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7 October 2020

FIRST MINISTER STATEMENT: COVID-19

Dear colleagues,

I am writing to update you following the First Minister's announcement of further, temporary restrictions to control the spread of coronavirus in Scotland, and their implications for students, colleges and universities.

As you are aware the virus levels in Scotland have been increasing. Drawing on [evidence from our senior clinicians](#), the First Minister has set out a targeted approach to control the risk of transmission as tough action is needed now to avoid tougher action in the future.

To confirm, we are not going back into lockdown and colleges and universities will remain open with blended learning in place.

Under [the measures announced](#) by the First Minister today, temporary restrictions will apply to hospitality premises nationwide from Friday 6pm until Sunday 25 October.

More stringent restrictions will apply in the central belt where infection rates are higher - Greater Glasgow & Clyde, Lanarkshire, Ayrshire & Arran, Lothian and Forth Valley health board areas. In these areas:

- all licensed premises will close, although cafes without an alcohol licence can open between 6am – 6pm
- people are being asked to avoid public transport unless absolutely necessary, such as travel to work or study
- people who live in these areas are being asked not to travel outside their health board if they don't need to. Likewise people in other parts of Scotland should not travel to these areas if they don't need to

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- snooker and pool halls, indoor bowling alleys, casinos and bingo halls will close in these areas for two weeks from 10 October.
- indoor group exercise activities and contact sports for people aged 18 and over will be suspended, with an exception for professional sports. Gyms can remain open for individual exercise
- outdoor live events will not be permitted for two weeks

The First Minister also confirmed:

- regulations will be brought forward to extend the mandatory use of face coverings in workplace communal areas such as corridors and staff canteens. Face coverings should already be worn in these areas in colleges, universities and student accommodation, unless an exemption applies, in line with existing guidance.
- FACTS advice will be strengthened to encourage greater compliance, for example with self-isolation, and I am grateful to colleges, universities, students associations and accommodation providers for continued support in heavily promoting this and other Scottish Government campaigns.
- shops are being asked to reintroduce 2m physical distancing, which already applies in most areas of campus.
- a further review of the Scottish Government's Testing Strategy to build capacity and resilience, including extending testing to more people and groups of people.
- people who were previously shielding should take extra care, especially if they live in the central belt.

Today's announcement means that staff and students will still be able to attend campus where necessary, with safety measures in place as set out in the guidance.

Students and staff will be also be able to continue to meet for food and non-alcoholic beverages subject to the rules on social gatherings (up to six people from no more than two households) and local restrictions. We expect that campus catering will be able to continue and food deliveries to students self-isolating should be maintained.

And while the additional restrictions in the central belt will curtail some activities, outdoor exercise and individual exercise in gyms are still permitted.

In my [statement to Parliament](#) on 30 September, I set out the steps being taken in our colleges and universities to keep students, campuses and communities safe. Current levels of COVID-19 mean we need to redouble our efforts.

Further action being taken by the Scottish Government and our ask of you is detailed in Annex A.

The DFM has also announced today that [Higher and Advanced Higher exams](#) to go ahead in 2021, from 13 May, while National 5 exams will be replaced by a system where grades are awarded based on coursework and teacher judgement.

My officials will continue to liaise with you over the implementation of today's announcements.

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I would like to reiterate my thanks for all that you are doing to keep students, staff and society safe. I fully appreciate the challenges you have been dealing with as a result of coronavirus: we are all in this together and it is through our collective endeavor that we will be able to get through this crisis.



RICHARD LOCHHEAD

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Further action on COVID-19 in colleges, universities and student accommodation

Keeping students, campuses and wider communities safe

Knowing, understanding and complying with Scottish guidance and restrictions is essential to reduce the risk of virus transmission and I am grateful to colleges, universities, accommodation providers, student associations and trade unions for your significant efforts **communicating with staff and students** throughout this pandemic.

I ask that you continue to provide clear information about Scottish guidance, such as on social gatherings and staying safe, and promote Scottish Government public health campaigns to staff and students. This includes those already on campus as well as those still to arrive.

We continue to expect **blended learning** to remain the approach in colleges and universities at this time.

As our guidance makes clear, colleges and universities should consider the use of risk and equality assessments to decide what a blended learning model looks like in their own institutions. And institutions should be working with their staff and students to discuss any concerns they have about the use of face to face teaching and enabling more online where that can be done.

We want students to have the option to **return home safely at Christmas** and want to work with you on the best approach. This includes looking at public health measures, staggered departure dates, and transport considerations.

We will work with the UK Government and other administrations to bring as much consistency across the four nations as possible.

Supporting students to comply with current measures and supporting their wellbeing

This is a very difficult time for all of the Scottish population and particularly for our students. I know in the last few weeks that significant work has been undertaken to support the health and wellbeing of students. Over this particular period I would like to emphasise that this is crucial and I would expect that you do make every effort to provide appropriate support.

I welcome Universities Scotland's **'core of consistent care' pledge** made on 30 September, which outlines a minimum support package for all students including those self-isolating.

We are now exploring similar commitments with private accommodation providers and colleges.

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For students looking to hand in their **notice on tenancy agreements**, or if a student has left accommodation and wants to re-apply at a future point, I ask that you look on their situation sympathetically and continue to be as helpful as possible.

We have commissioned advice from public health on issue of **serial self-isolation** in student halls.

We last month announced a further £3.645 million towards our commitment to provide more than 80 additional **mental health counsellors** in our colleges and universities over the next four years. We are actively considering what further support we can give

Supporting staff

The sectoral guidance states that institutions should continue to make reasonable efforts to facilitate **working and studying remotely**. Where this is not possible, public health measures (including physical distancing) must be in place and the guidance sets out the risk-led approach that institutions and providers should follow to protect the health and safety of staff and students.

It is vital that staff and students have confidence in the steps being taken to protect their health and safety and I expect institutions **to fully engage with staff and students**, through trade union and student association representatives, and to monitor and respond to feedback and concerns about operational arrangements.

I am grateful to staff who are working extremely hard to support students in these exceptional times, and we expect institutions to **follow fair work practices**.

Outbreak management and compliance

While we have no evidence to date of transmission with an FE or HE teaching setting, we do have outbreaks amongst our student population, with significant clusters in university student accommodation.

I ask that you provide **twice weekly monitoring** on positive case numbers including supporting information on those self-isolating and staying in student halls.

We are also working with the Health and Safety Executive and Environmental Health Officers to explore how they can further support institutions.

Testing

We will input into the review of the Scottish Government's Testing Strategy from the point of view of colleges, universities and accommodation providers.

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