



*Dear Hertford Community,*

I wanted to update you on how this unprecedented term is going, as we approach the halfway point and – like so many of you - move into a new phase of the pandemic response.

The good news is that college staff and students are responding incredibly well to a tough situation. I've been so impressed by the adaptability, patience and kindness being demonstrated every day to keep this term on track. Here is my latest [video](#) for students on the challenges ahead.

I'm also pleased that – despite the necessary constraints - we have managed to retain this term some of what makes the Hertford experience so special. The bar is closed, but the marquee is proving popular, and now serves food. I've loved watching the way it has been used for tutorials, college meetings and socialising. Hertford stags mark the seats that can be used in line with distancing rules – rear on the deer. Chapel services are not possible, but much has moved [online](#), and it was wonderful to watch our choir in good voice under the bridge. A full Freshers Week was not possible, but our new arrivals experienced their first formal dinner in hall (in their household bubbles) and pizza and Prosecco in the marquee after [matriculation](#) . The library can't open as usual, but the team have found new ways to connect students to the books they need, and to open up C19-compliant study space. Much tuition is online, so we're providing tablets and trying to keep the Wi-Fi from flagging.



Outdoor choir practice, Virtual Matriculation and socially-distanced welcome dinners



Of course, we're all aware that Winter is coming. The second lockdown is

imminent. Many colleges have had significant spikes in C19, and we've had our share of households in isolation, and several cases. So we will continue to do everything we can to protect the health of our people, of the academic environment, and the wider community. Sitting here in the heart of Oxford, I'm constantly reminded of the fluid and uncertain balance between physical proximity and social distancing. We are learning and adapting every day. Hertford has traditions of liberty, tolerance, community, society. All are challenged by the constraints of protecting each other from a pandemic: students are making new social sacrifices and being asked for new social obligations. All in the midst of a city that needs us and yet braces itself against the risks of hosting us.

The answer must still lie in those values. Liberty is restrained, but not the liberty to think and learn, for students to find themselves. Tolerance is tested, but we can find creative ways to live well together as a community. Society is fragile, but we can refresh our commitment to a university as a hub for ideas, learning and opportunity. We need to be physically distant from the world outside, but this time can make us more determined than ever to contribute to it. As I [said](#) at the beginning of term, this year might be shaped by the pandemic, but it won't be defined by it.

Final thought on COVID-19. Several alumni have been in touch to ask if you can help. The answer is of course an enthusiastic yes. Like so many, we are taking a financial hit this year. Do contact the [Development Office](#) if you'd like to know more about how you can help students struggling financially, keep the marquee up or support our ambitious plans for the future.

More widely, we're keen to keep finding ways to think beyond the pandemic. Huge thanks to Fiona Bruce for hosting my [Question Time grilling](#) by alumni and for all your great questions. Please do also take a look at the first of our series on [21<sup>st</sup> Century Survival Skills](#). New fellow Carissa Véliz launched her great new book, *Privacy is Power*, alongside the former UN Human Rights Commissioner, Zeid Ra'ad, and Hertford fellow, Mike Wooldridge (whose Computer Science Department has just been ranked best in the world for the third consecutive year).

Our next 21<sup>st</sup> Century Survival Skills session focuses on 'How to Negotiate', with Baroness Cathy Ashton (former EU Vice President who brokered key deals with Iran and on the Balkans), plus Sir Nicholas Soames (veteran parliamentarian and grandson of Winston Churchill), and current Hertford grad Adam Parr (an experienced business leader, entrepreneur and a former Chair and CEO of the Williams F1 team). Hope you can join us for that on 10 November. Later this term, the third session will focus on 'How to be Global'. Global education guru Andreas Schleicher (OECD Director) will launch his new initiative on how to teach and assess vital global skills, and I'll also be joined by fellow new Head of House, Baroness Valerie Amos (University College). Valerie's extraordinary career includes running SOAS, head of UN humanitarian operations, and being the first black woman in the UK cabinet.

And Peter Frankopan will give us a perspective on global history. His bestselling *Silk Roads* is my book of the decade.



# 21<sup>st</sup> Century Survival Skills



**Baroness Catherine Ashton**  
Former First Vice-President of European Commission & EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy

**Adam Parr**  
CEO, Williams Formula 1 Racing (2006-2012)

**Sir Nicholas Soames**  
Member of Parliament (1983-2019), Former Minister of State for the Armed Forces & Shadow Secretary of State for Defence

## HOW TO NEGOTIATE

[WWW.HERTFORD.OX.AC.UK/21NEGOTIATE](http://www.hertford.ox.ac.uk/21negotiate)

We'll also be connecting with some of our alumni further afield. I'm looking forward to our first [Hertford Regions](#) event with Oriental Studies fellow Bjarke Frellesvig speaking to our alumni in Japan. We will also be getting together with our US alumni following the 2020 election. I will be joined by Carole Cadwalladr, Josh Earnest (Barack Obama's speechwriter), and Patrick Davies (until recently Deputy UK Ambassador in Washington) to reflect on the result of the election, and the wider issues at stake. You can register for the event [here](#).

I promised an update on Hertford 2030. Governing Body agreed last week that we should launch a process of consultation focused on the question: what matters most to us, and how do we demonstrate it? I'm delighted that Professor Emma Smith has agreed to help me steer this process. Emma knows Hertford incredibly well and joins me in looking for brave and creative ideas. Thank you for all those you have shared them so far and please do keep them coming. While the immediate challenge is to keep the ship steady in some choppy waters, I'm hoping that we can set off to discover some new continents once the storm passes.

Congratulations to two Hertford fellows who have been recognised by the University in their Recognition of Distinction exercise: David Dwan, Professor of English Literature and Intellectual History, and Jamie Lorimer, Professor of Environmental Geography. Do look out for Professor Lorimer's vital new book, [The Probiotic Planet](#), out this week. Congratulations also to Hertford grad and poet Will Harris for winning the Felix Dennis Prize for Best First Collection with [Rendang](#). And of course commiserations to Jacqui Smith who left *Strictly* in a flurry of feathers far too soon but having done us all proud.

I hope you are all keeping safe amid these challenging times. I look forward to seeing you on the other side. Keep calm and carry on Hertford...

*Best wishes,*

*Tom*

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