

Concerns about the End of the Academic Year 19-20 & the New Academic Year 20-21

Forward summary and outline of important plans:

1. We will be extending our student disciplinary process to encompass public health protection issues, our Covid-19 Community Pledge and incidents of antisocial behaviour in the community. Disciplinary measures including financial sanctions up to £1,500, suspension or exclusion are already in place for serious breaches of our Code of Discipline on an escalation basis. For matters of antisocial behaviour in the community, students may be required to attend a 'Community Living and ASB Workshop' which is being delivered in collaboration with Nottingham Trent University.
2. We are actively exploring extending and enhancing our Community Protection Officers in recognition of the new challenges our students and the communities face due to the pandemic.
3. The University is asking all students to commit to a Covid-19 Community Pledge – six clear expectations as how students should follow guidance to reduce the spread of Covid-19, show respect to other, and how they will be subject to disciplinary action should they not uphold this pledge.
4. We have worked extensively with Public Health England and local public health officials to develop a Local Outbreak Plan commended nationally as an exemplar. There is a dedicated Incident Management Plan Task and Finish group for Higher Education and we are already running scenario preparation exercises in conjunction with local healthcare organisations.
5. We are developing a package of support for students in the community who need to self-isolate, to ensure they understand what is required of them and are supported to isolate safely and effectively.
6. Building on the research expertise within the University and the contribution we have made to the national testing effort, we are exploring enhanced testing of students to support fast and effective local outbreak management.
7. We will be in contact with local shops to offer support for maintaining social distancing measures if they require it.
8. We will be running a campaign in conjunction with partners which will reach all new and returning students, reminding them about their responsibilities as members of Nottingham's community.
9. In conjunction with local agencies, we will be presenting regular data updates to partners, neighbourhood groups and other stakeholders, ensuring a reliable and transparent evidence-base for decision-making underpins our approach.
10. We are now holding regular ASB Problem-Solving Group meetings with local community organisations and agencies.
11. We will continue our student recycling campaign.
12. We will be working closely with the University of Nottingham's Cripps Health Centre, one of the UK's largest GP surgeries, to ensure that students have access to outstanding primary care – and that other healthcare providers in Nottingham are able to balance the needs of the entire city's residents. The purpose-built facilities within Cripps Health Centre are designed to allow the building to be split into segregated secure zones as a response to a range of public health emergencies, including pandemics.
13. We have now signed the first University of Nottingham Civic Agreement in partnership with local authorities, healthcare organisations and the Local Enterprise Partnership, which will commit all partners to work together to ensure the safe and secure return of students to Nottingham and Nottinghamshire from September 2020, and develop a new long-term integrated student-living, community cohesion and regeneration strategy.

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Response to letter concerns:

B.1 Many returning students are blatantly ignoring the guidance clearly laid out by both universities as well as Westminster. Rather than collecting their belongings, as instructed by the universities, they are staying, meeting up with friends, partying, going back to each other's homes, planning on coming back when their friends are back rather than trying to avoid each other.

On 22nd May the Department for Education announced that students could return to their term-time address to collect belongings. In response to the new rules the University set and communicated very clear guidance as to how a return to student accommodation should be conducted. Initially, the majority of students undertook this challenge in line with advice. However, as national lockdown guidance eased we did see a rise in complaints of student-related issues.

There were a number of examples of students engaging in gatherings, most commonly in their garden, sometimes accompanied by music, and causing nuisance and distress to neighbours. Every report of student misconduct has been investigated and followed up by the Off Campus Student Affairs Team.

I will be happy to share a report detailing the number and types of cases and the associated University action. Reports of ASB and Covid-19 breaches have been taken very seriously with a significant number of students facing financial sanctions as part of the Code of Disciplinary for Students.

B.2 Many of the students who have been spoken to are twisting the guidance to suit themselves. For example: 'The Government says you can move house'; 'The Government says you're allowed to join another household'; 'It's okay for us to come back as long as we isolate' – only then being seen as a group leaving to go shopping.

It is fair to say that whilst the vast majority of students have understood the advice, there have been examples where the regulations have been misinterpreted. All future University information and guidance will reflect and reinforce the accurate information at the time. Our Covid-19 Community Pledge will emphasise the importance of self-regulation and a personal responsibility to be educated and understand the necessary guidance.

B.3 Many students are showing little understanding of what social distancing means: when entering each other's HMOs; when walking down the street in groups; when queuing at shops; when greeting each other with hugs, kisses, etc. in the streets, parks and shops. Many have the attitude 'We're young so we're not at risk' showing no appreciation of, or care for, the possible wider implication and impact on the residents' communities around them and their responsibility towards them.

It has been disappointing to see a minority of students exercise a casual approach to social distancing, unfortunately something also reflected in wider society. We have updated our communications and guidance to strongly emphasise the importance of the social distancing regulations in place. Our Covid-19 Community Pledge will emphasise the importance of self-regulation, challenging peers to uphold standards.

B.4 Local shops and supermarkets, parks and streets have been considerably busier over the last three to four weeks with large groups of students – sometimes eight to ten in queues at the shops or walking down the street; fifteen to twenty in the parks – all making residents, particularly those vulnerable for whatever reason, feel uncomfortable

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about leaving their homes even when they need to, let alone when, as recommended by Government, to take their daily exercise.

The capacity limits in shops and businesses has resulted in queues outside of those premises and this reflects a perception of being over-busy. Furthermore, HMOs will form households of typically 6 plus contributing to the perception of excessive mixing when this may not be the case.

Future university communications and guidance will emphasise the importance of the social distancing measures that are in place at that time.

The Off Campus Student Affairs Team will reach out and work with shops and businesses to ensure they have a direct point of contact (see point C3 and C4). Shops and businesses are welcome to contact me at any time if they have problems.

B.5 Although residents are predominantly the groups most affected by the problems we are highlighting, there are students, living in HMOs, who have stayed during lockdown, either because of health issues, or because of work. A number of these have not been consulted before housemates have returned, leaving them to cope with awkward situations where they have had to manage to adapt from living alone, or sharing with one other, to now having a house with five or six occupants.

The University guidance recommended liaising with housemates before making a return to term-time accommodation. Students with any welfare or wellbeing concerns are encouraged to contact the University or Students' Union. Students that cannot manage or are having difficulty making arrangements for taking up their term-time accommodation will receive the necessary support.

C.1 Many residents are asking themselves if so many of the (relatively few) students who have returned recently, are ignoring guidance, how many more will also ignore similar guidance in September?

The vast majority of students have followed the guidance. However, it is important to learn from the issues experienced during the recent moving out period to inform how we best communicate, and where necessary enforce, the information, advice and regulations that will be in place for the start of term.

The recent moving out period was unique because it was detached from campus life and normal daily routine. Furthermore, it coincided with the easing of a strict lockdown with severe restrictions that we have not seen before. At the start of the new term students engaging in campus activities will be provided a sense of purpose, structure and help to embed required behaviours. The moving in period will feel increasingly aligned to the University experience whereas the recent moving out period felt distant and withdrawn, given the unusual set of circumstances at that particular time.

To acknowledge the significance and importance of Covid-19 the University has developed a Covid-19 Community Pledge that we will ask everyone connected to the University to commit to. I will be happy to share this document with you, once finalised.

For more information about plans for September please see section D.

C.2 Whilst it is understood that transmission of Covid-19 is very unlikely when passing some-one in the street, nonetheless, with a great deal more students on our streets in September than at present, it will be far harder for social distancing to take place, and this will inevitably result in a great deal of anxiety for some individuals.

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The University will communicate and emphasise the importance of the social distancing regulations that are in place at that time.

C.3 During term-time, at certain points in the day, the bus stops along Derby Road regularly have twenty to thirty (or more) students waiting at any one time. It is not unusual for buses to have little or no standing room, let alone seats, and it is obvious that once the new academic year starts there will be no opportunity for social distancing, either at the bus stops or on the buses. Again, this will inevitably cause stress and anxiety to those who are exercising social responsibility.

The University has a meeting with Nottingham City Council, Nottingham City Transport and NET in early August to discuss any potential issues regarding student use of local public transport. We'll be happy to update you on any significant plans that emerge from that meeting.

C.4 At this time, the queues at Sainsbury's Local are so long (and so full of groups catching up with one another) that it has been asked how anyone elderly or infirm will be able to cope with standing in the queue once all students have returned? Equally, during what pass for 'normal' times, the small local supermarkets are busy and their aisles are crammed. If any social distancing is to remain in place, how are local supermarkets and local businesses, including local pharmacies, meant to cope?

Having been alerted to the issues of queues at Sainsbury's on Derby Road, we immediately contacted the store manager and were assured that they have a robust system to ensure the health and safety of customers, including a maximum store occupancy of 12 persons at any one time. The limited capacity has resulted in queues outside of the store that are managed by store colleagues.

In addition to Sainsbury's on Derby Road, we will write to shops and businesses in the Lenton area offering to help them with any issues they foresee.

C.5 Local GP surgeries have large numbers of students registered with them. Currently, they are minimising the number of patients allowed in at any one time with the result that appointment times are spread out much more, therefore limiting the availability of appointments. Some residents who have on-going health issues are extremely concerned about the additional pressure that will be put on the surgeries in September with the arrival of a very large cohort of students, and how this will impact on their ability to access medical care.

Chief Operating Officer - The University of Nottingham Health Service:

Whilst I cannot respond directly on behalf of all local practices, the University of Nottingham Health Service at Cripps Health Centre on University Park is the largest single site NHS practice in the country (est for Sept 20 of >50,000 patients) serving approximately 15% of NHS Nottingham City.

Our patients represent the majority of Students from the University of Nottingham as well as considerable numbers of staff both past and present and members of the local community. Since the outbreak of covid-19 alongside the majority of practices in the city we have had to alter the way we work. We are now offering a range of telephone and video consultations as the default option and at no point since the beginnings of the outbreak have we closed our doors to face to face contact. By offering this range of options we have seen zero reduction in the number of available appointments (over 3000 per week) and indeed waiting times have reduced to the point where a routine GP appointment is consistently available within 24 hours.

We are of course very much aware of the students returning to Nottingham and are working together with the University to ensure that they are registered with the NHS locally. From September we will have an unprecedented number of appointments available across our wide multidisciplinary team.

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We continue to work closely with our wider NHS colleagues, Public Health and the practices covering both NTU sites to ensure that we have robust planning in place for the coming academic year and the challenges that may bring.

C.6 Students, some of whom are student nurses or medical students, and who are living in our neighbourhoods, have spoken of their concerns about having signed contracts prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, and now find themselves in a position where they will have to share houses with others who may not be as cautious and socially aware as themselves.

Students with concerns about their living arrangements for 20/21 are encouraged to contact the University or Students' Union for support. Should issues arise during the course of their tenancy, again, support will be available.

C.7 A major concern which has been raised by residents in many of Nottingham's neighbourhoods with large numbers of students is that if pubs (which may still have limited capacity in September and, possibly, into 2021) and clubs are not operating as usual, the 'normal' number of gatherings and house parties which we experience will be greatly increased. Closely linked to this is the probability, since many students will be following much of their courses on-line, that there is likely to be (as we have experienced recently, and continue to do so now) far greater numbers of loud, non-socially distanced gatherings during the daytime as well.

Information, advice and guidance will make it explicitly clear that antisocial behaviour as a result of gatherings in residential houses is not acceptable and will be challenged using the code of discipline for students. Consequences for antisocial behaviour and breaches of Covid-19 regulations will be made clear.

Increasing the funding for Community Protection Officers to deal with any gatherings that take place will help to close down those issues quickly.

The University and Nottingham City Council are monitoring the night time economy closely and the impact of this on student experience.

D. Summary of Concerns & Some Suggestions for Mitigating Actions

- If the universities insist on bringing so many students back into our communities this September, will they provide funding to pay for a dedicated team of Community Protection Officers with the capacity to provide 24-hour cover in neighbourhoods, such as those in the Lenton, Arboretum, City Centre areas, and those others in close proximity to the universities, so that the usual term-time problems with bins on streets, littering, street drinking and other forms of anti-social behaviour can be dealt with, along with the extra work that can be anticipated to occur when students return as a result of the Covid-19 situation?

The University will provide additional funding (over and above the previously committed £30,000) to increase the capacity of Community Protection Officers to meet local needs. CPOs will be working, longer, later and more often to respond to ASB issues. The funding provides no restriction on when these hours can be conducted but should be fit for purpose.

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- In addition, increased funding should be provided for local Nottinghamshire Police beat and response teams to ensure adequate policing of incidents when Community Protection Officers do not have the necessary powers.

We will be meeting with Nottinghamshire Police to ensure their service can adequately respond to the anticipated challenges.

- Additional staff need to be made available to help manage socially distanced queuing outside those small shops and businesses which cannot afford to employ their own security staff.

We will reach out to local shop owners and businesses and work with them to ensure that students do not inhibit their ability to operate safely.

- A suggestion has been made that Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) be put in place to limit the number of groups gathering at any one time, either outside shops, in streets, at bus stops, or in parks. Clearly this, as with all similar legislation, would require additional resources to police it.

Many parts of Lenton and surrounding areas are already covered by PSPOs or DPPOs. CPOs have devolved powers to make alcohol confiscations and take other enforcement action as part of this legislation. CPOs can utilise additional University funding to meet the need of additional cover in parks etc. There are no objections to the City Council expanding PSPOs to cover areas that are suitable and necessary.

- In line with the recent example set by Bristol University, where the Vice-Chancellor has announced that any breaches of social distancing by its students will be treated seriously and fines of up to £800 will be applied, Nottingham's two universities must take a similar stance, making it widely known to all students that the policy will be rigorously adhered to, whether CPNWs, CPNs, etc. have been issued or not.

Off Campus student misconduct which includes Covid-19 breaches and antisocial behaviour will be challenged under the code of discipline for students where fines of up to £1,500 can be levied on an escalation basis. This will be widely communicated as part of the information, advice and guidance given to students.