

To: All UG and PG students

Date: 26 November 2020

Subject: COVID Update #9: Reading to enter Tier 2 restrictions after lockdown

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.

Dear students,

The government has announced that, following the end of lockdown restrictions in England on 2 December, Reading and Wokingham, the local authorities in which the University is located, will be placed under the 'high alert' or Tier 2 level of restrictions of the local COVID alert system. The government has indicated that this new system will be in place until the spring. Prior to lockdown, Reading and Wokingham had both been under 'medium' or Tier 1 restrictions.

The government has assured universities that we can remain open as long as safety measures are in place to minimise the spread of the virus, so this email sets out some initial information about what that will mean for you. Please also take a moment to read the full details of the [high alert restrictions](#) on the government website.

As with everything to do with COVID-19, there is a lot of information here, but it is important that you understand these new rules and how the University is responding.

What restrictions will apply in Reading and Wokingham from 2 December?

This announcement means that the Reading and Wokingham areas, including the University's Whiteknights and London Road campuses, will be subject to tighter restrictions than applied before the lockdown in England began on 5 November.

Based on what the government has announced so far, here are some of the main rules that will apply:

- you can only socialise indoors with people you live with or who are in your support bubble, whether it is at home or in a public place
- outdoors, you can meet up in a group of up to six people, including in a garden or a public space like a park
- restrictions will apply to food and drink businesses, and pubs, bars and nightclubs must close unless they are operating as restaurants
- other businesses, including retail shops, hairdressers and cinemas, can operate in a COVID-secure way, but some may have to close early or there will be limits on numbers
- gyms can open and organised indoor sport, physical activity and exercise classes are permitted if people can avoid mixing with those they do not live with or share a support bubble with
- organised outdoor sport, physical activity and exercise classes can resume.

You will still be able to return to University after the Christmas break if you have been away, even to a Tier 3 area, and commuter students can still travel to and from University. However, you should try and keep your travel to a minimum and avoid public transport if you can.

What is the impact on University activities before the Christmas break?

The plans that we have [previously shared](#) for services and facilities after the end of lockdown until Christmas are all within these new restrictions and so they will not change. These are set out in our [one-page guidance note](#) and include:

- Our catering facilities that are currently open will continue to operate on a takeaway-only basis, with some dine-in capacity at Park Eat, Wantage Hall and St Patrick's Hall for catered students.
- Our bars will remain closed, as will the SportsPark, which is currently in use as our on-campus asymptomatic testing facility.
- 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 (22 December to 4 January). All other study space across campus will be closed from 9 December.

What is the impact on University activities in the Spring term?

We will need to wait for any final regulations from government on the impact of the high alert restrictions, including on universities, but we anticipate that from the start of the new term on 11 January, we will be operating as follows:

- **Teaching**
We will continue to offer a blended model of online and face-to-face teaching, with all our current safety provisions in place.
- **Study space**
You will be able to access bookable study space in the library, as well as non-bookable space in the URS building and other locations around the campus.
- **Student support**
Our student support services will continue with the current blended approach of face-to-face appointments for welfare cases, supported by online services. The student support reception desk will remain open for drop-in queries.
- **Library, museums, and collections**
The Library and our museums and collections will be open with COVID-secure measures in place such as social distancing and additional hygiene measures. There may be some changes to opening hours.
- **Food, sport and recreation**
Services across some food and recreation services will be open, with COVID-secure measures in place such as social distancing and additional hygiene measures. We anticipate that the SportsPark will be open, but there may be some limitations on its operation.
- **RUSU**
Your students' union will continue to provide a blended service, but with an 'online first' approach. RUSU intends that food outlets, bars, social spaces and study spaces will be open, subject to social distancing, additional hygiene measures and government rules. Social activities will continue to be offered online, as well as face-to-face activities allowed within the high alert restrictions. The nursery will remain open subject to government guidelines.

What do these new rules mean for socialising?

The tier 2 restrictions mean that you can only socialise indoors with people from your household or support bubble. This applies whether you are in your home or in a public place like a restaurant. Outdoors, groups of up to six people can meet up. This applies to public spaces like parks and also to private outdoors spaces like gardens.

It is really important that you stick to these rules. We are all frustrated by the ongoing restrictions on our ability to see family and friends and enjoy a full range of face-to-face social activity. This is not the University social experience you hoped for, or have experienced before COVID-19 came along. But the more strictly we stick to the rules now, the sooner we get the virus under control and we can return to something like 'normal life'. Under the current lockdown restrictions, case numbers for both the University and for Reading and Wokingham have dropped, so we know that the restrictions work.

If people break the rules, the virus will continue to spread – killing people as it does – and we will face limitations on our activities for even longer. Lots of people are pinning their hopes on a vaccine. The news about vaccines does sound very positive but rolling out vaccinations once they have been approved across the population will take time, and the government has already indicated that it will be prioritised for those most at risk.

It is really important that I make you aware about some very serious incidents that we are currently investigating regarding student gatherings. Some of these relate to potentially serious breaches of the lockdown rules, but some if proven could actually give rise to other criminal charges, including assault. I have no doubt that you are as appalled by this as I am, and unsurprised that we are taking these incidents very seriously. I can only ask that you please abide by the rules, respect our staff and do the right thing. Please think not just of yourself, but of the safety of those around you, including your friends and family.

I do not wish to finish on a negative note, so I will close by saying that our number of [daily reported COVID-19 cases](#) continue to remain low. This is really positive and can only be achieved because so many of you are sticking to the rules, acting constructively and keeping our community safe. Thank you.

As with all other major government COVID-19 announcements, we anticipate that there will be more detailed guidance provided for universities about the tier system, and will update our current plans if we need to. The national and local situation may also continue to change. So please check your University email account regularly, even over the Christmas break, for important updates. We will also 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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Director of Student Services