

To: all UG, PGT and PGR students

Date: 16 November 2020

Subject: COVID-19 update #6 (urgent) – end of term and travel for Winter break

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.

I would like to update you on the plans we are putting in place here at Reading for the end of term, in line with [government guidance](#), so that students who plan to travel for the Christmas break can do so as safely as possible. **Please take some time to read this message carefully** as it contains important messages on:

- end of term travel and the government's 'student travel window' from 3 to 9 December.
- the end of face-to-face teaching for the Autumn term
- university facilities after the end of the lockdown restrictions on 2 December
- social and extra-curricular activity after the end of lockdown restrictions
- COVID-19 testing for our University community
- support if you are not travelling over Christmas or are returning early.

Until 2 December, the government requires all students to stay in their term-time accommodation. You can find more information about our current lockdown arrangements in my [email of 4 November](#).

We will be writing with additional advice later this week to our international students, PGR students and those who are due to be on placements before the end of term.

If you plan to travel for the Christmas break

The national lockdown restrictions for England are set to finish on 2 December. While our **term will still finish on 11 December**, if you are planning to travel for the Christmas break, the government asks that you do so during a '**student travel window**' from **3 to 9 December**.

If you intend to travel, you should therefore plan to do so by 9 December at the latest. If you cannot travel by 9 December, the government advises that you should undertake a further period of restricted contact either before or after returning home to minimise risk of transmission.

The government advice is to **avoid public transport where possible**. We appreciate, though, that this may be necessary for some of you so we will be speaking to local transport providers including Reading Buses and Great Western Railway so that they are aware of when they can expect students to be travelling.

Regardless of this travel window, **you should not travel if you have tested positive for COVID-19, or have otherwise been instructed to self-isolate**, until the end of your full self-isolation period.

However you plan to travel, including by private car, please read the government's [COVID-19 safer travel guidance](#). If you are planning to travel overseas, you should consider the restrictions on entry

to the country in question, such as whether you would need to undertake a period of self-isolation in that country on arrival or when you return to the UK. We will be sending separate advice for our international students shortly.

End of face-to-face teaching for the Autumn term

To support students to travel in a safe and orderly way, in line with the government guidance, we will **finish all face-to-face teaching by 9 December**. Your last day of face-to-face teaching in that week will be as set out in your timetable, based on your programme, modules and module sub-groups.

The government has selected the date of 9 December for the end of face-to-face teaching as it allows enough time for students to complete self-isolation before Christmas, should you develop symptoms that day or be identified as a contact (of someone who has tested positive) by the tracing system.

Universities have been instructed to stagger the end of face-to-face teaching to support those who are travelling over this period and to reduce the pressure on transport networks. As in-person teaching is already reduced this term and only a small number of students' have identical teaching timetables, students will naturally finish their face-to-face classes on different days during the travel window. As such, rather than impose different arrangements for different subjects or year groups, we consider that following our existing timetable for face-to-face teaching until 9 December achieves this staggering naturally without creating unnecessary complexity.

All online provision, including interactive online sessions for those who cannot attend face-to-face teaching, will continue. This means you can still study remotely until the end of term on 11 December.

University facilities after the end of the lockdown restrictions on 2 December

From 3 December to the start of the University closure period on 22 December, the same arrangements that have been in place for our on-campus facilities during lockdown will continue. You can find these arrangements in [my message of 3 November](#) and this [one-page guidance note](#). This includes our catering facilities operating on a takeaway-only basis for everyone other than catered students, and our bars and the SportsPark remaining closed.

One difference from current arrangements relates to study space. Once all face-to-face teaching has finished on 9 December, bookable study space in the Library and non-bookable study space in halls, the URS building and The Study at RUSU will remain available until the Christmas closure period. All other study space across campus will be closed from 9 December.

Our facilities will re-open for the Spring term on 4 January in line with any government requirements and restrictions in place. As we do yet know exactly what these will be for Reading, we will update you closer to the start of term. So please continue to check your University email over the Christmas break.

Social activity after the end of lockdown restrictions

The four-week lockdown period currently underway for England is intended to limit the risk that you will contract COVID-19 and, in turn, spread the virus to your families and friends over Christmas. So it is very important that you continue to comply with the lockdown measures.

Even after lockdown finishes on 2 December, you should continue to follow national guidance and keep your social interactions to a minimum. The government has told us that we must not re-start any in-person social and extra-curricular activity so all our University and RUSU bars and the SportsPark will remain closed.

The end of the Autumn term may usually be a time for socialising and pre-Christmas celebrations. Unfortunately, this year that simply cannot be the case. Otherwise, you risk undoing everyone's good work in sticking to the lockdown rules, and the number of cases will inevitably increase again.

COVID-19 testing for our University community

To provide students with some reassurance they can travel safely and minimise the risk of transmitting COVID-19, the University is investigating several options to provide you with rapid COVID-19 testing prior to the Winter break. We hope to have more information from government on testing to share with you this later this week, so please continue to check your email regularly.

If you intend to remain in Reading over the Winter break

We understand that some students will not be travelling and will remain in Reading over the Winter break. While the University is officially closed from 22 December to 4 January, support will remain available for those living on campus. All halls of residence are to remain open, with catering available if required and support for anyone who needs to self-isolate during this time. If you will be remaining in halls and you have any questions, please contact the UPP Halls Hotline.

Our COVID-19 Support & Behaviour Team will be available outside of the University closure period to support students and housemates of students who develop symptoms or have a positive test result at this time, including help for you to self-isolate.

As with previous messages, I apologise that this is a lot of information. As with everything else during the pandemic, the end of term will be a bit different so it is important that we are as prepared as we can be. Our COVID-19 support line remains available so if you have any questions, please call 0118 214 7813 between 9am and 5pm on weekdays and 11am and 4pm on weekends.

Best wishes,
Paddy Woodman

Dr Patricia (Paddy) Woodman
Director for Student Services