

Welcome to the start of the autumn term from your Vice-Chancellor

Dear students,

I am very pleased to welcome you for the start of the new academic year and also to share [my video message](#) for all students.

While some of you will be enrolled on courses that have already started teaching this year, or will not be starting until later in October, this week marks an important step in our phased return to our campuses here in Reading. Whether you are currently studying on campus or remotely, I hope you are looking forward to the term ahead.

Our strong community is something I talk about often, as it makes Reading a truly special place for us all. In the last 6 months, we have faced enormous challenges, individually and collectively, and I have never been more proud of you, our students, and of my colleagues. Despite being largely dispersed across the world, we have continued to support and inspire one another. While our campus is clearly an important part of our identity, our 'community' is so much more.

As we launch our ['blended' learning environment](#) this autumn, I hope you will see that spending less time with one another in person does not mean you will be any less supported through your time with us. In this spirit, I wanted to take the time to highlight some particularly important things you need to know.

Protecting yourself and others from coronavirus

We now have many students back in Reading, and it has been great to see our campuses coming to life. I would like to thank everyone who is doing their bit to keep our community safe by sticking to the government and University requirements. You can be sure that your efforts will help save lives.

The government last week announced stricter rules particularly around social activity. So we have published [a joint message for all students](#) with the Reading University Students' Union, RUSU, giving an overview of the latest legal restrictions. The consequences of breaking these rules can be significant so please make sure you are familiar with them. In particular, if you meet with more than 6 people (from outside your household), you can be fined £200 by the Police and up to £400 by the University. For serious offences, you could also be expelled from Halls and/or the University.

This week we received confirmation of a positive COVID-19 test result for one of our students in Reading. The student has been in self-isolation at home since developing symptoms, and relevant teaching colleagues and members of their cohort have been informed. We are also working closely with Public Health England. I am sure you will understand that we need to protect the privacy of the individual and therefore we will not be communicating any further details.

This is a timely reminder that we must do all we can to protect ourselves and each other from the virus. There are three things we must all continue to do to help prevent the spread of coronavirus:

- Wash hands - keep washing your hands regularly
- Cover face - wear a face covering in enclosed spaces
- Make space - stay at least 2 metres apart (or 1 metre with a face covering or other precautions)

Symptoms and testing

If you have any of the main [symptoms of coronavirus](#):

1. [Get a test](#) as soon as possible.
2. [Stay at home](#) (self-isolate) and do not have visitors until you get your test result.

Anyone you live with must also stay at home until you get your result.

If you need to self-isolate, for any reason, you must stay at your current address and not travel elsewhere. For example, if you are living in halls or private accommodation, you will need to self-isolate there and not travel to your family home.

Please see our [further information for students who need to self-isolate](#). You can also contact our dedicated team at covid-support@reading.ac.uk.

Our response to the ongoing pandemic

Please make sure you read our [‘Collective responsibility’ briefing](#). It outlines the measures we have put in place to protect your health, as well as the steps you must take to protect those around you.

Last week the Prime Minister reiterated that keeping education institutions open, including universities, was a priority. We have worked hard adapt our campuses to provide you with a safe and supportive environment to study and live. However, we are nonetheless prepared to respond to any local or national developments that mean we need to change our current arrangements.

There has been some recent media speculation about travel over the Christmas vacation. One thing we have learnt in recent months is that the COVID-19 situation continues to change rapidly, and none of us can predict what may happen in the coming weeks and months. We will continue to keep you updated with the latest government and university advice.

NHS COVID-19 app

The new [NHS COVID-19 app](#) is now available to download. It is part of the large-scale NHS coronavirus testing and contact tracing programme and will be used to notify users if they come into close contact with someone who later tests positive for coronavirus.

We have installed QR code posters around campus, both in and outside of buildings. On entering each building, you can use the app to ‘check-in’ by scanning the QR code with your phone. Whilst not compulsory, in order to help us manage the risk of coronavirus in our community, we strongly encourage everyone to get into the habit of ‘checking-in’ every time you enter a building or venue with a QR code. For further information, please see [our blog post](#).

Your university experience

I recognise that the government restrictions outlined above mean that your university experience this term may be different to what you had hoped. We will continue to support you throughout this time and offer opportunities for you to continue your personal and professional development.

As outlined in my [recent video message](#), our [Academic Tutors](#), [Library and Study Advice](#) teams are here to support your learning. This year it will be more important than ever to work closely with your

Academic Tutor so make sure you take the opportunity to meet them at the start of term, and keep in touch regularly. We have published resources and information about how to make the most of your Academic Tutor on [Essentials](#).

In addition, our [network of specialist support teams](#) are available for advice relating to your welfare, mental health, finances, disabilities or long-term health conditions, or visas/immigration for international students.

We are very fortunate to have a [fantastic Students' Union, RUSU](#), who have put together a varied programme of social events and activities, on campus and online this autumn. You can also take the opportunity to join a sports club or society, many of which are running a combination of campus and online activities.

Opportunities like [learning a new language](#), [volunteering](#), [THRIVE Mentoring](#), the [Reading Internship Scheme](#), becoming an [Academic Rep](#), and [Students in Schools](#) can also help you to gain new skills and meet new people. The [RED Award](#), our official employability certificate, means you can be rewarded and recognised for participating in extra-curricular activities like these.

While some of you may feel it is too early to plan for your future career, and others may be worried about the economic impact of the pandemic, you should seek professional advice from our [Careers team](#) and make the most of all their support. The knowledge, skills and attributes you develop at university will be valuable in a range of contexts. You have something unique to offer and it is our job to help you to do this. To find out more about our events, schemes, and how to book a 1-2-1 telephone appointment with a consultant, please visit the [Careers webpages](#).

I hope this information has been useful. We will of course continue to keep you updated throughout the term. In the meantime, if you have any queries and you are not sure who to ask, please speak to your [Academic Tutor](#), [Support Centre or Henley Helpdesk](#), or [Graduate School](#) (for Research students).

I would like to end with the message we have displayed on the side of our Palmer Building, at the heart of our Whiteknights campus:

'It's up to each one of us to keep us all safe. Take responsibility, be kind and respect each other'.

With best wishes,

Robert

Professor Robert Van de Noort

Vice-Chancellor