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## **CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19): STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK AND RETURN OF COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES**

Dear colleagues,

Further to my letter of last week, and following the First Minister's announcement to Parliament this afternoon, I am writing to update you on the [strategic framework published today](#) and what this means for the return of students to colleges and universities in Scotland.

As the First Minister set out in Parliament, the strategic framework sets out our initial priorities, and an indicative timeframe, for cautiously easing restrictions and restoring greater normality to our lives, just as quickly as it is safe and sustainable to do so. At the moment, and for a bit longer, we need to rely very heavily on restrictions to suppress the virus. This is essential when the virus is so transmissible, and when case numbers are still quite high.

This means that, under the refreshed strategic framework, universities and colleges can continue to bring back a small number of students where in-person learning and teaching is critical.

For both universities and colleges the vast majority of learning will continue to be online, with the number of students on campus to be kept as low as possible. No more than 5% of students should be on campus at any one time for in-person learning and teaching.

Students should only be on campus for the duration of the practical work and should continue to learn remotely for those course elements where this is possible. This limit does not include safe study spaces and it is imperative that the guidance setting out how to safely manage access to these facilities is adhered to at all times.

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Within these limits, students who can return are:

- University students whose learning is critical under Phase 1 of the staggered plans agreed in January, phased up to the end of March;
- College students whose return is time-sensitive and critical to the successful conclusion of their studies and it is absolutely not possible to deliver remotely or postpone; and
- A very small number of senior phase school pupils (c.425) to college for essential practical coursework for Level 6 Foundation Apprenticeship engineering and scientific technologies courses only.

Students are also able to return to their workplace placement in order to maintain workforce pipelines in critical sectors, such as health and social care, and early learning and childcare. However, if they are on campus for in-person teaching they should be considered within the 5% limit.

Colleges who are in the few areas not subject to level 4 restrictions should follow the guidance relevant to their local authority protection level.

Any further return to in-person learning and teaching will be kept under regular review, with decisions informed by the data on virus prevalence. As the First Minister has outlined, if the data allows and positive trends continue, we will seek to accelerate the easing of restrictions.

I recognise that this means that in-person teaching in colleges and universities continues to be significantly limited and that, even with the limited additional activity permitted under today's announcement, the situation for staff and students remains extremely challenging.

We will do everything we can to support students who may not be able to complete their courses by the time originally planned.

I would like to take this opportunity to once again thank you for your continued patience, understanding and support as we work together to support learners during these hugely difficult times and offer them a safe learning environment.



**RICHARD LOCHHEAD**

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