Thursday 29th October student virtual town hall
Transcript 6pm

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Speakers in order of appearance:
• Catherine Martin, Vice-Principal Corporate Services
• Christine Tait-Burkard, Assistant Professor, Roslin Institute
• Norman Towler, Police Scotland
• Gavin Douglas, Deputy Secretary (Student Experience)
• Andy Shanks, Director of Student Wellbeing
• Dave Robertson, Vice-Principal and Head of the College of Science and Engineering

00:00:39 Catherine Martin

Good evening and thanks very much for joining us. We know that you've had relatively short notice of this meeting, so we're grateful that you've done that.

I'm Catherine Martin, I'm Vice Principal for Corporate Services, and I just want to say a few words of introduction before passing over to a number of colleagues who are going to speak to specific issues today.

First, I'd just like to acknowledge the challenges of the last few weeks since we last met. So number of you joined one of our four town hall meetings around a month ago and in that time we've seen a peak of Covid cases in the student community. Reduced now, of course, but still a pretty fragile situation and within a context in which as cases continued to rise nationally.

A number of you have had to self-isolate, either because of quarantine regulations or because you've had the virus yourself, or because you've been a close contact of somebody who has. And the support operation that we have put in place has been a really very big and significant operation for us. And we know when we've said to you previously that we haven't always got that right.

I hope you'll agree that colleagues in accommodation and catering have really made significant improvements in areas like food deliveries and our support for students who are self-isolating. Our statistics that we review frequently, do suggest that is the case.

We've worked to improve Wi-fi connections, in our halls of residence, we've provided Ethernet cables where those have been needed and obviously all of our colleagues continue to work extremely hard to make a positive difference in residence life.

Outside your accommodation, we've also made some changes. We've opened some new study spaces across our campus is to make sure that you have access to safe physically distance spaces to continue your work, and also we have also open some new social spaces, notably the Lodge in Bristo Square and also the Spiegel tent at Kings Buildings.

We do understand though, that the limitations placed in all of their lives, and particular social lives, mean that this semester is not the experience that many of you hoped for or expected, and particularly those of you in first year of university.
Some of that frustration has played out in some very challenging behaviour from a small minority about students and that's made some of the fellow students, and also some of our staff feel anxious and at times unsafe.

Now your safety and not of all of our colleagues is obviously our toll priority. We are here to support you and we want to hear your concerns, whether that's tonight, or whether that's it other times when those concerns occur to you. And we want to emphasize again that every one of us has a responsibility to keep ourselves safe and to do nothing that might compromise the safety wellbeing of anybody else in our community.

We have several colleagues here this evening to speak to you about specific topics. Importantly, we will hear from Gavin Douglas who is Deputy Secretary for Student Experience and from Andy Shanks who is Director of Student Wellbeing and they will outline our expectations of your students, but also outline the support that we provide.

We're really fortunate tonight to have been joined by one of our academic experts in Coronavirus, Doctor Christine Tait-Burkard, who will outline the Covid situation in Scotland at the current time and tell us what that must mean for us.

We are very grateful to have Inspector Norman Towler from Police Scotland this evening. He's going to talk to us about our individual and collective responsibilities in the community at this difficult time.

And we also have with us Professor Dave Robertson who's Head of the College of Science and Engineering, Gary Jebb, who is Director of Place, and Carina Svensen, who's Director of Accommodation, Catering and Events.

And we there will be an opportunity at the end for you 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 questions. Gavin will be coordinating responses to those in the second part of the meeting.

Colleagues, may of course, respond electronically too, as we go through the meeting. If there are questions that we are unable to answer this evening then obviously we will gather those up and will respond to those as soon as possible after the meeting.

So no more for me at the moment I will pass then into my colleague Christine Tait-Burkard to talk to us about the Covid situation in Scotland, and reiterate my thanks to you for joining us tonight.

**00:05:08 Christine Tait-Burkard**

So hello everyone, I'm Christine Tait-Burkard, I'm Assistant Professor over after Roslin Institute, and I've actually been working on coronavirus for the past 12 years or so, and we're also currently working on SARS coronavirus 2, of course.

So at the beginning I want to just give you a little bit of background on SARS coronavirus 2. Just because this is actually what my friends ask me as well. So if we can go to the next slide, please.

So Covid, or coronavirus infectious disease 19, is caused by a virus called SARS coronavirus 2, a close relative to a virus that caused an epidemic in 2002/2003 already.

Initially it causes respiratory infection and that is where it will end for most people, you will have a persistent cough, loss of taste or smell, which is actually very important in young people as a symptom, and an increased temperature or fever.
The problem is in some patients, it will actually go to a second stage where an immune system fails to deal with this virus and causes an overreaction, and that over reaction leads to severe respiratory distress and this can lead to an Acute Respiratory Distress Syndrome and I will talk about more in the next slide.

The other problem that can also happen, and that is also something we see in young patients particularly, is that our body starts to produce more clotting factors which can obviously lead to blood clots and strokes in young patients.

If we go to the next slide so acute respiratory distress syndrome, is the problem that we obviously see with SARS coronavirus two. This can actually also happen in young patients and we find that some of them actually have a genetic underlying basis for this. But again, it can happen in some young patients.

Initially you will have a very sore chest and then our immune system starts to produce alarm signals, fluids in both in cells come into her lungs and we basically start drowning from the insight.

There’s no some treatments that we have against that. One of us is dexamethasone, a steroid that stops or immune system from overreacting, but again, it's only helpful in hospitalized patients. We can put people on blood thinners, but that’s always risky because they will be there could bleed out internally. So again, this is only in hospital, and a lot of clinical trial treatments that stop viruses from replicating that help our immune system. But again, all of these treatments are only available in hospital.

And the problem is, whilst mostly elderly people die, a lot of young people actually need hospital treatment. And in Scotland we have increased our ICU capacity from 170 to almost 700 if the worst hits the worst, but that still is only enough for 1% population so even young people can obviously take up that capacity. So we all need to be careful and we all need to be careful for others in our society.

If we go to the next slide. The risk factors of spreading is not everyone spreads coronavirus to the same extent. About 20% of people cause eventually 80% of infections. And especially super spreaders events are the biggest problem.

We start transmitting the disease quite early before we see symptoms, about two days before at least, and 40% of transmission actually occur in that stage. So just be vigilant that you can potentially spread this virus before your symptomatic and about another 30% occur on the first day that we actually have symptoms.

If you go to the next slide, the biggest risk that we have at the moment is the indoor meeting space, especially badly ventilated spaces. We start to spread the virus throughout these rooms, and gatherings are an important factor where super spreading events can happen. And the very important there is that the louder we talk, the more droplets we emit into a space, the more filled this piece actually gets.

And obviously we have music, or a party, we start talking louder, and music makes us go slightly deaf. We lose about 12 decibels so we wouldn't hear somebody breathing loudly next to us anymore on 0.3 per mil alcohol, So that's below the legal limit, and that makes us talk louder again.
So to situation in Scotland. If we go to the next slide, as you can see we have a different areas of problems in Scotland on the left hand side map. But the more important thing is that indeed, the cases have started slowing down, we see a slower increase, and actually simply based on case numbers we're currently just above 1, about 1.04 in the R number.

But what you can see in the second graph here is that our hospitalizations are still going up. And that is obviously the biggest risk factor, so our overall R number at the moment is 1.3.

If we look at the situation in Edinburgh, it's much more positive actually. Next slide, we have seen a decrease in daily cases which is really good and it's also good news on our level in the new Scottish Tier system, we are going to be level 3 but there has been announcement from the first Minister today that we could go into level 2 very soon which means pubs and bars could open to some extent and we could actually start meeting with other people, at least outside our households and indoors controlled spaces again. Thank you.

00:11:08 Gavin Douglas

Christine, thank you so much for that really fascinating presentation and it's really great to have that deep academic expertise and to share it with our audience. I'm going to hand over now to Inspector Norman Towler from Police Scotland who kindly joined us to talk through some of the issues that he wants to bring to our attention.

So Norman, with gratitude over to you.

00:11:33 Norman Towler

Gavin, thank you very much. So as a small introduction to myself, my name is Norman Towler, I am the Community Inspector and Deputy Area Commander for the South East of Edinburgh, and I been in the police for about 22 years and to say that this is been most challenging year in my policing career is an understatement, but I think that is shared by everybody. It’s a very strange time in all our lives and it’s impactful for us all.

In my job I have a great I get to speak to everybody here, but last night I was speaking to the Newington Cubs, now the Newington Cubs were a great crowd, actually listened as well, which is lovely. Now they asked me the same questions the Newington Cubs, that asked me about what's the difference between legislation, what's the law, guidance and I got confused and they did as well, but it's not really confusing. Outside six people, two households. Inside, there's no visiting.

The Newington Cubs at the end of that understood that outside no more than 6 from 2 households, and inside there not allowed to have their pals down to play. That's simple.

Now the majority of the people who are meeting have been complying with the law and we know that the public confidence in the policing approach has been well received. Our approach throughout this whole pandemic’s been using a 4E model. Which is engaging with the public, which prior to us having to wear mask by legislation is a lot easier 'cause it was a smiling face, explaining the legislation and the guidance, encouraging compliance which is the main thing. And only using enforcement at very last option.

Now we will continue with that approach, but we will not hesitate to use enforcement action where it is necessary. I think that's really key in particular we won't tolerate blatant disregard to the law, which is in place to help the stop that help stop the spread of the virus.
And we have been using our powers recently to disperse large groups of people at house parties. When dealing with these groups of people who are clearly in breach of the regulations, we will move through the four Es a little more quickly, and take enforcement action at our discretion.

By taking account of any of these trigger points, a blatant breach is the size of the gathering. Is the attitude of those involved clearly showing disregard for the need for these public health measures. That's really, really key folks is the attitude of everybody.

Now repeat locations and repeat individuals. News in, Pollock Halls is a repeat location. We are unfortunately having to speak to the same people time and time again. We will move to enforcement. We don't want to please listen to us. Please listen to the Community safety team.

Now the public confidence if we don't do any of this, with the absence of enforcement, damage public confidence in the policing all. Increase that with the public confidence damaged their reputation of the university who you are representing. I would think they will.

Now, Chief Constable has made it clear that we are asking people to take personal responsibility to do the right thing and remember the purpose of these measures is to aid the collective effort to stay safe, protect others, save lives by preventing the virus from spreading.

Now let's move on to the next step? What happens if? That great question that everybody asks. Consequences, what are they? If there is a breach of the legislation and it's a blatant breach and a repeat location and we moved to enforcement and in the attitude isn't correct, then will issue a fixed penalty notice. £60 fine next time £120. Next time £240 fine.

But that also includes a refusing to desist manner and which is arrestable, and you'd be taken to St Leonard's police station just down the road.

Now what we have done in the past are blatant breaches. I think everyone in the press may have seen that there was an Air BNB party in milothian where the party hosted invited 200 people around to the house. Now the party host was charged with culpable and reckless conduct. What does that mean? A party host getting charged with culpable and reckless conduct that's a crime punishable by imprisonment and will stay with you for the rest of your lives that will inhibit your job prospects. And also we won't be able to go and visit some countries. I'm not trying to frighten people, I'm just trying to tell you the facts.

Now this weekend is Halloween. We all know that I've been fortunate enough to look after the last four city center details over Halloween and I often hear that Superman is running away from the police. There's gonna be different this year and we know that, but you've got to remember we the police, fire brigade, and ambulance, and once it's one of our busiest days, and with the greatest respect I don't want to be dealing with you. But we are here to keep you safe that's our job and that's what we will continue to do.

The Community support team and the security will engage with students first and foremost. Please use them, please speak to them. That's what they are there for. They will listen to you and so we don't have to become involved. Please listen to them. If not, we will have to get involved. And genuinely we don't want to. But we will deal with criminality. We will deal with it robustly.

The other part, I think is quite crucial. It's not often touched, is being a good neighbour. No Pollock was empty, and the halls have been empty for some time. And the other residents that are here all the time kind of got used to that. And then everybody coming back and
increasing everything that's going on. I would like to say this point, that's not what I want. Yes, they're not used to the the noise levels, they're not used of students being around about. Just think about that when you're walking through the innocent tunnel blaring music, which is one of the largest amplification tunnels around, just think how that affects other people, please.

Now just before going I think it would be really amiss for me to not to mention the tragic events that happened down in Northumbria where four students tragically died last weekend, now they died from drug overdoses and drug related deaths. Someone took ketamine. I'm not a medical person but I think that's used by vets. And some took an ecstasy and a mixture of both.

Now in Edinburgh we have something called fake valleys. Fake Valium. Kind of explains what they are, there fake. You don't know what you're taking. You have no idea what you're taking. We've also seen a trend throughout the country and throughout the UK of dealers attending our halls. If you're seeing someone there and shouldn't be there, I'm not asking you to tell tales all I'm asking do is try and save someone's life.

Gavin I hope that really sums up if there's any questions later on I'll be more than happy to take.

00:19:43 Gavin Douglas

Norman thanks very much indeed for that very straightforward and of course very sobering series of messages, but very clear and very helpful.

I'd like to promise that I'm going to be the light relief in contrast to Norman unfortunately that's not the case. My job as Deputy Secretary Student Experience, my job is really to try and work on improving the student experience in student services. Unfortunately at the moment I spending a lot of time writing to you about disciplinary matters and I am going to carry on with the slightly sobering theme of student discipline before we reach the sort of latter stages of the presentation.

So, next slide please.

So I'm hoping that by now you've had a chance to see the Good Citizen Guide we produced at the start of this year, setting out what we call the Guidelines for Community during times of pandemic and you'll recognize those messages are very similar to the ones that Norman just shared with us, that it's all of our responsibility to slow down the spread of the coronavirus - mine, Norman's, yours as students, every on this panels for responsibility that we all have a duty to help ensure the safety and wellbeing of every on campus. It's a legal requirement that.

But as Norman, as pointed out, we have a responsibility to the wider community as well. Whether that is noise in the innocent tunnel or whether it is spreading infection in the wider community.

As a result we all need this year to act with renewed level of personal awareness and responsibility at all times. Next slide, please.

The problem is that a minority of Edinburgh students have not been following these guidance, and in fact they've been ignoring the rules and the kind of things I'm talking about are parties, whether those are parties in accommodation or outside accommodation gatherings, we heard about the innocent tunnel there on the meadows, down the beach, and so on.
Setting off malicious fire alarms or refusal to wear face masks in libraries, these sort of things and these are all problematic because they go against the rules to go against the guidance and of course, ultimately these increase the likelihood of the transmission of COVID-19, and that is the one thing that we're trying to avoid.

As well as that is fair to say that other people may not feel safe. Of those students who have decided to leave University of Edinburgh accommodation this semester, so 30%, so roughly speaking one and three, have said they're doing that they don't feel safe in university accommodation and that is tragic, that should not be the case.

Even if there's a belief in some parts of the population that Covid doesn't hurt young people, and we just heard from Christine a few slides back, but it can hurt young people. But nonetheless, even if you believe that there is an increased risk university staff - we've got cleaners we've got security stuff. We've got all sorts of people who work in close contact with you in our accommodation and it's really important they are kept safe. It's really important that kept safe. That is their right to be safe at work.

I think discipline is becoming a distraction from more important issues. We've got great teams of people in our accommodation team and our residence Life team who are there to help you to support you in times of difficulty to help you make friends to enjoy life. And there finding themselves spending more time on discipline, which is not the best way to make use of their expertise.

And frankly I think we're wasting police time when the police had to come onto campus to sort out problems in Pollock Halls or other university accommodation. That is an inexcusable waste of police time what should be used to deal with more serious matters.

Next slide please.

So what does it mean if you ignore the rules in University terms? We just heard what it might mean in police terms, in legal terms. In the university we abide by the code of student conduct. That hyperlink there will works if you want to go and look at it later on, please do that. But the Code of Student Conduct covers a number of things which are possible offences. The two relevant ones here are that you might be behaving in a way likely to cause injury or to impair safety, or that you are failing to comply with any university rule, regulation or policy. And just to be clear, Norman there gave us a good sense of what the criminal and police sanctions might be, but within the university if you are found to have held a party in your room or set up a fire alarm so - first time offence, it's a fine of up to 150 pounds if it's a repeat offence, it's a referral to the Student Discipline Committee, who have access to a much wider range of sanctions, up to and including suspension and exclusion. If it's abusive language or assault of our staff that will be an automatic referral to the student Discipline Committee, and indeed, if it's an assault, may also be also be referred to police Scotland as a criminal act. And of course, the sanctions available there also include suspension and exclusion, so we obviously take the safety and security of our stuff very seriously as we take the safety, as we take the safety and security of you very seriously and everything that goes against that will be will be dealt with in the most severe way.

I should point out that this week so far for students, I've started on that process of formal discipline proceedings, and I would really urge you not to add to those numbers by behaviour over Halloween. next slide please.

So in summary, as Norman said, Halloween, a busy time of year. Traditionally a time for year parties and fun. It can't be that way this year we want you to enjoy Halloween, but you'll have to do it in a safe way by staying at home, and I know that's not much fun compared to
the old way of doing it, but, pun very much intended, don’t lose your head this Halloween. Stick to the rules. Don’t be a covidiot, don’t get in trouble with the police. Cause the police will be on campus and our residential campuses throughout the weekend. We will have enhanced security across the campus.

We want to keep you safe, but we need you to play your part and be the great majority who stick to the rules and keep everybody else safe.

I’m gonna pass on to Andy Shanks, the Director of Student Wellbeing, who will talk a little bit more about the support available to you and particularly the increased support we’ve been putting in place since the start of this outbreak, and the increased numbers of you having to self-isolate. So Andy, over to you.

00:25:45 Andy Shanks

Thank you Gavin. So moving on to my first slide. My name is Andy Shanks. I'm director of student, wellbeing here at the university. So amongst other things I manage the Student Counselling service, the student disability service, the chaplaincy, and more recently, the Residence Life Service.

These are very challenging times due to the pandemic and we realized this experience here at the moment is probably not what you'd hoped for or what you were expecting when you applied to the University of Edinburgh.

So we do know that this is a very difficult time for you, and the pandemic has had a significant impact on many of you in a whole lot of different ways. You might be feeling isolated, bored, lonely and you may feel that you're spending too much time in front of a screen, so I wanted to reassure you tonight that we have a great deal of support available for you here at university in different formats so in person, online, or the phone or face to face on campus.

I've seen a couple of questions about mental health supports in the chats, and hopefully we're going to say this evening will help to reassure you that we do have mental health support available, and I put a couple of links up in the chat later on in response to some of those questions. So we're doing as much as we can to support your mental health and well being. And not come until services on my second slide.

We're not here to replace the NHS. But we work very closely with NHS services when students are struggling and needs to see mental health specialists.

We have a great online program, events and activities currently including live fitness and exercise classes. We've tried hard to communicate those across the university I don't know whether you've seen information on them, but I've embedded a link on my next slide for you to access those resource is and we're working in partnership with the Sports Union, the sport and exercise department, the student association and residence life to look at how we can organize more activities and events outdoors when the regulations and guidance allows us to do so.

Now that the majority of your no longer self-isolating although I realize that some of you are, please remember that staying active going for a walk or 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.

So moving on to my second slide.
There's a whole range of different support for you here at the University. Each of you as undergraduates or postgraduate taught students will have a personal tutor assigned to you. There are good point of contact for you if you have got questions about your course or even if you struggle with your mental health, will be able to signpost you to the right services.

As well, the student support teams in your school, all 22 schools and deaneries have a student support team and as well as helping you with things like special circumstances and course choice, they can also signpost you to our support services or mental health and wellbeing services. We work very closely with all of the Student support teams across the university.

Our health and wellbeing services are delivered very much in a hybrid model.

On the right here I've got the motifs from 3 online platforms that we use - the feeling good app is used by thousands of people across the UK and it supports users with depression and anxiety and outcomes are extremely positive.

Silver Cloud is an online cognitive behavioural therapy platform, and Togetherall is an online community for people to share stories and share experiences of how the feeling but also to receive peer support from other people.

All three of these online platforms are accessible through the student counselling Service webpage. They're all free there, all confidential and they're all evidenced based, so there's evidence that demonstrates good outcomes for people use them.

I'd encourage you all to register with a GP general practitioner here in Edinburgh. That's the gateway to specialist physical health and mental health services.

Residence Life operate in all of our university student accommodation units and again, they're good first point of contact if you feel you're struggling with the situation and they can very quickly escalate your situation through to our student counselling services who, as I say, is delivering online and in person services. We've got probably the biggest student counselling service in Scotland. It's well resourced. We've just been given permission to recruit, so another five and a half posts, which we're going to do as quickly as we can.

Currently we are receiving over 100 referrals week and we're seeing 95% of students within two weeks for assessment so far, and if the situation is more urgent we can often get in contact with you and speak with you or see you the same day or the day after. Again, escalate your situation if it's a serious mental health situation.

The Student disability services work with people have long term mental health conditions, as well as those who have protected characteristics within the Equality Act, so Visual impairments and hearing impairment etc.

Our Chaplaincy works with students of faith, but also with any students who need support, and gets in contact with them and as well as delivering mindfulness and Tai Chi free of charge for all students, we have a listening service which is contactable 24 hours a day out of ours through the University Security Service phone number of which is on the back of your library card (your student card).

We are based in the Health and Wellbeing Centre on Bristo Square, and we also deliver support currently at Kings Buildings in Murchison House and the Chaplaincy has its location on the corner of Bristo Square next to Potterow.

As a final point, I want to address the students who haven't yet come forward for support. So if you need support for your mental health, or if you've experienced any sort of assault,
whether that's racial, sexual, or other form of harassment, then please do come forward to the Advice Place or one of the student support services will work with you to identify how best to support you, and will treat your situation as fully confidential.

So Gavin, that's limit the key points that I wanted to cover. I'll hand back to you.

00:32:25 Gavin Douglas

Andy, thanks very much for that useful survey and reminder of the accessibility of these important services, much appreciated.

Our final speaker today is Professor Dave Robertson. Dave is formerly the Head of the School of Infomatics, now the Head of the entire College of Science and Engineering.

Dave would you like to give us a few closing words please?

00:32:48 Dave Robertson

OK, so just a few words from the academic side of things and I wish I could see you so that I would get out rough idea for the first year or second year. Wherever you are.

I think just a few thoughts actually. I'm talking not just as a as an academic, but somebody who has kids, actually who are at university, two my sons are at university that are going through similar sort of thing. Not at Edinburgh through, cause they don't want to be anywhere near where their father works.

So first thought is really to do with the academic side of things. I think you have to realize is that I'm from science and engineering and so you think we're quite far distant from the fight against Covid, but in fact we're not. So we're doing quite a lot of stuff. That's actually very very directly relevant, we're doing on figuring out how masks can work. We're doing stuff and figuring out what the mechanics of doing testing that would actually be economical might be.

I personally am the Director of Health Data Research Scotland, so we're doing lot on the data side of things. Being able to figure out what on Earth is going on with people coming into hospitals and all those sort of things. Moving data around quickly, trying to get it to the point of clinical care, so folk can make decisions.

So my point is, a lot of people you're working with there aren't passive, they're actually trying to do thing about the Covid pandemic right here in Edinburgh.

And even if they weren't, those people, they would have been the people that are just sent spent six months trying to make sure that we can do the very best we can to push out the right kind of material to you wherever you are depending on the circumstances. It's been a real stretch and people like Gavin actually, who is unfortunately in the role of being quite authoritarian, has been hugely helpful in trying to get us to that position. We can actually make sure that we're doing something that's keeping you going and keeping you in good shape academically as we go through.

And it's not been easy. It's definitely not easy for you, and it's definitely not easy for us. And it is from where I sit one big experiment.

We've never done this sort of thing before, as said at the beginning, six months ago, we'd end up with some stuff being a lot better than it was before, and some stuff where we wanted to revise. I think that's precisely correct.

We'll learn a bit as we go through here will do more as we go through in the second semester.
If you're a science and engineering person and you're looking forward to labs we're thinking very carefully about how to get that to work, but we got to do it safely.

And that's the other bit with my other hat on Health Data Research UK I have spent some time in intensive care units. You don't want to be there. You don't want to put people there actually there, they're really quite unpleasant places. We do have a responsibility not to do that.

When I was first year in university I spent, I run a drinking club. Actually, would you believe? it was completely innocuous? 'cause you're very unlikely to do any harm to anybody other than yourself.

But this is not that you're very, very likely to do harm to others if you're not careful, so there is, I'm afraid, an extra responsibility, and it's on everybody.

It's not just not just on you, it's on me. It's on everybody. So I do hope that you can just throttle back a little bit in order to get us over this particular bump.

If you do, then I think one of the one of the really positive things that will come out of this it, certainly in science and engineering I believe, and I can't really speak pretty humanities I'm not an expert, but I believe that to be true in the humanities, definitely true in medicine that these disciplines will be changed fairly radically as a consequence and one of the advantages that you do have that I wouldn't have had when I was in university is that you can learn to be part of that.

And with these radical changes that the economy, society, science, that if you're at a place like Edinburgh, and Edinburgh is one of the top universities in the world, you could be one of the people who actually helps to change things a lot for the better. And you should think about that actually depending on which degrees you're doing, you could be coming out and doing those sorts of things.

And that's something I never thought about when I was first year undergraduate 35 years ago or more, actually, and now it's actually a real possibility with the pace of change in science and in society. So, I don't want to burden you with these sorts of rather heavy thoughts, but is something worth thinking about it. And it's certainly not something worth throwing away because Guy Fawkes is really nice.

So hopefully you give a little bit of thought. So keep optimistic, because I certainly am.

I think if you're like my sons continue to enjoy your academic career despite the fact that's being delivered in a slightly different way.

Question and answer section

00:38:31 Gavin Douglas

Dave, many thanks. Andy, many thanks to all our speakers.

And we're going to move now to the final stage of the town hall, which is the questions and answers.

And to those of you who've been involved in a town hall before, what we'll do is we'll work through the questions in order of the most likes or trying to take the most popular questions
first. If there any questions left at the end that we haven't had chance to answer, we will answer those offline and post all the questions and answers in a SharePoint site for you to have a look at.

So, the most like questions so far with 13 likes.

1. **It appears there is more money being spent on extra security to try and lock students down rather than any comprehensive mental health support.**

Let me say first of all that I think we all would rather not be spending any money to try and keep people safe and lock people down. And we always have a need for security, but unfortunately need more security now that we have in the past.

It would be absolutely great if we have no need for extra security and we didn't have these disciplinary problems, but I can also say that we're spending an extra 1.7 million pounds on mental health over the next 24 months and that includes 750,000 extra this year. That's more counsellors, more mindfulness, more listening service and additional services being rolled out later in the year for BME students and so on. So there's a lot of money being spent on additional mental health support and universities highly committed to that and it's doing that with hard cash, so I can't tell you in all honesty, whether we spend more on metal support and security, I suspect we do, but we're spending a lot more on mental health support over the next 24 months and that starting right now.

The next most popular question with 12 likes is:

2. **If the university is so concerned with Covid, why did they ask us to come back, is it all about the money?**

No, it's not. Genuinely is not all about the money. I've sat in many, many sort of discussions about the plans for this year and money under needs to have students on campus to make money has never been mentioned. I'm going to bring Dave back into this because I think the answer is that we believe it is the best possible way for students to learn. We're not an online University, although we have expertise and aspects of online education. We are university located in the City of Edinburgh. We believe that's the best way for our students, the best place for students to be, but Dave would you like as our senior academic, would you sort of a stab at that particular question?

00:40:46 Dave Robertson

It's an experiment for all of us, so let me take an example.

Engineering is my favourite example. I don't know there any engineers in the audience is impossible to know, but one of the things we do in engineering is we tried to give people choice. I actually believe this is an important thing for life. What's the most important thing you can have? Choice. So we try to provide the various options for being educated. One of them is residential, you can turn up and do your lectures. The other option is online, and there are various intermediate options involving all sort of flipped classroom activities and so on.

And actually, in engineering at least, we're finding the online stuff, at the moment, I actually don't think this will persist, I think this will change, is more popular.
Overtime I think that that's going to flip back as the weather improves and hopefully as Covid becomes less important and so on. But I think the most important thing is to be as malleable and adaptive as you possibly can. We're trying to be.

And then what we hope is that because of the close linkage into your home schools in the people you deal with, and you will get that even online, you get to know people, you just drawn closer and it pulls you closer into us and the people who are actually really interested in doing your education.

And we work at a common happy medium for all of this.

But the important point to realize is the very fact that you've been able to get so much of an educational already is because we were so adaptive over the six months before you came, and we just thought it could only be residential, you wouldn't get much education at all, same would be true if he thought it was entirely online, very little of great interest would have happened, but we deliberately designed it to be adaptive so that we could adapt to you. And I don't know that's enough Gavin.

00:42:47.449 Gavin Douglas

No, I think that's very helpful. It's a difficult question to answer, but it's a very helpful explanation from you Dave. So thank you for stepping at that point.

I'm going to say I have. Question is now reasonably popularity:

Somebody saying that the presentation is increasingly aggressive and threatening were lot of confrontational language. It seems like the mass of students have been demonized. There's little regard for how hard it actually is for us in accommodation.

3. I am finding this presentation incredibly aggressive and threatening with a lot of confrontational language. It seems like the mass of students are being demonised and there is little regard for how hard it actually is for us in accommodation. The 'support' offered does not counteract the continous threatening correspondence through emails. I understand rules must be enforced but how necessary is it to keep students here if this is the reality - I think this should be strongly considered for December and return plans in January. Seems frankly unethical

I suppose I started my presentation by saying that my job is Deputy Secretary Student Experience and what I actually am here to do to improve the student experience in all the ways I can.

I talked about how many of our staff, accommodation staff, and residence life staff, are here to support students, build community, support students with mental health and so on. And I started both that presentation by saying that it's unfortunate that many of our staff is spending more time on discipline right now than they are on the supports. And that's true for me as well as for a number of other colleagues on the call.

So I'm sorry if it comes across aggressive and threatening. We do have a discipline problem in some of our university accommodation at the moment. We heard that from our Police Scotland colleague that we are regarded as a somewhat problematic site at the moment, where there's repeat behaviour. And typical night we're getting reports of between 10 and 15 parties or gatherings in university accommodation that are against the guidance.
So we have to get to grips with this guys, and if we get to grips with it then we can step away from it, we’re trying to lay out very clearly to the minority of students who are transgressing that there are going to be consequences for this, because we can’t let this carry on. I’m sorry that comes across being heavy handed and confrontational.

We do understand and are deeply committed to, sorting out these issues, both discipline but also student support, and that’s why this particular presentation as be structured in that way today.

Somebody asked questions saying:

4. **What authority do the University have to issue fines? Are they legally binding? How many fines have actually been issued? And how many have actually been paid by students?**

So when you enroll the student at the University of Edinburgh, you put yourself under the authority of the sonatas academicos. You actually sign up something called this sponcio academico, all in Latin, given our ancient roots. But so by doing that you put yourself under the authority of the academic Senate and the academic Senate has authority for maintaining discipline in the university and that’s quite well established in its legal ordinances.

So, basically Senate approved the Code of Student Conduct that I referred to earlier on. Code of Student Conduct sets out the different sort of sanctions that are available to discipline officers in the university, and that’s where the authority to impose fines actually comes from. They’re not legally binding in the same way that a police fine is, but they are binding within the university context so if you don’t pay a fine, you likely to face further consequences under the code of student conduct.

So, how many fines have actually being issued? I only have the data up to the middle of October, but as of the middle of October over 160 fines have been issued and afraid I don’t know off my head how many have actually being paid by students. But they do need to be paid. I’m afraid that is the way it works.

A question which is perhaps a little hard to understand but Norman might have a crack at it:

5. **Dear Inspector, when dishing out fines, how can we prove that we are not at the party?**

Norman do you want to try to answer that one, it is almost a philosophical question I suspect. But what’s the process? Somebody says they feel they have been fined unfairly. How does that process work? I guess is the question.

00:46:21 Norman Towler

To answer the question is quite simple, don’t be there.

Yeah, how can we prove you’re not a party? Don’t be at the party and that would be the first one, but in the bigger scale of things I’m going to go back to the question.

I don't want to sound aggressive. I want to sound factual.
I'm going to start off with the majority of people are complying. The majority are. It's the small minority that aren't and are causing issues and it's causing issues for university, it's causing issues for the neighbourhood. It's causing issues for everybody now.

If there is a party and it's in one household then legally that's allowed.

However, you've got to bear in mind you be good neighbour. Think about the noise. Think about disruption it's causing. Think about that way and so just bear in mind those little ones, but to answer the question was how can we prove we're not there don't, then don't be there.

00:47:19 Gavin Douglas

OK, thank you OK.

Next question is about Christmas, and I suspect there might be a couple of other questions later on about Christmas as well, so let me talk a little bit.

About Christmas. People are saying are we going to be allowed to go home?

I will be stuck in accommodation over Christmas - that was Donald's question, that's had 10 likes so far.

6. Is there any advice on what is going to happen at Christmas? Are we going to be allowed to go home? Or are we going to be stuck in accommodation over Christmas?

The situation for Christmas remains a little unclear as things currently stand. You may have heard different pronouncements or different announcements from this Scottish Government. One most recently I think from John Swinney, the Deputy First Minister, saying it maybe the students are not able to go home at Christmas.

But other announcements saying much more positive things like we think it is really important for students feel like to go home at Christmas.

That's a view, by the way, that we would support entirely at the university.

And there's been some tentative suggestions coming forward which you may have seen about everybody should self-isolate for two weeks at the end of term before going home for Christmas and so on.

So there's a lot of thinking going on in the Scottish Government at the moment, and indeed in the other UK governments, the Northern Irish Assembly, the Welsh Assembly and the Westminster governments to workout at a national level across the four nations, how can students be safely allowed to go home at Christmas without leading to a further spread of Covid across the nation.

Because of course we're talking about hundreds of thousands of people moving around the country in a short period of time. There's no decision at this stage. Our view is that we would like as many people who want to go home for Christmas to be able to do so safely. We are engaging at every level from Peter Mathieson, the Principal, downwards with the Scottish Government on their emerging and developing plans. And we will continue to represent our views strongly to them about the best way to make this happen.

But the importance would be able to go over Christmas if they can. So we don't have a clear answer yet, but we're working hard. It ultimately it will be guidance from the Scottish
Government and the other governments that determine the rules we're keeping our fingers very firmly cross that as many of you as possible who want to go home for Christmas will be able to do so.

There was a question further up but it may have been answered already by Carina about being stuck in Edinburgh.

Carina I know you've answered it, but to bring you in briefly to explain the answer a bit further if you could, about what happens if people can't go home for Christmas, 'cause we recognize that it might be challenging, particularly for international students this year.

00:49:41 Carina Svensen

Yeah, so of course I wish is that everyone that wants to go home for Christmas can do so, but of course it's a little bit out of our hands.

So if we should find yourself in a situation where there is restrictions on travel, or for any other reason a student choses to say in Edinburgh over Christmas, we are working on plans so that we can look after our students over Christmas whether it is with food and Christmas dinners or whether it's social activities virtually or in an a way that we can socially distance and do activities face to face.

And that's a program that we're working off at the moment together with our colleagues in residence life. So I can't give you a full details on it yet, but we are preparing for it should we be in that situation? But of course we are hoping that those students that want to go home for Christmas and can do so.

00:50:32 Gavin Douglas

Thanks Karina, that's really good to hear and I think will answer a couple of questions further up as well.

00:50:38 Carina Svensen

There's one other question, Gavin, that I can answer which is about how having parties within the household so when I'm when I'm live now, if that's OK.

7. Are we allowed to have "parties" with people strictly within our households. If not, why?

So, if you live in a household that has a pantry that allows 6 people, and it's very clearly marked outside our pantries, how many people can be in a pantry, so some other households as larger pantry somewhere smaller, but if you have a pantry that is large enough to hold a group in your household, you are allowed to socialise with that group.

At you're not allowed to have any parties within your household unless it has been approved by your warden. So if you want to hold a household party of six people in a pantry where you are allowed to have six people, then you need to seek permission from your warden. And the reason why we're doing that, and then you're asking that question, is also to look after other students that live in the surrounding area or in the household. There may not want to have a party so that we can look at them from a noise perspective and ensure that everyone feels safe, so that's why you have to ask for permission before having a party.

But in a in a space where you can be a certain amount of people in your household, you can get together and socialize.
00:51:49 Gavin Douglas

That's really helpful, Carina, so thank you very much for stepping in to clarify that.

So I'm looking at the comment that says:

8. Easy for adults who live at home with their own families to complain about students who are living in often less than satisfactory condition halls with people they may not get on with. Very little regard for mental health and a lack of perspective, as if everyone is in the same position.

I understand that comment. I'm speaking to you from my spare bedroom. I'm living at home with my wife and that is a different situation to somebody is living in a Hall with a group of students who they may not know very well. And you may be struggling with issues around the Wi-Fi, whatever else it might be. So I accept that I am certainly come from a different perspective, but what we're not doing is just sitting in our spare bedrooms or living rooms pontificating about this.

We have many many staff who are living on campus - Residence Assistants, Wardens and so on as Carina just mentioned who live directly on our accommodation are taking part in that experience.

We have many many staff who work on residential estates and support students on residential estates who actually know - security stuff and so on. So everything that we're saying is informed by the views of those people as well as our own views and so it's not quite fair to say that we're just sitting here with a different perspective, although I recognize it is true, I certainly have a different perspective I'm not in all the residents.

But we are listening to the views of students, residents life teams and of other accommodation catering teams who are working in those residences and that's informed our decision to have this town Hall today.

So that's dealt with the question about parties that Carina mentioned.

The question here:

9. If our flatmate had a party and we'd have leave the flat to avoid being fined, would you expect us to sit outside in the cold to avoid being fined? What would you suggest us to do?

Carina, I wonder whether there is an answer there. Obviously speaking for where I'm sitting, I'd say. Is it possible to speak to your flatmates and encourage them not to have the party? Or if the party has been arranged legitimately as Carina suggested, then there's no problem being part of that party. I guess what you're saying is you're flat mates had a party and invited people from outside, that's against the guidance and therefore you're at risk being of being fined. What should somebody do in that situation Carina? Do you think?

00:54:12 Carina Svensen

So, your absolutely right having people from the outside into your household, of course, is not allowed at the moment, so that should not happen. There are various ways that this can be dealt with. Obviously you can speak to your household and explain that you are not comfortable with this.
They may or may not listen, so I appreciate that doesn't always work. And of course you can report it to us should you wish to do so. That's not always easy so I appreciate that, not wanting to be the one that tells on the rest of the households.

If their household is fined, of course, there is also an appeal process in there as well, so it doesn't mean that you cannot appeal and say I was not part of this, I was in my room at all the time and I did not join the party. So, there is various ways that you can communicate with us without necessarily just going to say ‘stop this now’ and be the one in the household that doesn't want to be part of the party so I think communication there is key and we are here to listen and I know there's been some comments about we don't answer emails so please let us know which emails are not being answered so we can follow that up. There is many communication emails that it's available out there suggested that we know exactly which one to address. But please communicate with us and there is always an appeal process if you have not joined the party then we understand that it's not right that you should be charged a penalty.

10. I have been hearing that the second semester will also be entirely online - is this true? And on this topic, I would like to emphasize that a reduction of tuition fees seems appropriate, especially if you would like students to be more co-operative: one thing less to worry about, one reason more to trust the university administration.

00:56:05 Dave Robertson

So, subject to a government regulations and guidelines, of course if they made it impossible for us to have people on campus then that would be a different story, but assuming that doesn't happen then the answer is no from a science and engineering.

The reason I can be so categorical is because an awful lot of in science and engineering subjects are lab based. We can do some lab teaching that is off campus and we're doing various creative things. Actually, the most creative one I've heard is in physics, where somebody apparently has a lab experiment that he's been able to kind of outsource that to students who couldn't actually get in, but we much prefer for you to come in and work in the labs, and we've been trying to this semester the push more of the final year students, honor students, that absolutely need to be in the lab to finish their degrees, through in the first semester, precisely so that we can get you in the second semester.

So we're working as hard as we possibly can to get you in on campus and when I talk to people, I mentioned this before when I was giving my general talk, when I talk to people who are who are doing some of the teaching their greatest regret is that they don't have more people in on campus for the synchronous teaching.

Now, of course we can't have everybody because there is not enough space. And actually I don't think you'll want to be there because for a lot of you maybe it's easier to do some of the stuff online and that's great if that works for you.

But our plans and 2nd semester are to have you on counters as much as we reasonably can for the reasons I described.

00:57:44 Gavin Douglas

Dave OK, thanks very much for that.

So folks, we're now at the end of the town hall. We're out of time.
I know we haven't managed to answer all those questions, but as I said before, we will make sure we get through those questions and publish answer to them. Some of them have got quite some specific questions and will deal with those will probably says answers.

Thank you for coming today. There will be further town halls by the way, the Students Association are arranging town halls next week at which number if Senior Colleagues will be present including Colm Harmon, Vice Principal Students and Peter Mathieson, the Principal.

So watch out for details of those if you want to carry on engaging with the University's senior management. Thank you for coming.

Thank you to our speakers. Particular thanks to Inspector Norman Towler from Police Scotland who's given up time to come in and speak to us.

Really appreciate his input today. So to finish off, I do hope you have a safe but enjoyable Halloween and I look forward to seeing you or engaging with you at a future town hall in the near future. Thanks very much and good night.