



Press Release

Issued: **Wednesday 22 April, 2019**

University to support NHS by testing Covid-19 samples

Scientists, laboratory space and equipment from the University of Edinburgh are being used to support NHS Lothian's testing efforts to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

A pool of 25 scientists from across the University – selected from more than 750 volunteers – will support NHS Lothian staff deliver up to 1000 additional tests per day.

Testing will take place in the laboratories of the University's Institute of Genetics and Molecular Medicine (IGMM) at the Western General Hospital and the facility is operationally ready today (Wednesday 22 April).

Tests will be to diagnostic standards, fully integrated into NHS systems and under NHS Lothian oversight. Results will be available directly to NHS Lothian clinical staff within 24 hours.

In addition to providing NHS Lothian with scientific expertise and laboratory space, the University will supply key reagents – special chemicals used to detect the presence of coronavirus – and testing machines.

Scientists will use real-time polymerase chain reaction (PCR) machines to identify the active presence of the virus in people who are symptomatic for the disease.

University research scientists are being trained and supervised by NHS Lothian Laboratory Medicine personnel. Several similar hybrid University-NHS testing centres are in development in other Scottish universities that will also operate under NHS oversight.

The IGMM comprises of the Cancer Research UK Edinburgh Centre, the MRC Human Genetics Unit and the Centre for Genomic & Experimental Medicine.

University of Edinburgh Vice-Chancellor and Principal, Professor Peter Mathieson, said: "The University of Edinburgh is making numerous contributions to the response to Covid-19 and I am delighted to see this latest example. Our collaboration with the NHS will always be vitally important to us and we are pleased to be helping to bolster testing capacity. My sincere thanks to everyone involved."

Mr Jim Crombie, Deputy Chief Executive for NHS Lothian, said: "The Royal Infirmary of Edinburgh was one of the first two national launch centres for Covid-19 PCR testing in Scotland earlier this year, and we have increased our test capacity considerably since then. The partnership with the University of Edinburgh enables us to increase capacity even further, which will support the Health Board's requirements but also contribute to national COVID-19 virus test resilience."

Professor Andrew Jackson, Medical Research Council funded scientist and academic lead for the WGH-IGMM facility said: "Opening this facility shows that research scientists can help deliver testing by the NHS for the NHS at a time of vital need. While based on a routine procedure in many research labs, it is complex to implement as a fully integrated end-to-end process. I am proud of many researchers and NHS lab colleagues who have made this possible, and who will help create other hybrid University-NHS labs across Scotland under the auspices of NHS Scotland."



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Professor Wendy Bickmore, director of the Medical Research Council's Human Genetics Unit at the University, said: "It is uplifting to see the strong relationship between the NHS and IGMM labs harnessed at this crucial time. There has been an enormous effort by a strong, agile team of staff across the IGMM to organise lab space, equipment, reagents and people. It is testament to their professional expertise that this has been executed so efficiently."

Dr Ingólfur Johannessen, Director of NHS Lothian Laboratory Medicine and Clinical Lead for the Scottish National Laboratory Medicine Programme, said: "We are delighted to employ the knowledge, skills and expertise of our academic colleagues in a collaborative University-NHS partnership approach to Covid-19 virus testing."

More information on how the University is supporting global efforts to curb Covid-19 can be found [here](#).

For further information, please contact:

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