

Updates from your Vice-Chancellor

Dear students,

I hope you remain safe and well, and that you are looking forward to some rest over the summer, whether you finish your exams this term or you are continuing to work on dissertations or research in the coming months.

Thank you to my colleagues Professor Julian Park and Professor Elizabeth McCrum for their recent update to you on plans for the autumn term. I wanted to take this opportunity to provide you with some further information about this, and some other developments, before the end of term next week.

### **Your safe return to campus for autumn 2020**

I am personally very much looking forward to returning to campus, after such a long time working remotely away from colleagues and students. We have developed a roadmap, which I am pleased to [share with you](#), setting out our plan for managing the gradual reinstating of our campus activities in a phased and careful way.

Our Whiteknights and London Road campuses will be open in September and we are expecting to welcome students back for the start of the autumn term, where possible. We are working to create a vibrant, active campus and provide you with the best possible experience, while taking the necessary steps to protect your health and safety as well as that of colleagues.

To achieve this we are focusing on two key areas:

1. **A blended approach to teaching**, through a combination of face-to-face and online activities, to ensure you can continue your programme as planned while adhering to social distancing requirements. Please refer to the [previous email](#) from Professor Julian Park and Professor Elizabeth McCrum on 26 May for more detailed information.
2. **Adapting our facilities and services**, in recognition that your student experience is about much more than the course you are studying. Although campus will initially feel different, we will provide opportunities for you to continue your personal development and make the most of your time at university.

Subject to any changes in government guidance, for the autumn term we anticipate that:

- our Support Centres and wider network of support services will be available to provide advice on campus;
- Halls of Residence will be open;
- the Library will be open;
- many of our catering outlets will be open offering a great range of meals, snacks and drinks as well as our Clever Cuisine Eating Plans;
- Our SportsPark will be open, offering a range of activities and exercise opportunities.

RUSU are also working to offer as full a range of events and activities as possible from September, in line with social distancing requirements, and they will share more details closer to the start of term. They will continue to provide as many support services as possible on campus and online, deliver a range of virtual events and work with student activity groups to enhance your student experience.

Appropriate social distancing measures will be applied to all of the facilities and services highlighted. We will keep these arrangements under close review and adjust as required to align with government advice and the needs of our students.

### **Support for students studying remotely**

If you are unable to return to Reading in time for the start of term (for example, due to travel restrictions or continued guidance to isolate for health reasons), our flexible blended approach will enable you to start term remotely and continue to work towards your programme learning outcomes until you are in a position to come back to campus.

As outlined in the [previous email on 26 May](#), we will provide high-quality digital course content, as well as interactive online activities to ensure you maintain a strong connection to the University and your course community. You will also continue to be supported by your Academic Tutor and our wider network of specialist support services.

### **Longer term planning in response to COVID-19**

I also wanted to take the opportunity to provide further information about the steps we are taking to mitigate the longer term impact on our University. This week, I have been briefing all colleagues on these issues, and while we do not yet have all the answers, I want to be as open as possible with our students too.

The economic impact of the pandemic has been immense for the whole nation, including the university sector. The University of Reading is in a better position than many to cope with this, but it represents one of the biggest financial challenges that we have ever experienced. While this means we will have to make savings, I am committed to doing this in a way that does not compromise your student experience or that of future generations.

To achieve this, we are:

1. Making savings that take effect now, by:
  - pausing a number of big projects that are less critical in the short to medium term;
  - reducing expenditure where at all possible;
  - making use of the government furlough scheme.
2. Planning ahead to make further savings over the next three years through:
  - future asset sales;
  - a wider strategic review of the University's operations.

Despite being at a very early stage of this work, it is possible that we will need to make some reductions in staffing in some areas, as the scale of savings is too large to make up in other ways. We expect to soon begin a period of collective consultation with the University & College Union (UCU) and the Staff Forum, our staff representative bodies, to fully explore ways that would minimise any job losses. Your RUSU President is also directly involved in the strategic review of the University's operations.

Our highest priority is, and will always be, providing our students with the best possible experience, at the same time as protecting the long-term future of our institution for our whole University community. This means we will be considerate about how and when to make these necessary changes, to minimise the impact as far as we reasonably can.

The effort that everyone has made to adapt to new ways of work so quickly, while supporting each other, is just one example of our sense of community at Reading. While I feel disappointed to have

to share such news with you after what has been a very difficult few months, I believe it is important to be open and to provide every reassurance that you, our students, will continue to be at the forefront of our minds throughout our decision-making.

### **Keep in touch**

We will continue to keep you updated with news and developments over the summer break so please do check your University emails regularly.

Our Student Services newsletter next week will contain useful advice about preparing to move out of private rented accommodation and ongoing support from our network of services. For those students who will be receiving exam or assessment results this summer, we will be in touch soon with further information about the timeline for results publication and subsequent next steps, depending on your stage of study.

That concludes my updates for now. Thank you for taking the time to read this long message, which I hope has been useful. As always, if you have any queries please do speak to your Support Centre, Academic Tutor or Supervisor, HBS School Office, ISLI Helpdesk, or Graduate School, as appropriate.

I wish you all the best and hope you take some time to rest after what has been a difficult few months for us all.

Kind regards,

Professor Robert Van de Noort

Vice-Chancellor