

Questions and answers from the recent talk held by our Vice-Chancellor, Professor Lisa Roberts, Students' Guild President Sunday Blake, and other senior members of staff, on Tuesday 23 February.

## **Returning to Exeter**

### **My mental health is suffering from living at home. Would returning to Exeter be considered "essential"?**

Students may return to university in order to access study spaces and support if they are:

- International students who have remained in the UK, or those who have arrived and do not have alternative accommodation
- Students without access to appropriate study spaces or facilities in their vacation accommodation
- Students who have remained in their university accommodation over the winter break
- Those requiring additional support, including those with mental health issues

### **As an international student, can I travel to the UK while my study sessions are still online?**

You can find more information on international travel on [this webpage](#). We don't specifically advise students to come back (due to the additional costs if they are travelling from a country on the travel ban list) but of course they can, especially if they fit into one of the categories in the answer above.

## **Wellbeing**

### **To what extent there is coordination between the tutors and the wellbeing team?**

The University has clearly defined processes for ensuring Wellbeing and academic colleagues work together to meet the learning-related needs of students. For students who declare a disability, an ILP can be created which sets out any recommendations for reasonable adjustments to teaching and learning. It informs academic tutors and can support a range of adjustments in order to remove barriers that may prevent students from participating at the University, and to minimise the impact that their health condition or disability may have on their ability to study. These can include recommendation on the recording of teaching session and opens a dialogue between wellbeing and academic staff should any further advice or guidance be supportive.

The recording of academic sessions for students is recommended as good practice, not just as a reasonable adjustment. Wellbeing is working increasingly closely with the Academic Development team as well as the Technology Enhanced Learning team to ensure there is clear advice and guidance for staff around recording sessions and making them accessible e.g. captioning guidance.

Under the HWSS support for study meetings, wellbeing and academic staff (academic and/or senior tutors) work closely together to provide programme and study guidance including reviewing any barriers to a student's learning and teaching.

### **What do you say to those students who the wellbeing services turn away or place on long waiting lists for help that they need now, not later?**

No student is ever turned away by our wellbeing services so we encourage students to get in touch whenever they need to. We are committed to offering a compassionate and supportive service to all students.

We have a small number of on the day appointments if students have an urgent concern or are experiencing significant distress and encourage students to contact us at wellbeing to discuss their support needs.

We aim to have a telephone consultation with each student within three working days of their contacting us. This telephone consultation is an initial conversation which gives students the opportunity to discuss their concerns and to agree next steps for support. We follow a stepped care approach, which means we look at an individual's needs first and start with the least intensive and most effective support. This can mean we may recommend students try self-help resources, webinars or psych educational groups before we move onto one to one support.

We have also partnered with Togetherall which offer 24/7 peer and professional support. There are a wider range of courses and tools to help, with counselling professionals online at all times too should you need any additional support. Among the other options are access to other services such as online CBT via Silvercloud, a popular self-help online therapy platform which is often utilised in NHS settings as well. It also allows the student to access the materials immediately and at a time which suits them.

We also work in partnership with colleagues in the NHS to give the best possible outcome and so may refer a student to an organisation such as [Talkworks](#), which specialises in evidence based treatments for depression and anxiety.

We understand that sometimes students are disappointed when they are referred to services such as the ones above but these referrals are based on individual needs and alongside the evidence of their success. We always encourage students to come back and see us if they have tried our recommendation but their circumstances have not improved so we can review what else we could do to support.

## **Mature Students**

### **What help can you offer mature students or those who have re-entered education and may feel isolated?**

Prior to starting at the University, mature students are invited (via email) to attend various induction events, these include:

- Enhanced Induction Programme (Exeter and Penryn)
- Mature Students Academic Skills Day (Exeter and Penryn)
- Peer Mentoring Programme (Exeter)

These programmes are designed to not only provide skills and knowledge for these students but to also provide an opportunity for students to be able to meet each other and form networks and connections.

We are well aware that some students may feel isolated, especially in the current climate and for 2020/2021 academic year we piloted a 'Mature Student Together' Network and will be looking at developing this for the next academic year. These have been peer led with support from staff and have provided students in certain disciplines and campuses the opportunity to further connect with fellow mature students.

We are also developing our Mature student champions across the University to include both professional services staff as well as academic staff. In addition, on both Exeter and Penryn campuses there are student-led Mature Student Societies, allowing students to meet one another.

**Are there plans to increase the accommodation provision for mature students?**

The University does not limit the provision of accommodation for mature students, accommodation is provided to all students who fall within our accommodation guarantee, regardless of their age.

**Fees**

**What is the University doing to proactively seek additional funding from the government to cover [those] losses [Mike spoke about] and to provide additional support?**

We are working via UUK and the Russell Group to ensure that the Government is aware of both the additional support that students have required this year, and those areas in which it has been difficult to replicate the full teaching and learning experience.

**Will a reduction in fees be offered to students to help them? Will tuition fee reductions also apply to international students?**

In line with the expectations of the Government, [Universities UK \(UUK\)](#), and the [Office for Students](#), the University's position remains that we will not be offering refunds or compensation for tuition fees in light of the COVID-19 pandemic.

**What is being done to ameliorate the educational/financial experience of international students specifically? In practical degrees, the experience currently is significantly different from the intended one, in addition to the 10,000+ GBP international students still pay.**

We have invested tens of millions of pounds over the past 12 months in education and support for students. We have delivered as much on-campus teaching as we could alongside live online teaching and created thousands of new digital learning resources to support degree education.

Nearly 70% of students in a recent survey rated the academic support they have received as very good or quite good but we will not lose sight of the 10% who said the support was poor. 68% said their experience of online teaching was good or average. We are focused on all students achieving excellent learning outcomes.

We want students to succeed and will do everything in our power to help students succeed. We will ensure fairness and also maintain the high standards associated with an Exeter degree.

Ultimately, the decision about value for money and fee compensation is not for the University but we have certainly done everything we could and our very best to provide good quality education in a challenging year.

**I am an international student and my tuition fee is high. Can I apply for financial help from the University? Also, I have applied for the fees scholarship though I have started my course after March 2020. Will my application be considered?**

Students who are suffering additional hardship may be eligible for additional financial support

through the Success For All fund. <https://www.exeter.ac.uk/financialhelp/>. Deadlines for specific scholarships will be detailed in the eligibility criteria and we would encourage all students to make applications if they are eligible.

### **Can international students still collect their BRPs late and won't be penalized?**

Yes – there is currently no time limit for collecting your BRP so you can collect it whenever you arrive in the UK and complete your period of self-isolation. If you have asked for your BRP to be sent to the University you can book an appointment to collect it using the link in the email that we sent you to confirm that we have received it. You can [find out more here](#).

### **Is it true that international students can't get any hardship funds?**

No, this is untrue. The Success for All fund is open to all students.

### **Why has the Vice-Chancellor not addressed the rent strike?**

We waived accommodation fees for students who cannot or have not returned to university, with the accommodation estimated to cost over £10 million. Unfortunately, there is little we can do about students in private accommodation but we continue to lobby the government on their behalf for additional support. We recognise how tough financially this year has been for students and we have distributed over £1million in hardship and emergency funding to students most significantly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **COVID-19**

### **You are asking students to get tested for COVID-19 twice a week but will you subsequently check that people have been tested before they are allowed to enter buildings?**

We strongly encourage all students and staff who are coming to our campuses to get tested twice a week, every week. This is necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19 and to keep safe those around us. Our students have pulled together and played their part in reducing the spread of COVID-19 and we expect this to continue. We do not have plans to require proof of testing.

### **In light of the government's recent announcement, what are the plans for this summer's Graduation?**

We are working with the Students' Guild and Students' Union on our plans for graduation and these will be announced soon.

### **No- disadvantage guarantee**

### **Could you explain the no-disadvantage policy for postgraduate taught students in more detail?**

Students on postgraduate taught programmes in the academic year 2020/21 will have the education commitment measures applied during the Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee (APAC) that is considering their complete body of work. Depending on when you started your

programme (October or January) and when you hand in your final piece of work, this will take place either in the September APAC or the June APAC.

This means that:

- The positive commitment to scaling (where marks across the module are identified as impacted compared to previous years) will be undertaken. Each department will take a consistent approach and will compare average marks, and the distribution of marks, achieved by each year group this year with the equivalent marks from previous years. They will then apply appropriate adjustments to correct any significant downward deviation.
- Taught postgraduate students entering the job market or applying for further study this year, will be eligible for an additional safety-net on their final classification. The definition of the 'borderline zone' will be expanded, ensuring that all students close to a degree class border are considered in detail, with a greater range of final weighted marks being considered for preponderance than in previous years. This is effective because APACs have authority to award each student in a borderline zone a higher class of degree - where at least half the student's weighted credits lie in the higher class. **We are discussing the final detail of this safety net and will update you with exact specifications as soon as possible.**

### **Why is there not a no-detriment policy this year?**

Supporting you and ensuring that you are treated fairly with respect to your peers and previous and future generations of students, while also recognising the particular circumstances in which you are studying, is central to well-established and rigorous policies that the University has in place.

Although the pandemic continues to disrupt our lives, the conditions at the start of the 2020/21 academic year are different from those in spring 2020 in which we were faced with the immediate emergency of the pandemic's escalation and the imposition of a sudden and unprecedented lockdown.

The main difference between last year and this year is that this year we are unable to create a benchmark for each student. The benchmark is what provided the 'safety net' for individuals in last year's **No Detriment Policy**. Each benchmark was calculated using the record of achievement for each student during that year of study prior to the escalation of the pandemic. We do not have such a pre-pandemic record of achievement for each student in the current year of study. We cannot create a benchmark now for the whole year based on last year's performance alone - or based on qualifications obtained outside Exeter (1st years and postgraduates with no University of Exeter record of achievement), because that would risk undermining our academic standards and the value of our degrees.

However, a key consistency is our commitment to *Success for All Our Students*. While it is not possible to implement the No Detriment Policy of last year, our well-established core policies and processes will provide you with similar protection, both as a whole cohort and individually, as well as the range of measures outlined as part of our no-disadvantage guarantee introduced for the 2020/21 academic year. This approach is in line with the Russell Group, who [released the joint statement](#) on No Detriment on 7 January 2021.

### **Accommodation**

#### **1. I'm struggling and need financial support – where do I go?**

We understand that some students, in returning to our campuses later than originally planned, may suffer an additional financial burden. In partnership with the Students' Guild and Students' Union we have therefore committed to doubling the support available through the '[Success for All Fund](#)' for those experiencing unexpected financial challenges by adding a further £500,000 to the fund. Should you need it on your return next year for the start of on-campus teaching, please reach out for support and apply to the fund if you are suffering financial hardship.

## **2. I'm paying for private rented accommodation that I'm not living in, what can I do?**

If you are living in privately-owned accommodation you are advised and encouraged to refer to your contract and speak to your accommodation provider/landlord directly in the first instance

The Students' Guild Advice Service can also help you and you can find out further information and contact them [via their website](#).

## **3. I'm an international student and I've been studying online for the whole of year 1, will I be eligible for accommodation in year 2?**

If you are entering your second year of an undergraduate/postgraduate course you will not be covered by our Accommodation Guarantee as this is reserved for new students entering the first year of an undergraduate programme or international postgraduate students entering their first year of postgraduate study. You will therefore need to seek private accommodation within the city. Further information and advice is available on our [private housing webpage](#).

## **4. I have a question about the impact of COVID-19 on my accommodation, where can I find answers?**

We have created a list of frequently asked questions in relation to the impact of COVID-19 and your accommodation. This can be found on the accommodation website on their dedicated '[Coronavirus](#)' [webpage](#).

If you wish to speak to a member of the Accommodation Team, then you can do this by logging an enquiry through [SID Online](#) or via the web or app version of iExeter. Please note that they are currently experiencing high volumes of enquiries, so there may be a delay in them responding. Please refer to the [SID webpage](#) for the current turnaround times.

You can also email: [sid@exeter.ac.uk](mailto:sid@exeter.ac.uk)

If your enquiry is urgent or time-sensitive or time you can call the team:

**UK Tel:** 0300 555 0444

**International Tel:** +44 1392 72 4724

## **5. Is there University-managed accommodation for mature students?**

For students studying on our Exeter campuses, we guarantee to offer accommodation to all new unaccompanied\* home or international undergraduates who have firmly accepted an offer of a place at the University of Exeter entering your first year of study (i.e. Year 1) as a full-time student. We also guarantee International postgraduates for the full academic year starting in September as

long as you apply by 31 July in your year of entry. Note: You are defined as an international student if you pay international fees. Please note that our guarantees are offered to those who apply within our accommodation guarantee and before the deadline. Please see our website for further information whether you are a mature [undergraduate](#) or [postgraduate](#) student. We would aim to place you with students who share your interests and if you are an undergraduate student, you may be placed with other mature students or postgraduates to enable you to settle in with people of a similar age.

If your course is based on Penryn campus we have a limited number of Postgraduate flats at Glasney Student Village and The Sidings. Postgraduate students will be allocated based on the date and time of their application. Wherever possible you will be allocated to dedicated accommodation that is reserved for postgraduate and mature undergraduate students. Please see [our website](#) for further information.

## Careers

### **Should international students start to find employment information as soon as possible?**

Yes, this is true for any student, the sooner you can start working on career planning the better as it is often a multi-step process which can include developing an understanding of your strengths and weaknesses, industry research and career skills preparation. The earlier you start, the better prepared and more employable you will be when opportunities come along. [Advice on getting started with career planning can be found here.](#)

### **What will you be doing to ensure graduates still have a competitive edge when entering an especially difficult job market?**

We have made several enhancements to our service to help graduates maintain a competitive edge:

[Handshake gives students and graduates access to more opportunities](#) and employers. [Careers Forever](#), many of our services can be used by our graduates whenever they need them. Unique [products and services for graduates](#) (eg, MCZ digital for grads) can also be found here.

Graduate careers development platform, [available now here.](#)

Summer interventions for students leaving us this year to offer intensive, late interventions to boost prospects – Search ‘events’ on My Career Zone [or access this here.](#)

We are also calling graduates roughly 6 months after they leave to check progress and offer support