Important update on coronavirus (COVID-19) for international students

Dear students,

Further to my email to all students on Tuesday, I wanted to follow up with our international students with some specific advice and guidance.

I appreciate that the current situation regarding coronavirus may cause particular concerns for you, given you are away from your home and family. Some of you will have friends and family in the worst affected regions and may be worried for their safety. Please remember our Student Welfare Team is here to help, whether in person or by phone and email. If you have any health concerns, you have access to a free National Health Service helpline for immediate medical advice, available 24 hours a day, by calling 111 from any phone. For an emergency, where someone’s life or safety is at risk, you should dial 999.

It is very important to remember that the number of coronavirus cases in the UK remains low compared to the worst affected areas globally. The UK government has been clear that its decision-making is guided by the advice of organisations such as World Health Organisation and the best available scientific evidence. The initial phase of the government response focuses on isolating and containing the first cases of COVID-19 in the UK. It has made clear that planning is already in place to escalate the response if the virus becomes more established. This may include restrictions on large-scale events, increased home working, and school closures.

The current advice from the National Health Service is that it remains safe for people to go to work, school and public places, and there is no advice in the UK against public events. As such, the University is continuing to operate as normal in order to minimise disruption to your studies. This means that we intend to go ahead with all teaching, assessment and examinations as scheduled.

We therefore strongly recommend that all students continue their studies in Reading as planned. Given either your own concerns or those of your family, you may be considering whether you should return home. This is ultimately your decision but you should carefully consider the impact on your studies. As there is no advice from health organisations or the UK government for international students to leave the UK, if you are a University of Reading enrolled student we will not authorise any absences from term-time activities scheduled as part of your programme. If you do choose to leave, you would not be able to claim extenuating circumstances for any missed teaching or assessments unless some other extenuating circumstance applied (e.g. illness or bereavement affecting someone close to you).

For a very small number of students whose primary registration is with another university not the University of Reading, there may be other factors to consider, including advice you are receiving from your home university. Please contact studyabroad@reading.ac.uk if this applies to you and we can provide advice based on your specific circumstances.

We are required to monitor the attendance and engagement of students holding Tier 4 student visas. Any unauthorised absence will consequently be noted on your student record.

We understand some of you may have concerns about the expiry date of your current visa or leave to remain in the United Kingdom. The UK Home Office has published detailed guidance for people in this situation, which we would encourage you to read. This guidance outlines that most people in the UK whose immigration status is affected by the coronavirus outbreak will get an automatic extension of their visa until 31 March 2020. If you are affected by this and have any further
questions or need immigration support, please contact our International Student Advisory team at immigration@reading.ac.uk.

If the government advice changes, we are already planning alternative arrangements and we will continue to keep all our students fully informed. In the meantime, if you are concerned and want to understand the consequences of leaving the UK at this time, you should email coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk.

With regards to face masks, we are following National Health Service advice that, outside of specialist health care settings, wearing face masks is not recommended for the general population. However, our communications to students and staff have emphasised the need for tolerance and respect, noting that some members of our University community may make a personal choice to wear masks and we should all respect this. We are not aware of any issues of harassment or bullying on our campuses relating to wearing face masks. We will never tolerate any form of discrimination, bullying or harassment and would take any reported behaviour very seriously. Students can report any incidents and find out about the support available on our #NeverOK webpage.

I hope this helps reassure you that we are following all expert advice to respond to the coronavirus in proportion with the current risk levels in the UK. If you have any queries that are not covered in this email or on our Essentials coronavirus webpage, please contact us at coronavirus-students@reading.ac.uk.

Best wishes,
Patricia

Dr Patricia Woodman
Director of Student Services