Hello Peter’s students: I am Judith Buchanan, Master of the College. It has been quite a year for you and here we are again at another challenging moment. We’ve all been hearing the news from universities around the country and understandably you may have concerns about how this is going to impact on you. And it may well be weighing on your families too.

So I thought I would send a direct message into this moment of heightened concern to set out where we are with things.

I am confident that you will understand that College is a compact site with a lot of people on it and that you will be ready to make the sad, but necessary, compromises in order to make College work. Certainly we have the systems and the protocols in place in order to minimise risk and to keep us all safe. But for it to work, will depend on all of us understanding the unprecedented imperatives of the moment and being willing set aside social ambition for now. The moment will come when social ambition can be pursued again, but that moment is not now. There can be no place here for those who want to be cavalier about risk.

So here’s how it’s going to work. Number one, if you’re unwell, please don’t come. If you have any symptoms at all that might be COVID-related, stay home. We will in stay touch with you; we will make sure you stay connected; and once you’re well, then you can come. But [smiling] we don’t want you until you’re well.

Number two, all students in College accommodation are grouped into households and every household has to be thought about as a self-contained unit. This means you cannot enter anyone else’s household and they cannot enter yours. It isn’t what any of us would have wanted for you, but it’s what we’ve got and it’s what we have to put up with for the moment in order to be a college at all.

Number three, the rule of six applies. So long as you are beyond your household and adhering to the social distancing and the face covering rules, you can have an event with six people at it.

Number four, face coverings and social distancing. You do not need to wear a face covering or socially distance within your household. Outside of your household, you need to wear a face covering whenever you’re in shared indoor space anywhere in College, and that includes even when just walking through the Lodge or being in the JCR or MCR. And socially distance from everybody beyond your household.

Number five, use of common rooms. We’re very keen to keep the JCR and MCR open for your use if we possibly can. Maximum occupancy rates are reduced in order to allow for social distancing. But it is a space in which you can be, hang out, chat, read - so long as you are socially distanced and retain your face covering. We’re also going to have a marquee up on the front quad throughout the coming term as an additional common room space.

Number six, no visitors in college. The only exceptions will be students who are being taught in College and one parent or supporter on the day in which you are delivered to college. No others.

Number seven, the NHS COVID-19 app. Please download it. Please use it.
Number eight, self-isolation. If told to self-isolate, you must do so and we will support you all we can.

Number nine, those living-out. You are not exempt: all the government guidelines apply to you too. Don’t put your good standing in College on the line.

I met your JCR president, Lucy Lupton in the front quad earlier today, and she had this message for you. Forgive the sound quality – it was very windy.

‘Hi! Just a brief message from me. I know this year, and this term, is going to be a little strange. But we’ve all got to make sure we do our best and work together as a team to protect the most vulnerable in our society. So that’s sticking in your households, whether that’s in college or out of college. If there’s an event, please don’t go to it. Don’t host any events. I know it’s tricky, I know it’s tempting but the more we adhere to these rules, the sooner we can get back to life as normal.’

So that’s a lot. I wish I wasn’t the Head of House having to launch a whole new raft of regulations at you and I wish you weren’t the cohort who had to receive them on top of all else. I feel for you all in this moment. But this is where we are, and it’s down to us to try and find the good things amongst the restrictions and look together to a time when being in each other’s company can be a simple human pleasure again and not an enhanced risk. It is an enhanced risk at the moment. Even if you feel robust, and indeed you may well be so, the person who cleans your corridor, sorts your post, and serves you lunch and, indeed, teaches you may be less so. And we are a community together and it is our collective responsibility to keep every single one of us safe.

If you have concerns about the term ahead, that is perfectly reasonable. These are not usual times and we all have some concerns. We’ll have Welfare provision in place to help support you.

If you have pre-existing conditions that might make you particularly vulnerable in any aspect of your health in COVID times, be in touch with our Academic Office, or with our Welfare Team to discuss the best way forward for you.

Well that’s more than enough from me. Freshers, please note that we are really looking forward to meeting you, and returning students, we are really looking forward to having you back. The old place has missed you.

See you all soon.