

International Students – Plans for Semester 2

Introduction

In light of the current COVID-19 situation and national lockdown in the UK, a survey was sent to all international students at the University of Bath (around 5900) on Monday 11th January 2021 to learn about their plans for Semester 2. The survey specifically looked at if international students intended to be in Bath, study remotely or if they hadn't decided yet, as well as exploring the deciding factors involved. All responses were recorded anonymously and participants were given the opportunity to raise any other thoughts or concerns about their experience as an international student.

A total of 445 students responded to the survey as of Tuesday 19th January 2021, with key trends from their responses being noted in this report.

Summary of key trends from survey

From the results of the survey, the following trends for international students were identified:

Plans for Semester 2:

- Just over half of participants intend to be in Bath for Semester 2 (continuing to stay in Bath or come to Bath after studying remotely in Semester 1.)
- Just over a quarter of participants plan to continue studying remotely.
- Only 3.1% of participants plan to return home.
- 20% of participants have not yet decided on their plans for Semester 2.

Reasons to stay in Bath for Semester 2:

- COVID-19 situation – lockdown, travel restrictions, quarantine and safety.
- Academic – better study conditions, possibility of IPT, research or lab work, access to facilities, being in the same time zone.
- Rent – feeling obligated to stay due to an accommodation contract or having already paid rent and therefore not wanting to waste their money.
- Social – being with friends and flatmates.
- Immigration – needing to be in the UK to fulfil requirements.

Deciding factors for students who haven't yet decided on their Semester 2 plans:

- COVID-19 – how the situation evolves, when they can travel and clearer government guidelines.
- Academic – University plans for Semester 2, particularly around study mode and IPT.

Other issues highlighted:

- Demand for tuition fee and rent refunds due to poorer quality of teaching and other issues resulting from online learning, along with paying for accommodation they can't return to due to COVID-19 restrictions.
- University guidelines – suggestions for these to be more inclusive of international travel difficulties and should confirm if there will be IPT in order to help students decide on returning home.
- Loneliness – some students are feeling isolated and struggling to make friends due to online teaching, limited activities, different time zones and other students leaving accommodation.

- Accommodation – concerns about finding housing for next year and accessing belongings left in University accommodation.

Quantitative Data

Most of the 445 participants identified as Overseas students and undergraduates (both around 60% respectively) with a roughly even spread of students across the three types of accommodation.

Just over half of the participants plan to be in Bath for Semester 2, with almost 40% continuing to stay in Bath and almost 11% planning to come to Bath after studying remotely in Semester 1. Additionally, just over a quarter of participants plan to continue studying remotely and only 3.1% plan to return home.

A significant portion of participants (20%) have not yet decided on their plans for Semester 2, with most being undergraduate students (78.7%) or living in Bath in either University or private accommodation (48.3% and 32.6% respectively).

Below is the quantitative data recorded:

Demographics	No. of participants	% of participants
EU students	171	38.4%
Overseas students	274	61.6%
Level of study		
Undergraduate	263	59.1%
Postgraduate Taught	136	30.6%
Doctoral/PhD	44	9.9%
Other	2	0.4%
Accommodation in Semester 1		
University accommodation	156	35%
Private accommodation in Bath	152	34.2%
Other (not in Bath)	137	30.8%
Plans for Semester 2		
Stay in Bath	177	39.8%
Come to Bath (I have been studying remotely during Semester 1)	48	10.8%
Return home and study remotely	14	3.1%
Continue studying remotely away from Bath	117	26.3%
Haven't decided	89	20%

Qualitative Data

Question 5: If you have other plans that are not listed above, please include them below.

Almost all participants who answered this question did so to clarify that they will be arriving mid-semester (studying remotely for the start of Semester 2) or that they had started in Bath and then left either permanently or just for the winter break. Comments also referred to waiting for the national lockdown in the UK to end, whether travel to the UK would be possible and how the COVID-19 situation evolves as factors for determining when they will return to Bath.

Question 6: If you will be staying in Bath for Semester 2, what has helped you make this decision?

The participants gave a variety of reasons for staying in Bath for Semester 2 with most referring to the COVID-19 situation. They noted lockdown (both in the UK and their home country) along with international travel issues for returning home (flight restrictions, quarantine period and risk of contraction) in particular for contributing to their decision to stay, whereas those intending to come to Bath in Semester 2 plan to wait until the UK national lockdown ends or when the COVID-19 situation improves.

Some participants mentioned better study conditions, being with their friends or flatmates and wanting to experience University life as their main reason for staying in Bath, while others highlighted academic benefits including the possibility of having in-person teaching (IPT) again, needing to do research or lab work (mostly Doctoral students), having access to campus facilities and being in the same time zone as lectures.

However, many participants also felt obligated to stay in Bath due to an accommodation contract or having already paid rent and not wanting their money to go to waste. Some also noted immigration requirements keeping them in the UK in relation to pre-settled status, ILR (indefinite leave to remain) and applying for a Graduate Visa.

Question 7: If you have not decided on your plans yet, what do you need to know to help you make a decision?

Most participants who hadn't decided noted the uncertainty around COVID-19 and needing to know key information from the government to help them decide. These included when the UK lockdown will end, if the COVID-19 situation in the UK improves, if it is safe enough to return and when they can travel internationally.

Comments also indicated that it's important for the participants to know the University's plans for Semester 2, particularly what study mode their course will be delivered in (e.g. completely online) and if IPT will continue, in order to make a decision.

Question 8: If there are any thoughts or concerns about your experience as an international student that you'd like to share with us, please let us know below.

The vast majority of comments referred to tuition fee and rent refunds. Participants noted that it was not fair for them to pay higher tuition fees for an online learning experience resulting in poorer quality of teaching, no access to resources and facilities, as well as limited interaction with lecturers and other students. Similarly, participants highlighted their concerns about having to continue paying rent for accommodation in Bath they can't return to due to COVID-19 travel restrictions.

Participants also commented on the difficulty of making plans for Semester 2 without having University guidelines confirming the study mode for their course, if IPT will continue, if there will be a Heathrow coach service to the University, if there are any repercussions for missing practical/lab sessions, and when the summer assessments will finish. Additionally, some comments noted that University guidelines should consider the limited availability of flights and understand that these will influence decisions to return home and avoid feeling isolated in the UK during lockdowns.

Several participants (based in Bath or studying remotely) commented on feeling lonely and isolated due to online study and the COVID-19 restrictions. Aspects of online study such as remote learning from a different time zone and students not turning on their cameras and microphones were noted

as barriers to meeting other people, whereas limited social activities and flatmates returning home contributed to loneliness. There were also concerns about making friends in Bath after studying remotely in Semester 1 as students will have already made friendship groups.

Some concerns regarding accommodation were also mentioned, mainly regarding finding housing for next year while not in Bath, and not having access to belongings in University accommodation due to travel restrictions.

Appendix - Survey Questions

The survey consisted of the following questions:

- 1. Are you an EU or Overseas (not from the EU or UK) student?**
 - EU
 - Overseas

- 2. What level of study are you?**
 - Undergraduate
 - Postgraduate Taught
 - Doctoral/PhD
 - Other

- 3. What accommodation have you been living in during Semester 1?**
 - University accommodation
 - Private accommodation in Bath
 - Other (not in Bath)

- 4. What are your plans for Semester 2 (after the January exams)?**
 - Stay in Bath
 - Come to Bath (I have been studying remotely during Semester 1)
 - Return home and study remotely
 - Continue studying remotely away from Bath
 - Haven't Decided

- 5. If you have other plans that are not listed above, please include them below.**

- 6. If you will be staying in Bath for Semester 2, what has helped you make this decision?**

- 7. If you have not decided on your plans yet, what do you need to know to help you make a decision?**

- 8. If there are any thoughts or concerns about your experience as an international student that you'd like to share with us, please let us know below.**