

To: All students

Date: 31 December 2020

Subject: COVID-19 update #15: Government announcement about start of Spring Term

Dear students,

This message is being sent urgently to all students and we recognise that this may include some who have recently completed their studies. Please ignore this message if you are not a current University of Reading student.

You may have seen the UK government announcements about changes to the return of schools and universities in England in January, and you will be wondering how this affects us at the University of Reading.

We understand that more detailed information from the UK Department for Education will follow, but we wanted to provide you with some initial guidance based on what we know from this latest announcement and a subsequent [letter from the Minister of State for Universities](#).

Teaching to move online only until 25 January in most cases

Our term will still begin on 11 January. However, with a small handful of exceptions, the government has instructed all universities to move teaching online until 25 January at the earliest. The government will review this position in the week commencing 18 January and we will keep you informed of any changes to our position at that stage.

We will work with Heads of Schools to provide all students with more detailed information about what you can expect for your programme early next week.

The government advice allows for some priority subjects to recommence COVID-secure face-to-face teaching before 25 January. For students in the following areas, we anticipate that your blended online and face-to-face teaching will recommence as previously communicated to you. Your School will be in touch with you with further details next week, including regarding placements:

- Education
- Physician Associates
- Clinical Language Sciences
- Pharmacy

Government advice to reduce travel

In an effort to keep the virus in check, the government is asking all of us to keep travel to a minimum. The government is encouraging students not to return to university until your face-to-face teaching re-starts or unless you otherwise need to be back on campus.

We understand that, in addition to those who remained in Reading over the closure break and those returning for face-to-face teaching, there may be others who need to come to campus, including:

- international students
- those who do not have access to appropriate study facilities at your vacation accommodation
- those who require additional support, including mental health and wellbeing support

- students on placements that are able to go ahead.

If you are returning to Reading, please be assured that we are here to support you. Halls have remained open throughout the break, and if you are a halls resident, you continue to have access to your accommodation at any time. We will also be reopening other facilities on campus as [previously communicated](#) including the Library and study space (although the Study@URS space will be closed until the 11 January). If you need to drop-in for advice, the Student Services Reception in the Carrington Building will be open from 4 January, and the Support Centres will be open from 11 January. In the meantime all support services can be accessed by telephone and email as normal from 4 January

Commuter students should only access campus facilities if you fall in the above programmes or groups.

In relation to **Postgraduate Research students** specifically, the government has said that you should work from home where possible, but those who require access to specialist facilities can return to campus. Please speak to your research supervisor(s) about how this affects you.

Advice for international students

For international students travelling to the UK from overseas for the Spring term, the government advises that you consider whether you need to travel to the UK at this time, particularly if you are not on one of the programmes that recommences face-to-face teaching on campus before 25 January. The government recommends that you should consider delaying if travel arrangements can be rearranged without undue costs.

Please remember that all international arrivals must complete a [Passenger Locator Form](#) prior to travelling to the UK, and those travelling from a country [not on the exemption list](#) will need to self-isolate in your accommodation for 10 days. There is now the option to take part in the ‘test to release’ scheme, which means that people arriving from non-exempt countries will be able to pay privately for a COVID-19 test to reduce the length of time you need to self-isolate. This is optional and travellers may still choose to self-isolate for the full 14 days rather than pay for a test. If you wish to opt in, you can do this when you complete the Passenger Locator Form prior to travelling to the UK

Please be assured that if you are in transit or need to travel, we will be ready to support you on arrival.

If you need further advice or support about the impact of this updated advice on you, our International Student Advisory Team will be available from 4 January on immigration@reading.ac.uk for immigration or Home Office inquiries and Int.Adv@reading.ac.uk for general questions.

Testing available on campus from Tuesday 5 January

Our testing centre for those without symptoms re-opens in the SportsPark Hall on our Whiteknights campus from 5 January for students who are returning to or who have remained in Reading. If you are on campus or when you return to Reading, **we very strongly encourage you to get a test and to minimise social contact until you receive a negative result**. It is a very important way of keeping our whole community safe and ensuring that we can resume our blended model with confidence.

If you had previously booked a test but these latest changes mean that you no longer require it on the day you have booked, please take a moment to cancel it so that we can make your testing slot available to others who may need it. Simply click on the 'change your appointment' link in the confirmation message you received when you booked your test. If you cannot see this link, check that you have enabled pictures to be downloaded for the email.

As I have emphasised many times before, the need for following the government rules is not just for you. You may not feel that you are at particular risk, but the reality is that the virus is continuing to spread and it is imperative that you follow the rules concerning travel and household mixing. Until numbers are under control, we can expect strict measures to remain in place, limiting our social and educational activities. Even if you are not personally worried about getting sick, remember that your actions have a direct impact on others around you and the University and local community as a whole.

Our testing centre in the SportsPark Hall is currently scheduled to be open until 29 January. Given the delay in the return of many students and colleagues to campus, we will be reviewing and are likely to extend this date once we have more detailed guidance from the Department for Education.

Supporting you

Certainly, we are all hoping that 2021 will see an end to the pandemic and a return to normal life. In the meantime, we are here to support you through this ongoing uncertainty. Please do take time to check all of the [resources that are available to you](#), whether you are facing challenges in your studies, feeling lonely or isolated or struggling with your mental wellbeing. We are here to help – all you have to do is ask.

If you have any questions, our COVID-19 support hotline (0118 214 7813) will re-open at 9.15am on Monday 4 January.

In the meantime, I hope you see in the new year safely and enjoyably and we look forward to you re-starting your studies in the new year.

Best wishes,
Paddy

Dr Patricia (Paddy) Woodman
Director of Student Services