

During a lockdown, how does a campus community cope?

A series of vignettes from different members of the LSE community



Pret, silent zooms, and banana bread

Marral Shamshiri-Fard, a PhD candidate in the LSE Department of International History, talks about how she has adapted to life under lockdown



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- Which part of your day/week do you most look forward to?

The part of my day that I look most forward to is lunch time, and dinner time. I'm really lucky to live with people who love to cook and try new things out, in particular my partner Lucien who is just such a talented cook, so he cooks, and I eat. His spicy tofu burger is probably one of my favourites. Sometimes I think about what life will be like when we're on campus again and back to choosing between uninspiring sandwich options from Pret.

- What have you found challenging during lockdown?

Not being able to visit my grandparents has been really hard as I was hoping to spend time with them as they're not doing so well, and also, learning to manage my own expectations has been quite challenging. By that what I mean is that, I thought with so much time, and not that much else to do, I would be able to read loads, get through huge book piles both for the PhD thesis but also leisurely reads that I've been WAITING to have this much time for! You think that you have all this time to do all of these things, but actually, I realised fairly quickly that I didn't have the headspace for it. And I found that really hard and frustrating but I think there are lots of reasons for that and many of us are feeling this way, so accepting how things are right now and not putting extra pressure on has been key.

- How do you keep in touch with the LSE community - colleagues/peers/staff/society?

Well, Zoom is certainly at the centre of our digital lives. I message peers and have stayed in touch with friends mainly via chat, and with colleagues we speak through email, or Zoom, the LSE Middle East Centre hosts weekly coffee mornings which are optional to tap into so it's really nice to catch up with colleagues there. I have started doing 'silent Zooms' with some of my peers and colleagues, so we will come online, tell each other what our goals are for the morning and then do 50-minutes of focused work, with a 5-10 minute break after. And then repeat. The idea is that you stay on Zoom but you mute your microphone, so you're working in the presence of each other online. I've found that it makes me really productive.

- What do you miss most about being on campus?

I really miss being around people. Meeting someone for lunch, going for a walk, bumping into someone and just having a chat. Especially now that weather's getting sunnier, I really crave just having a regular day on campus and spontaneously going for a drink at the end of the day. It's really people more than anything. I have also missed being in seminars, being in the classroom, while I enjoyed adapting to the online teaching, it's no where near the same as teaching in the classroom.

- Would you like to share some words of advice or your personal mantra that gets you through lockdown?

Prioritise your mental health and do what feels right and good for you. I think especially for students and those of us who don't have daily deadlines to meet, recognising that your progress is not linear and constantly on this path of doing more and more is really important. It's okay to have one or two productive days and then another day that's not so great. Also, it's fine to not be doing much with all this time that you have, move at your own pace, don't feel pressured to be making banana bread all the time!