**Political Affairs Digest**

A regular digest of House of Commons, House of Lords and higher education sector business. If you would like more information on parliamentary business, or advice on engaging with Parliament or a parliamentarian, please contact:

**Issy Cooke**  
issy.cooke@universitiesuk.ac.uk  
0207 419 5434

Click on the items in the Table of Contents to go straight to the debates, answers, forthcoming business, etc.
# Table of Contents

**Parliamentary Business** ......................................................................................................................................................... 3

- Education Select Committee hearing on the impact of Covid-19 on education and children’s services ........................................................................................................... 3
- Immigration Bill second reading .................................................................................................................................................. 3

**Forthcoming business** ................................................................................................................................................................ 4

**Written Questions** ........................................................................................................................................................................ 4

- Coronavirus: student accommodation ............................................................................................................................................... 4
- Coronavirus: students in on-campus accommodation .................................................................................................................. 6
- Coronavirus: international students in university accommodation ................................................................................................ 6
- Coronavirus: students at risk of homelessness .................................................................................................................................. 7
- Coronavirus: impact on higher education sector ............................................................................................................................ 8
- Coronavirus: response to UUK proposals ....................................................................................................................................... 8
- Coronavirus: impact of travel restrictions on overseas students to university finances ............................................................ 9
- Coronavirus: international student recruitment ............................................................................................................................. 10
- Coronavirus: course availability for international students ....................................................................................................... 10
- Coronavirus: research sustainability taskforce ................................................................................................................................ 11
- Coronavirus: extensions for doctoral students .............................................................................................................................. 11
- Coronavirus: research and innovation – extension of grants ....................................................................................................... 11
- Coronavirus: students financially penalised ..................................................................................................................................... 12
- Coronavirus: students in financial difficulty ............................................................................................................................... 12
- Coronavirus: standard of education and course fees ................................................................................................................... 13
- Coronavirus: student recruitment on public service focused courses ........................................................................................ 13
- Coronavirus: support for disabled students ................................................................................................................................... 14
- Coronavirus: graduate programmes ............................................................................................................................................... 15
- Coronavirus: apprenticeships .......................................................................................................................................................... 16
- Coronavirus: converting poor performing universities to vocational training colleges ................................................................... 19
- Visa applications .................................................................................................................................................................................. 19
- Adult Education ................................................................................................................................................................................ 20
- University Technical Colleges ...................................................................................................................................................... 21
- Independent higher education provider registration .................................................................................................................. 21

**Sector News** ................................................................................................................................................................................. 22

- Ofqual blog and guidance: advice for schools and colleges on making grades fair ................................................................... 22
- OfS publishes case studies of student support from universities ................................................................................................ 22
- Open letter from Emma Hardy, Shadow Universities Minister, to the Universities Minister .................................................................. 22
- New Guidance from QAA ............................................................................................................................................................. 23
Parliamentary Business

Education Select Committee hearing on the impact of Covid-19 on education and children’s services

On Monday 18 May, the Education Committee held a session on ‘the impact of COVID-19 on education and children’s services’. The Committee heard from leaders in higher education on the challenges facing the sector and how higher education in England may change as a result of the crisis.

Witnesses for the session included Zamzam Ibrahim, National President, National Union of Students; Dr Jo Grady, General Secretary, University and College Union; Professor Debra Humphris, Chair, University Alliance; Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive, Office for Students and Sir Michael Barber, Chair, Office for Students.

The first panel focused on wellbeing, financial and online learning support for university students and staff. The panel agreed that more information was needed on the number and background of students missing out on online learning, and that the government should provide further guidance to allow universities to re-open safely and communicate properly to students.

During the second panel session committee members largely posed questions to the Office for Students’ Chair and Chief Executive regarding widening participation activity, the case for tuition fee refunds, quality assurance and the new condition of registration. On the latter, Nicola Dandridge said she felt the consultation would strengthen the condition but that it would not fully remove competition.

You can watch this session here.

Immigration Bill second reading

On Monday 18 May Parliament hosted the second reading of the Immigration and Social Security Coordination Bill. The bill will end free movement and allow the government to introduce a new points-based system that applies to people inside and outside the EU. MPs debated the bill then passed the bill through a vote (MPs are unable to attach amendments during the second reading).

There were several mentions of international students and academic staff. David Johnston, a member of the Education Select Committee, welcomed measures for attracting international students including the two-year graduate route but worried about universities prioritising international students over widening participation. Jonathan Gullis, also a member of the Education Committee, welcomed the introduction of a fast-track visa route for researchers and STEM specialists. Kevin Foster, a Home Office minister highlighted the importance of international students to cities across the UK while Shadow Immigration Minister Holly Lynch mentioned Universities UK among a list of several bodies with a keen interest in the bill.

You can read a transcript of the debate here.
Forthcoming business

The House of Commons and House of Lords is in recess until 2 June 2020

Written Questions

Coronavirus: student accommodation

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, what the guidance is for students who chose to stay at university but who now wish to travel home. [43014]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): As my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

The government’s COVID-19 recovery strategy published on 11 May sets out a cautious roadmap to ease existing measures in a safe and measured way. The strategy allows for certain necessary travel if people take precautions.

In light of this, we are developing guidance on students travelling to and from student accommodation and this will be published as soon as possible.

Meanwhile, we have made clear that we do not believe that students should be fined for failing to collect their belongings if this is the case because they are complying with the government’s travel advice.

Alex Cunningham (Stockton North): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to ensure that students are able to retrieve their possessions from university accommodation during the covid-19 outbreak. [43013]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): As my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

The government’s COVID-19 recovery strategy published on 11 May sets out a cautious roadmap to ease existing measures in a safe and measured way. The strategy allows for certain necessary travel if people take precautions.

In light of this, we are developing guidance on students travelling to and from student accommodation and this will be published as soon as possible.
Meanwhile, we have made clear that we do not believe that students should be fined for failing to collect their belongings if this is the case because they are complying with the government’s travel advice.

**Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to support university students with accommodation they can no longer use as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [45348]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** As my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by Covid-19.

We expect universities to communicate clearly with residential students on rents for this period and to administer accommodation provision in a fair manner. A number of universities and large accommodation providers have waived rents for the summer term or released students early from their contracts.

Students will continue to receive scheduled payments of loans towards their living costs for the remainder of the current 2019/20 academic year.

Students who are tenants with individual private landlords can discuss with them the possibility of an early release from their tenancy agreement. Tenants without an agreed release are still liable for their rent and should pay this as usual.

If students face financial hardship and struggle to pay rent, support is available. In the first instance, they should speak to their landlord if they think they will have difficulty meeting a rental payment. In this unique context, tenants and landlords are encouraged to work together to put in place a rent payment scheme.

The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has published guidance on consumer contracts, cancellation and refunds affected by the Covid-19 outbreak [here](https://www.compete.gov.uk). This sets out the CMA’s view on how the law operates to help consumers understand their rights and help businesses treat their customers fairly. Students may be entitled to refunds from accommodation providers, depending on the terms of their contract and their particular circumstances. If students need help, organisations such as Citizens Advice offer a free service, providing information and support.

If a student thinks that their accommodation provider is treating them unfairly, they can raise a complaint under the accommodation codes of practice as long as their provider is a code member. The codes can be found at: [https://www.thesac.org.uk/](https://www.thesac.org.uk/) ; [https://www.unipol.org.uk/the-code/how-to-complain and: https://www.rla.org.uk/about/nrla-code-of-practice.shtml](https://www.rla.org.uk/about/nrla-code-of-practice.shtml).

**Colum Eastwood (Foyle):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what discussions he has had with (a) the Northern Ireland Executive and (b) other devolved institutions in Northern Ireland on creating a co-ordinated policy to provide assistance to students financially affected by continuing obligations to pay rent on student accommodation during the covid-19 outbreak. [45509]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** As my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Housing and student maintenance loans are devolved matters, as is higher education. However, the department has been working closely with colleagues in Northern Ireland to discuss a range of higher education areas affected by the COVID-19 outbreak.
English-domiciled students anywhere in the UK are continuing to receive scheduled payments of loans towards their living costs for the remainder of the current, 2019/20, academic year. Many higher education providers will have hardship funds to support students in times of need, including emergencies.

We have worked closely with the Office for Students to enable providers in England to draw upon existing funding to increase hardship funds and support disadvantaged students impacted by COVID-19. As a result, providers will be able to use the funding, worth around £23 million per month for April and May, towards student hardship funds.

Students with a part-time employment contract should speak to their employer about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19), which has been set up to help pay staff wages and keep people in employment.

**Coronavirus: students in on-campus accommodation**

**Baroness Bennett Of Manor Castle:** To ask Her Majesty's Government how many students are currently living in on-campus accommodation at (1) colleges and (2) universities; of these, how many are (a) UK students (b) EU students, and (c) non-EU international students; how many are minors; and whether those students are housed in adequately maintained conditions and have access to the basic facilities they require. [HL3590]

**Baroness Berridge:** As both my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Statistics on the numbers of further and higher education (HE) students resident in on-campus accommodation following 23 March’s lockdown are not held centrally.

However, Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data show that approximately 360,000 students at UK higher education institutions in 2018/19 were resident in provider-maintained property, including some 117,000 international students, of which 31,000 were from the EU.

Levels of current occupancy of accommodation vary widely between different institutions with those students still resident likely to include care leavers, students estranged from their families and international students for whom there is no alternative accommodation easily available or who are not able to get home because of travel restrictions.

HE providers have been asked to aim to ensure staff (catering, cleaning and laundry staff, for instance) are available to support on halls management. Counselling staff should also be available to support on isolating students’ mental health. This support could be provided virtually.

We have worked to improve joint continuity planning between HE providers and Local Resilience Forums to consider how to ensure availability of supply of food and medicines.

College campus accommodation where children are resident is inspected by Ofsted against national minimum standards. The inspections are conducted on an age basis and include international students.

Ofsted holds a record of ratings for further education accommodation.

**Coronavirus: international students in university accommodation**
Lord Pendry: To ask Her Majesty's Government what support they are providing to international students stranded in universities across the England due to the coronavirus crisis. [HL3659]

Baroness Berridge: We have been working closely with the higher education sector to ensure that it provides the additional support needed for international students who have decided to remain in the UK or who are unable to travel at present. Universities have an obligation to ensure that students have continued accommodation and access to essential services in the UK for the duration of their stay. Universities are also offering a range of support to students, including support for catering and cleaning, and providing support for mental health.

We have worked closely with the Office for Students to enable providers to draw upon existing funding to increase hardship funds and to support disadvantaged students – both domestic and international – impacted by COVID-19. As a result, providers will be able to use the funding – worth around £23 million per month for April and May – towards student hardship funds, including for the purchase of IT equipment and mental health support as well as to support providers’ access and participation plans.

We are pleased to see that the sector is making every effort to enable students to continue their studies – including moving learning online either in the UK or in the student’s home country – so that their teaching and assessment can proceed. Many providers are also bolstering their existing mental health services and adapting delivery to means other than face-to-face.

The government is also applying discretion under the current circumstances to ensure that international students are not negatively impacted if they find themselves in a position where they cannot comply with certain visa rules. The government has published bespoke Tier 4 visa guidance for students and sponsors who are affected by changes to UK immigration and borders due to COVID-19. This guidance includes the latest information for those who might have questions around visa expiry, switching visa category within the UK and distance learning.

Coronavirus: students at risk of homelessness

Baroness Bennett Of Manor Castle: To ask Her Majesty's Government what are their plans to assist A-level and university students who are at risk of homelessness due to their on-campus accommodation contracts being terminated, and how they will ensure these students are neither rendered homeless nor forced into debt. [HL3591]

Baroness Berridge: As my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have both made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, has written to all higher education (HE) providers to explain the importance of HE institutions operating a non- eviction policy so that no student is required to leave halls if their contract has ended, if their rental agreement does not cover holiday periods or if they are unable to pay their rent. This is particularly important in the case of international students, care leavers and students estranged from their families.

In her letters, my hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, also emphasised the need for HE providers to consider practical support to ensure that students who remain on campus can access sufficient food, medical and cleaning supplies, along with mental health support.

Students will continue to receive scheduled payments of loans towards their living costs for the remainder of the current 2019/20 academic year.

We have worked closely with the Office for Students to enable providers to draw upon existing funding to increase hardship funds and support disadvantaged students impacted by COVID-19. As a result, providers will be able to use the funding, worth around £23 million per month for April and May, towards student hardship funds.
Students with a part-time employment contract should speak to their employer about the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, which has been set up to help pay staff wages and keep people in employment. This can be accessed here.

We have also asked that HE providers pay particular attention to the additional financial hardships that are being faced by student staff who have been reliant on income from campus-based jobs at this time.

The government encourages universities and private hall providers to be fair in their decisions about rent charges for this period.

**Coronavirus: impact on higher education sector**

**Lord Bourne Of Aberystwyth**: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on the higher education sector. [HL3856]

**Baroness Berridge**: In 2018-19, there were 2.38 million students studying at UK higher education providers. This includes 143,000 students from the EU and 343,000 students from other countries.

The total UK sector income in 2018/19 was £40.8 billion. Almost 50% of this income was from tuition fees, around 15% comes from research grants and contracts and around 6% comes from residences, catering and conferences.

The government recognises that the Covid-19 outbreak will have an unparalleled impact on all elements of the global and UK economy. The higher education sector, including student recruitment, is no exception.

On 4 May, my right honourable Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures to stabilise university admissions this autumn and to ensure sustainability in higher education at a time of unprecedented uncertainty. My right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, wrote to all Honourable Members with full details of the package, details of which have also been published on GOV.UK here.

The government is doing all that it can to keep staff and students at our universities safe in this unprecedented situation whilst mitigating the impact on education. In March, my right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, wrote to students at higher education institutions to outline the support available. We continue to work closely with the sector, putting student wellbeing at the heart of these discussions.

Our latest guidance on the impact of Covid-19 is set out here:

**Coronavirus: response to UUK proposals**

**Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet)**: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, if he will publish a response to the proposals from Universities UK on achieving stability in the higher education sector following covid-19, published 10 April 2020. [45029]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham)**: On 4 May, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures, drawing on proposals from the universities sector, to ease pressures on universities’ finances, boost support for students, stabilise university admissions this autumn and ensure sustainability in higher education (HE) at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.
To stabilise admissions, temporary student number controls will be put in place for domestic and EU students for the academic year 2020/21. These measures mean that providers will be able to recruit students up to a temporary set level, based on provider forecasts, which allows additional growth of up to 5% in the next academic year, and ensures that the admissions process for students will be fair and orderly.

My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places on top of the controls, of which 5,000 will be allocated to students studying nursing or allied health courses, to ensure growing numbers that will support our vital public services. This measure will only apply to UK/EU domiciled full-time undergraduate students, with certain specified exemptions. These controls will not apply to international (non-EU) students.

The Office for Students (OfS), the regulator in England, will also consult on a new temporary condition of registration. The OfS’s proposed condition would prohibit registered providers from engaging in any form of conduct which, in the opinion of the OfS, could reasonably have a material negative effect on the stability or integrity of the English HE sector.

The government has reprioritised tuition fee payments, expected to be worth £2.6 billion, for providers so that they receive more cash in the first term of academic year 2020/21. The government has also announced that £100 million of public funding will be brought forward to the current academic year to help protect vital university research activities in England. Additionally, the government has confirmed that providers are eligible to apply for the government’s financial support schemes, which are estimated by the OfS to be worth at least £700 million to the sector.

Universities have an integral part to play in our economy, society and culture, which is highlighted now more than ever through their leading role in the fight against the COVID-19 outbreak.

**Coronavirus: impact of travel restrictions on overseas students to university finances**

Lord Bassam Of Brighton: To ask Her Majesty’s Government what estimate they have made of the financial impact on UK universities of restrictions on travel from overseas students in the (1) current academic year, and (2) 2020/21 academic year. [HL3890]

Baroness Berridge: In the 2018/19 academic year, tuition fees from international students at UK higher education providers accounted for around £6.9 billion of sector income. The government recognises that the COVID-19 outbreak will have an unparalleled impact on all elements of the global and UK economy. The higher education sector, including student recruitment, is no exception. We have been working closely with the sector to monitor the likely impacts of COVID-19, on international student numbers, including restrictions on travel. We understand the coronavirus outbreak and a possible reduction in the number of international students poses significant challenges and stand ready to help the sector with various mitigations.

The government is working to ensure existing rules and regulations, including visa regulations, are as flexible as possible for international students under these unprecedented circumstances. Higher education providers will also be flexible in accommodating applicants’ circumstances where possible, including if they are unable to travel to the UK in time for the start of the academic year.

On 4 May, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced the package of measures to stabilise university admissions this autumn and ensure sustainability in higher education at a time of unprecedented uncertainty. My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, wrote to all Honourable Members on 4 May, with full details of the package, which have also been published on GOV.UK here.

The new graduate route, due to be launched in summer 2021, provides an opportunity for international students who have been awarded their degree to stay and work in the UK at any skill level for two years. This represents a significant improvement in our offer to international students and will help ensure our world-leading higher education sector remains competitive internationally.
The International Education Strategy, published in March 2019, by the Department for Education and the Department for International Trade, set out a commitment to review progress following its publication. The review will ensure the International Education Strategy responds to this new context and the challenges that are posed.

**Coronavirus: international student recruitment**

**Neil Coyle (Bermondsey and Old Southwark):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to work with the higher education sector to attract international students to (a) creative and (b) specialist universities in the UK in the next academic year. [45252]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** The government continues to recognise the huge value, both culturally and socially as well as economically, that international students bring to higher education in the UK. We recognise that the COVID-19 outbreak will have an unparalleled impact on all elements of the global and UK economy. The higher education sector, including student recruitment, is no exception.

We have been working closely with the whole sector, including representatives of smaller and specialist higher education providers, to monitor the likely impacts of COVID-19 on international student recruitment. We understand that the COVID-19 outbreak and a possible reduction in the number of international students poses significant challenges. We stand ready to help the sector, including creative and specialist institutions, with various mitigations.

The government is working to ensure that existing rules and regulations, including visa regulations, are as flexible as possible for international students under these unprecedented circumstances. The latest visa guidance for students includes English language workarounds that will also benefit smaller and specialist higher education providers and providers of pre-sessional courses. Higher education providers are encouraged to be flexible in accommodating applicants’ circumstances where possible, including if applicants are unable to travel to the UK in time for the start of the academic year.

The government has also committed to publish a review of the International Education Strategy this autumn, which will respond to the new context and the challenges that are posed by COVID-19 across all education settings. We look forward to continuing to welcome international students in the future - they are one of the reasons why our higher education sector remains world-class.

**Coronavirus: course availability for international students**

**Dr Ben Spencer (Runnymede and Weybridge):** To ask the Secretary of State for Education, with reference to the covid-19 outbreak, what recent assessment he has made of the adequacy of availability of courses for international students at UK universities for academic year 2020-2021. [43766]

**Michelle Donelan (Chippenham):** Teaching, learning and assessment in higher education (HE) are not stopping. We are working with the sector to ensure universities are able to make all reasonable efforts to enable all students, both international and domestic, to continue and complete their studies; for their achievements to be reliably assessed; and for qualifications to be awarded securely.

Despite the significant disruption being felt across the HE sector, students deserve appropriate support and recognition for their hard work and dedication - many universities and colleges have moved rapidly to develop new ways of delivering courses through online teaching and alternatives to traditional end-of-course exams.
Our universities will always be open to international students. Both the government and the HE sector are working together to ensure existing rules and processes are as flexible as possible under the current unprecedented circumstances, to ensure that international students who are planning to study at a UK institution from autumn 2020 can do so.

The UK looks forward to continuing to welcome international students in the future. They enrich UK HE culturally, socially and economically, and are one of the reasons why our HE sector remains world-class.

**Coronavirus: research sustainability taskforce**

**Lord Blunkett:** To ask Her Majesty's Government when the research sustainability taskforce is expected to publish its recommendations; and what assessment that taskforce has made of the impact of any decrease in income from international students on the ability of higher education institutions to conduct research. [T] [HL4217]

**Lord Callanan:** The Taskforce was announced on 4 May. It was created to advise Government on the urgent decisions needed to ensure the university research sector emerges from the pandemic able to contribute to UK society and the economy in the recovery and beyond. It will not produce formal recommendations to government. It will advise government as it seeks to address challenges to the sustainability of university research and knowledge exchange arising from COVID-19 including loss of income from international students.

**Coronavirus: extensions for doctoral students**

**Lord Bassam Of Brighton:** To ask Her Majesty's Government what process they will use to decide the lengths of extension given to doctoral students funded by UK Research and Innovation; and how that process will take into account the level of uncertainty about the ongoing impact of the COVID-19 pandemic when determining the lengths of extension granted. [T] [HL4215]

**Lord Callanan:** The Government is aware of the consequent pressures of the COVID-19 pandemic on doctoral students and their ability to complete work. This is a difficult time for all post graduate students, academic staff and researchers.

UKRI is continuing to engage with the higher education sector and have made sure that all doctoral students funded by UKRI will continue to be paid their stipend. On 9 April it was announced that it will offer a costed extension of up to six months for UKRI PhD students due to complete by 31 March 2021 whose study has been impacted by the pandemic. Those students not in their final year may be granted extensions on a case by case basis.

On 24 April, UKRI issued detailed guidance to universities on how the policy should be implemented. UKRI has outlined that universities must put in place processes that are based upon the principles of ensuring all UKRI doctoral students are supported to complete their projects and that they should be treated fairly, generously and sympathetically given the disruptions caused to research programmes and individual’s personal circumstances.

UKRI will continue to engage with the wider sector about the implementation of the extension and to identify and understand future impact. The extension will be reviewed in four months’ time to ensure that any further impacts to doctoral training are taken into account.

**Coronavirus: research and innovation – extension of grants**
Baroness Randerson: To ask Her Majesty’s Government what plans they have to require UK Research and Innovation to extend the term of grants for those projects which have been interrupted or delayed by the impact of coronavirus. [HL4014]

Lord Callanan: The Government is aware of the consequent pressures of the coronavirus on businesses, universities, and research institutions.

UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) is already offering no-cost extensions to all grants.

UKRI has also confirmed it will offer a costed extension of up to six months for those UKRI funded PhD students due to complete by 31 March 2021 and whose study has been impacted by the pandemic. Where a student’s doctoral research project has been repurposed towards COVID-19 related research, a costed extension to cover the time needed to adapt the research could be considered and covered in the same way as other case-by-case extensions. More information is available on the UKRI website.

We are in discussion with UKRI and wider stakeholders about what else may be required to best support the research and innovation system.

Coronavirus: students financially penalised

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has to ensure university students are not financially penalised due to a delay to the academic year as a result of the covid-19 outbreak. [43754]

Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): Students will continue to receive payments of maintenance loans for the remainder of the current academic year.

Universities offering good tuition online will continue to charge fees. However, the government has been clear that if universities want to charge full fees, they will have to ensure that good-quality courses are delivered which are fit for purpose and help students progress towards their qualifications.

The government’s clear expectation is that providers should make all reasonable efforts to enable students to complete their studies. If institutions are unable to facilitate adequate online tuition then they should seek to avoid charging students for any additional terms they may need to undergo as a consequence – therefore avoiding effectively charging them twice.

If students are concerned, there is a process in place. They should first raise this with their university. If their concerns are unresolved, students can contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education.

Coronavirus: students in financial difficulty

Owen Thompson (Midlothian): To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, if she will temporarily amend the eligibility criteria for universal credit to allow students who are in financial difficulty as a result of the covid-19 pandemic to claim during the summer 2020. [47363]

Will Quince (Colchester): A condition of entitlement for Universal Credit is that the claimant must not be in education, which excludes most students. Financial support for students comes from the system of educational loans, grants and bursaries designed for their needs. To safeguard fairness Universal Credit does not duplicate the support provided by the student support system. Exceptions are made where students have additional needs that are not met through the student support system.
Students will continue to receive scheduled payments of loans towards their living costs for the remainder of the 2019/20 academic year, which covers the summer period.

Coronavirus: standard of education and course fees

Lord Taylor Of Warwick: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of whether students returning to university in the autumn will be able to receive the same standard of education as would normally be provided, and whether course fees should be reduced. [HL4044]

Baroness Berridge: The government continues to work with the higher education (HE) sector to make sure that all reasonable efforts are being made to enable students to continue their studies to the best of their abilities. The HE sector is already working hard to prepare learning materials for the autumn term.

The government is working with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education, professional bodies and the Office for Students (OfS), the higher education regulator in England, to ensure students continue to leave university with qualifications that have practical value. The OfS has published guidance for registered providers about how it will approach the regulation of quality and standards during the COVID-19 outbreak. This guidance is clear that standards must be maintained: https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/guidance-for-providers-about-quality-and-standards-during-coronavirus-pandemic/. Actions that providers are taking now may continue to be required in the 2020-21 academic year if there is prolonged disruption as a result of the outbreak.

Universities offering high-quality tuition online will continue to charge fees. We only expect full tuition fees to be charged if online courses are of good quality, fit for purpose and help students progress towards their qualification. If universities want to charge full fees they will have to ensure that the quality is there. The government has made it clear that if providers are unable to deliver adequate online teaching then it would be unacceptable for students to be charged for any additional terms, which would effectively mean that they were being charged twice.

Whether an individual student is entitled to a reduction of their fees will depend on specific contractual arrangements between the HE providers and the student. Fee loans are being paid directly to the university at the start of the third term.

If a student is concerned about their education or about the steps that their provider has taken to respond to the situation, they should speak to their HE provider in the first instance. The government expects student complaints and appeals processes to be operated flexibly, accessibly and sympathetically by institutions in order to resolve any concerns. Students who are not satisfied with their provider’s final response can ask the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education to consider their complaint if their institution is based in England or Wales.

Coronavirus: student recruitment on public service focused courses

The Lord Bishop Of Winchester: To ask Her Majesty’s Government what plans they have, if any, to increase the number of students enrolling on courses with a public service focus, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL3912]
Baroness Berridge: On Monday 4 May, my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, announced a package of measures to stabilise university admissions this autumn and to ensure sustainability in higher education at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

My hon. Friend, the Minister of State for Universities, wrote to all hon. Members on 4 May with full details of the package, which have also been published on GOV.UK here.

Controls on student numbers at provider level will be determined based on provider forecasts and will allow for 5% growth above this. My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State for Education, will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places, with 5,000 of those places ringfenced for students studying nursing or allied health courses.

From September 2020, all new and continuing degree-level nursing students and midwifery students - and many allied health students - will receive additional funding of at least £5,000 per academic year, which they will not need to pay back, to help with living costs.

Students are already a priority target audience for our recruitment campaign for teaching, which supports the department’s targets for entry to post-graduate initial teacher training. The marketing campaign is resuming in May and will run through until August for applications to start training in autumn 2020.

The government will continue to support enrolments on social work education programmes through the provision of bursaries and our fast-track graduate entry programmes.

As both my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Our latest guidance on the impact of COVID-19 is set out here:

These are rapidly developing circumstances. We will continue to keep the situation under review and to keep Parliament updated accordingly.

Coronavirus: support for disabled students

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department has taken to ensure that disabled students in (a) further and (b) higher education are able to access (i) home learning and (ii) educational support during the covid-19 outbreak. [43708]

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford): The department is committed to ensuring that all pupils and students, including those who are disabled, are able to learn and access educational support during the COVID-19 outbreak. That is why we have asked educational settings to remain open for pupils and students with an education, health and care (EHC) plan where a risk assessment has determined that their individual needs can be better supported at their educational setting than at home.

For pupils and students who remain at home, while educational settings remain responsible for education provision, we have worked to help provide additional support to disabled pupils and students of all ages and needs.

We have published a list of high quality online educational resources to support home learning, including materials for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND). This includes resources that are suitable for pupils and students with SEND of all ages, from early years to those in further and higher education settings. We will be publishing a second wave of home learning resources within the next few weeks. The initial list of resources can be found here.

In addition, to support the hard work of schools in delivering remote education for disabled pupils, the Oak National Academy launched its SEND Specialist Curriculum on 4 May. This is providing
educational support to disabled children and young people with more profound needs who would normally receive their education in specialist settings. More details are available here.

Furthermore, we have published detailed guidance for parents, teachers and schools on how to best provide educational support at home. This includes specific guidance for parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, which provides links to further specialist home learning resources for disabled pupils and students. Designed to cater to all needs and ages, these links include resources from the Early Years Alliance and TechAbility, a specialist organisation for students in mainstream and specialist further education colleges. More details are available here.

The Office for Students has committed to protecting university students by working with providers to develop practical ways to maintain teaching quality and standards, and enable adequate exams and assessment, including for students who are disabled.

Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department has taken to ensure that disabled pupils in (a) primary and (b) secondary schools are able to access (i) home learning and (ii) educational support during the covid-19 outbreak. [43707]

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford): The department is committed to ensuring that all pupils and students, including those who are disabled, are able to learn and access educational support during the COVID-19 outbreak. That is why we have asked educational settings to remain open for pupils and students with an education, health and care (EHC) plan where a risk assessment has determined that their individual needs can be better supported at their educational setting than at home.

For pupils and students who remain at home, while educational settings remain responsible for education provision, we have worked to help provide additional support to disabled pupils and students of all ages and needs.

We have published a list of high quality online educational resources to support home learning, including materials for children and young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND). This includes resources that are suitable for pupils and students with SEND of all ages, from early years to those in further and higher education settings. We will be publishing a second wave of home learning resources within the next few weeks. The initial list of resources can be found here.

In addition, to support the hard work of schools in delivering remote education for disabled pupils, the Oak National Academy launched its SEND Specialist Curriculum on 4 May. This is providing educational support to disabled children and young people with more profound needs who would normally receive their education in specialist settings. More details are available here.

Furthermore, we have published detailed guidance for parents, teachers and schools on how to best provide educational support at home. This includes specific guidance for parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, which provides links to further specialist home learning resources for disabled pupils and students. Designed to cater to all needs and ages, these links include resources from the Early Years Alliance and TechAbility, a specialist organisation for students in mainstream and specialist further education colleges. More details are available here.

The Office for Students has committed to protecting university students by working with providers to develop practical ways to maintain teaching quality and standards, and enable adequate exams and assessment, including for students who are disabled.

Coronavirus: graduate programmes

Stuart Anderson (Wolverhampton South West): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps he is taking to promote entrepreneurship programmes for 2020 graduates at higher education establishments during the covid-19 outbreak. [42187]
Michelle Donelan (Chippenham): The UK is home to leading universities that generate many of the skills that our economy needs.

The higher education sector plays an important role in teaching a broad range of skills in undergraduate and postgraduate study (for example, in relation to problem solving, analytical thinking, collaboration, teamwork, management and entrepreneurship), which enables millions of people to fulfil their potential. Responsibility for entrepreneurship programme falls to universities as autonomous institutions that set their own curriculum in line with wider regulatory steers and it is for them to determine the support and skills that their graduates need.

There are a range of master's courses available to students that have entrepreneurship on their curriculum. Postgraduate loans are available to eligible students studying for designated master's courses on a part-time or full-time basis.

Coronavirus: apprenticeships

Stephen Farry (North Down): To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what assessment he has made of the potential economic merits of a temporary suspension of the apprenticeship levy during the covid-19 outbreak. [46199]

Kemi Badenoch (Saffron Walden): The apprenticeship levy is an important part of our aim to raise apprenticeship quality, supporting employers to make a long-term, sustainable investment in training. Only the very largest businesses pay the Levy, which requires only those employers with an annual pay bill of £3 million or more to pay 0.5% on the part of their pay bill exceeding this threshold.

For employers operating in England, levy funds are available for them to invest in the training of their apprentices for 24 months. Given that Education and Skills Policy is devolved, the arrangements for apprenticeship funding elsewhere in the UK are the responsibility of the devolved administrations.

Where apprentices are furloughed, they can continue to train for their apprenticeship as long as it does not provide services to or generate revenue for their employer.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Education what assessment he has made of the effect of the covid-19 outbreak on apprenticeships; and what guidance has been issued to those that employ apprentices where the apprentice can no longer undertake their work or studies due to that outbreak. [43903]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): We continue to closely monitor the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on apprenticeships. We know that social distancing measures have created some challenges for apprentices, employers, training providers and assessment organisations.

We have introduced a number of flexibilities, which remain in place, so apprentices can continue learning and complete their apprenticeships, including promoting the remote delivery of training and assessment and allowing apprentices who have been furloughed to continue their off-the-job training.

The government has announced steps to allow workers, including apprentices, to begin returning to work where it is safe to do so, and in line with the safer working guidance here. Employers, providers and apprentices should continue to mutually agree where and how training takes place.

Where it is not possible to continue training or assessment due to COVID-19, we have enabled apprentices, employers and providers to initiate a break in learning, to ensure that apprentices can continue and complete their apprenticeships when it is possible to do so.

Our latest guidance on the support available for apprentices, employers and training providers is set out below:
We continue to keep this guidance under review.

**Lord Storey**: To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the number of young people losing apprenticeship opportunities due to the current crisis; and what plans they have to provide access to high-quality and independent advice and guidance for such young people. [HL3637]

**Baroness Berridge**: We have introduced flexibilities to make it easier for apprentices of all ages to continue to benefit from the high-quality training that an apprenticeship provides. We are encouraging providers and assessment organisations to deliver training and assessments remotely and are keen that providers remain open for business to support learners.

Furloughed apprentices can continue to train and undertake end point assessments ensuring they can continue to progress in their careers. Where it is not possible to continue training, employers and providers can now initiate a break in learning so that the apprenticeship can resume when possible. We are pleased that 81% of apprentices have been able to continue with their studies.

We are also supporting employers and training providers during this challenging time so that people can continue to access high-quality apprenticeship opportunities. Employers can still recruit and start apprentices and eligible furloughed employees can also start apprenticeships.


People of all ages can also use Find an Apprenticeship to search for new apprenticeship opportunities here.

The National Careers Service will continue to provide high-quality, impartial careers information, advice, and guidance to young people at this difficult time via its helpline, website and web chat facility. The Careers & Enterprise Company will also continue to support schools and colleges, where possible, to provide young people with quality careers education and guidance.

**Lord Watson Of Invergowrie**: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that apprentices who have deferred, or taken a break in their studies, because of the COVID-19 pandemic can continue once the lockdown is lifted. [HL3933]

**Baroness Berridge**: We have introduced flexibilities to make it easier for apprentices of all ages to continue to benefit from the high-quality training that an apprenticeship provides. This includes apprentices who are furloughed, who can continue to train and undertake end point assessments, and also start apprenticeships where eligible. We are encouraging providers and assessment organisations to deliver training, assessment and support for apprentices remotely wherever possible.

Where it is not possible to continue training or assessment due to COVID-19, we have enabled apprentices, employers and providers to initiate a break in learning to ensure that apprentices can continue and complete their apprenticeships when it is possible to do so. We have also introduced flexibilities to enable apprentices to complete their apprenticeship in the event of disruption to assessment. Apprentices ready for assessment, but who cannot be assessed due to COVID-19 issues, can now have their end-point assessment rescheduled.

Further guidance for employers and training providers is available here.
Lord Watson Of Invergowrie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to support the long-term viability of apprenticeship providers, in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL3931]

Baroness Berridge: As both my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Training providers have in many cases developed effective online learning resources which enables them to retain their apprentices on programme so they can continue developing new skills, which will be vital for our economic recovery. At the same time training providers also have access to the comprehensive range of business support measures announced by HM Treasury. In addition, on 24 April 2020, the Education and Skills Funding Agency launched a Provider Relief Scheme which will put in place short term financial measures to support eligible training providers’ cash flow based on an assessment of need. This will enable us to retain capacity within the apprenticeships and adult education sector to deliver the skills we will need to support economic recovery post-outbreak. The relief scheme will also enable training providers who are eligible for support to maintain delivery to and support for existing apprentices, learners and employers whilst enabling new apprentices and learners to enrol as soon as it is safe to do so.

Additionally, to ensure that providers are able to continue to deliver quality apprenticeships and maintain their income throughout the disruption, we have made significant changes to some aspects of our funding rules, offering immediate solutions to the problems being faced.

Our latest guidance on working with apprentices in the current environment is set out here: 

These are rapidly developing circumstances; we continue to keep the situation under review and I will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

Lord Watson Of Invergowrie: To ask Her Majesty's Government what plans they have, if any, to review the current rules for apprenticeships, which require those who have been made redundant to find another job within 12 weeks in order to continue their apprenticeship. [HL3934]

Baroness Berridge: Our ambition remains for any apprentice facing redundancy to be supported to find alternative employment and continue their apprenticeship as quickly as possible and within 12 weeks.

We fund an apprentice’s training to completion if they have 6 months or less of their apprenticeship remaining at the point at which they are made redundant.

Apprentices need to be able to apply their off-the-job training to a workplace environment, so it is important that apprentices remain in work relevant to their apprenticeship.

Substantial support for businesses, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme, is intended to enable people to remain in employment and reduce redundancies.

Should COVID-19 lead to redundancies, we will endeavour to provide comprehensive, practical support to ensure that apprenticeships can continue.

Lord Taylor Of Warwick: To ask Her Majesty's Government what discussions they have had with Universities UK about the number of universities who have furloughed academic personnel. [HL4043]
Baroness Berridge: As both my right hon. Friends, the Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer have made clear, the government will do whatever it takes to support people affected by COVID-19.

Since my right hon. Friend, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, announced this government’s unprecedented package of support to help keep staff employed and support businesses, the department has developed guidance for higher education providers so that they are aware of the support that is available to them and may confidently apply for it.

That guidance is available here:

In developing this guidance, the department worked with trade unions as well as Universities UK (UUK) and the Universities & Colleges Employers Association (UCEA). The department is working with HMRC and HM Treasury to develop appropriate monitoring arrangements for the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (CJRS).

Lord Watson Of Invergowrie: To ask Her Majesty’s Government what assessment they have made of the role that apprenticeships will play in supporting (1) the economy, and (2) people to gain the skills they need, after the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL3932]

Baroness Berridge: Apprenticeships will play an important role in supporting economic recovery. They provide individuals with a valuable route into employment, a boost to their career, and enable employers to build the skilled workforce they need to recover and grow.

There are now over 530 high-quality, employer-designed apprenticeship standards to equip individuals with the transferable skills, knowledge and behaviours that employers want.

We are actively supporting apprentices, employers and training providers during this challenging time, and have introduced a number of flexibilities so apprentices can continue learning and complete their apprenticeships. We are promoting the remote delivery of training and assessment, and eligible furloughed employees can continue or start new apprenticeships.

We continue to work closely with employers, providers and apprentices to ensure high-quality apprenticeships support businesses to recover and thrive by equipping them with the skills they need for the future.

Coronavirus: converting poor performing universities to vocational training colleges

Lord Blencathra: To ask Her Majesty's Government what consideration they have given to converting the 30 poorest-performing universities to vocational training colleges following the COVID-19 pandemic. [HL3942]

Baroness Berridge: The Office for Students (OfS) has made it clear that all higher education providers must continue to meet conditions related to the quality of their courses and the standard of qualifications they award. This means ensuring that courses are high quality, students are supported and achieve good outcomes, and standards are protected. If providers breach those conditions the OfS has powers to impose a range of sanctions, potentially culminating in deregistration and the loss of university status.

Visa applications
Emma Hardy (Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, how many Tier 4 visa applications have (a) been made and (b) been successful in (i) January 2019, (ii) January 2020, (iii) February 2019, (iv) February 2020, (v) March 2019, (vi) March 2020, (vii) April 2019 and (viii) April 2020. [43144]

Kevin Foster (Torbay): The most recently published transparency data in February 2020 includes data up to the end of December 2019, so we are unable to provide any published data for 2020.

For the 2019 statistics requested, please see the table below.

Study Applications
Q1 2019 4,674 In-Country
Q1 2019 14,692 Entry Clearance
Q1 2019 19,366 Total Study Intake

This data is taken from the In-Country Migration Data and International Operations Transparency Data published in August 2019.

The published data does not include grant rates, for this specific cohort of applications, however the table below does show the number of cases granted in this period.

Study Approvals
Q1 2019 5,438 In Country
Q1 2019 16,099 Entry Clearance
Q1 2019 19,366 Total Study Intake

Adult Education

Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what recent assessment his Department has made of the (a) social and (b) economic effect of residential adult education colleges on local communities. [45224]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): To help manage the pressures of COVID-19, we can confirm that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) will continue to pay grant funded providers, including residential adult colleges, their scheduled monthly profiled payments for the remainder of the 2019/20 funding year. And for 2019/20 only, the ESFA will not carry out the final reconciliation for grant funded providers in receipt of ESFA funded adult education budget (AEB) and the advanced learner loans bursary (ALLB) fund, subject to them meeting certain conditions set out in the further education (FE) Operational Guidance on maintaining education and skills training provision, published on 23 March 2020.

The ESFA also confirmed in March 2020 the AEB provider allocations for 2020/21 for providers, including residential adult colleges. Advanced learner loans facilities and the associated bursary fund for the 2020/21 academic year will be issued later this month.

The government appreciates the importance of adult education to improving people’s life chances. We are currently reviewing funding for Residential Specialist Designated Institutions, focusing on the residential support for learners funded via the AEB and the ALLB. We will complete this review in autumn 2020.

We are also looking carefully at all elements of FE funding in preparation for the forthcoming Spending Review.
Dan Jarvis (Barnsley Central): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what steps his Department is taking to maintain the level of funding for residential adult education colleges. [45223]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): To help manage the pressures of COVID-19, we can confirm that the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) will continue to pay grant funded providers, including residential adult colleges, their scheduled monthly profiled payments for the remainder of the 2019/20 funding year. And for 2019/20 only, the ESFA will not carry out the final reconciliation for grant funded providers in receipt of ESFA funded adult education budget (AEB) and the advanced learner loans bursary (ALLB) fund, subject to them meeting certain conditions set out in the further education (FE) Operational Guidance on maintaining education and skills training provision, published on 23 March 2020.

The ESFA also confirmed in March 2020 the AEB provider allocations for 2020/21 for providers, including residential adult colleges. Advanced learner loans facilities and the associated bursary fund for the 2020/21 academic year will be issued later this month.

The government appreciates the importance of adult education to improving people’s life chances. We are currently reviewing funding for Residential Specialist Designated Institutions, focusing on the residential support for learners funded via the AEB and the ALLB. We will complete this review in autumn 2020.

We are also looking carefully at all elements of FE funding in preparation for the forthcoming Spending Review.

University Technical Colleges

Karl McCartney (Lincoln): To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what assessment he has made of how the specialisms taught at University Technical Colleges can support the (a) skills needs of employers and (b) UK’s economic recovery after the covid-19 outbreak. [41998]

Gillian Keegan (Chichester): University Technical Colleges (UTCs) are well positioned to support the skills needs of local economies, placing employers at the heart of designing their specialist curriculum, mostly in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) subjects such as engineering and digital technologies. There are over 500 employers involved in the 48 open UTCs, including leading names such as JCB, Network Rail, Toyota, Siemens and the Royal Navy, helping to create 30,000 opportunities for young people to train as the engineers, technicians and scientists of the future.

UTCs will continue to play a role in building the skills capabilities the country needs now and in the future following COVID-19. An immediate focus for UTCs will be to help this year’s leavers use and build on their technical skills through becoming apprentices, as well as other paths to employment including progression to universities, or going straight into technical jobs.

Our latest guidance for schools and other educational settings is set out here.

These are rapidly developing circumstances; we continue to keep the situation under review and will keep Parliament updated accordingly.

Independent higher education provider registration

Baroness Randerson: To ask Her Majesty's Government why the registration process for independent higher education providers has been suspended by the Office for Students; and when they plan to recommence registrations. [HL4015]
Baroness Berridge: The registration process for higher education providers is managed by the Office for Students (OfS), the independent regulator of higher education in England.

Due to the outbreak of COVID-19 and the current unprecedented circumstances, the OfS has decided to suspend new registration applications. This is due to a reprioritisation of resources that enables the OfS to focus on urgent COVID-19 response work.

The OfS is responsible for deciding when to resume new registrations and will do so as soon as circumstances allow. The OfS is continuing to process applications already submitted for both registration and degree awarding powers and has offered to discuss with individual potential providers wherever there might be exceptional circumstances.

Sector News

Ofqual blog and guidance: advice for schools and colleges on making grades fair

On Friday 15 May, ahead of the publication of the outcome of their consultation on awarding GCSEs and A-levels, Ofqual published a blog which offers advice on what schools and colleges should be doing to make sure the grades they award are as fair as possible. The blog offers advice for teachers in response to concerns voiced about different levels of generosity in grading in different centres. It also addresses issues around objectivity and fairness in centre grades and offers advice about quality assurance.

In addition to the blog, Ofqual have published new guidance on grading objectively for heads of centres. The guidance highlights the importance of objectivity on grading and ranking, and the potential for unconscious bias. It also offers advice on using data on previous years to establish if there have been occurrences of systematic under- or over-prediction for different groups.

Find the blog here and the guidance here.

OfS publishes case studies of student support from universities

On Friday 15 May, the OfS published two sets of case studies to further support universities to share practice. The case studies offer detailed examples of the ways different universities have supported students on student accommodation and on mental health.

Find case studies on student accommodation here and mental health here.

Open letter from Emma Hardy, Shadow Universities Minister, to the Universities Minister

On Friday 15 May, the Shadow Universities Minister, Emma Hardy, wrote an open letter to Michelle Donelan, Universities Minister. The letter refers to regular and continued dialogue between the minister but notes a growing concern that there isn’t enough financial support available for students who need it, referencing crowdfunding appeals by some universities that have been launched to raise money for hardship funds. The letter further emphasises that it will be those students that have faced barriers to get to university who will likely be most in need of these funds and urges government help for these students who are unable to access other support, such as Universal Credit.

You can find the letter here.
New Guidance from QAA

QAA have published several new sets of guidance on their Covid-19 web pages today. Newly published resources include:

- The effect of Covid-19 on the outcomes of graduates (see dropdown)
- Changes to exceptional guidance for student and student alternatives in the 19/20 collections
- A helpful guide focusing on resources relating to the admission of new students during the COVID-19 pandemic, and delivering effective transitions, into HE or graduation.

All-Party Parliamentary Universities Group meeting

On Wednesday 20 May the Universities APPG welcomed the Universities Minister Michelle Donelan to speak. The Minister outlined the government’s financial sustainability package for the sector then fielded questions from MPs and vice-chancellors on a range of topics including student welfare, admissions, research and the sector’s role in the recovery from Covid-19.

Department for Education guidance on collecting belongings from student accommodation in England

On Thursday 21 May, the Department for Education updated its guidance on ‘actions for HE providers during the coronavirus outbreak’ to include guidance for collecting belongings from student accommodation.

The guidance notes that, within England, students are now permitted to travel back to student accommodation to collect their belongings and providers are encouraged to enable students to do so in a way that minimises the risk of infection. It recommends that providers first contact students and advise them on the procedure they should follow to make sure they collect items in a safe and managed way. It also makes recommendations for those unable to collect their belongings, suggesting that possessions may be stored for later collection.

The Department for Education has also updated its FAQ for students with details for students (rather than providers) wishing to collect their belongings.

You can read the updated guidance for institutions here and the FAQs for students here.