

To: All students

Date: Monday 21 December

Subject: COVID-19 update #14: Reading to enter Tier 4 restrictions

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.

At the weekend, the Prime Minister announced tougher COVID-19 rules for England, coming into effect from yesterday morning (Sunday 20 December). Berkshire, where our Whiteknights and London Road campuses are located, is now under new [‘Tier 4’ \(‘Stay at home’\) restrictions](#).

We are very pleased to advise that universities can stay open in Tier 4, while adhering to the [government guidance](#) to ensure strict measures are in place to minimise the spread of the virus.

As today is the University’s last working day before the Christmas closure period (from 22 December to 4 January), the immediate impact of the change is limited but we have carefully reviewed the new Tier 4 regulations with regards to our plans for the start of the spring term. The Tier 4 restrictions are due to be reviewed on 30 December. If they remain in place into the new year, however, we can confirm that term will still start on 11 January (with a small number of programmes starting in the week of 4 January) and face-to-face teaching will resume [as previously communicated](#) over the month of January. Most of our university activities will continue [as planned under Tier 3](#), with some exceptions explained below.

Please do take a few moments to read all of this email carefully to make sure you are fully informed and prepared for the spring term.

Travelling to and from university

The government rules include provisions about student travel. These say that you are permitted to move on one occasion from your student accommodation to one other household (such as your family home) for the break. But you can only do this once. Further information is [published on the government website](#) and in [a letter to students](#) from the Universities Minister.

Once you have arrived at the household where you are spending the Christmas closure period, you are subject to the tiers restrictions for that area and, in most cases, this means you must not travel back and forth to your student accommodation, except when returning to university for the start of the spring term. If you commute to university, you will be able to continue to travel for this purpose in the spring term.

With Reading now under [Tier 4 \(‘Stay at home’\) restrictions](#), if you are remaining in Reading, you should not leave your current residence except for [reasonable excuse](#), including for education or work, to buy essential food or to access medical care. If your plans to travel have changed and you will now be staying in Reading for Christmas, please [let us know using our online form](#), in case we need to share urgent information over the closure period.

University activities from 4 January

Subject to any further changes from government, our spring term will officially start on Monday 11 January. A small number of programmes will resume teaching the week commencing 4 January, as previously planned.

- **Teaching**

The government has confirmed universities can stay open in Tier 4. As the situation currently stands, we will therefore continue to follow our [previously published spring term phased return plan](#), continuing with our blended approach of online and face-to-face teaching.

Your academic timetable for the spring term has been published, which shows when face-to-face teaching will resume for each of your modules. Institute of Education students can expect to hear directly regarding planned activities in the week commencing 4 January.

Given that the national and local situations remain changeable, we will keep this situation, including our safety measures, under very close review and communicate any changes to colleagues and students early in the new year.

- **Library, museums and collections**

The Library will remain open for study space and Click & Collect book borrowing. Our museums and special collections will also operate a Click & Collect service.

- **Study Space**

Students will be able to access pre-bookable study space in the Library, as well as non-bookable space in the URS building, The Study at RUSU and other locations around campus such as in Halls.

- **Student support**

Our student advice and support services will continue to be available remotely. Our reception desks will be open for drop-in queries and students can still make bookings for face-to-face appointments where needed.

- **Food, sport and recreation**

Under Tier 4 regulations, all our catering outlets will be offering takeaway services only, including for students who live in halls. Students on catering packages will still be able to access their catering needs.

While under Tier 4, all fitness facilities at the SportsPark will be closed, but outdoor sports fields and grass pitches will remain accessible.

- **RUSU**

The Students' Union will move most of its services online, with only essential services being offered in person. Takeaway service will continue in food outlets and The Study will remain open. Social activities will continue to be offered online only. The nursery has now closed and will communicate any changes directly with parents.

- **Research**

Where feasible, research should be conducted at home. Research students should contact their Supervisor(s) or the Graduate School with any queries about the impact of this change on their studies.

New Tier 4 restrictions

For your own safety and that of your friends and family, it is really important that you fully understand the [Tier 4 restrictions](#) so please take time to read them thoroughly. If you are currently in Reading, the main rules relating to socialising are:

- you must stay at home, except for [reasonable excuse](#), including for education or work, to buy essential food or to access medical care;
- you must not meet socially indoors with others, including family, unless they are part of your household or 'support bubble';
- you can exercise or meet in a public outdoor place (including our campus) with people you live with, your 'support bubble', or with one other person;
- when meeting others not in your household or 'support bubble', you should stay 2 metres apart or, where this is not possible, stay 1 metre apart and take extra precautions (eg wearing a face covering);
- if you are currently living on your own, [you can form a 'support bubble'](#) with one other household, until your housemates return after Christmas;
- if you have a health condition that places you in the clinically **extremely** vulnerable group, the guidance for Tier 4 is that you should now 'shield'. If you need support to shield you should register to receive help with priority shopping deliveries and also find out what support your local authority is providing.

Please be aware that the police can take action against you if you meet in larger groups or leave your place of residence without reasonable excuse for doing so. The police can break up illegal gatherings and issue fines (Fixed Penalty Notices). You can be given a Fixed Penalty Notice of £200 for the first offence, doubling for further offences up to a maximum of £6,400. If you hold, or are involved in holding, an illegal gathering of over 30 people, the police can issue fines of £10,000. We will also fully investigate any breaches of government or University regulations and take action in accordance with our disciplinary procedures.

It is clear that, even though we have news of a vaccine, it remains critical for all of us to do our bit to prevent the current coronavirus situation worsening further. The harder we work now to keep the virus in check, the sooner we can look forward to a loosening of restrictions. If we ignore the rules now, the situation will only deteriorate and we will face tougher restrictions for longer.

Support for students over the Christmas closure

While the University is closed from 22 December to 4 January, our halls will remain open, with welfare services and takeaway catering available. Christmas lunch and dinner will still be available to all students who have [booked by 3pm today \(Monday 21 December\)](#). For the safety of our students and staff we are very sorry that we can no longer offer this as a dine-in opportunity for halls residents. All those who have pre-booked your Christmas Day meal, whether you are living in halls or in private accommodation, will be able to collect it from the takeaway collection point at Park Eat in line with your booking reservation.

The Co-Op on campus has closed temporarily until 4 January, but The Marketplace at Park Eat will stay open. Essential shops like food retailers are permitted to stay open under the new rules so some food shops and outlets near to our campuses are likely to be open over the Christmas and New Year break.

The changes to rules on 'Christmas bubbles' mean that we will no longer be able to permit visitors to halls, or for students to form a 'Christmas bubble'. However, if you are currently living alone, you can form a temporary ['support bubble'](#) with one other household until your housemates return after the Christmas break.

While the University is closed for the Christmas break, the COVID-19 hotline will transition to an email-only service on covid-hotline@reading.ac.uk. This will be for urgent COVID-19-related questions that cannot wait until we return on 4 January, such as access to testing or self-isolation support. We will check the inbox daily, apart from 24 – 26 December and 1 January, to respond to urgent queries only. All our online resources, including [Essentials](#), remain available throughout the closure period.

Students living in halls who have problems or concerns, including access to food packages, should contact the Halls Hotline on 0800 029 1984, which is available 24/7.

Book a Lateral Flow Test for January

With Reading currently under the strictest COVID-19 restrictions as cases of COVID-19 continue to increase, **it is even more important that you [book a Lateral Flow Test in January](#)**. We strongly encourage you to book a test, even if you have stayed in Reading for the Christmas break. If you are travelling, it is particularly important that you book a test for as soon as you return to campus.

Please note that you should not book one of our Lateral Flow Tests if you have had a positive PCR test in the preceding 90 days or if you are required to [self-isolate after arriving from overseas](#). You must either self-isolate for the full 10 days, or take up the [‘Test to release’ scheme](#) to reduce the time for which you are required to self-isolate.

The COVID-19 phone line will reopen at 9.15am on Monday 4 January (0118 214 7813). If there are any major external developments between now and 4 January, we will keep you updated through our social media channels and by email, if necessary. Please do continue to check your University email account regularly.

I hope you have a restful Christmas break.

Best wishes,
Paddy

Dr Patricia (‘Paddy’) Woodman
Director of Student Services