

1 February 21

Dear All

Although the national indicators are beginning to improve, it still seems a long time since we entered this lockdown and a long time until it will end. I know this is a really difficult time; you are working on the front line, homeschooling, caring for relatives, keeping up with your studies and have many other calls on your time. Some of you are dealing with sadness and grief, which must seem overwhelming at times. Please try to look after yourselves as well as those you have responsibility for.

Across the University and the country we have been talking a lot about mental health this week. One of the campaigns that has caught my attention are the 5 steps you can take to improve your mental health and wellbeing. Trying these things could help you feel more positive and able to get the most out of life. You can read more about this common framework to promote wellbeing, through the [NHS](#) and charities such as [Mind](#). I think it is really worth having a look.

My colleagues in Student Development & Wellbeing recommend this [podcast](#) as a good introduction to mindfulness and it's benefits. They also tell me that a focus on breathing can be mindful and relaxing – this quick and simple belly breathing exercise podcast from [NHSInform](#) is a good place to start. The University also runs meditation sessions every Friday, 1 - 1.30pm. This is online via Zoom. For more information and to be sent the link to join, please contact Marie-Therese Lacey via [laceym@hope.ac.uk](mailto:lacey@hope.ac.uk).

If you are struggling with your mental health or simply need someone to talk to you should contact [Student Development and Wellbeing](#) through sdw@hope.ac.uk or you could access some of the [online resources](#) which have been made available to students. There is loads of great information here - it's definitely worth a look.

On the academic front, just to remind you that we will reconsider the situation with respect to face to face teaching once the PM has issued his planned statement on 15 February. I will write to you with our plans for the remainder of the academic year as soon as my academic colleagues have had a chance to discuss the information. You are already aware that we have changed all formal exams into online versions of various types. Your tutors will discuss these with you. Just to be clear, you will need to complete all of the assessments that are set for your cohort. I also want to emphasise again that we have made a commitment that you will not be disadvantaged in your progression or award outcomes as a result of the pandemic.

I am aware that the circumstances some of you find yourselves in means that studying has become particularly difficult. I am thinking of those of you who are homeschooling but I am sure that there are others as well. If you need some additional support to allow you to keep studying, you need to talk to us about what can be done to help. We have already introduced flexible extensions but if there are additional arrangements that would help please talk to your tutor or Head of School so that they are aware of your difficulties and can discuss potential solutions.

Whether you are living on campus or offsite I have been asked by the police to remind you about keeping to your agreed residential bubbles. They have also asked me to remind you that you must not hold parties in halls of residence or elsewhere until the lockdown rules are eased. This is really important to prevent further spread of the virus. Please also remember to use your masks and to wash your hands as regularly as possible.

Please also remember that if you are living on any of the campuses or are visiting to use the facilities, you must get tested twice a week, either at the University test centres or at one local to the University. This is to keep everyone as safe as possible and has been requested by the Department of Education. The University expects you to do this. As an incentive next week, the SU will be distributing goody bags to everyone who gets tested onsite.

Look after yourselves

Best wishes

Penny

5 February 21

Dear all,

I am writing my normal Friday message from my kitchen. The sun is shining through the windows so strongly I can barely see the screen of my laptop. I love the sunshine and I can't wait for the weather to be warmer so that I can take my cup of tea outside and sit in the sun for a few minutes. I know that some of you are interested in my garden, so I am pleased to report that there are crocuses, snowdrops and irises flowering in the sunshine.

The news around the pandemic is starting to show signs of improvement, numbers of infections are going down and the number of people who have been vaccinated is gradually rising. Despite these indications of hope, it is a great sadness that so many people are still very unwell and so many of you have lost friends or relatives. I know that this time is still very difficult for all of you. You must ask for help if you need it. The sdw team have drop ins each day which you can attend sdw@hope.ac.uk, the chaplaincy team are available to talk to you chaplaincy@hope.ac.uk and the SU have a great support scheme which can also help you with very practical matters union@hope.ac.uk. Alternatively you can always ask your tutor or write to the Gateway team gateway@hope.ac.uk who will make sure you get directed to someone who can help. I would also like to remind you about Nightline which is an information and listening IM service run by volunteering students for students. Nightline aims to be non-judgemental, anonymous & confidential, so it's a safe space to talk about anything. It runs every Friday to Sunday 10pm till 2am in term time. For more information check out the Nightline website: <https://liverpoolhopenightline.carrd.co/>

I know that the pandemic seems to have been going on forever and that you are all weary of it, as are all of my colleagues at Hope. We do however need to keep in mind that we are in a national lockdown. This means that we need to stay in our place of residence unless we need to undertake a range of essential tasks. It also means that there should not be any mixing of households. I am sure that you are all aware of the recent [news story](#) about students at a nearby institution where a student who organised a party was fined £10,000. Please don't let this happen to you, the lockdown won't go on forever - we all need to stick to the rules for another few weeks.

I am grateful to those of you who are on campus for your use of the testing centres - this is so important to keep all of you safe. Please would you remember, whether you are onsite or living at home/offsite, that you need to report a positive test result through the Covid Control Team covid@hope.ac.uk. This allows us to ensure that we contact you for support purposes.

Some of you have told me that you are looking for things to occupy your time, so I have been collecting ideas this week:

- There is a great collection of free courses at futurelearn <https://www.futurelearn.com/courses/collections/boredom-busters> I am registered on one of these and am trying to learn to write my first song - it's not going well!
- If you dream of being able to travel and visit museums again then the Lonely planet has got together a great collection of virtual tours. <https://www.lonelyplanet.com/articles/virtual-tours-travel-destinations>
- Our partners at the [Tate](#) have produced a podcast on slow looking and our neighbours at Calderstones Park, [The Reader Organisation](#), have moved their daily readings or inspirational poems and texts [online](#).
- The SU wanted me to pass this message on: Keep your eye out for all our events and activities over this month, our LGBT+ Society are hosting their first workshop on Monday! We are also excited to announce a new SU daily competition - Student Showdown, show us your talent for a chance to win some exciting prizes. For all our latest news and information, please check our socials @liverpoolhopesu and our website @www.hopesu.com

I know that some of you have very little time because you are studying whilst looking after children or are caring for others or are working or are in school or elsewhere on placement. Please let us know if we can do anything to help - we can be as flexible as possible if you let us know.

Look after yourselves.

Best wishes
Penny

12 February 21

Dear All

It's hard to believe that it is Friday again. I hope that you have had a good week. At least the sun is still shining, although I think I will be happier when the temperature starts to rise a bit. Everything is frozen in the garden - even the puddles. I hope all my bulbs are still OK when the thaw eventually comes.

Although the end of the lockdown seems to be a bit closer and the news on the R number today is a particularly good sign, please don't let your guard down. We still need to look after each other and to follow the hands, face, space guidelines. We've come so far, we just need to stick with it for a while longer.

I am conscious that things are getting more difficult for some of you. You need to let us know if we can help in any way. In terms of mental health support you can, of course, contact the University support services through sdw@hope.ac.uk. If you would rather not do this, I think I have mentioned [Student Space](#) before - this website is run by the charity Student Minds - it has all sorts of really great resources, including the opportunity to speak to someone. I think it is really useful particularly if you want to speak to someone who is not connected to the University. I have also this week come across MIND's new online peer support community [Side By Side](#), where you can share experiences and hear from others which I think is great. I would also like to remind you again about Nightline the information and listening IM service run by volunteering students for students. It runs every Friday to Sunday 10pm till 2am in term time. For more information check out our Nightline website: <https://liverpoolhopenightline.carrd.co/>

I have been contacted by several students asking about extensions for coursework. We have committed to being as generous as possible with extensions for all course work. You need to apply for your extension, which you can do using the form on the [Understanding your Degree](#) pages of the website. These pages also have a lot of other information about how your degree is structured and that you might find useful. Just for clarity, if you have an extension and submit your work within your new deadline, you will still get the full range of marks and there will be no cap - I know that this was worrying some of you.

Following my attempt to suggest things to do last week, I was sent the following by a student (thanks Laura!): She said "WildEarth host 2 daily live safaris (morning and afternoon) so you can join guides on safari across Africa and text questions and interact with the guides <https://wildearth.tv/live-safaris/> The sights and sounds of nature and beautiful sunrises and sunsets have helped me through and may be helpful to others." I had a go at this myself one morning - it was really great! I would also draw your attention to the monthly activity planner which lists events run by the SU and HopeSocial. You can find this on the [Hope Social](#) webpages or via @liverpoolhopesu or the SU website @www.hopesu.com

I promised an update on teaching matters and the opening of the campuses on the 15 February, so I will drop another note to you on Monday. Obviously the Government guidance is not clear at present, but I will be able to fill you in on our current thoughts.

Have a good weekend. I am thinking of you all.

Best wishes
Penny

27 February 21

Dear All

Just a short note for Friday today, because you heard from me at length yesterday. Those of you in the halls will also receive a separate message as I indicated yesterday.

I just thought I would share my joy at sitting at my desk in the sunshine - it makes such a difference to look out and see the brightness. I went for a walk with my husband after work yesterday. Despite the fact that we live in quite a built up area, we could hear the birds singing and see the flowers beginning to bloom. As it got dark we even saw a couple of bats! I think Spring is finally on its way and let's remember that Easter is not far off!

This week has given us hope that a return to something like normal is on the horizon, albeit a while away yet. We should be encouraged by the drop in numbers of cases and the success of the vaccination programme. I am aware, however, that there is much still to be done, that many of you are still living in difficult circumstances and that there is still much grief amongst our community. As I have said many times before, please ask for help if you need it - we will do whatever we can.

If you are struggling financially or are in need of IT resources, please don't forget the hardship fund and the laptop loan scheme. The information can be found [here](#).

You will be aware that an important part of my role, and one that I really enjoy, is to work closely with the Student Union. The sabbatical team this year have played a really important part in liaising with the University over the period of the pandemic, in providing you with opportunities to be heard and encouraging you to take part in a range of activities. We are edging closer to the time for you to decide who will be your student leaders for the next academic year. I would strongly encourage you to be part of this process because it is important you have a say in who undertakes these essential roles. A considerable number of students have put themselves forward as candidates for the three available posts. A full list of candidates and their manifestos for all the Students' Union Sabbatical Officer candidates are available under the 'Elections' tab of www.hopesu.com

Next week the SU is holding virtual debates with all candidates, alongside a great opportunity for you to submit questions that are important to you, to all those who are standing. We have three separate debates, (one for each role), on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday of next week. All debates start at 6.00 pm.

To submit a question to those running for Vice President Welfare and Community, debate on Monday March 1st, click [here](#)

To submit a question to those running for Vice President Sports and Activities, debate on Tuesday 2nd March, click [here](#)

To submit a question to those running for President, debate on Wednesday March 3rd, click [here](#)

Questions must be submitted by 12noon on the day of each hustings.

All the sessions and candidates responses will be recorded, and uploaded to the Students' Union website.

I look forward to working with the new team.

Have a good weekend
Look after yourselves.

Best wishes
Penny