



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

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10<sup>th</sup> May 2021

Dear Students,

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your continued resilience and co-operation throughout this challenging time. I am fully aware of the stress and frustration you may have felt this year at being unable to return to your university for in-person teaching due to the disruptions caused by the pandemic.

In April, the Government announced that all students on non-practical courses would be able to return to in-person teaching alongside Step 3 of the Roadmap, when restrictions on social contact will be eased further and the majority of indoor settings can reopen. Following the latest review of the data against the Government's four tests, I am delighted to confirm that from 17<sup>th</sup> May there will no longer be any restrictions on the in-person teaching of students on non-practical courses. Whilst I understand that many universities have now entered periods of assessment and that opportunities for timetabled in-person teaching may be limited for the rest of this academic year, I hope that this easing of restrictions will provide a chance for you to get involved in cocurricular and other on-campus activities before the end of term and enable you to have the option of engaging with your academic tutors in-person. HE providers have been planning a range of activities for you to engage with which could include in-person career support, society events as well as other social student experiences that have had to remain remote up until now.

I fully appreciate that many of you have faced financial difficulty due to the delay in being able to return to in-person teaching. When I last wrote to you, I advised you that we were making a further £15m in hardship funding available, bringing the total for this academic year to £85m. Should you need to, please continue to seek this support from your institutions. I also understand that your mental health and wellbeing may have been impacted during the course of the pandemic. Please know that this is always a key priority for me, and I am continuing to work with my colleagues and your institutions to ensure on-going support is available. I encourage you to engage with your provider's welfare services and resources such as [Student Space](#), which is a dedicated platform for students, funded by the Office for Students. You can also access support through the [NHS urgent mental health helplines](#) and from [Every Mind Matters](#).

Now that you are able to return to in-person activities on campus, it is more important than ever to get regular Covid tests and to follow the national restrictions in place. One in three people with COVID-19 do not experience any symptoms and may be spreading the virus without knowing. Regular testing is crucial to combat this and help prevent outbreaks. Everyone across the country is being strongly encouraged to participate in twice weekly asymptomatic testing.

This is particularly important for you as you may be travelling to another region for university and will be mixing with new people as restrictions begin to relax. We want to ensure the return to university is as positive as possible and avoid new outbreaks that require the self-isolation of students.

You should take a test before travelling back to university, either through your local community testing programme or by [ordering a home test online](#) via the Universal Rapid Testing Offer. On arrival at university, you should then take three tests (3-4 days apart) at an on-site testing facility where this is available. All students should then test twice a week, either using home test kits or at an on-site testing facility. Where it is not convenient to access tests through your university provider, you can order tests online through the Universal Rapid Testing Offer. Alongside the rollout of the vaccine, regular testing is going to be an essential part of the easing of restrictions as it will help us quickly suppress the spread of variants.

It is really important that you report the results of any home tests straight away whether void, positive or negative at <https://www.gov.uk/report-covid19-result>. When reporting your results, remember to identify yourself as a student and state which university you attend. Recording all results helps us get a better understanding of the spread of the virus across the country. If we only record positive results, the level of COVID-19 cases will look worse than they really are. Scientists use the information to spot patterns and outbreaks more quickly and accurately; helping reduce the risk of future lockdowns.

We are aware that those of you graduating this year will have had fewer opportunities to gain work experience (fewer internships, placements, part time jobs) and participate in extra-curricular activities, experiences that traditionally help students develop employability skills. My Department has worked with Universities UK, the Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (AGCAS), the Institute of Student Employers, the Office for Students (OfS) and across the sector to understand what more we can do to support graduates who are looking to enter the labour market or continue their studies at this challenging time. As a result, we have developed the [Graduate Employment and Skills Guide](#), which signposts you to public, private, and voluntary sector opportunities, to help you build employability skills and gain work experience or enter the labour market. The Guide also links to further study options and resources on graduate mental health and wellbeing.

The Department is also working closely with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), professional bodies and the OfS to ensure students continue to leave university with qualifications that have real value, reflect their hard work and allow people to progress. Our message to employers is that standards have been maintained and that the qualifications awarded will be of the same academic standard as in previous years. As a student cohort, you have responded to the pandemic with formidable resilience and motivation and have shown a clear ability to adapt and learn at pace. As a result of online learning and teaching, you have also developed excellent digital and remote working skills and will be well equipped for future ways of working. Employers from across different industries have agreed, assuring that they are confident that the skills you have developed this year will be hugely beneficial as you move into the world of work, even though you may not even have realised you were developing them.

I am very grateful for your efforts during these challenging times, and I hope this information is useful. As ever, please be assured that I will continue to work with your institutions and advocate for your education, future prospects and mental health and wellbeing.

Yours sincerely,

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

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