Throughout the COVID-19 crisis Information Services (IS) worked tirelessly as a team, from the preparation for home working and teaching, throughout the transition period, to the present day, supporting the new normal as we adjust to business as usual.

Here we’ve highlighted, in no particular order, a snapshot of some of the fantastic work achieved and delivered in an incredibly short time. The work spans IS with each contribution of vital significance.

### Provision of University equipment

For staff requiring laptops for remote working we ordered additional laptops and brought forward the launch of a new **Mobile Device Management (MDM) service**, Intune.

Prior to lockdown we held daily drop-in sessions to prepare staff laptops for home working. Post-lockdown we were faced with the challenge of distributing them safely. P&F colleagues provided safe access to campus for schedule pickups. A new and comprehensive instruction allowed the user to get set up and enrol for IntuneMDM themselves, ensuring the machine was “box fresh”.

### Supporting access to University desktops

Once the campuses closed, the **Virtual Desktop Service (VDS)** machines usually reserved for on campus Zero Clients, were reallocated for off-campus use increasing VDS clients to 480: 240 each for staff and student users.

We also encouraged the use of the **Virtual Private Network (VPN)** which has no limitations and ensured that whenever possible staff office PCs could be remotely woken to enable Remote Desktop Connection.

### Provision of library and IT information

As part of our pre-lockdown planning, we knew that many library services would inevitably change. We wanted to communicate these changes easily and effectively to our users so we created our [COVID-19 Library FAQs page](https://www.ed.ac.uk). One place for library staff to update and for library users to check.

We also streamlined our IT [online information](https://www.ed.ac.uk) and worked with Marketing and Communications to develop a new [Working from Home](https://www.ed.ac.uk) webpage, as well as creating a [Hints & Tips intranet page](https://www.ed.ac.uk) to share our IT FAQs and top tips.

### To date we’ve issued:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>124</td>
<td>Staff laptops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Student loan laptops above those already on loan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Headsets &amp; mobile phones</td>
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### VDS at a glance:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5,129</td>
<td>Connections to a Virtual Desktop in last 7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>982</td>
<td>Unique users connecting to the VDS in last 7 days</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>480</td>
<td>Virtual Desktops available for staff and students</td>
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Enhancing communication and collaboration tools

The roll out and adoption of MS Teams as an IS supported communication and collaboration tool has been prioritised, whilst MS SharePoint familiarisation sessions have been organised to help staff get started with SharePoint and find out more about Office 365. To date 6 sessions have been held with 37 staff members attending.

We reacted quickly to develop a softphone service using the Cisco Jabber software, enabling staff working remotely to connect to our University telephone system to make/receive calls as if they were in the office. We now have over 100 staff members registered to use the softphone service and will soon be launching this as a full service.

We also enabled off-campus access to the Staff Directory (via login credentials), allowing easier access to contact details.

Supporting teaching and learning

We’ve been providing support for Webex and also using Webex to support other applications such as Moodle, Panopto, and Turnitin.

We have run 35 Webex drop-in sessions since mid-March with over 200 staff attending. In total there have been over 5,000 Webex sessions since the beginning of March (excluding those with only the host attending) with over 35,000 attendees.

We’ve been supporting academics with course work grading as well as helping prepare for trimester 3 and pre-arrival induction courses.

Panopto recordings peaked on 27 April where there were 7,620 views by 2,527 individuals totalling 81,564 minutes:
Providing temporary access to additional resources

Some publishers are providing free access to online content during the COVID-19 pandemic to support continuing learning, teaching and research. Collating and maintaining this information is a considerable ongoing task.

The Library LibGuide gives users clear instructions and information from one central location that Library staff update with new resources and changes to the temporary access conditions.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Supporting exams</th>
<th>Exams in numbers:</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The on-campus Trimester 2 exams have been replaced by an open book format, and so a new Moodle server with a bespoke user enrolments process was developed to manage this. We set up specific access control lists to ensure that groups of students that met particular conditions were allowed access to the server.</td>
<td><strong>4,117</strong> Students registered on the exam server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To date there have been over <strong>4,553</strong> answer documents submitted to <strong>147</strong> exams, with support being a collaborative effort between the Exams Office, the School Support Service and IS.</td>
<td><strong>4,553</strong> Submissions to the exam server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IS have also been monitoring available space and system response given the potential for an increased number of e-submissions over a short time period.</td>
<td><strong>147</strong> Exams on the server</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<tr>
<th>Maintaining library operations</th>
<th>Library enquiries:</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have extended automatic renewal of books and laptops, increased the number of items individuals can borrow and removed all fines to help staff and students during lockdown.</td>
<td><strong>600</strong> Support calls received during lockdown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have provided return boxes in the student halls for those living there and as a convenient, alternative location for those wishing to return books before leaving University.</td>
<td><strong>400</strong> Library enquiries from students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We are preparing our service for next academic year, updating Leganto reading lists, reviewing stock editions, updating LibGuides and webpages. Whilst we continue to communicate with our customers via social media.</td>
<td><strong>93%</strong> Customer satisfaction from feedback</td>
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<tr>
<th>Securing the University</th>
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<tr>
<td>We successfully retained our Cyber Essentials Plus certification after undergoing assessment in March 2020. The assessment and management of the process were carried out remotely but worked seamlessly.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Although we initially paused our scheduled rollout out of Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA), this project has now been restarted and prioritised to strengthen the University’s cyber security at a time when malicious attackers are exploiting the COVID-19 situation. With the majority of users now working off-campus MFA will provide an additional layer of security by requiring an extra step to validate logins from unknown devices &amp; off-campus locations.</td>
<td></td>
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</table>
We’ve ramped up our **Information Security Awareness** activities to help protect the University while the majority of staff work from home on their own devices. We’ve been reminding staff that they must complete the “**Stay Safe Online – Top Tips for Staff**” and have been highlighting our information security tips and advice via Workplace by Facebook.

### Moving to a virtual Service Desk

The softphone service was piloted and deployed to the IS Service Desk in March so we were ready to move to a **virtual, remote Service Desk operation** at lockdown.

The Desk have been key in the transition to home working, helping staff and students set up remotely, troubleshooting issues that arise and liaising with other teams to ensure that all are aware of the current issues faced by customers and are able to target information and resources accordingly.

The **opening hours have been extended** to provide additional cover for staff working amended hours and to assist with the changed exam arrangements. IS staff members from other teams have been brought in temporarily to assist with increased call volume.

### Service Desk in numbers:

- **996** Calls logged w/c 23 March
- **83%** Increase in calls w/c 23 March from same week last year

**Most common calls 9 Mar – 1 May:**
- Virtual Private Network (349)
- Password (238)
- Virtual Desktop Service (66)

### Managing our student systems

**COVID-19** has presented many challenges for the team supporting the applicant-to-graduate journey through its many systems and events including matriculation, assessment and timetabling.

The team’s expertise has been called on to **shift the schedule**, to give **students credit** before study completion, for them to graduate differently, or ensure that next year can be **funded** by SLC and SAAS. We’ve really had to think on our feet, working with partners to model different scenarios, aiming for the optimal student experience.

**Project work** has been continuing to improve our systems and how they link together. We’ve been active with the Curriculum Management tenders, considering a much wider rollout of e:Vision and planning the upgrade of our CRM this summer, and improving GDPR compliance in SITS.

Finally, we’re continuing to support colleagues with **information and training**, all with a new Student Systems Team Manager who started with us immediately before lockdown.
**Provision of software**
We helped staff and students access **temporary at-home software licenses** when offered by suppliers. This includes access to Adobe Creative Cloud, Autodesk as well as access to Chaos Group V-Ray and COVID-19 Sim (an Interactive Recognition and Care of a Deteriorating Patient with suspected COVID-19). This is in addition to the software already available off-campus via AppsAnywhere and Virtual Desktop Service.

**Supporting our finance systems**
During lockdown we went live with **PT-X, the University's new secure payment portal**. This cloud-based system allows authorisers to easily send payment files (Payroll and Accounts Payable) to the bank, ensuring no interruption to these services.

We developed a process to remove 'Ghost Tasks' from Agresso which have been plaguing requisitioners, clearing almost 500 erroneous notifications from user accounts.

The **Agresso Upgrade** was postponed from March and rescheduled to go live later in May. To comply with a Scottish legislative directive, we’re implementing an Agresso bolt on called **Proactis** which is a procurement marketplace and will accept electronic invoices.

There’s a lot of work ongoing with **WPM, or online store and payment provider**, including two new payment pathways for the payment of library fines and online courses from Course Merchant. We’re also looking at ways to improve the WPM processes and online store in order to improve the payer journey.

**Library e-purchasing scheme**
To support learning, teaching and research in an online environment, the library organised an **e-purchasing scheme for 2020**.

**100,000** new eBooks were available in LibrarySearch for a limited time and with a small budget redirected from print book purchase. Usage of the eBooks chose which ones were automatically purchased for future use.

In this way, **library users have the power to choose new eBooks**. Previous annual e-purchasing schemes have been School and subject focused, but we responded to the COVID-19 crisis by running a cross-disciplinary scheme and importing more records to allow access to a wider range of temporary eBooks at this time.

To date **21** titles have been purchased outright with over **200** rentals.

**Adapting our business improvement service**
We’ve tailored our **Business Improvement service**, offering the same service but working on a distributed model to provide coaching & training and facilitation, as well as advice on facilitation for online activities.

**Resuming digitisation and the inter-library loan service**
We’ve been working to resume the **Digitisation Service** and **Inter-library Loan service** services as well as possible and, while the temporary relaxation of CLA Licence restrictions has helped, there are some inevitable limitations to the services when we are away from physical library stock.
The team is prioritising digitisation requests for Trimester 3 teaching before the focus shifts to supporting online/blended teaching for Trimester 1. The Inter-library Loan service will initially prioritise support for our academics, researchers and Post Graduate students.

**Researcher Skills Forum webinars**

The Researcher Skills Forum is an annual researcher development event run by the Research & Innovation Office and IS. The event is attended by researchers at all levels, but is especially useful for new PhD students. With the cancellation of the face to face event the team quickly adapted by converting as many sessions as possible to webinars to make sure that researchers wouldn’t miss out on this valuable event.

Subject Librarians have run 2 sessions so far (with 80 participants in total). The series of webinars can be accessed on the Researcher Skills Forum Blog.

**Supporting our nursing applicants**

In place of an on-campus interview, applicants have been asked to record a short video and upload to the Moodle Community server according to their intended field of nursing.

Since mid-April there have been 682 videos submitted with the Learning Technology Advisors providing technical support via the course forum.

**And finally...**

Not only have achieved all of this on top of our Business as Usual activities, we’ve also:

- Reprioritised our current project list to ensure projects are progressing in accordance with current priorities, for example we’ve taken delivery of a new Storage Area Network (SAN) enabling us to upgrade the University’s storage facilities.
- Created an online Book of Condolence to support the School of Health & Social Care in the sad passing of one of their staff members.
- Created a new report for Senior Management reporting on student engagement for Widening Participation students during the current lockdown situation, to date the report has been accessed 14 times since 28 April.
- Enabled external examiners to access exam papers.

**Contact us**

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