



**Michelle Donelan MP**

Minister of State for Universities

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street tel: 0370 000 2288

[www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus) Westminster London SW1P 3BT

4<sup>th</sup> May 2020

Dear colleagues,

Thank you once again for the work that you are doing in the fight against COVID-19. I know the strain that this pandemic has placed upon higher education and I remain impressed by your fortitude and resilience.

I, and colleagues, have had a number of very productive meetings and conversations in recent weeks in order to understand the pressures faced by higher education providers. We have listened to you and, drawing on proposals from the universities sector, we have now announced a package of measures that address your key concerns. This package will protect students and universities by stabilising student admissions, ease pressure on universities' finances and enhance support for students.

We will continue to work closely with colleagues in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales to mitigate the challenges the entire UK sector faces as a result of COVID-19. We will keep these measures under review and will consider whether we need to do more to secure the sustainability of the sector and to protect the interests of students.

A statement about these measures can be found here

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-support-package-for-universities-and-students>. They include the following:

- **Stabilising admissions** – Providers will be able to recruit full-time, domestic students up to 5% above their forecasts in the next academic year, which is in line with proposals originating from the sector, to help reduce volatility and ensure a fair and orderly admissions. The Government will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places, with 5,000 ring-fenced for nursing, midwifery or allied health courses to support the country's vital public services.
- **Preventing exploitative admissions practices** – The OfS will consult on a new registration condition so it can intervene if providers take actions that are harmful to the sector and students.

- **Enhanced Clearing process** – UCAS is developing a new, personalised Clearing system for students this summer. This includes Clearing Plus, a new service which matches students to universities or other opportunities based on their achievements and course interests. If students' calculated grades exceed their predicted ones, it can suggest alternative courses with higher entry requirements.
- **University research funding** – The Government is bringing forward £100m of Quality-related research funding for providers in England into this current academic year as immediate help to ensure research activities can continue during the crisis.
- **Research sustainability taskforce** – DfE and BEIS Ministers will set up an advisory sector working group with the Devolved Administrations to consider how best to respond to the challenges universities face on research as a result of Covid-19, and so university research can continue to support the UK's economic recovery following the crisis.
- **Government business support** – The Government has confirmed that universities are eligible to apply for the Government support schemes, including business loan support, which the OfS estimates could be worth at least £700m, depending upon eligibility and take-up. Providers can also access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to safeguard staff jobs, including for those with short-term contracts.
- **Changes to tuition fee loan payments** – The Student Loans Company will bring forward tuition fee payments to providers, expected to be worth £2.6bn, in the 2020/21 academic year to help cash flow. This will not affect the loan liability, amount of interest charged to students or the timing of their maintenance loan payments.
- **Financial opportunities** – As part of existing programmes and using established procedures, the DfE will consider purchasing assets, such as land and buildings, where they can be used for new or expanding schools and colleges. This financial year the DfE has budgeted for up to £100m to acquire sites for planned projects across purchases from suitable vendors, including higher education providers among others.
- **Financial help for students** - The Government has worked with the OfS to help clarify that providers can use existing funds, totalling £46m across April and May, to boost their hardship funds for students in financial difficulty. This can include help for IT equipment and internet access.
- **Restructuring support** – Should providers face further financial difficulties, the Government will work with institutions to review their financial circumstances and assess the need for structured transformation and any attached conditions.
- **Supporting international students** – The UK continues to welcome overseas students, and Ministers are working across Government as a priority to ensure universities can continue to attract international students. DfE and DIT Ministers will also chair a group, including key sector representatives, to consider how the International Education Strategy can be updated to respond to the impact of the coronavirus outbreak.

I welcome the decision by the OfS to consult on a time limited new condition of registration designed to help maintain stability in the higher education system, including admissions, this year.

We are also giving students who do not feel their calculated grade reflects their ability the opportunity to sit an exam as soon as is reasonably possible after the beginning of the new academic year. Our aim is for results to be awarded before Christmas. I am grateful for assurances from universities that they will be as flexible as possible in their admissions arrangements.

I am keen to ensure that students, the wider public and an international audience understand that the higher education sector remains “open for business” and that it is committed to maintaining its world class status. We expect any student who was planning to go to university to be able to go if they meet the terms of an offer they have accepted. Students will still get a grade reflecting their hard work that will allow them to start this next exciting chapter of their lives.

I have found it invaluable to talk to you over recent weeks and I am very happy to answer any questions that you might have. You will find answers to some of the questions that I have been asked here:

<http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-he-providers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>.

Thank you again for all the extraordinary work that you and your staff are doing in these most testing times.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle Donelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

**Michelle Donelan MP**  
**Minister of State for Universities**