

# Europe's largest lockdown student population well looked after

**More than 4,500 students housed in university-managed accommodation have been able to access vital support throughout the pandemic, thanks to a dedicated team comprised of staff and students.**

"Residence Life" at the University of Edinburgh has been responsible for the welfare of what is thought to be Europe's largest population of "locked-down" students, as thousands of predominantly international students remained in the city as the pandemic hit.

The innovative group, founded in 2014 on an evidenced based model popular in large campuses in the United States has worked throughout lockdown, moving digitally and increasing its programme of community-building events.

Its team consists of student welfare professionals, wardens living on-site and 200 Resident Assistants (RAs) – returning students who are appointed to welcome and support first year students while running a busy events calendar.

Christopher Tucker, Director of Residence Life, said: "It's well documented that adapting to the first year of university life can be extremely challenging for many, even in normal times.

“For lots of students living away from home, the lockdown will have really taken its toll, making them feel isolated, uncertain and a long way from family.

“The response from our team has been nothing short of remarkable. We have supported the University’s Community Support team with delivering food outside the door of anyone self-isolating or shielding, along with basic cleaning supplies. We have also

been calling these students daily to check in and monitor their recovery, while encouraging physical distancing in the accommodations. Furthermore, the team has been incredibly creative and organised virtual social events that have proven far-reaching and popular, we have had over 10,000 in attendance to all of our events since we started our program.”

“We have also developed new and creative ways to provide a mixed model of 24-hour digital and in person welfare support to all of our residents. Throughout the pandemic Residential Life has been supporting our community using these developing practices.”

The University has praised the Residence Life team for stepping up to the challenge at such a challenging time.

Carina Svensen, Director of Accommodation, Catering and Events at The University of Edinburgh, said: “We have nothing but admiration for the way in which our Residence Life, its wardens and its student team has stepped up to the challenge of looking out for the wellbeing of this large, often vulnerable population.

“It just demonstrates that Residence Life is a huge selling point for the University’s accommodation. We hope it gives students joining in the weeks ahead a lot of confidence and reassurance.”

Events created by RAs have ranged from online cook-alongs, life drawing, wine and cheese nights and academics have been

invited to host webinars on a range of topics.

Christopher added: "It's been vital that while we're so detached physically, we still foster a real community spirit. Nobody living in our accommodation should feel alone.

"We've noticed some really interesting trends too, which we hope we can take forward with us.

"It's been fascinating to see how quickly students have moved back to Facebook for its community, a platform most young people now associate with their parents! Like most of the country, students are loving learning simple pleasure skills, such as baking and drawing.

"Going forward into the new academic year we'd naturally love to be able to host more in-person events, but if there is one good thing that can come out of the pandemic, it has shown just how quickly we can come together online."

The University of Edinburgh has one of the largest accommodation offers of any university in the UK, with the capacity to house more than 10,000 undergraduate and postgraduate students. It typically witnesses significant excess demand for spaces.

Operated by its Accommodation, Catering and Events team, this group has developed and provides a range of new approaches to keep student residents safe, including providing support for those required to self isolate in their rooms, including meal deliveries.

Physical distancing measures are being introduced in all public areas, which will be subject to increased cleaning and disinfecting measures.