Zara - January 2021

RETURNING TO UNIVERSITY IN THE PANDEMIC

ROYAL HOLLOWAY, UNIVERSITY OF LONDON





II started studying at Royal Holloway last year, in September 2019, so with returning in the middle of a pandemic, I was a little worried about how many changes I might face. However, life at university isn't so different this year – the changes to studying and social activities just mean everyone is safer in our community.

I still get a lot of face-to-face time with my professors and peers: the blended learning delivery system means that I still get the opportunity to attend classes in person, which is great for discussing ideas and talking to people on my course. I also have the option to study online and attend the same seminars remotely, so I can still contribute to the discussion from the comfort of my bedroom, which is great for when I'm feeling under the weather or I'm having a busy day. My lectures are pre-recorded too, so I can access them whenever I want and rewind them to get all the important information that I need. Of course, managing your own timetable can be a little difficult if, like me, you don't always have the best self-discipline, but my personal tutor helped me out with suggesting ways to create structure so I don't fall behind – she has been available to help me throughout the year which is handy!

Of course, the pandemic guidelines are new for everyone, and although the university has done well moving course materials online so quickly, there can sometimes be difficulties, especially as there's so much tech involved. However, I've been able to raise queries at any time, with my course rep or professors, and I feel like my input is being taken seriously. Course feedback forms are becoming more regular, so suggestions are always welcomed and valued in order to improve the course. I've always liked the fact I felt listened to at this university, and this term has showed me once again that Royal Holloway values the opinions of its students.





Although I don't have to be on campus as much as last year, the facilities are still open, so grabbing a coffee with a friend or studying (procrastinating) in the library is pretty much the same as last year. We all wear masks inside and follow social distancing where possible, which actually makes me feel really safe going to classes, allowing everyone to use the campus facilities without putting themselves at risk. The coronavirus testing facilities on campus are also well placed and easy to access, and the university also offers free testing for travelling to and from the campus, which is great for putting your mind at ease about the virus. Obviously, venues like the Students Union or Medicine haven't been able to operate as usual, as clubs still aren't open due to guidelines, and I was mistaken when I thought that my social life would take a big hit. As always, the events team (query name?) have gone above and beyond to cater to students whilst being covid safe. Some of the events I've attended this term included the Halloween party at the Students Union, and the brilliant outdoor cinema experience in founders south quad, both of which were safe but all the more fun because of it!

I've also found that the sports teams and societies on campus have gone the extra mile to provide for students – I've attended my fair share of zoom socials this year, which is a great way to get to know people with the same interests, but we have also been fortunate to be able to play team sports, and I've met some of the best people this year just by turning up to training once a week. Some of my friends used the lockdown period to create new societies based on their interests (adding to the hundreds already in existence) and the online following is already huge in some of those groups, showing just how active people are off campus. I honestly thought that I wouldn't manage to make more friends this year with the pandemic, but the community at Royal Holloway has such a friendly atmosphere, that its almost impossible not to!

Essentially, being in lockdown has made me value every experience more, so yes, university life is a little different this year, but its just made me more determined to get as much as I can out of it. I feel really lucky to be on a campus where the university cares about our well-being so that I can experience student life safely, as well as paying attention to our needs in terms of a social life and mental wellbeing.