innovative and creative as we can. We have a lot of experience in digital learning. We've been doing it more than any other institution in the UK for longer I should say. For example, on the campus, right now we have a 7 fully equipped studios for colleagues to do their material at high quality, right down to people using desktop capture software in their homes, working hard to get
everything ready. Much of the small class teaching across the spectrum of seminars and workshops and tutorials, but also where possible, lab and practical classes will happen face to face.

We are, as Gavin said, working with an acutely constrained campus facility that brings reassurances around safety, but also brings constraints and how we operate. So we expect to see as much of that small class teaching as can possibly take place on campus, taking place on campus, some of it will get shifted to Semester Two. I think that's a very common practice is going to happen with labs. For example, some of it will be focusing on cohorts that are returning, and so because incoming cohorts can have a different experience in the early days, but those practical lab sessions become more important as they progress. Some students have particular accreditation and other requirements, which means that our colleagues will focus their practical kind of teaching into those years because of those requirements, so it's going to vary. I know many of you are trying to get quite specific details from schools, they're really working on that right now. We're locking down timetables and all of those things as we talk, and so I think the details that many of you are striving to get will firm up.

Many of you ask them what to expect in terms of the digital content, and I think I would just simply say we don’t expect you to come here and sit in their dorms watching videos. We're developing study and social spaces where students be able to shape their own approach to receiving content but we're also focusing attention on the cohort on the programme students are in. So while some of the teaching for their degree will be delivered face to face, so too will the enrichment activities associated with being a student. There may be exciting workshops, meetings with authors which would be meeting visiting academics who may be here on campus but also taking part in debates and group discussions as part of that in richness, and part of that campus experience.

Safety of course will be critical throughout and boring. A lot of attention to the experience of life on campus, including how and when students will be able to sort of receive content were also saying, and I think this is being picked up in some other questions so far, but if you can be here, you should be here. That's not to say that we're not fully intent and committed to delivering digital content. If you can't be, it's just because we really do believe in the value of the campus experience. Some of it relates also to changing situations. We will be reacting as I said as the city opens and the country opens that originally closed down. We will respond to that as we go but thinking positively, our objective is always being to follow this trajectory out of this crisis. And as we do, we will expect to see changes in how we do our business over the course of the semester.

But I think being here means you’re part of the changing and evolving landscape, and that's going to be important, and I think finally, for me, when you're considering like time differences and if your daughter can't be here; I'm going to be with you at home. Network would be a relatively small, amount of teaching will take place synchronously, I think almost a tiny amount. Because of these challenges even if it does take place synchronously, will always ensure that we have everything recorded. Everything will always be available to be digested and received that offline.

And finally I think as parents many of the questions were about the stress that you may feel around online delivery and I would just say online delivery is not digital learning. We have as part of our orientation process, as Gavin said, developed material of digital learning I guess some of us want. My advice would be, and bear in mind I don't have kids of my own, but all that said, if the student is with you, they'll need all of the support that you’ve given them. The University of Edinburgh done fantastic job of getting to this point, I don't think you need to change your plans all that much to make sure they succeed and thrive at the university.
I'm going to pass it back to Peter and we continue with the rest of the programme and look forward to chatting more during the Q&A session later. Thank you.

OK Colm, Gavin. Thank you both very much, that’s enough of the old men. Now we’re not going to have a bit of an infusion of young blood. So we’re going to have first of all element, Ellen, who is a recent graduate of the University of Edinburgh and now a Sabbatical student, elected official, and she’s the President of the Edinburgh University Students’ Association and should be followed by Katie Macdonald, who is the President of the University Sports Union. So Ellen Macrae, first there with you.

Ellen MacRae

Thank you very much Peter and hello and thank you to everyone who can join us here. This evening I quickly wanted to give a quick introduction to the Students’ Association, where some of you might not be familiar with - who we are and what we do, but and then also how will be running our services and events throughout this year.

So the Students’ Association is separate from the University, but we work really closely together to make sure that students have the best time they possibly can during their time here. And as a student, you’re automatically a member of the Students’ Association, and there’s no membership fee or anything like that, and you immediately have access to our activities and services. And there’s a variety of ways in which we support students because we are for students, by students. We know it can be quite daunting to come to a new city or to a new country and we have lots of support available, especially in the first couple of weeks.

We will be running online How-To sessions on key topics like ‘How to Find Your Academic Community’, ‘How to Get Involved in Societies’, and online and in person social events to help you make friends. But the support that we offer doesn’t stop after September and we’re here through all of your time during Edinburgh from the very first day here until you graduate. I’ll be talking a little bit later about all of the different kinds of support that we can offer.

The Students’ Association is a representative body and we advocate for the student’s best interests. And we’re always here to help students have a voice and on the issues that matter most to them.

At Edinburgh University Students’ Association, we are actually really lucky to have four different venues on some of our campuses. We don’t have pictured Potterow, but I’ll just start with Teviot at which the one on the left just there. It’s actually the oldest purpose-built student union building in the world, and so whilst looking very impressive it’s also got a lot of history behind it as well. In the middle is a photo of Pleasance, so if you’ve been able to enjoy Edinburgh Festival, you might be able to recognise that. This also has a cafe and bar, and theatres as well as other societies. On the right hand side is the Kings Building House, named for being on our kings building campus. So if you’re in the College of Science and Engineering, you’ll most likely be on our Kings Campus. Glad that we have our own Students’ Association building out there too.

I also mentioned Potterow. That’s also within Bristo Square with McEwan Hall and this is where some of our key services are, like the Advice Place which will be operating this year both in person and online - but all of this based following the current COVID-19 guidelines like Gavin has already mentioned before, with hand sanitizing stations, one way systems, social distancing markings and we’ve also been able to introduce our food and drink ordering apps to reduce people flow in some of our commercial spaces. The signage that we use for this is also consistent with that the University is just so that we have that consistent message across our campuses.
So obviously, outside of academia, we want to make sure that students are having a good time in Edinburgh and that's why we organise a programme of events throughout the year and will still be able to do that. We will be able to host quizzes, live music, spoken word poetry, and we also have annual events such as Mental Health and Wellbeing Week when staff and students come together to explore mental health and highlight the support available to students who are struggling and will have a Christmas light switch on, which is always has a really good atmosphere, will still be able to enjoy that. And, we were also able to host the annual Teaching Awards online, so that happened just before the end of the academic year, and that was still really well received and will be doing that again this academic year.

We also mark national celebrations like Black History Month and LGBT plus History Month with combinations of educational and social events as well. So it is true that this year will be looking different, but we're still planning a range of online events which will enable students to connect with each other and share their experiences and the University of Edinburgh has an Events App, so students will be able to see what's coming up and then also be able to receive a regular email newsletter from us highlighting the key, upcoming events.

So we do have over 300 student-led societies, volunteering groups and social enterprises - so there really is something for everyone. And that will be hosting online spaces where students can connect with each other on different topics and these societies, around anything which students might have in common, like an academic discipline or astronomy or zoology, or a hobby like knitting or yoga, an interest, cocktails, rock, music, cultural faith, or political ideology.

And there are hundreds of student-led events every month, and will still be able to facilitate those. And when Scottish guidelines permit us to do so, and our risk assessments deem it to be safe, will be able to facilitate and support students in running more in person events.

I just want to draw attention slightly to the middle photo, and one of my top tips for if you're joining University or even if you're coming into the new semester, you can see a list of all of our societies volunteering groups and social enterprises on the Students’ Association website, and that is one of my biggest tips is just to have a look through all of all of them and see what you might be interested in. There's obviously no commitment to stay if you decide it's not for you.

In that middle photo there I mean, the bottom left, but this is a photo from Clarinet Choir and before I actually even joined - I had my place confirmed, but I remember scrolling through all the different societies and I remember coming across Clarinet Choir which is just a small group dedicated to playing the clarinet and having a really nice time. And I've been a member ever since I joined this university and they've been such a supportive group and even during lockdown and over summer, they've still remained to be that really supportive group and have run online events and one of the numerous pub quizzes - I'm sure everyone's been involved in - and it has just really been really supportive network for me, and it was also a really good way for me to unwind after studying Biomedical Sciences.

So I also said that the Students’ Association is a representative body and we do have over 1000 student representatives at all levels across the University who are working either publicly or behind the scenes to enhance the student experience at Edinburgh. So local level we have program reps who gather feedback from their peers on teaching and learning and pass it on to staff to improve their courses. But we also have over 50 elective representatives who give a voice to students and each school and specific student communities who otherwise might struggle to have their voices
heard. Getting involved with these groups can help you develop key transferable skills. But you can also achieve change and shape the University.

This photo here is of the five Sabbatical Officers. I am one of them and had pink hair at the time, but I couldn't really maintain it over lockdown. But we've all graduated, but we're all working full-time this year to represent students at the most senior level of the university. And the five of us have actually been able to be really involved in these discussions with the university as it adapts to Covid-19, and we get to ensure that the student voices heard in all of these spaces, especially those of our marginalised students.

Another part of our student representation structure are the Five Liberation Campaigns, which represents specifically marginalised communities on campus, including black and minority ethnic students, Disabled, LGBT plus and women students, and the liberation campaigns function much like a student-led society. So they run events and online spaces to help students connect and learn more about social inequalities and the students in these groups are incredibly welcoming and supportive towards new students and they'll be more than happy to offer advice and guidance on settling into the university in the city. But they do again offer really close supported network.

So I mentioned earlier that we do have some very specific support systems in place as well. One which is the Advice Place which offers free, professional and confidential, impartial advice to students or prospective students on a wide range of topics, from finances to housing to mental health and academic progression. These photos here are of the Advice Places the Advice Place office in Potterow, but they also contacted by phone, email or you can arrange a video call with one of the advisors and all of our all of their contact details are on the website as well.

Another form of support that the Students’ Association offers is our Peer Learning and Support schemes, which run in almost every school and schemes where our older students mentor first-year students who are then able to offer advice and support and helping the students settle into their studies in university life. The sessions aren't designed to replace teaching by academic staff but they supplement it and ensure that students are able to fully engage with their studies. Some of the other schemes are a bit more pastoral and wellbeing focused and these tend not to discuss academic work but instead help students focus to connect through social activities. And the student’s school should be able to let them know about the peer learning and support schemes at the start of the year. But again, we have a full list of them on our website.

Of course, Edinburgh is an extremely international university and it's something that we're incredibly proud of, and I think it's one of our real strengths of our community, and we feel it's important to celebrate this diversity and make sure that students have the opportunity to share their cultures with each other. The Students’ Association supports a range of events for international students, including global buddies program, which is a scheme which matches new international students with returning students who can introduce them to University life and the city. And this year we currently have 3000 students signed up to be involved in this programme, so I'm we're really excited about that engagement that we've got there. This scheme as well as language cafes give students the opportunity for informal language learning and practice. Both of these will be running on line in the first semester and we'll just have to wait and see what the guidelines permit us to do.

So with the societies and student groups, the Students’ Association has almost 400 events planned for Welcome Week alone and that's not even touching on the event that will be running throughout the entire year and again all of these events will be on the UoE Event App, so that's a really good place to find things that will be going on. And again, things will be different from how Welcome
Week was previously, but there are still so many events happening in our societies. We've heard a lot from them, but they're still so excited and ready to welcome students into their societies and get back into socialising.

And also the middle photo just there is of the garden at Teviot of which one of our spaces again and that's already open. While we've been able to have are socially distance tables and has the tracking, tracing and regular cleaning. But here you can already get a drink or some food and that's been really well received. We hope that our other venues can open their doors from the 7th of September, but again, we're still working through that progress to make sure those openings are done properly and safely, but we're really excited to welcome students back on to campus - making sure that our services can operate both in person and online and create these spaces where students can meet and socialise and feel safe on campus. But again our societies will still be operating almost in this hybrid model as well, so that will still be able to keep in touch with all those students who might not be on campus with us as well.

So on our website and Facebook page, you can always find out more. You can always find those lists of the societies.

I will hand over now to Katie, who is our Sports Union president, to give you more insight onto how sports will be running for this academic year. Thank you.

**Katie Macdonald**

Thank you very much, Ellen, and thank you all for joining us this evening. I will aim to give a very quick whistle stop tour of sporting community that we have on offer here at Edinburgh. And all the incredible opportunities that we will have offered for the upcoming year.

We are so excited to welcome new and returning students to Edinburgh. Whether that is in person or virtually and we're going to provide as much activity as possible for students. Whether your son or daughter has been active since starting school or has never considered themselves to be particularly sporty, I would certainly encourage them to give at least one of our sports a go during their time at university. We have opportunities for those who have never tried a sport before and catering all the way through to Olympic hopefuls so we really want to help cater for all students have the best experience possible and really create a sense of belonging here at Edinburgh.

So why be active at University? Having students to feel strong and confident as well as improving their self-esteem are just some of the benefits of physical exercise and incorporating this into your weekly routine. Getting involved in any of our programmes will allow students to meet a huge variety of people and help them to build that strong support network around them, including academic courses which is going to be especially relevant during the coronavirus pandemic.

Most importantly, in my opinion during my four years, was the wonderful break from academic stresses that sport and physical activity provided. And same as Ellen, I studied Biomedical Sciences, and my teammates and the time that I spent down a playing field on the football pitch was an incredibly welcomed break from all of the hours spent studying in the library. In addition, being involved in sports and running for committee positions within our sports club setup can really allow students to develop a huge variety of essential life skills. Including time management, organisation and leadership skills. Equally work done on sports and committees and such, chairing meetings, submitting agendas and budgets are directly applicable to post university life and as a result in the most recent purchase active student survey and 61% of active students at university were very
confident in Finding Employment Post University compared to 51% of their inactive counterparts. So it goes to show kind of the skills that you develop both on and off the pitch, or really transferable.

Our fantastic facilities here at Edinburgh are absolutely world class and they are very much open to all. And so we have our Pleasance sport complex which can be seen in this top right image here and currently it does not look very much like this in our cardio suite and given the social distancing requirements, the equipment is much more spaced out. However, we will still have a fantastic variety of facilities offering across our Pleasance gym. We have this cardio suite, we have free weights facilities, we have TRX area as well as our archery and rifle ranges within the same complex for this academic year. At 30 days student membership is going to be £15 per month, so it's incredibly good value for money for the fantastic facilities that you will be receiving.

In terms of the gym as well will be operating similarly to other university buildings with one of these systems an extensive cleaning measures in place as well as hand sanitizer stations and pretty much on every corner in addition to our Pleasance Sports Complex. We have world class physiotherapist and sports masseuse on hand for any injuries that your sons or daughters might pick up during their time with us. Hopefully they won't be needing those services, but they are available if required we have our St. Leonard’s Land swimming pool which is just down the road from Pleasance gym.

And we also in the last couple of years opened a site in the Easter Bush campus. So this is quite a small community out there for our Veterinary students. They are also are aiming to run lots of outdoor fitness classes, if government guidelines on permit, as well as they just opened a 5 kilometre trim chill that campus. So plenty of opportunities for Vet students to be getting active during the week.

I'm in the bottom right image here and you can see Peffermill Playing Fields too. These are about 15 minutes cycle down from Pollock Halls and they host our outdoor sports so you can see the two hockey astros to the right hand side of that image - with the blue one being the Olympic grade hockey carpet as well as two 3G Services in the centred image - the one looking a little bit worse for wear is actually being relayed as we speak so we'll have two world class 3G services for students coming in September

Currently Peffermill is back open, so we have a few trial groups in at the moment, across hockey, rugby and football and trying out different kind of cleaning procedures and the extra like time we've allotted between sessions for this and to see how this is going. So that's really positive for us that there is some activity already happening. With our Pleasance Gym and same with kind of in line with what is government guidelines were hoping for a September 14th re-open. so we're optimistic that for Welcome Week we will have activity going on in both facilities.

Additionally we also have our Firbush Outdoor Centre on the banks of Loch Tay so this is a fantastic way for students to kind of experience Scotland and get out to interactivities such as hillwalking sailing, kayaking and we have some fantastic outdoor instructors there and you can facilitate reading weekends to facilitate students to go away with groups of their friends and were people in their course.

So recreational sport offering at Edinburgh is pretty comprehensive, so we have our Active For Life programme - so this is where we would encourage people who typically won’t so active to incorporate physical activity and just into their daily activity. Whether that's once a week or once each day so we would like to do this through kind of increased walking, cycling or running to work, an encouraging more of an active commute and this year those programmes will really be focusing on kind of jogging and cycling groups both on campus run by our sports clubs, but also just in the
wider Edinburgh community, as these activities can obviously be done socially distanced and fairly easily.

And we also have our support for physical activity consultations - so this is where if an individual might find any barriers to physical exercise, such as the gym being quite intimidating, for example, then we can help to kind of breakdown those barriers as well as signpost to relevant sports clubs that they might be interested in or to the one off sessions that we offer. These one off sport events were fairly successful last year, so we ran, both our Africa Cup of Nations which is the image on the right hand-side, where I make it a cheeky appearance same as Ellen - couldn’t help but show the experience I've had over the past four years, and then these activities are all free of charge and they absolutely do not require any experience at all so people can get involved. Whether it’s the first time or the 500th time that they have taken part in that particular sport.

We also run our EdEx and Stressbuster events – so Edinburgh Experience events. Last year we had over 120 of these, and with nearly 3000 participants so these events are huge part of our offering, they aim to offer the chance to try a sport for free to students and we want to run as many of these as possible around our capacity and physical distancing constraints this year as well as our Stressbuster events which take place in the May and December, during exam diets, usually within good proximity to the Library, just to provide a nice break from studying.

Our Intramural support program is a fantastic way for those looking to get involved in sport with less of a time commitment. So we run weekly leagues in football, rugby, squash, hockey, netball and basketball. In 2019/2020 academic year, we had over 160 teams competing in these leagues across the University, so it’s a fantastic way to get to know people across Edinburgh University, whether that’s people in your accommodation, where we will prioritize entry for teams that are from the same accommodation this year, or whether that’s to meet people on your course. Alternatively we can enter individuals into these teams too if you wanted to get involved but didn’t have a team to enter alongside you, that is no problem at all and you can just get in touch with our Intramural Sports officers and they can help you in finding team, and their contact information will be on our website, which I’ve linked at the end. So last year we had 21 weekly leagues in intramural sports. This year, it’s unlikely that we will have the same amount of activity going on, but we will delay the start of Intramural leagues to give students a little bit more time to get settled in their accommodation and surpass any kind of quarantine or restrictions like that and then aim to provide as much activity as possible.

So last year, across our club sports offering, we had over 8000 members involved across our 64 sports clubs that makes us the largest student sports programme in Scotland. We have an absolutely fantastic offering with sports ranging from American football archery and athletics all the way through to water-skiing, windsurfing, and wakeboarding. So we really do have something offer for everyone studying here at Edinburgh. Obviously I think it goes without saying that activity will look slightly different this year. All of our club activity that is run will be very much in line with the University guidance, the Scottish Government guidance and specifically for each sport with their national governing body as well. So in terms of measures that we will be bringing for member safety all of our clubs activity this year will be risk-assessed and social distancing will be adhered to at all times with capacity maximum sets on each session around Pleasance and Peffermill, as well as at the external facilities that our clubs might be using. Access will very much be limiting the individuals who come into contact with the equipment and it will be thoroughly cleaned before and after every session and we’re going to have a stringent sign up procedure for each session to allow for contact tracing and this will have the built-in maximum capacities, but it will mean that no walk-ins are allowed to sessions and just for member safety so that we can get in touch with them if anyone is to
report symptoms to our students running the session. Following as Gavin had mentioned, then we will contact the relevant people and but the expectation would be that there in university accommodation or private flat that they would follow university guidance and in this instance. Additionally with our cleaning, they'll be strict procedures in place that are sport specific but also we will have clear signage in all university buildings around one way systems, and hand sanitisation and things like that.

Through our coaching Academy, we are always looking to increase your employee ability. So last year made a series of lectures and workshops as well as funding support spread over 100 hours of workshops and awarded roughly £6500.00 to students. This allowed them to upscale themselves in officiating in things first aid, mental health, first aid. And as Gavin had also touched on, we run a Sports Union Edinburgh Award and last year we had 76 participants in this system, which is not really fantastic way for students to kind of gain self-reflection skills and reflect upon three particular skills through their committee roles with us.

In terms of Welcome Week, there will be a combination of virtual, an impression activity, catering for those students who might not be able to join us straight away, or at all. But we will be aiming to run as much in person activity as possible within Scottish Government, University of Edinburgh and specifically national governing body guidelines for each sport.

During Welcome Week, we’re aiming to have activity from 6:00 AM to 10:00 PM - as much sporting activity as possible within those constraints. These in person things will supplement our virtual sports fair and all the amazing content that are clubs have been putting together for our new students to take a look at. And this will also include some How-To sessions around getting active joining the gym and as well as running one of our sports clubs and plenty of question and answer sessions with each individual club if your son or daughter wanted to approach them directly they would have the chance to do so virtually as well.

Overall, our students are just very excited to welcome all new students and returning students to Edinburgh, and we will facilitate as much activity as possible.

So if you have any specific questions for any of our sports clubs, I would encourage you to visit our website. Each club has their own page on this website as well as the Intramural programmes so you can check out all of the information there in one place.

To keep up to date on any developments and everything relating to Welcome Week, I would encourage you to follow our social media channels so at EUSU Sports Union, Instagram and Twitter, as well Facebook. You can find an excellent video highlighting the ‘We Are Edinburgh Spirit’ on the parents and supporters site also.

So I’m happy to answer any questions you might have relating to sports, clubs, recreational sport and activity in the question and answer section and just coming up now and then I'll hand you back to our Principal who will be leading on that question and answer session. Thank you very much.

END OF PRESENTATION