

Public Statement by Jan Royall regarding Covid-19

June 2020

What a time this is to live through. The current pandemic has ushered in an age of uncertainty, when the shimmering prospects of the future contemplated by our young people have been replaced by a cloud of unanswered questions.

It is, and will undoubtedly remain, a huge challenge for all. And yet, in many ways, institutions like Somerville were created to enable people to deal with crises like this one – providing them with knowledge and skills, inspiring their research, and in doing so making individuals and our society more resilient. Our learning has lost neither its currency nor its power to change the world. Our community still offers a sanctuary for those wanting to transform themselves and the world through the power of thought. Our people, from students to fellows to alumni, may be physically scattered, yet I see evidence everyday of how they continue to advocate for causes and work that are essentially of a piece: compassionate, intelligent, dedicated to the public good.

So many lives are in turmoil. I am acutely conscious of the disruption to the studies as well as the hopes and aspirations of offer-holders and our students. The latter have dealt brilliantly with the transition to online learning, and huge thanks must go to our academics who have provided online lectures, tutorials and assessments so brilliantly whilst juggling caring commitments and research. As ever, our student community has inspired me with its response, not least for the ingenious and altruistic ways our JCR and MCR have devised to support each other and others outside our community. I am immensely proud of them all.

There will be difficult times ahead. All our plans must change, the way we work together and live together must adapt. We will have to spend more carefully, live more frugally, be more conscious in everything we do, savour the truly important things of life. But in so doing, we will come back stronger. As Somervillian Elizabeth Kirk (1946) so wisely said: “Circumstances of daily life will change, but Somerville’s ethos will not”.