

EXAMS AND COURSEWORK DURING THE PANDEMIC

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As I sit in my parents' living room, listening to them chat and my brother noisily making food in the kitchen, I struggle to concentrate. This has been the case for many students this year, who are learning to work from home during the pandemic. However, this has not been my overall experience with my studies this year. Back in my house in Egham, where I live with five other Royal Holloway students, I had begun to create a routine. For my lessons, I had access to Moodle, Microsoft Teams, Campus Connect and a student email and, luckily for me, a reminder would always pop up on my laptop fifteen minutes before class. I should also mention that Moodle is an online service that shows you all the work set and provides links to your reading, or any exercises that you need to complete for that week. My timetable had been easily downloaded onto my phone's calendar app at the start of the year and this allowed me to complete my online lessons with relative ease. At Royal Holloway, I was especially fortunate, because even though I didn't need access to labs, I was still receiving at least three in-person lessons a week throughout November lockdown. I particularly valued having access to the Royal Holloway library, a huge modern building that can easily hold well over 1000 students while still allowing them to socially distance. As my deadlines approached, I spent a lot of time at the library and I know I wouldn't have passed if I didn't have access to a space like that to help me concentrate. Despite the pandemic, the library remains open from seven in the morning till eleven at night and I can admit to many late nights there. There are also two cafes on campus, the Boiler House and Starbucks, which stayed open for takeaway and provided me with many much-needed coffees (there's also a hot drink vending machine in the library if you're a cheapskate like me). In addition, if I became too overwhelmed with the coursework set, I also had a Personal Tutor who I could reach out to; he would be able to give me advice on how to approach my work, as well as passing me the details of other forms of support I could receive.



In terms of exams during the pandemic, there have been lots of different approaches. For my subject, the timed exam that I was expected to sit was changed to an open book exam. This meant that I had 24 hours to complete an essay and I had full access to the books and all my previous notes on the subject, rather than being required to sit-in and write two essays in an allotted amount of time. This meant those working in different time zones did not suffer from the changes, as well as being beneficial for someone like myself who struggles with dyslexia, as it gave me the processing time that I needed. I know that this was also helpful for students suffering from anxiety, as they were able to find a place where they felt safe to work and have some privacy. For other subjects, the weight of their end of year exam reduced by spreading it across the year; with some people doing regular online quizzes and others sitting Midterms. Whilst this does require an ongoing commitment to your studies, it relieves some of the pressure on your final exams and provides you with regular feedback. Although I would say that the course work and exams were by no means easier this year than before, the support Royal Holloway provides to help students with their work has improved. It is also important to remember that everyone, whether they are at this University or another, is in the same boat, so even if things have changed there will be people around you to support you and work with you through these hard times.