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College and University HE students

24 March 2021

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK UPDATE, PHASED RETURN OF COLLEGE AND UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Dear student,

I want to update you on the phased return to in-person teaching at colleges and universities and our new funding package of support.

I want to thank you again for your patience, understanding and support during these extremely challenging times. By following the guidance, you are helping us all progress back to normality.

Further phased return of students

Based on clinical advice, institutions have been allowed to return up to 5% of students for in-person learning at any one time.

From 5 April, colleges will be able to return more students, specifically those in groups identified by Colleges Scotland as being the most likely to not complete this academic year (including those taking qualifications in construction, engineering, hairdressing, beauty and related courses). This will be in place until Scotland moves into the level restrictions, where colleges will operate under the revised regional levels approach from 26 April.

Universities will continue to adhere to the limit of 5% of students for in-person learning at any one time until 26 April. There will be some very limited flexibility above this 5% limit for some specialised and postgraduate courses. However, overall numbers will continue to be low. Arrangements for any increase in the number of students beyond the 5% limit after 26 April will be discussed with universities.

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Your college or university will advise you on how this affects your own studies, and whether you will be asked to attend in-person learning or continue your studies online. Please do not return for in-person learning until you are informed you should can do so.

The final decision on these changes will be made week beginning 29 March to take into consideration latest public health advice and the overall situation with the pandemic at that point in time.

On 26 April, our hope is that all parts of Scotland currently under level 4 restrictions will move to a modified level 3. On that date, it is also expected that students on the shielding list can return to college or university, once in-person learning has resumed. If you are in the shielding category and have any concerns about returning to university or colleges, please speak to your institution.

We do not intend to make any further changes until 17 May, however, from this date I hope colleges and universities will be able to return to a more blended model of learning with more students allowed back on campus.

Student and staff testing

I am also pleased that regular, twice weekly testing has been agreed for staff and students. We are planning the logistics for rolling this out as soon as possible and will be able to update shortly.

Returning home for Easter break

Many of you currently in term-time accommodation may wish to return home for Easter. However, the 'stay at home' order remains in force across mainland Scotland until 2 April at the earliest, and you should only leave the place you live for an essential purpose.

The restrictions in legislation make it clear that travel without some other factor such as the start of face-to-face teaching, essential placements or serious wellbeing or safety reasons is very unlikely to provide a reasonable excuse. Therefore our clear advice to you is that you should not travel home during the Easter break, unless it is for an essential purpose.

If you do need to travel for essential purposes, please use available testing facilities to test before changing household and, where possible, to use a [Community Testing Site](#) to test again once the household change has been made. Prior to returning after the Easter break, and ahead of any change of household, you can now book a PCR test through the Department for Health & Social Care online booking portal, with follow-up LFD tests taken on campus once the household change has been made.

New one-off COVID-19 payment

Many of you will also be facing uncertainty around your funding, with some of you having to extend or repeat your courses and placements being impacted. The Scottish Government has announced a package of support to provide reassurance for both further (FE) and higher education (HE) students at colleges and universities which will allow you to complete your studies.

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Full-time higher education students who find themselves in this position of having to repeat or extend study will receive a guaranteed one-off Covid-19 payment of up to £1,600 for additional study of 16 weeks or less. This will be made at £400 per four week period up to a maximum of 16 weeks.

HE Course extension period	Amount payable
Up to 4 weeks	£400
Up to 8 weeks	£800
Up to 12 weeks	£1,200
Up to 16 weeks	£1,600

HE students who require to complete studies over a longer period (beyond 16 weeks) will be able to continue to receive their standard monthly package of bursary, grant, loan and fees until their extended course date ends. Full-time further education students will continue to receive their standard package of support for any extended study, until this date ends.

This extension will not impact on the additional year of support available to all Further and Higher Education students commonly referred to as a +1 year.

Discretionary Hardship Funding remains available to all FE and HE students via their college or university. It is important that you submit any application at the earliest opportunity so that help can be made available quickly.

Student Awards Agency Scotland (SAAS) will work closely with colleges and universities to identify where HE students are affected, students do not need to contact SAAS to progress this support if applicable. Colleges will continue to support affected FE students directly.

Further Support

Colleges, universities and accommodation providers have a duty of care to students, and we will continue to make clear to institutions and accommodation providers our expectations regarding support for you, including mental health and pastoral support. Essential in-person student wellbeing and study support services can continue to be provided where it is not possible to do this remotely - this includes providing access to safe study spaces on campus and in student associations for any of you who need it the most.

Please continue to stay up to date with the latest guidance for students, including FAQs on travelling, testing and accommodation, on the [Student Information Scotland](#) website.

I know this has not been easy and an extremely challenging period. I wish you all the very best with your ongoing studies in the future.



RICHARD LOCHHEAD

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