

MPLS message to DPhil students – Tuesday 3rd November 2020

Dear DPhil Students,

As you are no doubt aware, the UK Government announced over the weekend that there will be a new period of national restrictions starting on Thursday 5th November and continuing until Wednesday 2nd December. I am writing to let you know some of the implications for research students and to reassure you that the MPLS Division and the University are working to ensure that postgraduate research students are looked after during this difficult period.

Access to research spaces

The Government has only just published guidance for the Higher Education sector this afternoon (3/11), so there has not been time yet to fully digest all the implications for Oxford, but the early indications are that the impact on research students will be less disruptive than we experienced in the spring. In particular, the Government guidance states, “Researchers and research students will be able to continue in-person research activities if the research work cannot reasonably be conducted from home.” The University, MPLS and individual departments will need time to work through exactly what the guidance means in individual cases, but it is expected that buildings will remain open to research students who need to use them during the period of national restrictions (though if you can carry out your research at home, you should plan to do so).

You should, of course, continue to observe all social distancing and hygiene regulations when working in University buildings, as well as taking all necessary precautions when travelling to and from your place of work. If you need to travel we encourage you to walk or cycle where possible, and to plan ahead and avoid busy times and routes on public transport. This will allow you to practise social distancing while you travel.

Travel

The Minister for Universities has asked that students should stay in their current home from 5th November until 2nd December. This means you should not leave your term time address and you should continue to carry out your research work at the University for the remainder of this term. The reason she is asking you to do this is to prevent any further spread of COVID-19. Any movement around the country will risk spreading virus rather breaking the cycle of transmission (with implications for the health service and the lives of our loved ones).

International students

We are aware that international students may have particular concerns at this time, particularly with regards to whether they can return to their home country. International students should be mindful that the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office currently [advises against all but essential international travel](#). However, it is acknowledged that it is ultimately up to international students whether they choose to return home. Students who do choose to travel must adhere to all public health advice while in the UK to ensure they are travelling safely. If you have symptoms of COVID-19 or have been advised to self-isolate you must not travel in any circumstances.

If you are an international student who has started remotely and are wondering whether you are able to move to Oxford, please be assured that we are working on further advice for students in your situation. There is nothing to prohibit your travel in UK Government regulations. However, there are a number of different stakeholders around the University (particularly colleges) and we cannot currently provide a clear yes or no answer to your concerns. International students travelling from

countries not on the [exemption \(travel corridor\) list](#) will need to self-isolate in their accommodation for 14 days.

Log

As continuing students will be aware, at the start of the first period of national restrictions in March we produced a log template which students can use to keep track of any impact on their research. We urge you to continue using your logs to keep track of any effects that lockdown has on you. If you are a new student, you should start keeping a log now. Experience indicates that keeping track of situations as you go along provides invaluable evidence at a later date showing how you were affected. You can [access the MPLS log from the MPLS COVID-19 Communications page](#).

Welfare and wellbeing

We understand that this situation is very difficult and may cause anxiety and stress for many of you. Please make use of University and college support if you need it. Information on the resources available within the University and more broadly can be found on the University's [welfare and wellbeing section](#) of the coronavirus pages. You should also be aware that all members of the University are able to access free support 24/7 through [togetherall](#) (previously known as 'the big white wall'; register under "I'm from a university or college" with your Oxford email address).

If you think you may have COVID-19

If you develop any symptoms of COVID-19 (high fever, new continuous cough, or loss of taste and smell) you should return to your accommodation as soon as you can and book a test through the University's [COVID-19: Early Alert Service](#). After you have booked a test, notify your college and department's designated COVID-19 contacts so that welfare support and alternative teaching arrangements can be put in place if needed.

If you have received a positive test from elsewhere, please complete [the form for reporting external coronavirus positive results](#).

University Coronavirus pages

Finally, you are advised to [check the University coronavirus pages](#) for further information.

I wish you the best for this difficult period. Please look after yourselves and protect our community.

Best wishes,
Mike

Prof Michael Bonsall, Associate Head of Education, Mathematical, Physical and Life Sciences Division