

Dear student,

I hope this email finds you safe and well. If you have now started exams I wish you the best of luck. These are really challenging times – do look after yourselves as you study, take your exams and complete your coursework. There is support available to you [from Queen Mary](#) and [from our Students' Union](#). If you have any concerns, do reach out – either to your Advisor, or through the [Student Enquiry Centre](#) or our [wellbeing services](#). Remember our campuses are open, and if you need to come onto campus to access quiet study space, IT or internet facilities, or if you feel that your mental health and wellbeing will be better served by being on campus, you are welcome to do so. If you are coming onto our campuses to study, please [book a space](#), as we will be temporarily locking some teaching spaces that are currently not being used to ensure everyone is studying and working in Covid-safe areas. If demand for study space increases we will open more space across our campuses.

This week, I want to touch on keeping safe on our campuses, education and student support, ensuring fair assessment, the implications of Brexit, and rents and financial hardship.

### **Keeping safe on our campuses**

Thank you to everyone for continuing to follow our [Covid Code](#). It is really important that we do everything we can to keep everyone safe. We have made some adjustments, in the light of the new Covid-19 variant, to our health and safety policy, including:

- a change to our [face covering policy](#). Face coverings must now be worn in all indoor spaces where 2m social distancing cannot be maintained. **Face coverings must also now be worn at all times in all of our libraries and study spaces.** If you are exempt from wearing a face covering please ensure you wear the sunflower lanyard or an exemption badge. If you do not have a lanyard you can collect one from our libraries
- you are very welcome to come onto our campuses to study if you don't have access to adequate space or facilities at home. If you do want to use study space, please [book a space](#), rather than just using teaching rooms. This is to ensure everyone is studying in Covid-safe areas
- in relation to the Covid-19 testing we are offering for students and staff who don't have coronavirus symptoms, every student living on our campuses or travelling regularly to our campuses should be tested every week. Remember you need to book two tests, two to three days apart. Please [book on our website](#). Regular testing is a key way in which we can stop Covid-19 spreading. Over 4,000 tests have been successfully completed so far
- in our buildings, use the stairs if you can. If you need to use lifts, please follow the guidance about how many people can safely be in the lift at one time
- we are also improving ventilation in buildings, particularly where 2m social distancing cannot be maintained

### **Education and student support**

As you know, owing to the new national restrictions education will now be online for most subject areas until at least mid-February. Your teaching will start on the dates planned, but sessions will now all be online for most subject areas. If you are in one of the areas that can start in-person teaching earlier, you will be contacted directly by your School/Institute.

I realise studying wholly online is challenging. If you are worried or anxious, about your education or anything else, remember we are here to support you. Have a look at our wellbeing services,

including our mental health support, and remember there is also support available to you via your School or Institute, including via your Advisor. As well as scheduled Advising sessions, remember office hours are available for all students if you would like to virtually 'drop in' on your Advisor.

### **Ensuring fair assessment**

I know there are some concerns about how we will assess your progress and ensure fair assessment in the face of the ongoing pandemic.

Our primary concern has been, and always will be, is your overall health and wellbeing and ensuring we uphold our Queen Mary values. We are confident in the ongoing quality of our academic provision, and have received, and been able to respond to, excellent feedback from some of you. We realise, however, that no matter how good our provision, the wider issues of the pandemic may, in different ways, continue to impact on some students' ability to study and carry out their assessments. We are committed to ensuring our assessment processes are fair, and robust, and that they take into account any overall trends in students' achievements as well as students' individual experiences.

We will continue to work through our governance structures, as well as with our students, through our Students' Union and Student-Staff Liaison Committees, as we continue to ensure a fair approach to our assessment through these difficult times.

### **Rent for term-time University-owned accommodation**

Concerns about the payment of rent for term-time accommodation during this period of greater national restrictions are being raised locally and nationally. We have been working with our Students' Union on this issue, and have now written to all our students in University-owned residences on this point. Many of our students are of course in privately-run accommodation. We are working through university umbrella bodies, as well as the Government, to try and influence the behaviour of the larger private providers of accommodation for students. In the meantime, if you are facing financial hardship, please do apply for help via our [Financial Assistance Fund](#).

### **Brexit: update on student exchange programmes**

As I'm sure you're aware, the UK and the EU agreed on 24 December the EU-UK Trade and Cooperation Agreement, in advance of 1 January 2021 and the end of the Brexit transition period. I want to take a moment to explain what this Agreement means for UK universities and student exchange programmes.

The Agreement has taken the UK out of the new Erasmus+ Programme (2021-27). The UK Government has announced, as a replacement, the [Turing scheme](#) with £100m funding to support UK students to study and work abroad in 2021/22. We are waiting for the details of this scheme. If you are a student who will be going abroad for work or study as part of your Queen Mary degree in 2021/22, the Global Opportunities Office will be in touch with more details as soon as possible. Participation in the current Erasmus+ Programme (2014-20) is not affected.

If you have any questions about Erasmus+ or the Turing scheme, please contact [Wiebke Leugers](#) in our Global Opportunities team.

Finally, I just wanted to say again that I know that everyone is struggling with the restrictions during these very difficult times. Please do look after yourselves and each other, and remember there is

[support available](#) for you if you need it. Please also remember that if you feel that your mental health and wellbeing will be better served by being on campus, you are welcome to come onto our campuses to study. The vaccines also provide light at the end of the Covid tunnel! In our vaccination centre alone, by the end of last week over 2,000 people from the local community had been vaccinated. Our staff and students also continue to contribute directly to the fight against Covid-19, on the NHS frontline, helping our local communities or through Covid-related research programmes, which makes us all very proud.

Please keep safe. I will write to you again next week with a further update, or earlier if necessary.

Best wishes,

Colin

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