

Covid-19 Briefing Note 1 –

SUMMARY OF KEY ANNOUNCEMENTS AND PUBLICATIONS RELATING TO THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR AND COVID-19

29 May 2020

GuildHE is an officially recognised representative body for UK Higher Education. Our members include universities, university colleges, further education colleges and specialist institutions from both the traditional and private sectors. Member institutions include some major providers in professional subject areas including art, design and media, music and the performing arts; agriculture and food; law; business and finance; education; health and sports.

Overview

This briefing brings together the key announcements from government, regulators and other bodies that relate specifically to higher education and the coronavirus pandemic.

The detail of three announcements are set out in the body of this briefing, together with links to over 40 other briefing and guidance documents which have been made available since the start of the pandemic. Subsequent thematic briefings will analyse the implications of these announcements.

This briefing seeks to serve as a “one-stop-shop” to identify the key advice that has been published to date (and will continue to be updated).

1. DfE Government support package for universities and students (4 May 2020)

Full transcript of the announcement:

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

This announcement was made in response to the letter of support submitted by UUK to the Treasury.

- Temporary **cap of 5% increase** for domestic and EU **recruitment** compared to the forecasts that were submitted to the OfS (NB, not 5%+ compared to last year, but 5%+ to forecast)
- UCAS to implement their “**Enhanced clearing**” process (matching)
- Already earmarked **Quality Research (QR) funding of £100m** brought forward
- **Tuition fee money** that is usually paid in 3 instalments (25% December, 25% March, 50% June) will now be paid in 2 (50% December and 50% June). This brings forward 25% of income from March 2020 to December 2020.

This builds on an [initial letter from Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan to providers](#) which was published on 27th March 2020 which has sections on:

- Students in **residence in halls** in England (students should remain where they are)
- **Student finance** (term 3 instalment will be paid)
- **Visas** (no one will be considered “overstaying” due to pandemic)
- **Exchanges** (advise against all non-essential travel for initial period of 30 days)
- **Regulatory Framework** (OfS revised approach, REF delay, TEF delay)
- **Finals** (OfS to issue guidance)
- Support for **staff** (promote wellbeing, expect staff to be supported as normal, eligibility for Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme)

Analysis of the government support

The Government’s **package is predicated on higher education facing a liquidity challenge, whereas the sector is confronted by a solvency problem**. This means that the entire package is

© GuildHE (This information may be freely used and copied for noncommercial purposes, provided that the source is acknowledged).

dependent upon continued student demand with limited supply side support, unless requested by specific providers.

The mechanisms in place to curb competition – the one-year cap on home undergraduate intake and new regulatory condition – could be insufficient in stabilising recruitment across the whole sector. There will be “winners and losers”. Particularly as larger multi-faculty and research intensive institutions remain financially exposed, they will still rely on domestic students, and this will have implications for the entire sector. This will likely incentivise more aggressive competition for student numbers, accelerating what has of course been steadily increasing since the removal of the cap.

The number of unanswered questions means precise forecasting remains very difficult for providers. Therefore any models or forecasts which have been published are being studied closely.

2. Our Plan to Rebuild – The UK Government’s Covid-19 Recovery Strategy (11 May 2020)

Link to the full strategy -

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/884760/Our_plan_to_rebuild_The_UK_Government_s_COVID-19_recovery_strategy.pdf

On 11th May, following a televised address the government has announced plans to measure the threat from Covid-19 in England, with a new five-level, colour-coded alert system.

Stage of outbreak	Measures in place
Risk of healthcare services being overwhelmed	5 Lockdown begins
Transmission is high or rising exponentially	4 Social distancing continues
Virus is in general circulation	3 Gradual relaxation of restrictions
Number of cases and transmission is low	2 Minimal social distancing, enhanced tracing
Covid-19 no longer present in UK	1 Routine international monitoring

- Level 1** COVID-19 is not known to be present in the UK
- Level 2** COVID-19 is present in the UK, but the number of cases and transmission is low
- Level 3** A COVID-19 epidemic is in general circulation
- Level 4** A COVID-19 epidemic is in general circulation; transmission is high or rising exponentially
- Level 5** As level 4 and there is a material risk of healthcare services being overwhelmed

The national strategy is intended to set the UK on a roadmap to begin to return the UK toward re-opening key services, helping to support the economy whilst balancing the risk of any increase to the R rate of infection.

The strategy does not make a single reference to the higher education sector (apart from three references to the work of Oxford University in helping to develop a vaccine). Whilst the references to education relate to schools and further education only, this does give us some indication that HE is some way off government thinking at present. There is no mention of students or even libraries either. The section on **international travel** (page 29) sets out a new requirement for new arrivals in the UK from 13 May to supply contact and accommodation information such that they will be able to self-isolate for two weeks. The new requirement will be “kept under regular review”. Whilst we can reasonably assume this will apply to international students arriving in the country, or indeed domestic students returning from a period abroad, it is unclear how long this requirement will remain in place for.

Separately the **Scottish Government have published Scotland’s route map** through and out of the Covid-19 crisis:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/pages/4/>

3. Statement from the Universities Minister Michelle Donelan in Parliament (13 May 2020)

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.

Universities offering high-quality tuition online will continue to charge fees. Fee loans are paid directly to higher education providers at the start of the third term. We are working closely with sector representative bodies to understand the impact of COVID-19 and the immediate financial implications for students and providers.

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.

The government is also 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 that students continue to leave university with qualifications of 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 (further details are available at the following link): <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 COVID-19 outbreak.

It is important that students receive a good standard of education. 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.

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 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.

Other announcements and guidance (relevant to higher education)

Treasury – Financial support for businesses during coronavirus (3 April 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/financial-support-for-businesses-during-coronavirus-covid-19>

HMRC – Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (26 March 2020)

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>

BUFDG – Explanation on the Job Retention Scheme (20 May 2020)

<https://www.bufdg.ac.uk/Resources/News/View?q=bbc15660-9a14-4789-9cf2-ba0ef07307e3&t=Updates%20to%20the%20BUFDG%20JRS%20document>

The Office for Students have so far produced 16 publications and letters relating to coronavirus

[Student guide to coronavirus](#) (ongoing)

[Students without family support](#) (14 May 2020)

[Prevent monitoring during coronavirus pandemic](#) (7 May 2020)

[Implications of the coronavirus pandemic for OfS funding](#) (6 May 2020)

[Consultation on the integrity and stability of English HE](#) (4 May 2020)

[Supporting student mental health](#) (30 April 2020)

[Student accommodation](#) (22 April 2020)

[Further extension to moratorium on unconditional offer making](#) (18 April 2020)

[Coronavirus: update on support and information](#) (14 April 2020)
[Moratorium on unconditional offer making](#) (3 April 2020)
[Guidance for providers on quality and standards during coronavirus pandemic](#) (3 April 2020)
[Project monitoring update from OfS](#) (2 April 2020)
[Letter from the Minister of State](#) (27 March 2020)
[Uni Connect update from OfS](#) (26 March 2020)
[Regulatory requirements during the pandemic](#) (25 March 2020)
[Update from the Office for Students on coronavirus](#) (17 March 2020)

Scottish Government – Scotland’s route out of the Covid-19 crisis (20 May 2020):

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-framework-decision-making-scotlands-route-map-through-out-crisis/pages/4/>

Communications from the Scottish Funding Council on coronavirus

<http://www.sfc.ac.uk/COVID-19/COVID-19.aspx>

UUK Requested package of measures proposed to enable universities to play critical role in rebuilding the nation (10 April 2020):

Overview - <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Package-of-measures-proposed-to-enable-universities-to-play-a-critical-role-in-rebuilding-the-nation-.aspx>

Letter - https://universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Documents/uuk_achieving-stability-higher-education-april-2020.pdf

UUK Response to Government package (4 May 2020):

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/UUK-response-to-government-announcement-on-support-package-for-universities.aspx>

UUK Actions being taken by universities in response to coronavirus (13 March 2020):

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Actions-being-taken-by-universities-in-response-to-coronavirus-.aspx>

UUK and UCAS Open Letter to applicants (20 March 2020):

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Update-from-UCAS-and-Universities-UK-.aspx>

GuildHE What might the new normal be like? (1 May 2020):

<https://guildhe.ac.uk/what-might-the-new-normal-look-like/>

Ofqual Guidance – How GCSEs & A Levels will be awarded in Summer 2020 (3 April 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/how-gcse-as-a-levels-will-be-awarded-in-summer-2020>

Ofqual Guidance – Awarding Vocational and Technical qualifications this summer (9 April 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/awarding-vocational-and-technical-qualifications-this-summer>

Ofqual Consultation – Views on GCSE and A Level grading proposals for 2020 (15 April 2020):

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-seeks-views-on-gcse-and-a-level-grading-proposals-for-2020>

UCU and London Economics –

[Financial modelling of impact of coronavirus](#) (23 April 2020):

[Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on university deferral and student switching](#) (20 May 2020)

QAA Covid-19 Support and Guidance –

[Admissions and transitions: information and resources](#) (20 May 2020)

[Resources for students' union officers](#) (20 May 2020)

[Perspectives on transnational education during Covid-19](#) (20 May 2020)

[Work based learning](#) (8 April 2020)

[Accelerated degrees](#) (8 April 2020)

[Securing academic standards and supporting student achievement](#) (7 April 2020)

[Practice and lab based assessment](#) (7 April 2020)

[Initial guidance for providers on standards and quality](#) (23 March 2020)

[Advice to degree awarding bodies on mitigating the disruption to students](#) (20 March 2020)

QAA Scotland Technology Enhanced Learning resources

<https://www.qaa.ac.uk/scotland/focus-on/technology-enhanced-learning>

Advance HE Resources in relation to Covid-19

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/resources-support-you-during-covid-19-pandemic>

Advance HE Project to tackle the challenge of socially distanced campuses

<https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/consultancy-and-enhancement-services/creating-socially-distanced-campuses-and-education-project>

UCEA Coronavirus links to information and resources

<https://www.ucea.ac.uk/library/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-links-to-information-and-resources/>

NUS Request for “No Detriment” (7 April 2020):

<https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/press-releases/national-approach-needed-to-exams-assessment-and-no-detriment-policies-says-nus-/?load=5&top=510>

UUK Response (14 April) - <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Universities-UK-response-to-NUS-letter-calling-for-no-detriment-exam-policy.aspx>

NUS Demands for student renters – [open letter](#) to providers of student accommodation

[Reply](#) from UUK -

Association of University Directors of Estates coronavirus resources:

<https://www.aude.ac.uk/Resources/News/View?q=73da95b8-b679-4fe3-84d2-bddde59a7f51&m=4&y=2020&t=Coronavirus%20resources>

Society of Occupational Medicine [toolkit on returning to the work place](#)