

To: All students

Date: 3 December 2020

Subject: COVID Update #10: Returning to campus in the spring term and non-symptomatic testing

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.

As I am sure you will have seen reported in the media, yesterday afternoon we received guidance from the government about their plans for students returning to university campuses in the spring term.

Institutions have been asked to:

- 'stagger' the return of students to campus, prioritising students on programmes with practical elements or placements;
- and
- provide Lateral Flow Tests for non-symptomatic students when they return to campus.

We are working our way through this new guidance and developing plans for this staggered return. We will write to all students before the end of term to let you know about testing arrangements and when you should plan to be back on campus.

We can confirm, however, that our spring term will start as planned on **Monday 11 January** for most students, noting that a small number of programmes will start before that. Programmes will start online for many students initially, as we transition back to face-to-face teaching in a phased way by early February, in line with government guidance.

We are still planning to reopen our Library, catering services and campus facilities from 4 January after the Christmas closure.

This new government guidance does not change any of the information we have already provided to our international students, including students from the European Union, about the return to campus.

In the meantime, we have provided some [brief Frequently Asked Questions on Essentials](#).

Tier 2 restrictions in Reading

Reading and Wokingham are both now subject to the 'high alert' or [Tier 2](#) level of restrictions of the local COVID-19 alert system. In our email last week [we explained](#) what this means for you and the impact on our University activities up until we close for Christmas from 22 December until 4 January. Please make sure you familiarise yourself with the new regulations.

Testing for non-symptomatic students (1 to 11 December)

Our Test Centre at the SportsPark Hall is open until Friday 11 December, offering Lateral Flow Tests for students and members of staff without symptoms. These tests are to help provide you with extra reassurance heading into the Christmas break, particularly those of you who plan to travel.

If you haven't done so already, you can still [book a test](#). There is plenty of availability for you to select the date and time that suits you. Further information and frequently asked questions are [published on Essentials](#).

Remember that if you have any of the [main symptoms of COVID-19](#), you should not take one of these Lateral Flow Tests at the Sports Hall and you should book a PCR test through the [national NHS system](#).

If you test positive for COVID-19, from any type of test, you must [let us know](#) as soon as possible so we can support you.

Going away or staying in Reading? Please let us know

If you are living in halls, please use the 'Going away' form on the Home at Halls app to let us know your planned travel dates. It is really important that we know which rooms are occupied so we can best support our students who are staying at this time

Whether you live in halls or private accommodation, if you are staying in Reading for the Christmas break (over the closure period from 22 December to 4 January) please let us know using [our online form](#). We will then be able to keep you informed with what is happening in and around Reading over this period and to contact you if there are any important updates you need to know at this time.

To help connect students who will be around campus at this time, RUSU are hosting a [virtual Christmas meet-up](#) on 18 December for those staying in Reading – find out more on their [Facebook page](#).

Planning travel at the end of term

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 are using public transport you should follow the [safer travel guidance](#). This includes wearing a face covering (unless you are exempt), planning your journey in advance to avoid busy times and routes, washing/sanitising your hands regularly, and keeping your distance while travelling, where possible. We also recommend that you pre-book travel by public transport, if you can, as there may be increased demand over this period. The government has also confirmed that if you had already booked rail travel, it may be possible to change your journey [without paying an admin fee](#).

For those travelling home in your own car, Thames Valley Police have asked us to remind you not to pack your car the day before and leave items visible overnight, as this may be a target for thieves. Please also be aware that there are some [major roadworks planned on the M4](#) for the next two weekends.

Changes to self-isolation for people travelling to the UK from overseas

The government has recently announced plans to offer a new ['Test to release' scheme](#) from 15 December. This means that people arriving into the UK from countries [not on the exemption list](#) will be able to pay privately for a COVID-19 test to reduce the length of time they 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.

Socialising at the end of term

We would like to end by thanking you all for continuing to play your part to adhere to the government restrictions. As we come towards the end of term, it is essential that we all continue to keep social contact with others to a minimum. The [current Tier 2 regulations](#) mean that you must not meet indoors with anyone other than members of your household, even if you have tested negative for the virus.

It is, however, important to note that, unlike during the recent 'lockdown', you can now [meet outdoors in a group of up to 6 people](#) from outside your household, meaning you can meet others safely outdoors if you wish to do so.

We are also continuing to offer a range of online social events and activities, such as gingerbread making and a virtual escape room. Find out more on the [Get Together Diary](#).

I hope this email has been helpful. We will continue to keep the [Essentials webpages](#) updated with the latest information and advice. You can also contact our COVID-19 support line on 0118 214 7813 from 9am to 5pm on weekdays and 11am to 4pm at weekends.

Best wishes,
Paddy Woodman

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