



Michelle Donelan MP

Minister of State for Universities

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14th May 2020

To all MPs

Dear colleague,

STABILISATION MEASURES FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

The Government is clear that we do not want to see any students miss out on the opportunity to benefit from our excellent HE system as a result of COVID-19. I wanted to let you know that we have recently announced a package of stabilisation measures for the higher education sector in England.

Our message to the public is clear: we all must stay alert, in order to control the virus and save lives.

We know that COVID-19 has placed great strains on the sector and those who study and work in it. We have spent the past few weeks engaged in intensive discussions with sector representatives and listening to their concerns and needs. That is why, drawing on proposals from the universities sector, we have developed a package of measures to boost student support, stabilise the admissions system and ease pressures on universities' finances, so that we prevent these unprecedented events from causing undue hardship to providers and students. We will monitor the effectiveness of these measures on HE providers and consider whether we need to do more to secure the sustainability of the sector and to protect the interests of students.

You will find a statement about these measures [here](#). They include the following:

- **Stabilising admissions** – Temporary measures mean 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 temporary 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 (QR) 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 have now 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. The first meeting was held on 12th May.
- **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 of students in the in the 2020/21 academic year to providers, expected to be worth £2.6bn, 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.
- **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 know that prospective students will be anxious and unsettled by the effect of current events on their education. I want to reassure those who are due to go to university this autumn that there are enough university places to go around and the Government's plans are to create a fair and orderly structure – not prevent people from going into higher education. Students will still get a grade reflecting their hard work and will be able to start this next exciting chapter of their lives.

We are working closely with the sector to ensure students can start and continue their studies to the best of their abilities.

Further detailed information about the package can be found in our [FAQ on the package](#) and more broadly, my [Q&A blog](#) about the impact of coronavirus on higher education.

I would be very happy to discuss with you any aspects of our stabilisation package for the higher education sector. Please do get in contact at michelle.donelan.mp@parliament.uk or universities.ps@education.gov.uk.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle Donelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "M".

Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities