



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 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



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-gcse-as-and-a-levels-in-2020/coronavirus-covid-19-cancellation-of-gcse-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://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. 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; 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



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 their '[initial guidance on quality and standards](#)' to support UK HE providers managing quality in the COVID-19 crisis.
- QAA advise all providers 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



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New Letter from the Universities Minister

- **Letter to Providers**
 - **Students in residence** should now stay where they are and not attempt to travel; providers continue to provide services including catering, cleaning, student health and welfare.
 - **Bolster mental health services** where possible, Minister is talking with key stakeholders on how they can help.
 - **Student Finance:** Term 3 tuition payments as scheduled; If you have student employees avail yourself of the governments' *Coronavirus job Retention scheme*. Communicate clearly with students on residential rents and provide in a "fair manner"
 - **Visas:** extensions, in-country visa switching, distance learning
 - **Exchanges:** No non-essential international travel for initial period of 30 days. All students overseas advised to return now.
 - **Regulatory framework:** OfS have set out reduced regulatory requirements; REF 2021 delayed; Current TEF awards extended until Summer 2021;
 - **Finals:** OfS shortly issuing guidance. "support students and enable them to leave with qualifications that have real value and that reflect their hard work and allow them to progress."
 - **Support for staff:** Providers can identify essential staff but review list of key workers in your business continuity plans to minimize number of people required to travel; Pay attention to additional financial hardships that are being faced by hourly paid and student staff who have been reliant on income from campus-based jobs- use *Coronavirus job Retention scheme*
 - **Universities Support for the COVID-19 national effort:** Thank you to those contributing to research and NHS effort.



Universities Minister note to students

- The Minister as written to students in HE to explain the “latest developments in the battle against COVID-19”
 - Reiterated advice on student in residence halls in England
 - Final Exams: OfS will produce guidance shortly covering teaching, continued learning and assessment
 - Visas: Home Office updated guidance on Visa extensions, In-country visa switching, Distance learning, and helpline
 - Volunteers: Universities facilities, medical and healthcare students, NHS volunteers
 - Finances: SLC making Term 3 maintenance fee payments as scheduled; Students facing financial difficulties should seek publicized government assistance.



HM Treasury

27 March

- Business Support is a website which is pulling together all business and economics support available
 - <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/>
- At last night's briefing the Chancellor announced the support available for the self-employed.
- The scheme will mirror the support of the Job Retention Scheme and will cover up to 80% of their profits with a cap to £2,5000. HMRC will use average profits from tax returns in 2016-17, 2017-18, and 2018-19 to calculate this grant size.
- Eligibility includes self-employed or member of partnership, lost of trading/partnership trading profits due to Covid-19, have trading profits less than £50,000 and more than half of total income.
 - <https://www.businesssupport.gov.uk/self-employment-income-support-scheme/>



Department for Education: travel advice

27 March

- Updated information from the DfE on travel advice including UK nationals studying abroad to bring it in-line with social distancing and FCO advice:
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-travel-advice-for-educational-settings/coronavirus-travel-guidance-for-educational-settings>
- This includes the advice to return to the UK immediately if commercial flights are still available



Office for Students

27 March

- OfS have published [new letter \(25 March\)](#) outlining objectives and [highlighted slimmed down regulatory requirements](#).
- IHE have outlined these changes on our COVID-19 Hub-FAQ: <http://independenthe.com/activities/covid-19-hub/faq>
- OfS identified two areas for reportable events:
 - where they cease or suspend courses without providing equivalent alternative study options
 - where they are unable to award qualifications or credit as they had planned.
- OfS has also published a [Provider Guide to Coronavirus](#) which outlines some key areas of quality such as decisions to close campus or stop delivery.



Student Loans Company

27 March

- SLC have closed their offices, helpline and social media.
- SLC have confirmed that students will receive the third installment of their maintenance loan regardless of the situation at their institution. Providers will also receive their third tuition fee installment as scheduled.
- SLC have identified several questions on SLC funding which they are not currently able to answer but are working with DfE to address. These can be found in the FAQ section of their website:
 - <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/guidance-for-current-students>
- SLC have also announced that the interest rate applied to all Plan 1 Income Contingent Repayment student loans will reduce from 1.75% to 1.1% from 7 April 2020.
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/change-to-plan-1-interest-rates>



Ofqual

27 March

- Ofqual has published a statement regarding to the summer examinations and how grades will be calculated. They say that they are making progress with stakeholders and will have an outline of the process by Easter:
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/further-update-on-2020-exams>
- They have also put out a statement on vocational and technical qualifications in 2020 stating that they are looking into how these types of qualifications will also be awarded and grades calculated:
 - <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/statement-on-vocational-and-technical-qualifications-in-2020>



QAA & Access to HE

27 March

- QAA Quality Discussion Forum: QAA have created a quality discussion forum designed to facilitate discussion and create supportive communities of practitioners where they can share their thoughts, ideas, experiences and practices about the current challenges being faced across the HE sector.
 - <https://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/news-events/support-and-guidance-covid-19/quality-discussion-forum>
- QAA have published information on Access to Higher Education in light of Covid-19. QAA are in discussion with DfE, Ofqual and others to establish clear assessment guidance.
 - <https://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/news-events/news/coronavirus-latest-for-access-to-he-students>

More information can be found on the Access for HE website:
<https://www.accesstohe.ac.uk/>



UKCISA

27 March

- UKCISA members can join UKCISA's Tier 4 Compliance Helpline on Wednesday 1 April 2020, led by Penningtons Manches Cooper LLP.
 - <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/studentnews/1349/Next-Tier-4-Compliance-Helpline>
- UKCISA have also updated their information pages to include the latest information from UKVI.
 - <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Studying--living-in-the-UK/Coronavirus-Covid-19-info-for-international-students#layer-6716>
- They have created a helpful “Questions we can answer” page for students: <https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Studying--living-in-the-UK/Coronavirus-Covid-19-info-for-international-students#layer-6726>



VocTech Trust

27 March

- VocTech Trust is a grant funding body to support adult vocational learning through digital technology.
- They have opened a fund to support providers who deliver vocational learning in the UK during the Covid-19 pandemic.
- Guidelines for the funding can be found here: <https://www.ufi.co.uk/voctech-now-guidelines>
- There is a webinar on 30 March at 1pm to get more information.
 - <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/5426600462246234636>



Media updates

27 March

- The Daily Mail has an article about tuition fees for next academic year suggesting that some providers may need to reduce tuition fees for next year as many courses and delivery will still be online or not back to usual.
- It also warns of a big hit to the number of international students coming into UK HE in September to dramatically drop.
 - <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-8158427/Universities-face-having-slash-tuition-fees.html>
- The Financial Times also has a guide on how to get reimbursed for a wide range of products and services including rail season tickets, flights and university costs.
 - <https://www.ft.com/content/21928dda-e2f0-49f3-8f97-c82831983025>



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Information on Tier 4 and international students

27 March Joy Elliott-Bowman

Director of Policy and Development



Home Office Fact Sheets released

- [Factsheet for visa customers not yet in the UK](#)
- [Factsheet for visa nationals and short-term visitors in the UK](#)



Tier 4 Absences (last updated 27 February)

*The Home Office recognises the current situation is exceptional and **will not take any compliance action** against students or employees who are unable to attend their studies/work due to the coronavirus outbreak, or **against sponsors which authorise absences and continue to sponsor students or employees despite absences for this reason.***

The Home Office will keep this under review, especially if the length of absences mean a potential repeat of period of studies become necessary

Guidance has confirmed that sponsors:

- do not need to report student absences where students are unable to attend studies due to coronavirus and where the sponsor is authorising the absence(s); and
- do not need to withdraw sponsorship if they consider that there are exceptional circumstances meaning that a student 'will be unable to attend' for more than 60 days.



Home Office: Tier 4 & Short- term study

27 March

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-for-uk-visa-applicants-and-temporary-uk-residents>
- **Extensions in UK until 31 May 2020**
 - Anyone whose leave expired after the 24 January and who cannot leave the country because of travel restrictions or self-isolation will have their visas extended to 31 May 2020. **Individuals must contact the Coronavirus Immigration Team email to advise of their situation**
- **Switching in-country permitted**
 - Individuals (students or staff) who cannot leave the UK due to travel restrictions or self-isolation and wish to stay in the UK in the long-term would ordinarily need to apply for a visa from their home country. Where individuals would normally be required to return to their country of residence to apply for a visa in a different category, they'll now be able to apply from the UK to switch.
- **Online learning permitted – in UK and from overseas**
 - The Home Office will not consider it a breach of sponsor duties to offer distance learning to existing Tier 4 students in the UK or who have chosen to return overseas but wish to continue their current studies. Sponsors do not need to withdraw sponsorship in these circumstances.
 - New international students who have been issued a Tier 4 visa but have been unable to travel to the UK are permitted to undertake distance learning and sponsorship does not need to be withdrawn.
 - New international students who have not yet applied for a visa but wish to commence a course by distance learning do not need



Contact IHE

- Info@independenthe.com