

To: All Students

Date: 07/01/2021

Subject: COVID-19 update #17: Important new information in response to national lockdown

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.

The sudden announcement of the new national lockdown this week means that you will have lots of questions about how this will affect your studies, now and in the longer term.

I apologise that it has taken some time for us to share this information with you. While the outline government guidance was available online on Monday, much of the detail of all government COVID-19 measures is contained in the underlying legal regulations. We needed to wait until the government had published the legal regulations for the new lockdown, which happened on Tuesday, before we could make important decisions on things like library services, travel, and catering. We have also today received specific guidance [for universities](#) from the Department for Education (DfE).

I hope this email will help provide some reassurance, although there are some further details we will work to clarify in the coming days as outlined below.

New national lockdown

The government has indicated that the [current lockdown arrangements](#) will remain in place until mid-February at the earliest. While difficult, these restrictions apply to everyone, even if you feel that you are not at particular risk.

The new variant of the virus is more transmissible and, now more than ever, it is vital that we all play our part in keeping our community safe. Remember, your actions have a direct impact on others around you, and if we all work together the current lockdown should help contain the virus and these stricter measures will hopefully not need to be extended.

We must be especially vigilant in remembering the basic precautions – washing hands frequently, wearing a face covering (unless you are exempt), and maintaining a distance from others.

Teaching and assessment

As outlined in [my email earlier this week](#), teaching will be online only until at least Monday 22 February, subject to confirmation from government that face-to-face teaching can resume then. The only exceptions are for Education (Initial Teacher Training), Physician Associates, Speech & Language Therapy and Pharmacy programmes where face-to-face teaching continues to be allowed.

Your academic timetable is being updated at the moment to reflect the changes from face-to-face teaching to online and will be finalised by Saturday 9 January. Please note that timetables are subject to further change, sometimes at short notice. You should check your timetable at least once a week and refer to alerts in your Outlook calendar.

Much of our coursework and other in-year assessment for 2020/21 can be completed in your current location (whether on campus or remotely) and therefore the majority of assessments will

remain unchanged for this term and the original deadlines set should be adhered to. Your module lecturers will be in touch in those cases where specific changes are required due to the national lockdown. If you have questions about your individual modules, please contact your Module Convenor to find out more specific information.

We have been working together with RUSU on plans for assessments and exams this spring/summer, including developing appropriate mitigation arrangements to take into consideration the impact the current pandemic continues to have on you and your studies. We understand some of you are keen to know more about this and we will share these plans with you as soon as we can.

In the autumn, we wrote to students on selected degree programmes where it had been identified that it would be difficult for you to meet programme learning outcomes without being on campus in the spring term. As we have now been asked by the government to move almost all teaching online, academic staff are working to review and amend planned teaching and assessment arrangements to ensure this does not impact your studies. If you are on one of these programmes and completed the online form to say you needed to study online, we will be in touch directly in the coming days.

Student travel

We must all adhere to the current [‘stay at home’ lockdown guidance](#), which means you can only leave your home if it is for a ‘reasonable excuse’ as [specified by the government](#). The government has asked students who travelled away for Christmas to stay in their vacation residence until face-to-face teaching resumes for their programme. Students who have already returned to Reading are asked by the government to remain in their term-time accommodation.

The legal regulations and the DfE guidance make clear that students can travel back to campus from your holiday accommodation, but you can only do this once and then cannot move back and forth between addresses during the lockdown. We would, however, encourage you to stay at your current address if you can, and only return if it is absolutely necessary, for example:

- international students who cannot amend their travel plans;
- if you do not have facilities to re-commence your studies online at your vacation address;
- for health and safety reasons;
- to continue to access specialist medical or mental health services.

If you are currently on campus, we have provided further information about the opening times of our facilities and services at the end of this email

Student support

Our full range of [specialist advice and support services](#) are available remotely, including your Support Centres and the Henley Helpdesk, the ISLI Administration team and the Graduate School. You will also continue to have access to all our online Library resources and remote support from our [Study Advice team](#).

We understand some students may have concerns about their finances in the current circumstances. We have made additional funds available to support those students who are facing unexpected financial hardship because of the pandemic, through our Alumni & Supporter Engagement Office and the government. If you are struggling to pay for essential living costs (such as rent or food) please visit the [Money Matters](#) webpages on Essentials, where you can find advice and signposting to external services, as well as how to apply to our [Student Support Fund](#) (hardship fund). We are also relaunching our [Digital Support Fund](#) for eligible students

The continuing difficult circumstances may sometimes lead to disagreements with others in your student household, particularly as the government restrictions have been changing quickly. If you have any concerns about the behaviour of other students, please contact our [COVID-19 Support & Behaviour Team](#) for advice.

As well as our expert teams, we also provide a range of resources to support you and your wellbeing, including:

- [Togetherall](#) - a safe and anonymous online space that you can go to if you are feeling down, struggling to cope, or just want to talk to people who understand what you're going through.
- [Support our Students scheme](#) - connects you to a fellow student or university staff member to help you feel more connected to our community.
- [Student Space](#) – specific to COVID-19, including information, services and tools to help you with the challenges of student life.
- [RUSU Welfare Directory](#) - provides contact details for a variety of organisations and support within, and external to the University of Reading.

The Student Services Reception in the Carrington Building remains open for drop-in queries.

Halls

Our Halls are open for students who need to be here and students have access to their rooms and our Halls Welfare Team, subject to the advice on travel above.

The University Executive Board is reviewing a rent waiver for students in University Halls of Residence, and the outcome of this work will be announced early next week. Please bear with us as we work through the practicalities of this as we are very keen to help and support our students at this difficult time. There are also existing assistance programmes in place within the University should students find themselves in difficulty, as outlined in the student support section of this email. The next rent instalments are due on Monday, with the usual payment terms of 28 days, and any waiver will then be credited against this.

RUSU

[Your Students' Union](#) continues to support you. All support services are available online, and clubs and societies will continue remotely as much as possible. The Seoul Plaza and Mailbox shops are open, as well as the Bagelman for takeaway. Under government guidance, the nursery will remain open.

Research

All research must be conducted from home wherever possible. If you are a doctoral researcher and need access to specialist facilities on campus, please seek permission from your Head of School and your Supervisor(s). If you have any more general queries about the impact of the current circumstances on your studies, please contact your Supervisor(s) or the Graduate School.

If you have a query related to your undergraduate or postgraduate research project then you should contact your project supervisor in the first instance.

As ever, we are here to support you through this ongoing uncertainty. Please continue to check your emails regularly – particularly for updates shortly relating to exams and assessments, as well as for halls residents. Take some time to [read all of the resources that are available to you](#). If you are facing any challenges, feeling lonely or isolated, or are struggling with your mental wellbeing, we are here to help – all you have to do is ask.

Our COVID-19 support hotline (0118 214 7813) continues to be available from 9.15am to 4.30pm Monday to Friday.

Best wishes,
Paddy

Dr Patricia (Paddy) Woodman
Director of Student Services

Facilities for students on campus

We strongly recommend that you study from your current residence and only use the Library and other facilities on campus if it is necessary or if you do not have access to suitable study space.

The Student Services Reception in the Carrington Building remains open if needed for drop-in queries.

Lateral Flow Tests

All students are strongly encouraged to [book two Lateral Flow Tests](#), three days apart, when you travel back to campus. If you have stayed in Reading for the Christmas break you should also book tests. The only exceptions are:

- if you have returned/arrived in the UK from overseas, as you will need to [self-isolate for 10 days](#) (unless you have travelled from an exempt country) or use the government [‘Test to release’ scheme](#);
or
- if you have received a positive COVID-19 test result in the last 90 days.

If you do not wish to take a Lateral Flow Test on your return the government recommends that you instead self-isolate for 10 days.

Library, study space museums and collections

You will continue to have access to all our online Library resources and remote support from our [Study Advice team](#).

The Library will remain open for study space and Click & Collect during the following hours:

Monday to Thursday: 8:30 - 19:00

Friday, Saturday & Sunday: 8:30 - 17:00

In addition to bookable study space in the Library, RUSU’s The Study is open for non-bookable study space and is accessible 24/7 by Campus Card. Given the reduced numbers on campus, Study@URS is currently closed, although we will monitor study space demand and keep this under review.

Our PC Labs in the Palmer and Agriculture buildings are also open 24/7. They are accessible with your Campus Card and you do not need to book them.

Our special collections will be available for scan on demand. The MERL Reading Room and museums will be closed.

Food, sport and recreation

The following catering services are currently open on campus for takeaway service:

- The Library café (9.00 - 16.00, Monday to Friday)
- Park Eat (8.00 – 22.00, 7 days a week)
- The Dairy (8.00 – 16.00, Monday to Friday)
- Wantage and St Patrick's Hall – for residents only (8.00 – 22.00, 7 days a week)

The Marketplace at Park Eat is also open from 8.00 – 22.00, 7 days a week, to buy food and other household essentials.

The SportsPark will remain closed. Under the current lockdown, all outdoor group exercise, including the sports fields and grass pitches, is prohibited. You can exercise outside on your own, with members of your household, or one other person from outside your household, including on our campus.

If you are meeting someone from outside your household, this must be for exercise and not for just for social reasons (for example, you should not meet outside for a coffee).