Thursday 29th October student virtual town hall
Transcript 5pm

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Speakers in order of appearance:
- Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
- Christine Tait-Burkard, Assistant Professor, Roslin Institute
- Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary (Student Experience)
- Andy Shanks, Director of Student Wellbeing
- Moira Whyte, Vice-Principal and Head of College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine
- Carina Svensen, Director of Accommodation, Catering and Events
- Niamh McCrossan, Vice President Welfare, Students’ Association

00:00:45 Catherine Martin
Good evening everyone and thank you very much for joining us for this meeting, especially at such short notice. For those of you I don't know, I'm Catherine Martin Vice-Principal Corporate Services.
And I just want to see a very few words of introduction before inviting my colleagues to speak to some specific items today.

First, I think it's important to acknowledge the challenges of the last few weeks since we last met. A number of you joined one of the four town hall meetings that we held about a month ago, and in that time we've seen a peak and Covid cases in the student community. Reduced now of course, but still fragile and within a context in which cases continue to rise nationally.

A number of you have had to self-isolate either because of quarantine rules or because you have had the Covid virus, or because you've been a close contact with somebody who has.

And the support operation for us has been a really huge undertaking and we've acknowledged before that we haven't always got that right. I hope you'll agree that my colleagues in accommodation and catering have made very significant improvements the areas like food deliveries and self-isolation support generally, however and their statistics suggest that that's the case.

We've worked to improve Wi-fi connection in our halls of residence and have provided Ethernet cables where those were required. And all of our colleagues continued to work extremely hard to make a positive difference to life in residences.

Outside of our accommodation of course we have opened some new study spaces across our campus to ensure that you can access safe physically distanced areas where you can continue your work and we've opened new social spaces, notably at Bristo Square and Kings Buildings.

We understand, though, that the limitations placed on many aspects of our life, and particularly the social aspects by the current Covid regulations, mean that this semester is not the experience that many of you had hoped for, and particularly if you're in your first year at university.

Some of that frustration has played out in some very challenging behaviour from a minority of our student community which has made fellow students and some of our own staff feel
anxious and sometimes unsafe. And your safety and that of our colleagues, of course, is our priority.

We're here to support you, we want to hear your concerns now and at any time that those arise.
And we want to emphasize again that every one of us has a responsibility to keep ourselves safe and to do nothing that has the potential to compromise the safety or the wellbeing of anyone else in the Community.

We have several colleagues here this evening to speak to you about specific topics. Importantly, we'll hear from Gavin Douglas Deputy Secretary for student Experience, and Andy Shanks, Director of Student Wellbeing, both of whom you've met before, who will outline own expectations of our students and the support that we provide.

We're also very fortunate to have been joined by one of our academic experts in coronaviruses, Dr Christine Tait-Burkard who will outline the Covid situation in Scotland at the present time and what that means for us and how we go about our lives.

We were hoping to have Inspector Norman Taylor from Police Scotland to talk to us about our individual and collective responsibilities in the Community at this time. Unfortunately, Norman’s having some technical issues at the moment but will hope to join us part way through.

We also have with us Professor Colm Harmon Vice Principle for students, Professor Moira Whyte, Head of College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine, Gary Jebb, Director of Place, Carina Svenson, Director of Accommodation catering and events, and Niamh McCrossan VP welfare for the Students Association.

There will be an opportunity to ask questions in the second part of the meeting, so please do use the Q&A function to pose your questions and like other peoples. Gavin is going to coordinate responses to those according to the most likes which was the same as we did before if you joined us for a previous town Hall. Colleagues may well of course respond electronically as well as we go through the evening.

As ever, if there are questions that we're unable to answer tonight, then obviously will gather those unresponded to soon as we can. I'll say no more just now, except to reiterate my thanks for joining us tonight and I'll pass those to Christine Tait-Burkard to outline for us the current Covid situation.

Thank you.

00:05:02 Christine Tait-Burkard
Yes, hi everyone, I'm Christine Tait-Burkard. I'm an assistant professor out at the Roslin Institute and I've actually been working with coronaviruses for over 12 years now.

So today I have outlined a few basics about coronaviruses and about COVID-19 'cause that's the question that I actually get most from my friends, and then just a few general things about where we're at, where the risk factors are and so on and so forth.

Gavin can I control this presentation? Oh perfect.

Covid-19 or coronavirus infectious disease 19 is caused by a coronavirus called severe acute respiratory syndrome virus 2. Very similar to SARS, one as many of you will know and many of you will already know that the initial symptoms are respiratory infection main
Symptoms are a persistent cough, loss of taste or smell especially actually in young people and an increased temperatures that are the main things to lookout for.

But the biggest problem about COVID-19 is the second stage. Basically, when our immune system starts to malfunction and basically going into a very big alert status. We start to expect experience. severe respiratory distress which can go down into an acute respiratory distress syndrome and I'll go into that a wee bit on the next slide, just to see how severe this disease can actually get.

One of the other side effects is actually also that we get an increased release of clotting factors into the blood, and especially young people have been seen with strokes and just because our blood starts clotting much more.

If we can go to next slide, please.

Yeah, acute respiratory distress syndrome or ARDS is the worst stage that covered can actually reach when our lungs send the big stress distress signal and they start filling with fluid and cells in that basically makes people drone from the inside. That's where we have to apply a lot of severe measures of putting people on ventilators.

Luckily we now have some treatments against our immune system, overreacting. We have dexamethasone that specifically does do that, but it's only effective once people are hospitalized people are also put on bloods and thinners such as heparin to stop blood clots. But again that is something that really needs to be monitored in hospital and a lot of people are on clinical trial treatments such as Remdesivir that is hoped to stop the virus replication and then lots of other things, Convalescent serum again, targeted against the virus, and interferon inhalers targeted to boost our immune system.

One of the risk factors that we see in patients, and especially in young patients that don't have any underlying symptoms is that some people have genetic variations in their cellular immune response and that means that some young people are actually at risk to go into this ARDS path so as a general, we just have to be careful towards anyone else. Taking personal risks is one thing but putting other people at risk is another thing.

And the biggest problem at the moment is that all the treatments that we have for COVID-19 are hospital based and we don't have a massive amount of ICU beds in Scotland. We used to have 170. We have now increased to 585 to 700 in the worst case scenario, but that's only enough hospital beds taught for 0.01% of the population and obviously staffing all these beds takes personnel away from other parts of the hospital.

So we really have to keep numbers at bay to just keep hospital capacity open also for other emergencies and other illnesses.

So if we go to the next slide.

Not everyone spread SARS Cov-2 some people just have simply what is believed to have too low viral numbers and super spreaders are particularly important events in eventually causing 80% of infection so 20% of cases actually tend to cause 80% of infections.

What is very important to realize as well that around 40% of transmissions occur before symptoms occur and around 30% of them occur on the 1st day that you actually experience symptoms so it's very important to stop the spread before it actually happens, 'cause you don't always know when you're actually spreading the virus.

And if we go to the next slide.
As we move into winter, we want to meet indoors and one of the biggest problems if we're indoors in a badly ventilated area is that the droplets that we release are actually filling the space that would in and if we have people over, if we have parties, if we have larger gatherings, the room starts to fill with droplets that one potential super spreader can emit. And that's a problem.

And the louder we talk, the more droplets we emit, so that is obviously one thing. If we had music going on and we start talking louder and louder. It's actually also an effect of alcohol. Alcohol, deafens as it reduces our hearing capacity by about 12 decibels. So we're not, for instance, not able anymore to hear someone breathing loudly next to us, and as a consequence we start talking louder and start to emit more droplets.

So to the situation in Scotland and particularly Edinburgh? As you can see, the situation overall is starting to stabilize. We see the R number just simply based on cases is now at 1.4. Our number though is still at about 1.3, which includes estimates of random sampling in the population and obviously the hospitalization numbers and the death rate as well.

As you can see we start to stabilize and just be aware that the case numbers from today are obviously still out, but the really worrying factor is that the hospitalizations are still increasing and we just have to be very careful of that situation.

What is very good news though is that Edinburgh City is indeed on a very good path, in that the cases are decreasing and the situation is on a very good path and we have heard today in the First ministers announcements that even though Edinburgh's going to end up in Level 3, there is a chance if the situation stays stable, Edinburgh could move into a level 2 which means pubs and bars could potentially be open for some of the day, and obviously makes socializing much easier for all of us.

Thank you, sorry.

00:12:27 Gavin Douglas

Thanks very much, Gavin Douglas here and really appreciate you coming on to speak to us. I'm always really humbled by the expertise and insights that our academic community at Edinburgh has and is really great to hear from you with that real scientific evidence as to what's happening.

So we'll skip very quickly over the unfortunate fact that Norman Tyler the Community police inspector for area, is not currently able to join us and we still hoping it might be able to give technology that allows them, but my name is Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary of student experience, and my job is really to try and improve the student experience, but unfortunately most time that you hear from me these days, I'm writing it to warn you by the horrible things will happen if you don't comply with various regulatory things.

Unfortunately, that's my role again today. To be the bad cop in all this so I'm going to just talk you quickly through some discipline issues that are worrying us at the moment. I'm hoping that at some point over the last few weeks you will have a chance to look at the Good Citizen guide that we produced for the start of this term, Guidelines for community during times of pandemic, and what we set out to do in this document was to say that we all have a responsibility to slow the spread of this virus. I have a responsibility, you as students have responsibilities, everyone on this panel has a responsibility to help slow it down by the way we behave.

We all, always, to be honest, have a duty to help ensure the safety and wellbeing of everyone on campus. That's a legal requirement for all of us, but we extended that to say that were part of the wider Edinburgh community and our behaviour has to reflect our
concern for the safety and wellbeing of that community as well. And that really means that we all need to act with the renewed level of personal awareness, renewed level responsibility at all times, and those other requirements that were imposing on you as students and on ourselves as members of staff as well.

Next slide, please.

Unfortunately, we are seeing a significant minority who are ignoring the rules around COVID-19. These are not just the rules that we set in terms of our good citizen guidance, but also the rules set by the Scottish Government in legislation.

So when people have parties involving people from other households, that's breaking the rules, as for having large gatherings outside. Setting up malicious fire alarms has always been a problem in terms of health and safety and refusing to wear face masks in libraries is another trend that we're starting to notice.

And all of these things clearly are of concern to us, not because they break the rules per say, but because they've eaten increased likelihood of transmission between students between students and staff is very clear that the behavior of some students is making other students feel unsafe.

30% of the students that have left accommodation in recent weeks have left because they don't feel safe in our accommodation, and that worries us now. Clearly there's an increased risk to our university staff. There's possibly an argument going round in some parts that coronavirus doesn't really cause much damage to young people. I think we just heard that's not necessarily the case, but it's only does cause damage to people who are older and we have many members of staff who are older. Whether they are security staff, whether they are cleaning staff and it's completely outrageous that they may be exposed to increased risk by the behaviour of an irresponsible minority.

So obviously a distraction, as I said at the start, really, many of our staff are here to look after you to help you build community to help you enjoy time at university. Thinking about the wardens, thinking about the residence life staff and so on, and many of them are getting sucked into behaviour management rather than doing the kind of work there supposed to be doing, which is building community and supporting you.

So that worries me. And although we haven't heard from Norman Towler from police Scotland, I know he would agree with the fact that we are wasting police time by having to bring them onto campus to break up parties and gatherings when they could be out there doing much more important work elsewhere.

So this minority here, ignoring the rules, are creating a number of issues of real concern.

Next slide, please.

So what does it mean if you ignore the rules? What it means is that we pull out our code of student conduct. And if you haven't had a chance to look through that, and there's no reason why you should, I have put a hyperlink on there, you can click through on that afterwards, but the code is student conduct sets out how we manage discipline in the university, and there are two things that are relevant to offences in terms of Covid.

One is behaving in a way likely to cause injury or to impair safety, and the other is failing to comply with any university rule, regulation, or policy. But I just wanted to explain to you very clearly what happens when people transgress and break rules at the moment?
So for parties and fire alarms? Setting off fire alarms, measurement maliciously, and so on. For a first time offense, you can expect a fine up to £150. For a repeat offense after repeat fire alarm, party, setting off, gathering and so on you will be referred to the Student Discipline Committee under sanctions.

There are far more serious potentially, and if you have found to have reached the code of student conduct in a serious way, you may actually face a suspension or exclusion from the University.

There have been a small number of cases often alcohol fuelled, I've got to say of abusive language or assault directed to or against our staff. Those will automatically be referred to this Student discipline committee and of course if we actually are talking about assault, they may result in criminal charges as well and the sanctions there are up to and including suspension and exclusion.

You understand I'm sure that we take any abuse or assault against our staff very seriously indeed. For your information 4 students this week so far have been referred to that process and will be facing potentially significant sanctions in the coming weeks. So this is a live process that does have consequences and I want to make sure that everybody is aware of these potential penalties.

Next slide, please.

It's Halloween this weekend. Halloween is traditionally a time of partying and having great fun, we recognize that unfortunately, that's not possible to do in the same way. You can still celebrate and enjoy Halloween, but you can't have parties. You contact mass gatherings. You can't have people around to your flat. This is all not allowed under the current rules, so we are urging you please not to lose your head, haha - Pun intended - during the Halloween sort of period. Stay safe. Stay in line with the Covid Rules. Don't be a Covidiot – perhaps that is the best fancy dress costume for this particular Halloween and we will have increased security and police presence out on the residential campuses this weekend.

And we want to make sure you have a good but safe Halloween, so please do pay attention to the rules, enjoy yourselves but stay safe at all times.

So that's my rather bad cop kind of message, but I do want to hand over now to Andy Shanks who's going to talk a bit more about the support that is in place for you and indeed we strengthen in recent weeks, recognizing the precious and the stresses that you're all under as result of the unusual circumstances, so Andy, over to you.

00:19:21 Andy Shanks

I'm Andy Shanks. As Gavin has said, I'm the Director of Student wellbeing here at the University.

As my colleague said, these are unprecedented times due to the pandemic and we realize that this experience is not what you'd hoped for Perhaps, or what you're expecting when you applied to Edinburgh, so we understand that we know that this is a very difficult time for you.

The pandemic has had a significant impact on many of you in a whole range of different ways. You might be feeling isolated, bored, or lonely and you may feel you're spending too much time in front of a screen. So we know that you're feeling under significant pressure on things. It might not be as you'd planned, rescued, hoped. I wanted to reassure you that we have a great deal of support available for you here at University of Edinburgh and different formats, in person or online and over the phone.
We are doing as much as we can to support your mental health and wellbeing and I’ll come to our services on my next slide.

We have a great online program, events and activities available for you which include fitness and exercise classes and I’ve embedded that in my slides so you can have a look at and sign up to these events.

We're also working in partnership with the sports Union, Sports and exercise, Student Association and residence Life to look at how we're going to organize more activities and events outdoors when the regulations and guidance allows.

Now that the majority of you are no longer self-isolating because of symptoms. Although a number of you're still out self-isolating because you arrived from overseas, please remember that staying active so exploring the city, going for a walk or a run, having a healthy diet sleeping well and maintaining a good balance in your life will enable you to stay healthy and to feel well during this very difficult time.

So moving on to my next slides.

So as I said, there's a whole range of support available for you here at university. All undergraduates.

and postgraduate taught students have a personal tutor who are the first point of contact for you if you're struggling with things. If you want to ask about anything in relation to your course, every school in deanery has a student support function within it. And again they are very good first point of contact for you for an assignment or assessment, or if you want to find out about what support is available for you.

We've got whole range of online support available for all students, free and confidential. The Feeling

Good app, Silver cloud, Online problems with behavioural therapy and the Together All platform, are great resources free to use. They are slightly different - you can access them all through the student counselling website. The Feeling Good App helps with depression and anxiety, Silver Cloud will take you through some guided self-help and also provides you with online blogs, behavioural therapy and Together All are a platform where you can meet other people who are struggling and deliver and receive peer support.

We’d compel you all, we’d urge you all to register the GP - a General practitioner here in Edinburgh. This is the gateway to all health and support, Health care for people living in Edinburgh. Residence Life operate in all of our halls of residence and they're a good point of contact if you're struggling, if you want to put on an event or be part of an event.

Our student counselling service is the biggest in Scotland within universities, and we’re operating through our new health and wellbeing centre, as well as at Murchison House. A lot of our delivery is online at present, but there are lot of myths around waiting times for student counseling. But at the moment we’re able to see 95% of people who refer themselves within two weeks and around 65% within one week. However, if your situation is urgent and we need to see you sooner, we can see people or speak to people often on the same day or the day after.

Our Student disability services are working with students with a whole range of protected characteristics within the Equality Act. So we work with people with physical disabilities, hearing impairment, visual impairment, as well as those with long term mental health conditions.
Chaplaincy are seeing students face to face as well as online. They are based at Bristol Square and they have a listening service which is now available 24 hours a day, so out of hours you can access that through the university security service and the phone number for them is on the back of your library card.

We're also delivering a great program of mindfulness Yoga, and Tai chi – these are all again free and accessible for all students. So we've got a wide range of support available for you. We encourage you to access that we can respond very quickly to any concerns you have and will do whatever we can to make sure you're linked in with the right services and support you to have best possible experience, you're going to have at the university here in Edinburgh within what are really challenging and difficult circumstances.

So that's the end of my presentation and I'm going to hand you back to Gavin.

00:24:48 Gavin Douglas
Andy, thanks very much and it's really good to be reminded of the accessibility of things and that the counseling service in these difficult times and the fact that waiting lists are well under control. That's great to hear.

So our final speaker today is Professor Moira Whyte who is somebody else knows an awful lot about respiratory disease, actually, but she's here as the head of the College of Medicine and Veterinary Medicine and I'm going to invite her right now, just to say a few words to close off this particular part and then we'll move into the questions and answers

00:25:17 Moira Whyte
Thank you very much, Gavin, for kindly recognizing that my clinical job is as a respiratory medicine consultant at the Royal Infirmary, but I defer to Christine’s excellent presentation earlier on SARS Cov which she is an acknowledged expert as you probably gathered.

So I think I want to be very brief because we're coming up to the half hour and we want time for your questions, but I did want to acknowledge, as others have done, that you're starting your academic journey in quite extraordinary, unprecedented times and we do all realize that and realized that although we will try to inject the intellectual excitement into your studies, that at the moment many aspects, many social aspects of the Edinburgh experience are being denied to you. So we do recognize that we sympathize with you and I personally would like to say how impressed I have being at the grace and responsibility that many of you have shown and the patience that you have shown as we all as your academic staff adapt rapidly to delivering online education, small group teaching in ways that we haven't done before, but I do hope that you are getting that intellectual input now in your studies.

As I've said, the vast majority of you are making the best of what opportunities there are, but of course my plea would be to the few who are frustrated and that frustration is going over into bad behaviour.

Don't let it mess up your careers. This is a great opportunity for you. These difficult times will pass and I for one really wants you to get the very best you can out of your time at the University of Edinburgh so I suppose my message is we sympathize, but we really want you to behave yourselves. And as others have highlighted, that means we'll hopefully get through this faster and Edinburgh is able to move down tiers of lock down and we can begin to see things progress back to normal.

So I don't want to say any more than that. If you have any questions in the ever growing list that I can answer, I'd be pleased to do so. But thank you for listening.
Question and answer section

00:27:55 Gavin Douglas
Moira. Thank you very much indeed, and I said a good place to end. So I said that's the end of the presentations. And thank you to everyone for their contributions and further input to and will now move into the live event questions and answers and those are - we got 18 published so far and I have ranked them on my screen in order of the numbers of likes per question, so we're going to try and start with the most popular questions and I work away through them. And some of them I will try to answer some of them I'll ask my colleagues to answer and we'll see how we get on. And so we've got 1/2 hour for this so do carry on posting questions as a dialogue throughout the next set of 25 to 30 minutes or so.

1. Is the second semester going to be online too? It starts to be difficult to enjoy the experience (exchange student) as we are not really able to have any social life …

I think it's fair to say that we have never set out to provide an online semester for anybody but there have been a number of courses which are decided to go fully online and I'm aware that for some students that means that experience is predominately online.

The University's aim has always been to have a Hybrid experience which is a combination on campus experiences, an online experiences and we're seeking to increase the amount of on campus activity that can be safely delivered next semester.

We're in the process of planning the timetable for next semester, so it's a little early to know how that's going to shape up, but that would be our ambition and aspiration, all assuming of course, that the Covid regulations allow us to carry on delivering on campus. I do recognize, however, with this comment that it is difficult to have social interactions with other people in the normal way, and we're looking at ways that we can increase the opportunities for people to get together on campus.

As Catherine Martin said, the beginning there's new spaces have been introduced on campus, so the student village in Bristo Square, the Spiegeltent in kings buildings, and we're actively looking at the moment of ways that we can encourage people to come in and meet knew groups, of students, peers, etc in a safe managed way in these sort of spaces, trying to improve the social contact, so, I do recognize we all recognize that social contact is really important and we want to strengthen the opportunities even more non free to have that over the next few weeks, let alone next semester.

2. Will there be any reduction in tuition since the first semester, and likely the second, is predominantly online?

As I said before, we are seeking to increase the amount of on campus provision that we possibly can next semester and university’s view is online or on campus is actually equally expensive to deliver. In fact in many ways, online tuition can be more expensive to deliver. We're having to develop new materials and new of delivery. We've had to invest in new mechanisms, new media, new software etc. to support that delivery. So I'm afraid the answer is no, there are no planned reductions intuition.

Now I should remind you if you are not already aware that should you decide that living in Edinburgh is something that you can't justify if you're predominantly online, the university has said that you can exit from your accommodation lease at any time without any notice period so there is that flexibility if you're wondering about the overall costs of your studies at this stage.
3. John Swinney said that students might not be able to go home - what do you think about this, and if we weren't allowed to leave, what would the university do regarding our contracts?

So I think what I'm going to say about Christmas is that it's all up in the air at the moment.

I've heard at least three different ideas coming from the Scottish Government. We've heard recently, the idea that students might not be allowed to go home. We've also heard from other Scottish government ministers that it's really important that students are able to go home for Christmas. We've heard some emerging ideas about if everybody self-isolated for two weeks before Christmas, then that will make it safer for people to go home.

I suspect there are lots of other ideas being – well actually I know that there are lots of other ideas being evaluated, such as introducing more testing to allow people to get a test might be one way to confirm their safe to go home, but the short answer is, it's all up in the air and there's no certainty yet as to what is going to happen.

We are working very closely with the Scottish government, from Peter Mathieson, our Principal, down – there are a number of people engaging with them on a regular basis. But it's a complex business that the Scottish government to manage. They're trying to manage across the four nations of United Kingdom to make sure that students who need to travel from Scotland to England. Well, there's also students in these who need to travel from England to Scotland and from Northern Ireland to Scotland and so on. So trying to make sure that all that coordinates in a way that minimizes the risks to people in the community with many thousands of students traveling across the country and possibly transmitting Covid with them. So, our aspiration would be that everyone who wants to go home for Christmas should be able to do so. We want to find a way to do that in a way that is safe but it's not yet clear what the best way of doing that will be.

This is getting increasingly urgent, I appreciate that, and we are working closely with the Scottish Government to make sure we get a solution as soon as we can, but we don't, just don't know the answer to that yet.

4. If someone in our household hosts a party is everyone in the household charged, or only those who organise and are at the party?

I think as I put in my most recent email to you, if you had chance to read that, then the working assumption is that is responsibility of household for the use of that pantry, and therefore you risk being fined for being involved in a household that held a party, even if you yourself are not part of it.

We are very keen that you take Community household responsibility for your spaces and therefore you may well have the risk of being charged if you host a party or your household host a party, even if you are not there.

He's also then a specific question that Community fencing I think is replying.

5. My household is larger than 6, can we meet in our pantry this weekend to celebrate halloween as we don't have to socially distance from one another?

Thanks

I'll leave Carina to reply to that one as she's doing that right now.
6. **Staggered leaving for Christmas break has been mentioned for students in the news. Are there any plans for this?**

   As I said before, yes, lots, lots of ideas have been mentioned in use for Christmas. It's really not clear what is the most effective and safe way to manage the movement of students around the country at Christmas, but staggered breaks is 1 idea. We don't have any certainty as to whether that's a practical or viable idea.

7. **My flatmates have friends over frequently, each from separate households. Am I subject to fines even if I'm not a part of the party and I am just sitting in my bedroom?**

   I guess that's really the same question I was just trying to answer. We do regard the households responsible for communal spaces. So if we're talking about people having making use of pantries, then that's a household issue and you need to discuss that with your flatmates.

   There's a risk you might get into trouble for that. It is different if you're talking about people using their rooms that's much more identifiable to the individual students, so I'd make that distinction.

8. **There has been talks of holding a rent strike due to the way students have been treated by the University. How would the University deal with this if it were to happen.**

   I think I'm going to ask Catherine Martin if you'd like to reply to that one, because that probably more in her area of responsibility rather than mine

   **00:35:58 Catherine Martin**

   Thanks Gavin absolutely. So obviously we talked that wouldn't come to pass as we've been describing today at the evening. We're working very hard to provide the correct learning experience for our students and also our accommodation experience. We think we've made significant improvements in, so I think that the answer to that is this is such a thing and comes to pass, we will deal with that at the time that we very much hope that that's not the case, and in fact, the correspondence that we've had with students of late has indicated to us that they appreciate the improvements that we've made and that we wouldn't expect arranged like to come to Edinburgh.

   As you're aware, Gavin, we did see a protest at the weekend, and obviously we are aware that students still have continuing concerns but we are addressing that in every possible way that we can.

9. **Will students be allowed to break their lease for 2nd semester without penalty?**

   **00:37:01 Gavin Douglas**

   So again Catherine just keep you on. My understanding is that we've agreed that students want to break their lease, they can do so at any stage without penalty. I presume that is true for semester two as well. Or if I misunderstood that you understood that correctly.

   **00:37:18 Catherine Martin**

   I hope you can hear me, but yes, that's the case that we have waived the 28 day normal rules so that students have more flexibility than the otherwise would have had and that is in place at the moment, thanks.
10. A few weeks ago a person in my flat had a high fever, so I tried to book a test for him. Since my friend was very sick and our university accommodation is more than 2.5 miles away from the testing centre, he couldn't go to a walk-thru testing centre. Moreover, when we tried to get a test delivered by mail the government website said “We could not confirm the identity of the person needing the test” (probably it doesn't work with term-time addresses). It would be great if the university could help us getting a test if we need one.

00:38:06 Gavin Douglas
So first of all I'm sorry to hear about those challenges. I would say if for anyone who finds themselves in that situation, do speak to your residence life Warden or your residence life assistants for ways they can help because there are ways in which it might be possible to get somebody to that testing centre - for example, using a secure taxi service and we'd be more than willing to help out with that.

We are indeed taking on board more stocks of these tests these self tests that the government is struggling to provide and I expect we might be able to make an announcement fairly shortly about getting access to those tests.

Clearly going to the walkthrough testing center is the preferred route and we want to facilitate your access to that test. But if we can in future, we should be able to administer these self tests on your behalf and return to the government in your behalf, and that should help with that particular issue, so I'm fairly sure that we'll be able to help with those situations do please ask if you find yourself in that situation again.

11. If we have to stay at home for Christmas (for example, following the advice from the Scottish government) what specific support would the University accommodation team provide?

I think it's probably fair to say that we haven't yet got the full plans in place for that, but we do have Carina Svensen, who's the director of accommodation catering and events on the call. Carina would you like to have a stab at answering that question even if the answer is we're working on it and I'm not quite sure where you've got to do with that.

00:39:29 Carina Svensen
So again, so this is what we will do for Christmas if a student have to stay. Yeah, we have started to look at this to try and make it as comfortable as possible of and that of course includes catering working with residence life on activities that we can do online or socially distance.

So we don't have a full plan in place. But we have started working at that scenario where some students or more than some students will have to stay on campus during Christmas. Our intention is to for instance, operate JMCC at Pollock to make sure that we can feed our students in catered accommodation.

So we are definitely trying to make Christmas as good as possible. Should you have to stay and you would have like to go home. So it's work in progress, but watch this space we are on the case to make it as good as possible for you.

00:40:21 Gavin Douglas
Great, thanks very much for coming in there and great to hear about the JMCC and so on. I think it should say to people we very much expect there to be more students who perhaps have to stay on campus over Christmas, even if it's not a government requirement, it may be
more difficult to travel internationally, etc. So we're certainly planning for and putting in place those additional ideas, as Canna said, they're being developed right now, so that's good.

12. Could we get a PSA [Public Service Announcement] for not only wearing a mask, but wearing one properly? I've passed too many people outside and in accommodation wearing a mask with their nose or whole face exposed

We can certainly put a PSA out and make it more widely known, but Moira you'll have views as to the correct use.

00:41:08 Moira Whyte
So absolutely. it's easy to forget with all this talk of drugs and vaccines that actually some very simple measures are the most important in protecting people against catching covid. And research from this university actually demonstrated the efficacy of masks in reducing droplet spread of SARS-CoV-2 by about 95%.

So masks are really, really important and obviously as the questioner is implying, they only work if you wear them properly. So the university has stressed time and again the importance of wearing masks except when you're by yourself in your room or in your bubble, and we must all adhere to it.

00:42:04 Gavin Douglas
Moira if that's great. Thanks very much, and I think it's entirely feasible for us to strengthen the message about how to wear a mask correctly. If people are not doing that, we can look to get that as the question said, that PSA sorted out of the next couple of weeks.

13. Scottish government regulations allow for the creation of an extended household that includes significant others (of course, if all inhabitants of a flat consent to this) -- how will this work out with increased security across student accommodation?

So I think whoever posted this question understands this is a very limited exemption. It's really fundamentally designed to deal with people who are living in isolation perhaps a couple who are living apart and who can create their own kind of mini bubble if you like and still visit each other.

I'm not quite sure how practical is for the average student household in university accommodation. What this would mean is that in a flat at 6 or 9 or whatever else it might be students listen agreement that one of those people can create an arrangement for their partner, their girlfriend or boyfriend or whoever to come and stay with them, but nobody else in the flat can. I think that pretty makes it fairly impractical for the vast majority of student households. But if there is such an arrangement in place and there is a legitimate agreement between the household is that one student can have their partner over and the rest will do that. Then that could be factored into any sort of security concerns and people have explained that that's fine. So say I think the number of such cases will be very small.

14. Why have you only stated plans for supporting students at Pollock over Christmas? Just because we don't pay £8000 in accommodation fees doesn't mean that we're not as important

It's not just for Pollock in all fairness - it's for all accommodation. We already have a significant number of students at Pollock, but we've got lots of students spread across, if I remember correctly, 42 sites and our planning is to encompass all those sites and support for all those students, not just Pollock. So apologies if that has come across. This focus on Pollock purely that wasn't the intention.
Carina Svensen
Gavin, just to clarify that as well. That is definitely not the intention mentioned on JMCC. Of course, is that specific to Pollock, but activities in any other Christmas events that we will do will of course applies to all students within the University.

15. What does the university think about the Great Barrington Declaration and how the universities own measures go against what Harvard, Oxford, Stanford, and 3 University of Edinburgh medical professors and epidemiologists all have called for?

Moira Whyte
Thank you, my first response is I wish I had been actively reading the list of questions, but for those who, for those who aren't in the know, the Great Barrington Declaration proposes that we should allow herd immunity to SARS-CoV-2 to develop in the population by allowing young people and those who don't have health issues to circulate freely live their lives as normal and presumably get infected And thus build up herd immunity where the bulk of the population are infected and hopefully be immune to SARS-CoV-2 and then that the other side of that is that those who are older or who have health issues would have to self-isolate for really very long periods of time and this idea has its advocates – many well-known people - but it also has a number of people including in this University on the other side of the fence as well, who think this is a very bad idea. So there are some serious arguments against it. First of all there are a small number of young people who will get ill with SARS-CoV-2. There's the long covid syndrome that's increasingly talked about that actually, if it happens as much in young people as it does in older people. And of course, importantly, as you're now hearing, there's no certainty about once you get immune to SARS-CoV-2, how long that immunity is actually affective for.

So there are some considerable flaws in the argument. What we're all hoping is that it's vaccines that are going to bring us herd immunity, but I guess I should say that academic debate is welcomed. This is what universities are for and it's by discussing these issues that maybe people end up working out the right path forward.

16. Will Peter Mathieson commit himself to taking part in a live town hall like this, since he is supposed to be a representative for the University

Gavin Douglas
Yeah, absolutely, Peter has done live town halls and will do them again. I'm just checking with Niamh who is the Vice President education for the students' Association. Niamh, there’s a town hall coming up is there not? When Peter and a number of other top team will be taking part?

so you want to say something about that?

Niamh McCrossan
Yeah there is a town hall that is being led by EUSA and it's happening next Wednesday, Wednesday the 4th of November. It's happening from half five till 7 and you will all have got an email about it today, hopefully.

So Peter will be in attendance as well. Colm Harmon, Andy shanks who you’ve met today. No actually sorry, Andy can’t come. But few of the panellists that have been here today as well as your sabbatical officers, so that will be a great opportunity to raise your concerns, to ask questions to get answers and to really work together in order to deliver what the student body wants to see in the upcoming semester.
So yeah, next Wednesday, half 5.

17. Is there anywhere to report misconduct of staff, for example security touching people and breaching privacy by going into rooms without permission.

00:48:51 Gavin Douglas
So clearly, yes, absolutely. I mean our staff abound by all sorts of rules and regulations as well. Just as you are students.

What my advice would be that if you have concerns about that kind of misconduct that you speak to the advice place, that's the Students' Association Advice Place. They are independent of the university. They are highly experienced advisors and they can advise on the best way to deal with that which would render thought be about raising a complaint with regard to that particular aspect.

So if you are experiencing those sort of behaviours, please speak to the Advice Place they will support you and advise you – both advise you and support you rather - with any complaint that you might want to make.

00:50:05
I'm just skimming through see whether any other major sort of topics.

18. People saying what happens if I'm not really involved in a party but I still get charged.

I want to stress this student discipline is not an automatic process. You always have the right if you're accused of doing something to make representations and say that's not fair, I wasn't there, or you've misidentified me or blah blah blah blah. I mean there's always that right to representation.

So in the perhaps unlikely event that you accused holding party even though you're living at home, then you can make that point and that would then resolve the issue I'm sure. So I just want to make that general point that discipline is not a one way process, even though it's important process.

19. Which courses have decided to go online? We aren't being told anything and so I think it would be useful if you could actually tell us. I've had absolutely no in person learning so far and teachers can barely manage with the technology

I'm really sorry to hear about that experience. Which courses have decided to go online that should be made clear by your school? They're the ones who will know that. So if you're not clear about that, I would strongly suggest you contact your school, your teaching office in your school and ask them which courses or online basically, thinking about making course choices for semester 2 and haven't already done so, it would be very wise to have that conversation with them first.

There's no central repository of which courses online and which are not. It's a school based decision. They're the ones taking decisions based on the most appropriate pedagogy for their discipline and the unique situation that they might find themselves in.

00:51:45
There’s a number of other questions which were not going to be able to answer today, but we’ve picked up on a number of them around staff behaviour, reduction in fees and so on.
And as we always do in these town halls, we will publish not only the recording of this session but also will make sure we go back over any questions that haven't been answered and make sure we can answer them and publish the questions and answers separately as a Sharepoint document for people who want to access and later.

So I think with that folks, I'm going to wrap it up. I'm going to say thank you to all our speakers today for being here for helping with the questions for sharing their thoughts. Particular thanks to Christine for the very interesting presentation on Covid. Really grateful to have her expert input into that.

I hope you found that useful. As Niamh said, there are more town halls coming up next week if you want to raise issues with other members of the university management, but in the meantime, as I said before, stay safe. Have a good but safe Halloween.

Please keep your heads and I look forward to speaking to you in a town Hall or another or at some point in the future soon.

Thanks everybody. Take care and bye for now.