

Community

Introduction
From Lisa Roberts,
Vice-Chancellor at the
University of Exeter

Winter
2020



Welcome to our new regular community newsletter. Firstly, I would like to introduce myself; I arrived in Exeter as the new Vice-Chancellor of the University in September. I very much believe that the University should benefit

the whole community and should be an institution that everyone is proud of. As such, I am keen to strengthen our bond with the local community. I will listen and work with you to ensure that the city and region thrives in the months and years ahead.

I realise that it has been a difficult few months as all of us have been dealing with the effects of the COVID-19 restrictions. I understand that during these last few difficult weeks there has sometimes been tension between our student population and local residents. We will continue to work closely with the Police, local authorities and everyone in our community to balance engagement, education and enforcement. The safety and wellbeing of our whole community comes first.

Through the set-up of our own rigorous test, trace and isolate system, and the cooperation of our students, we contained a virus outbreak in the autumn, preventing onward transmission to the wider community. We now have very few COVID-19 cases. We are proud that the vast majority of our 25,000 students have shown exemplary behaviour at a very difficult time in their young lives.

There is real hope now that scientists have made the breakthroughs required to tackle COVID-19, but many challenges lie ahead as we await the mass availability of vaccines. I am proud of the fact that our staff and students are involved in local and national trials, in developing new treatments and diagnostic tests and that many of our staff and students work on the frontline in the NHS; you can find out more about this

on our website. The University of Exeter has a vital role to play in the region and I am committed to partnership working and making the most of our education, research, innovation, global connections and creative community partnerships for the good of the whole region. This is at the forefront of our minds as we begin to develop our new ten-year strategy.

I welcome all feedback and I hope we can work together to ensure Devon and Cornwall flourishes in a fast-changing, and sometimes difficult, world. I wish you a happy, healthy festive season.

Lisa Roberts, Vice-Chancellor at the University of Exeter
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Student testing and travel plans for December

- From 30 November all our students are eligible for a COVID-19 test – even if they have no symptoms. Results are available within 24 hours.
- After Friday 4 December all our teaching will be conducted online.
- A student 'travel window' from 3 to 9 December has been agreed for the end of term. Students will be encouraged to get a test before returning home.
- If a student's test result is negative they can leave immediately. If the result is positive, they will be required to self-isolate for 10 days, as will other members of their household and any other close contacts.
- Many of our students have indicated that they will stay in the city or region for the winter break. We will offer support throughout.
- We await government guidance on travel and testing plans for January, but as education is considered a national priority we expect to start teaching again from 4 January.

Resident Liaison Group meetings

Our last Resident Liaison Group meeting was held on Wednesday 21 October.

The meeting was attended by representatives for the Police, Exeter City Council and Public Health Devon, alongside city councillors and representatives from the local resident associations.

At the meeting we discussed the enhanced operations underway since the start of term, which included:

- **enhanced testing capacity** including the development of asymptomatic testing strategies and over 4,500 completed tests
- **University-specific measures to reduce transmission rates** including a review of social, religious and sporting events in and around campus
- **communication and discipline strategies among the student body** including over 600 individual engagements ranging from formal letters of warning to suspensions

■ welfare and practical support for students in isolation.

The next meeting will be held remotely on Wednesday 2 December, from 5.30pm to 7pm. If you have any questions or concerns please raise them with your local resident association committee or councillor so that they can present them.



University Registrar and Secretary Mike Shore-Nye said, “Our number one priority throughout this unprecedented year has been to prioritise the health and wellbeing of our staff, students, partners and the wider community. Ensuring our local resident associations and City Councillors have been kept abreast of all our steps has been of the utmost importance to us. These virtual Resident Liaison Group meetings have proved invaluable to the University to understand and respond to the concerns of our local community.”

Our local partners

We’re proud of our staff, students and the wider community’s handling of this autumn term. Of course, it’s been challenging, but it’s also been wonderful to see everyone work together to face down the threat of COVID-19.

We wanted to share with you some comments made by senior figures in the community to highlight the achievement of the entire city.



“I’ve not seen a senior management team respond so successfully as the way that the University of Exeter did during this pandemic.

The prioritisation of the students, and also the wider community of Exeter, was first and foremost at all their decisions. As a city we owe a great deal to this team, both in the prudent planning of Halo testing and the subsequent control measures that took place.

There was no widespread community transmission as a result of the outbreak that occurred at the end of September. The difference between this result and outbreaks that have ended differently elsewhere are the specific actions they took – mostly completely unseen by the wider community they were looking after.”

Jon-Paul Hedge, Director, Exeter City Council



“We have a well-established and healthy working relationship with the University; developed over many years. This has proved invaluable during this testing time as we all strive to prevent the spread of the coronavirus, keep students and the wider population safe, reassure those who feel most unsettled and strike the balance between engagement and enforcement.”

Inspector Simon Arliss, Exeter Sector Inspector, Devon & Cornwall Police



“Devon still has a growing number of positive cases of coronavirus, in all age groups and communities. However, the level is currently below the national average.

The public health team in Devon County Council began working with the University of Exeter to agree testing resources and ensure facilities are COVID-19 secure well ahead of students returning in September. It was vital to establish how we would work together if we saw cases.

That preparation meant we were quickly able to respond to the increase in cases and drive down the numbers. All of this could only happen with the exceptional efforts and support of students and their adherence to the additional restrictions we put in place.”

Steve Brown, Director of Public Health Devon (designate)

'Students on the Move' at Christmas

The University's Community Liaison Team is collaborating with Exeter City Council to develop a winter version of our summer refuse collection scheme.

'Students on the Move' began because students' departures from term-time accommodation often don't occur on the same day their areas' bins are emptied. The challenges this presented became greater when general-waste bins began to be collected fortnightly, rather than weekly. The initiative paid for extra collections to occur between scheduled collection times, and brought about a series of recycling initiatives to promote the disposal of reusable items and food waste.

With the offer of virtual home-study, it is possible that departures for the 2020 Christmas break may be more staggered than in previous years, so from 2 December a series of extra refuse collections have been arranged to collect waste from student premises as they gradually depart for the holidays.



Student Warden interview



Amy Bond is studying full time for a Masters in Global Sustainability and is a Student Warden near the Streatham Campus.

What does a Student Warden do?

We go to student houses where neighbours have raised concerns like excessive noise or waste. A lot of the time they just didn't know they were doing something wrong – they're just dazed and confused about why you're there!

If there aren't any addresses to go to, we normally arrange our own walkabouts – we choose areas we haven't been to recently. We look for overflowing bins, or bins that have been left out on the street. We also got involved in community gardening projects and litter picking campaigns. There's a community allotment where some of the wardens helped with maintenance too.

How has it been different this year?

At the start of the year, some members of the community were concerned when students arrived. But I think a lot of residents have experienced students making a real effort to follow COVID-19 rules.

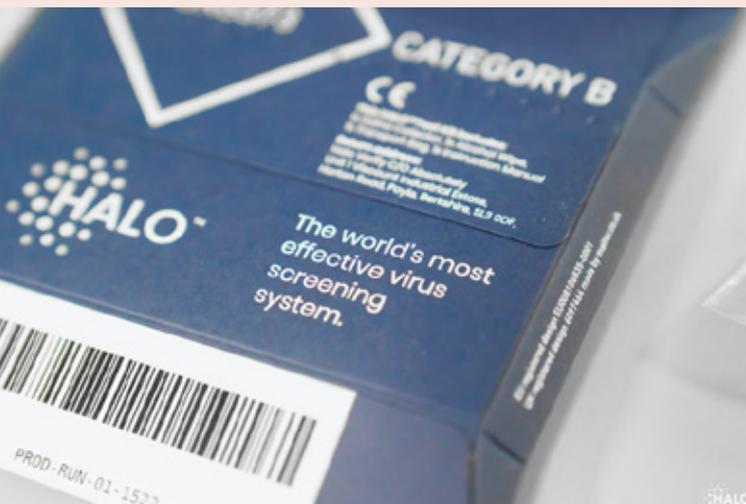
We've been consulted by the University over Zoom, and we took part in worst-case scenario planning. We've helped the uni put plans into place, but we haven't been able to speak directly to residents about this work.

Has that been difficult?

It's been a shame to not be able to do more, although I understand why we can't! We could have responded to concerns faster, but it was difficult to speak to residents face to face without worrying them further. And it's a shame we can't have the same interactions as before.

What are your own plans for the winter break?

I should be going home for Christmas. I'm planning on getting a test just before I go, and my housemates will too.





Don't drop your guard to COVID-19 this Christmas



Dr Bharat Pankhania teaches at the University Medical School. He has over 20 years' experience in communicable disease control and infectious disease management and has offered his expertise throughout the pandemic.

Here are his top tips for staying safe this winter:

- *Keep your Christmas low-key this year and have as few interactions with other people as possible.*
- *Don't drop your guard to the virus:*
 - wear a mask properly, fully covering your nose and mouth
 - wash and dry your hands, at least every two hours
 - no loud face-to-face conversations.

■ *If you have COVID-19 symptoms:*

- *get the test, and self-isolate for at least 10 days if the result is positive*
- *tell your close contacts and ask them to self-isolate for 14 days*
- *even if your results are negative, don't drop your guard – results are only valid on the day the test is taken.*

- **Whatever the government guidance says, take personal control for your protection. Know the risks and take charge of your own wellbeing.**
- **Invest in a restful Christmas for a better 2021. Effective vaccines are just around the corner!**

Term dates

Autumn Term:

Monday 21 September – Friday 11 December 2020

Spring Term:

Monday 4 January – Friday 26 March 2021

Summer Term:

Monday 26 April – Friday 11 June 2021

Key links and contacts

University of Exeter COVID-19 mini-site:
exeter.ac.uk/coronavirus/

Safe Community Charter:

exeter.ac.uk/media/universityofexeter/coronavirus/imagesanddocs/Exeter_Charter.pdf

Key information for the winter break:

exeter.ac.uk/coronavirus/students/winterbreak/

DfE guidance for student movement and plans for the end of term:

[gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/student-movement-and-plans-for-the-end-of-autumn-2020-term](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-reopening-buildings-and-campuses/student-movement-and-plans-for-the-end-of-autumn-2020-term)

If you have any questions please contact us via coronavirusenquiries@exeter.ac.uk

Estate Patrol: 01392 723999

COVID-19 social distancing breaches should be reported to the Police on 101/999 – depending on the seriousness of the breach.

The University's Estate Patrol (01392 723999) can assist with noise disturbances from student premises (if direct contact is not possible). Please note that Estate Patrol cannot investigate disturbances in parks and other public spaces. These concerns need to be passed to the Police for investigation.

If you are unsure whether a student noise disturbance also represents a social distancing breach, the University's Estate Patrol can pass relevant details to the Police and Council if they are leading with a noise investigation.

These investigations are often conducted in partnership. Please note that the University, Police and City Council are regularly sharing information and coordinating their response based on the information they are receiving.

