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Our ref: HES/IT
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College and University Principals

Copied to Colleges Scotland, Universities Scotland, NUS Scotland, Union representatives,
Scottish Funding Council

Dear Principal

I am writing to you following the First Minister's statement to Parliament today which set out further restrictions in light of the spread of the new variant of the Covid-19 virus. The extent of the restrictions announced today, seen as much closer to the March lockdown, reflects the seriousness of the situation in terms of transmission and the need to control this prior to widespread vaccination. The First Minister noted that we already had plans in place for the staggered return of universities and colleges and that we will be considering this week whether any further change is necessary.

Our fundamental advice, for everyone, is to stay at home. It will only be permissible to leave home for an essential purpose. Anyone who is able to work from home, must do so. Education will remain an essential purpose but I want to be clear that for universities and colleges any education that can be done online during this period of tighter restrictions must be done online.

Before Christmas we agreed a staggered start for term 2 that, for universities, had students returning over a 6 week period. Under those arrangements, the numbers of students returning to in-person teaching initially would be small, certainly significantly fewer than the number who moved into term time accommodation in September/October.

For universities, the staggered arrangements, and level 4 status for most of Scotland, already limits numbers of students returning for in-person teaching and gives only limited exceptions for critical assessment and learning, placements and well-being in the first three weeks of the staggered start. These arrangements will remain. Can I stress that the numbers returning to accommodation and campuses under these arrangements must be kept at the absolute essential minimum, supported by a range of robust measures to manage infection control in halls of residence in particular.

However, students who were set to return after 25 January should expect their return to be delayed, hopefully to a minimum, and we will discuss the detail with the sector in the coming

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days. There will, therefore, be some changes to the staggered start arrangement guidance for colleges and universities as published on 9 December 2020.

Colleges can open under their area's protection level guidance as before but as with universities we will be reviewing this during the course of this week to see if any further changes are required and again numbers attending colleges should be kept at the absolute essential minimum. We are seeking urgent advice on whether senior phase pupils may attend college and will confirm that position as soon as is possible. You will also wish to consider the implications of wider measures announced today for your operations.

Testing will remain an important part of the safe return of students.

My officials will be discussing these issues with sector representatives in the coming days and I am grateful for the positive way you are working with us in this unprecedented and fast-moving situation.

With best wishes for 2021.



RICHARD LOCHHEAD

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