

Should students be delayed in returning to university?

UPDATE – the First Minister said on Friday that all students must delay returning to their accommodation until the end of February. Until then they will be expected to engage in online learning.

Following news of the new national lockdown for mainland Scotland, there have been questions asked on social media about students and whether, or when, they should come back to Edinburgh to continue their university education.

One parent, for example, asked after the imposition of a national lockdown in Scotland, whether their student daughter should come back from England. Although travel between England and Scotland is not permitted, it is for [certain purposes](#), including attending school or university. If a student already lives in Scotland then it is permissible to leave home for the purposes of education.

There is differing information for students from different universities.

Edinburgh Napier University will offer testing ahead of the term starting. On their website they say: “We are pleased to be offering Covid-19 tests to students for the start of Trimester 2.

“These tests are aimed at new and returning students who will be living at a term time address that is different from where they spent the festive break. If you are remaining at the same address as you did for the festive period, we are not asking you to get tested.

“Many of our students caught Covid-19 at the beginning of Trimester 1 and were forced to self-isolate. It was a difficult time for many of them and we want to help avoid that in Trimester 2.

“We are therefore offering you the chance to have Covid-19 tests to reduce the transmission of Covid-19 and make the new trimester as safe as possible for you, your friends, and the rest of our University community.

“These Covid-19 “rapid” tests will be available to you on a voluntary basis throughout most of January and part of February. This means that those who return at different times will still have the opportunity to get tested.

“The location of the test centre is The Pleasance Sports Complex and tests will take place between **Thursday 7 January and Friday 12 February.**”

Testing was offered ahead of the Christmas holidays for all students in Edinburgh.



Covid-19 asymptomatic testing starts at Edinburgh University. The UK Government-backed asymptomatic testing site for students has today (Monday, 30 November) opened at the University of Edinburgh. The programme – running in partnership between the University of Edinburgh and other Scottish universities, the Scottish Government and NHS Test

and Protect – supports students leaving their term-time accommodation to travel home at the end of term for the winter break and protect the wider community. Asymptomatic testing sites (ATS) of lateral flow tests is launching at the University at two locations as part of the Government's UK-wide continuing drive to increase the availability of mass testing. The test centre is also open to students in Edinburgh Napier University, Queen Margaret University and SRUC. Pic caption: University of Edinburgh Medical student, Alasdair Smith takes the test under the watchful eye of one test centre staff. Neil Hanna Photography www.neilhannaphotography.co.uk 07702 246823

Queen Margaret University has an update on their website dated 5 January 2021, offering guidance and advice both to staff and students.

It states that the campus remains open, the catering is takeaway only, and there will be changes to the library and Learning Resource Centre reflecting any new risk assessments. QMU also state that: "The Scottish Government Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science has written to University principals, indicating that those students set to return to face-to-face classes *on or after* 25 January "should expect their return to be delayed, hopefully to a minimum"."

We asked The Scottish Government for a copy of the letter sent by the Minister but have not received that as yet.

A spokesperson from Hereto-Watt University told The Edinburgh Reporter: "We provided our students with timetables before Christmas that included a staggered return to on-campus teaching, in line with The Scottish Government guidance at the time. We will review these arrangements once we receive the expected guidance update and will put in place any additional delays to on-campus teaching that may be required. Semester 2 will start as planned online on Monday, 11th January.

"We have created a Responsive Blended Learning programme that combines both online and on-campus teaching and provides the

flexibility to move between each as appropriate for the current Covid restrictions. All of our teaching programmes are available online so no student will miss out due to increased restrictions. Any on-campus activities able to take place under the current guidelines will be in line with Level 4 requirements.

“Our priority remains the health and wellbeing of everyone at this University as we work towards a safe return to our campus for our staff and students in Semester 2.”

We have also asked Heriot-Watt University what their arrangements are.

Scottish Liberal Democrat leader Willie Rennie called earlier this week for The Scottish Government to delay the return to universities in line with the decision on schools.

He has also called for the publication of an urgent new plan so students can manage the weeks ahead. His call came after Richard Lochhead had written to college and university principals, but it is worth repeating here what he is demanding.

Mr Rennie said: “Students and universities have been left in the dark once again about the start of the new term. They should be advised without delay that in person teaching won’t start until after February.

“Before students returned to universities in the autumn, I warned that this was going to be the biggest movement of people since the pandemic began and called for testing to be put in place to protect students and the communities in which they live. Instead, the Scottish Government’s indecision and

lack of preparation allowed the virus to be seeded across Scotland.

“Students need clarity about what their studies will look like for the forthcoming year. They need to know if there will be in person teaching and how it will be phased in.

“Many students are stuck paying for student accommodation or private housing far from home. The Government will need to ensure that these students are supported with a proper rent rebate. Many of them have made huge sacrifices to keep others safe, they should not be punished financially for doing so.

“Our colleges and universities need to have access to routine asymptomatic testing to start in universities to reach people who show no symptoms but who carry the virus. There is also more to be done to help unwell students to get additional support from universities and local health professionals and mental health support services. We need to see the Universities Minister set out detailed plans this week to ensure that students are not left hung out to dry.”

The newly announced rules on testing incoming international passengers will also affect students returning from abroad.