



INDEPENDENT  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION

# Covid-19 Update: 23 March

*Joy Elliott-Bowman & Megan Wells*  
*Independent Higher Education*



# Covid-19 Hub

23 March

- Independent HE COVID-19 information hub:
  - <http://independenthe.com/activities/covid-19-hub>
- 19<sup>th</sup> March 2020 - Covid-19 Update from Tier 4 network:
  - <https://attendee.gotowebinar.com/recording/6575421887881583107>
- IHE FAQ developed through drop-ins
- IHE member webinars:
  - Thank you ThinkSpace
  - Invitations to members to share practice
    - [Megan@independenthe.com](mailto:Megan@independenthe.com)



## Department for Education: accommodation

23 March

- Students in halls of residence (provider owned or private) who develop symptoms should self-isolate in their current accommodation for 7 days. Providers should offer their support to facilitate this if possible.
- Students should only return home if possible not by public transport.
- Students living in privately owned halls should contact the manager of their accommodation to advise them of their plans
  - Recommend that IHE members with contracts with privately owned halls should seek to make plans in collaboration
- Note special advice for providers of under 18s in further education sector to support students to self-isolate
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-on-isolation-for-residential-educational-settings>



## Department for Education: travel advice

23 March

- Schools closed for all pupils apart from those whose parents are key workers
- Info for Erasmus+ students and UK students and staff already studying or working overseas: prepare for travel lockdown and inform home institution
- Education travel information now in line with FCO and social distancing advice – under 18s  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-advice-for-educational-settings/coronavirus-travel-guidance-for-educational-settings>



# Department for Education: entry qualifications

23 March

- GCSEs, AS and A Levels have been cancelled by the Education Secretary – what does this mean for HE providers?
- Calculate grade from predicted grade, teacher assessment and prior attainment. Calculated grade will be the formal grade used for FE and HE entry.
- Ofqual will develop and set out a process that will provide a calculated grade to each student which reflects their performance as fairly as possible
- Advice is to be flexible on admissions but not to start making new unconditional offers.
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-of-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-2020/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-of-gcses-as-and-a-levels-in-2020>



# Sector Response: entry qualifications

23 March

- OfS response to exam situation
  - <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/ofs-responds-to-further-details-on-grading-following-cancelled-exams/>
- UCAS and Universities UK have written a open letter to all applicants through UCAS on the arrangements of grades for this year's admissions cycle.
  - <https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/news/Pages/Update-from-UCAS-and-Universities-UK-.aspx>
- **A message from the Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan:**  
“We want to assure students that grades will be equally as valid as those in previous years, and their hard work will be rewarded and fairly recognised. There is no reason for the usual admissions cycle to be disrupted.”
- Discover Uni
  - <https://discoveruni.gov.uk/corona-covid-19-information/>



# HM Treasury: economic response

23 March

- Coronavirus job retention scheme
  - All UK employers will be able to access support to continue paying part of their employee's salaries for those who would have otherwise been laid off due to the virus.
  - Up to 80% of wage costs with a cap of £2,500 a month
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-announces-workers-support-package>
- Coronavirus Business Interruption Loan Scheme starting up today.
- [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/873676/Covid-19\\_fact\\_sheet\\_18\\_March.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/873676/Covid-19_fact_sheet_18_March.pdf)
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-business-support-to-launch-from-today>
- People unable to work for more than seven days because of Covid-19 can obtain an isolation note through a new online service. <https://111.nhs.uk/covid-19>



# BEIS: intel request

23 March

- The Government is closely monitoring developments in relation to potential economic impacts on the UK economy and individual businesses and supply chain. We welcome information from businesses on:
- The impacts across supply, demand and labour markets
- Actions being taken by firms to address these impacts
- Any gaps in the Government response from your perspective
- Please send your intelligence to [intel@beis.gov.uk](mailto:intel@beis.gov.uk). We are aware that individual company information may be commercially sensitive, and it will be treated accordingly. Please note that this inbox is only for receiving intelligence only and does not provide business advice.



QAA

23 March

- IHE has been in conversations with QAA about quality concerns
- Over the coming days and weeks they will be providing:
  - advice for institutions about **changes to ongoing and scheduled review processes**, which we are developing in dialogue with funding bodies and regulators across the UK
  - publicly-available guidance on **maintaining quality and standards in the immediate context**
  - publicly-available guidance on **mitigating the impact on assessment, progression and graduation in coming academic years**
  - **regular webinars to support the sector** on specific areas relating to these.
- This will be available to both QAA members and non-members
- QAA has set up a task group to assess quality of HE in this time



JISC

23 March

- Full set of links (covered last week in Guy's webinar) can be found on the JISC coronavirus hub.
- <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/coronavirus>



# HESA

23 March

- HESA have put an update out with Coronavirus related content.
- Graduate Outcomes will continue as normal throughout this time including current collection of survey responses for cohort B graduates.
- Helpdesk liaison team to offering support via a new number **+44 (0) 1242 388 531** or [\*\*liaison@hesa.ac.uk\*\*](mailto:liaison@hesa.ac.uk)
- <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/news/coronavirus>



UCAS

23 March

- UCAS have brought together resources for students, advisers and providers on the admissions related Covid-19 implications.
- <https://www.ucas.com/providers/coronavirus-update>
- Includes information on the exam announcements of all four nations, as well as impact on international qualifications
- Updated information on UCAS events cancelled.



# Things you should have received

23 March

- Letter from Nicola Dandridge, 17 March - <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/letter-from-the-office-for-students-on-coronavirus/>
- Letter from Minister Donelan, 20 March



# IHE Representation

23 March

- Office for Students
  - Meeting on quality assurance
  - Admissions processes
  - UUK, IHE, AOC work on partnerships
  - All consultations postponed
  - Mental Health bid postponed
- Home Office
  - Lobby for clear guidance released as soon as possible
  - Changes to attendance monitoring
  - SELTS, extensions in country
- Department for Education
  - Support for providers
  - Planning – international students admissions
- QAA
  - Information available to non-members
- UCAS
  - Statement on changes to admissions



# IHE Survey

23 March

- IHE to launch survey of all independent higher education providers to:
  - Better understand issues
  - Support lobby of government
  - Support actions of government and regulatory bodies
- Survey responses will be kept anonymous unless you give us your full permission to share.



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# Covid-19 Update: 25 March

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# Coronavirus Bill

25 March

- The Coronavirus Bill is currently going through the House of Lords after passing the Commons earlier this week. Key aims of the Bill are to:
  - Ease the burden on frontline staff and mitigating impact of staff shortages
  - Containing and slowing the spread of the virus (border control, childcare provisions, powers regarding public gatherings and premises)
  - Economic support (including protecting tenants, food supply, SSP)
  - Postponing elections
  - Exercise of powers and parliamentary scrutiny
  - Procedures for making regulations
- <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/explainers/coronavirus-bill>



# Department for Education: FE & Apprenticeships

25 March

- DfE has published further guidance for maintaining further education provision
  - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-maintaining-further-education-provision/maintaining-education-and-skills-training-provision-further-education-providers>
- They also have information for apprenticeship training providers including that Employers and training providers can now, temporarily, also report and initiate a break in learning where the interruption to learning is greater than 4 weeks.
  - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-apprenticeship-programme-response>



## BEIS: Support for business

25 March

- Commercial insurance – guidance has been published about commercial insurance and what you can access depending on your coverage.
  - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses#commercial-insurance>
- Confirmation that commercial tenants who cannot pay their rent due to Covid-19 will be protected from eviction.
  - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-and-businesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses#protection-from-eviction-for-commercial-tenants>



# UKRI & Research England

25 March

- Minister for Science, Research and Innovation has written to Vice-Chancellors and Principals at HEIs asking to identify a principal point of contact for requests for research to address the impacts of COVID-19. The letter also outlines that “BEIS has established a joint team involving UKRI, DfE and other government departments and agencies to consider what measures are necessary to support universities, the research community and research institutions during this very difficult time.”
  - <https://www.ukri.org/files/news/science-minister-letter-covid19/>
- REF 2021 submission date on 27 November 2020 will no longer apply and a new submission will be announced in due course.
  - <https://www.ref.ac.uk/publications/further-update-on-coronavirus-covid-19-and-ref-timetable/>



## Office for Students: offers to new students

25 March

- Universities Minister has made clear that universities should not be offering or amending existing offers for the next two weeks.
- Nicola Dandridge has responded, supporting the Minister's call:
  - *“Universities and colleges must stop making offers that are not in the best interests of students. They should not make any unconditional offer or amend existing offers for at least two weeks while Ofqual develops the details of the new system.”*
  - <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/press-and-media/universities-must-pause-unconditional-offers-for-two-weeks-in-student-interest-says-regulator/>



# British Council: IELTS

25 March

- The British Council and the National Education Examinations Authority (NEEA) have decided to cancel all IELTS tests scheduled for April across Mainland China.
- All those who had scheduled in a test at one of these sites will get a full refund.
  - <https://education-services.britishcouncil.org/news/market-news/ielts-test-cancellation-april-2020-mainland-china> (British Council log in required, basic service is free to most education providers)
- If your students have registered for an IELTS test and have any concerns or questions about the arrangements for their test, please advise them to contact NEEA call centre directly (email: [ielts.@mail.neea.edu.cn](mailto:ielts@mail.neea.edu.cn); tel: +86 10 8234 5671.)
- UK education institutions who require support for their work in China can contact the British Council China International Education Services team at [IES.China@britishcouncil.org.cn](mailto:IES.China@britishcouncil.org.cn)



JISC

25 March

- Free online content and support
  - <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/coronavirus#online-content>
- Second online briefing on planning for coronavirus now up. Curriculum managers, E-learning staff and tutors, lecturers and teaching staff should all view. Contents include supporting staff to transition to e-learning
  - <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/training/planning-for-coronavirus>
- Blog on how to spot coronavirus phishing scams including how to report scams to JISC
  - <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/blog/coronavirus-scams-how-to-spot-them-16-mar-2020>
- Kortext, in conjunction with JISC, is launching a free student e-textbook programme to give university students and staff access to learning resources
  - <https://www.jisc.ac.uk/news/free-student-etextbook-programme-18-mar-2020>



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# Information on Quality Assurance

25 March



# QAA: Covid-19 guidance

25 March

- QAA has published '[initial guidance on quality and standards](#)' to support UK HE providers react to Covid-19.
- Advice to consult with student representatives and partners when planning changes to policies, delivery of classes, assignments and progression.
- Learning and teaching
  - Guidance for online delivery, including supporting students in accessing IT systems and electronic resources.
  - Communicating to students what has changed
  - Consider alternatives for tutors to feed back to students
- Credit, progression and graduation
  - Up to awarding bodies to make appropriate decisions on credit and qualifications that may be awarded based on sufficient evidence to make such a call
  - Where possible, undertake an evaluation of the work load, for staff and students, involved in 'making up' lost time for teaching, learning and assessment where this is unavoidable.
  - Advise talking to relevant PSRB's education teams as soon as possible to establish any flexibility. QAA would encourage PSRBs to consider their ability to be flexible in their requirements, given the scale of the problem the higher education sector is contending with.



# QAA: Covid-19 guidance

25 March

- Admissions
  - Providers should keep in mind a range of factors for applicants anyway, not just grades.
  - Any changes to your admission processes would then need to be flagged to all applicants. You should also consider whether this requires a more in-depth appeals process.
- Assessment and Feedback
  - Consider a flexible application of your policies and procedures and academic regulations to allow for mitigation or unforeseen circumstances.
  - Please bear in mind potential vulnerability to misconduct when changing assessment methods – [QAA's guidance on contract cheating](#) may help.
  - Specific guidance for providers on [mitigating disruption for TNE students](#)
  - Where practicable, consider substituting exams with online assessment, with appropriate safeguards including unique ID, same start times, same log-ons, tech support, remote proctoring solutions, and so on
- Engaging students and external examiners
- QAA members can sign-up to the [Online Quality Clinics](#)



SQA

25 March

- Statement on coursework for National Courses following letter from First Minister states that no young person with SQA coursework to complete should attend school to do so.
- <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-update-first-ministers-speech-22-march-2020/>
- This means that for this year, schools and colleges are not required to submit learner coursework for marking in Higher and Advanced Higher courses.
- <https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/93658.html>



Pearson/  
Edexcel

- Pearson have released [a statement](#):
  - Will work with DfE and Ofqual on alternative assessment
  - Feel confident they can award BTEC grades for those finishing this academic year by “taking into account student progress on assignments and course work to date and by sampling and verifying student work”
- BTEC FAQ and info here:  
<https://www.pearson.com/uk/educators/fe-college-educators/supporting-the-fe-sector-during-coronavirus-covid-19/assessmentarrangements.html>



# Advance HE

25 March

- Supporting emerging priorities such as online assessment, supporting staff and student wellbeing at a distance and leading in times of crisis through [Advance HE Connect](#) in the first instance.
- Advance HE are conscious that many people will be working with online learning and assessment and want to offer as much support as possible. The [Learning and Teaching Network](#) is their hub for this and they will be posting resources and be available to answer questions or host discussions.
- In the resource area they have started a file with online resources which might be useful to you and others. If you would like to post anything please do so on the live feed and use the tags to help the content to be searchable.
- <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/coronavirus-covid-19-updates>



# Student Surveys

- NSS will continue say Ipsos Mori
- HESA announced Graduate Outcomes will go ahead



# Quality Assurance: Sector collaboration

- IHE working closely with UUK and AoC on guidance and best practice for collaborative partnerships
- Sector groups discussing impact on quality assurance and regulation including:
  - Assigning or changing credit
  - Assessing learning outcomes from previous work
  - Practical, experiential learning – how to assess
  - PSRBs
  - Complaints and appeals
  - National Surveys
  - Regulating quality in coming months
  - Academic governance
  - Impact on articulation arrangements



# Questions?

- Until 4:30 General questions
- 4:30-5:00 Academic Quality questions – guest Simon Bullock QA
- Friday 4pm – General Update and theme: Tier 4