Dear Students,

We thank you for your letter detailing your concerns for our international student community during this difficult time of COVID-19. The University prides itself on its international profile, and we celebrate our truly diverse global student body. International students make up almost 43% of our student population - over 10,000 students come to Oxford from more than 150 countries and territories, which in the context of planning against the backdrop of covid-19 presents its own unique set of challenges. We see no evidence of any diminution of the University’s appeal as a result of the pandemic or our response to it: in fact, quite the contrary.

The diversity of our student body means that the particular needs and circumstances of our students vary enormously. Within this context the smaller community nature of the colleges makes them best placed to respond to the individual and personal needs of their students, providing bespoke support on a case-by-case basis. This approach means that targeted local support can be given to those in most need, more effectively than broad-brush relief policies would be able to do.

Detailed and comprehensive planning has been taking place over the course of the long vacation – and will continue to take place in the coming weeks and months – as to how the University and colleges can best support the entire student population for the return to Oxford in Michaelmas Term and throughout the 2020/21 academic year, while ensuring that the health and safety of all who study and work at the University is not compromised. All colleges are working extremely hard to address the many and varied challenges that this involves, and the Oxford SU has been closely involved.

Given that the situation around coronavirus is continually changing, communications with students from both the colleges and the University are being regularly updated to reflect the most up-to-date support available. These can be found on the coronavirus pages of the website.

Your letter detailed several specific requests, which we will endeavour to address:

- **Fourteen days of fully-funded vacation residence before noughtth week for all international students to self-isolate, should they so need**
  If students are required to self-isolate for 14 days when they arrive in the UK, colleges are keen to help them do that, whether they are signed up for college accommodation or are renting on the private market. Provision may be in their own room, in another college room or in alternative accommodation. Arrangements will need to have been agreed with their college in advance. Most colleges are charging for accommodation to all students residing in college, including those arriving earlier than usual for any reason, but at the same time are offering financial support for those students who face unexpected hardship, including additional costs arising because of coronavirus. We believe this is the most equitable means of getting support to those who need it most.

- **Practical assistance from college in providing food for students in self-isolation**
  Colleges have confirmed that they will help support students staying in college-managed accommodation who have to self-isolate and cannot cook for themselves e.g. because there are not the facilities to do so. This may include the supply of delivered meals or provisions. If students are well enough, they may be able to provide for themselves if there is access to a kitchen. If students are very unwell, college Welfare teams will keep in touch to ensure individuals have enough to eat and to assist in making any medical arrangements if necessary. Individual colleges will be informing their students who is the lead contact for these arrangements.

  For students living in private accommodation away from the college who have to self- isolate, college staff and welfare teams will stay in touch and can help support if necessary.
• **Waiving the Residency Requirement for international students affected by the coronavirus**
  The requirements in respect of residency (i.e. that full-time students must live within a specified distance of Carfax Tower in Oxford’s City Centre for a minimum number of terms during their degree) are determined by university policy and not by colleges. As you have stated the University has provided advice and a process (via the Proctors’ Office) for applying for waiver of residency requirements as an individual. In addition, some postgraduate taught courses which have a high proportion of international students have been granted a blanket exemption of the residency requirement for Michaelmas Term 2020. This means that any student on these courses would not separately have to apply for an individual waiver, however they should still discuss the arrangements with their College. Departments have arranged for the blanket dispensations and notified students directly, however a list of courses with this approval is available via the Proctors’ website here.

• **Assurances that winter vacation residence will be available to students who may be prevented from returning home, due to a second wave or a vulnerable family member**
  If students need to stay on in college accommodation for Covid-19 related reasons in the Christmas or Easter vacations after the end of the standard term colleges have already agreed that they will assist. Arrangements will need to be made in advance, and systems for doing so will vary from college to college. However, all colleges will be supportive and make sure international students have somewhere to stay.

• **Increased transparency of plans**
  Communications from the colleges and the university have been subject to frequent updates in line with changing government guidance and developing expert health advice. Developing policy and practice to enable a COVID-safe safe return to Oxford of both staff and students is a highly complex matter and colleges and the university are communicating information to students as soon as they can once these policies and plans have been agreed and finalised.

• **Uniformity across colleges**
  There is an enormous amount of cross-college and joint college and university planning taking place to develop joint policy, guidance and protocols in key areas such as teaching, health guidance, and the testing early alert service. Colleges are working closely together to ensure that where possible and desirable there is comparable practice. The unique circumstances of each college have been taken into consideration when planning for the new academic year (e.g. student populations, physical layout, accommodation provision etc.) which means that making provision for the safe return of students and staff across the colleges is not always identical, but tailored to individual circumstances.

We recognise that the COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for all members of the University community and that our student population – both international and UK based – will have many concerns about their arrival in Oxford for Michaelmas term and in the months ahead. Detailed planning is continuing apace, and the University and colleges are providing regular updates with as much advice, care and support as we can to the student community. Students should always contact their colleges for the most up to date information as it pertains to their individual situation.

Yours sincerely,

Miles Young
Warden of New College, Chair of Conference of Colleges