

# Downing College: COVID-19 FAQs for postgraduate students

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## UNIVERSITY INFORMATION ON CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

### University Coronavirus (COVID-19) webpages

Please refer to the [University webpages](#) for up to date information and UK Government links relating to health, travel, visa and immigration matters, and staff working arrangements. They also contain important University statements on arrangements for teaching and learning, assessment, and research in Easter Term 2020. These webpages also include a growing set of helpful FAQs.

These pages represent the central definitive resource for University information on COVID-19 – please check it frequently.

## COLLEGE INFORMATION ON CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

### GENERAL

#### Why has the College asked as many students as possible to go home?

To the College the most important thing is that when the situation becomes truly difficult, students are at the place where they feel most at home. No student will be forced to leave the College. However, Government [advice](#) changed on Thursday 12 March as the UK has gone from the ‘contain’ to the ‘delay’ phase. The aim is to ensure that the disease does not spread fast so as to reduce pressure on the health service. The University is in ‘red’ phase of its Coronavirus response. The College is aware that a significant number of our staff will fall ill. Schools are closed and staff will also have to stay at home to look after younger children. The College does not therefore have the resources to provide the same facilities and support it can in normal times. The Pro Vice Chancellor wrote to all students on about University preparations on 16<sup>th</sup> March. Follow that advice and to keep in close contact with your program director or graduate supervisor on the action that is best for you. We believe most students will generally be better off going home for the time being where possible because they can support their own families and be better looked after if they fall ill. Foreign governments are closing their borders to all but their own nationals, and students are strongly advised to make their plans accordingly.

## ACCOMMODATION

### By when have I got to leave my College-provided accommodation?

Ultimately, no person will be forced to leave their College accommodation

Undergraduate students have been asked to leave as soon as possible. We realise this is more complicated for postgraduate students especially research students.

The University has issued advice for postgraduates research students that, for time being at least, these can continue in Cambridge – although this situation could change quickly and travel options are rapidly changing. The College position is that any postgraduate student should feel free to leave as soon as they wish. The College will support them in any addressing any consequent issues with the University relating to their academic progression or assessment, as applicable, in the longer term.

### Can I leave my belongings in my room?

Students who are unable to transport their belongings home with them are asked, where possible, to pack up their belongings securely and to label them with names and CRSID. Boxes should not weigh more than 20kg to enable them to be moved safely. Students who have already left, or who did not pack up their belongings before leaving may have their items packed by College staff. Please get in touch if this causes difficulties; the reason for this request is so that we can manage our room stock if needed with as little disruption to your possessions as possible. We are unable to accept any liability for damage to items that are packed by staff, although all reasonable efforts will be made. All valuables should be taken home. If this is not possible, either because you have already left College, or because you are unable to transport the specific items (e.g. large musical instruments), please contact your Tutor to discuss arrangements and we will find somewhere safe to keep them.

Where practicable we would strongly encourage students to take all their belongings with them. During the coming period the College may find it necessary to redistribute room usage for reasons including the better management of student support or infection prevention and control. We appreciate your understanding if this is the case; again, we will ensure that no student is financially disadvantaged (i.e. there will be no increase in Residence Charge if you are moved to a room in a higher band).

### Residence Charge

Whether you have left College already, or are due to leave in the near future, any residence charge payable from 17<sup>th</sup> March up until the commencement of NPR (Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> April) will be credited to your next College bill. Your residential contract for next term will be terminated and no residence charge will be payable.

If this, or any other factor, is likely to cause you financial hardship, then please discuss your situation with your Tutor.

## **If I leave now, can I return to collect my belongings from my room later?**

In principle yes but this depends on any travel restrictions imposed by the Government.

## **My family members are vulnerable and I am afraid of bringing the virus with me. Can I stay?**

We encourage you to discuss this matter with your tutor and your family. Steps may be possible to segregate you or them once you get home. In the longer run, you may be better placed to help them from home. Each case is distinct and you will not be forced to leave College accommodation.

## **What should students who are renting privately do?**

Students who are renting accommodation privately, not from a College or the University, will have a contract or licence with their landlord. They should comply with this contract; paying rent and giving notice as it requires and they should contact their landlord if they feel they need to shorten the rental period for any reason. They should still heed the advice from Public Health England on whether it is better to be in Cambridge or elsewhere for their safety and wellbeing, and should follow the public advice on self-isolation and social distancing.

Colleges remain responsible for supporting as best they can all of their students, so please do let the College know of your status and intentions if you are anywhere in Cambridge. Anyone who is in difficulty should contact their Tutor. In particular, please inform the College immediately if you are self-isolating or are ill.

## **ACADEMIC MATTERS**

### **Will the decision to leave affect my residence requirements?**

Refer to the Senior Pro-Vice Chancellors message on teaching arrangements , dated 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, available [here](#).

### **I am due to have exams in April or later, I would rather stay in Cambridge (for example clinical medics, vets and taught Masters)**

Refer to the Senior Pro-Vice Chancellors message on teaching arrangements , dated 16<sup>th</sup> March 2020, available [here](#).

## INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

### What effect will leaving have on my visa?

The University's FAQs also deal with this [point](#). See also the Government's own's [guidance](#).

### Several countries have closed their borders to non-nationals. I come from one of those countries. Should I still return home?

No student will be forced to leave the College. However, if you can, and have a clear travel plan to get you home safely then you should do so. However, students in difficult situations such as this will not be required to leave the College.

### I am from a country that has imposed quarantine on my return. Should the likelihood of the need to self-quarantine on my arrival in my home country for two weeks affect my plans to return home, book flights?

Take official advice for your country and discuss this with your family. No person will be forced to leave the College.

## COLLEGE PROVISION

### For those still in residence what facilities will be available?

The College's provision may change depending on staff availability. From Friday 20<sup>th</sup> March all College public spaces are closed, including the Dining Hall, the Butterfield Café, the JCR, the MCR and the Library. Sports facilities are also closed. The Porters will be on site but should be contacted by phone or email if possible; in person visits to the Lodge should be brief and necessary. Housekeeping will be operating a reduced service for communal areas only. The Nurse is contactable by telephone or email during her usual hours. Tutors are contactable by email.

### Catering Arrangements

**From Friday 20 March, we will be offering a pre-ordered lunch service, with collection from the Hall. All meals will be served in a take-away box with disposable cutlery and a napkin.** Please refer to separate instructions that you have received by email.

### If I stay in College and fall ill what help will the College be able to provide?

The College will not be able to provide routine nursing care. Students who live alone without shared facilities will have to self-isolate in their rooms for 7 days if they develop symptoms of new persistent cough and or fever. However, it is important to note that revised Public Health England guidance now requires all 'household' contacts to also self isolate for a period of 14 days starting

from the day of first onset of symptoms in the group. 'Household' is defined by the College as those sharing the same kitchen or bathroom or toilet. Further PHE guidance is [here](#). We shall check once a day, at minimum, on those we know are self-isolating (SI) or household isolating (HI) . We previously invited students to volunteer as self-isolation supporters. Now, we encourage all remaining students to nominate two willing people – also intending to stay, who have confirmed willingness to help each other should this be needed. We are concerned about the loneliness some students may feel. Where possible we will also provide online advice/support, again assuming the staff are well enough.

### **What should I do if I am self-isolating?**

You should self isolate for 7 days if you develop a new continuous cough and or a fever (greater than 37.8C). General Public Health England Advice is available [here](#). You must email or call the Porters Lodge ([01223 334800](tel:01223334800) or [porters@dow.cam.ac.uk](mailto:porters@dow.cam.ac.uk)) – do not go along in person.

The Porters will provide you with all of the guidance and support that you will require, including contacting other College staff as necessary. Note that revised Public Health England guidance now requires all 'household' contacts to also self isolate for a period of 14 days starting from the first onset of symptoms in the group. 'Household' is defined by the College as those sharing the same kitchen or bathroom or toilet.

### **Will mental health services be available to me even when I am out of residence?**

Your Tutor will be available for consultation via email. The University Counselling Service is putting in place arrangements for counselling by telephone for appointments, and will be developing these plans. College Counselling will similarly not be in person.

### **I am in a situation of financial hardship, can the College help?**

If students are suffering from financial hardship as a result of travel and other arrangements, please approach your Tutor. The College may be able to help, but it will not be able to meet all your costs resulting from Covid-19.