



INDEPENDENT
HIGHER
EDUCATION

Covid-19 Update: 6 May

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IHE Covid-19 Information Hub

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<http://independentthe.com/activities/covid-19-hub>

Bringing together information and resources from across government, sector and commercial partners

FAQs

<http://independentthe.com/activities/covid-19-hub/faq>

Collated from questions at Weekly Update and Member Drop-in sessions

Themed information and resources

- Admissions and recruitment
- Finance and Human Resources
- International students and visas
- Regulation and the OfS
- Student welfare and support
- Teaching and learning



IHE Drop-in schedule

- Monday a general update and drop-in webinar
- Wednesday a short general update and a specialist webinar with Q&A
- Fridays an email the essential information from the week
- We continue to update the IHE COVID-19 Information Hub with all the latest information.



Regulation, OfS and DfE

Further to the support and stabilisation package announced for the Higher Education on Monday the Government have issued [guidance](#), providing more detail on the measures outlined.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-he-providers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/actions-for-he-providers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>



Finance and Human Resources

Recap of Government announcements (4 May)

- Student loan fee payments in 2020-21 will be re-structured to bring forward the second 25% payment
- Providers can access government-supported loan schemes
- Providers can access Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme
 - Mindful of proportion of public funds (inc. student loans) vs commercial
- Working with OfS to prioritise funding allocations to specialist providers
- DfE will intervene to support a provider only where needed, possible and appropriate, and as a last resort. May impose restructuring as price
- Bring forward £100m Quality-related Research funding and establish a DfE/BEIS Ministerial taskforce on university research sustainability



Regulation

OfS have released new guidance on Access and Participation.

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-notice-1-access-and-participation-plan-guidance/>

- This is for new plans only for 2021/22

OfS have sent a letter to providers on the implications of COVID-19 on OfS funding: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/implications-of-the-coronavirus-pandemic-for-ofs-funding/>

- Current/announced funding will not be reduced but 2020/21 funding will be reduced by £48 million
- Current proposals protect disabled student premium at the 2019/20 rate and grant for courses in nursing, midwifery and allied health subjects that do not attract price group A funding
- Publication of allocations will be on 12 May for all providers registered in fee cap by 14 April 2020. Provision has been made for providers still in process and will be registered by the end of 2020/21 academic year.
- New funding model will wait until 2022/23
- OfS have also published their response to the consultation and Board decisions here: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/a9ae132b-583f-43c2-b011-ba93fde897b8/funding-for-2020-21-ofs-board-decisions.pdf>



Teaching and Learning

Office for Students publishes Statement on NSS

- “The National Student Survey (NSS) 2020 commenced on 6 January and ran until the 30 April. The majority of the survey period was undertaken before the current coronavirus restrictions began, the decision to continue running the survey was under constant review in conjunction with the other UK funding and regulatory bodies and Ipsos Mori. Many students had responded already, and we want to offer all other eligible students the opportunity to respond if they wish to do so.
- Student wellbeing was paramount in informing our approach, during the survey we were actively monitoring students’ reactions to being asked to complete the survey.
- We will look very closely at the data once we receive it to assess what impact the pandemic has had on comparability with data from past and future years.”



Admissions and Recruitment

Ofqual decisions on GCSE and A level grading for 2020

- Calculated grades for students in year 10 and below will be able to receive calculated grades
- There will not be a separate process for Private Candidates. Private candidates can receive grades where their Head of Centre is confident they can submit a centre assessment grade. They can transfer to another centre where their current centre feels they cannot provide a grade. If the above cannot apply – these student swill not be able to get a grade.
- Other decisions will be released later in May.
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/ofqual-publishes-initial-decisions-on-gcse-and-a-level-grading-proposals-for-2020>



Admissions and Recruitment

Sutton Trust briefing on the impact of Covid-19 on university access

- The briefing finds that a fifth of university applicants have changed their mind about attending in autumn, or are yet to decide, and almost half of applicants are worried that the pandemic will have a negative impact on access to their first-choice university.
- Includes findings about current students and shows that 6% do not have access to computers or devices to continue learning. The study also finds that 30% of current students report they are less able to afford to study.

<https://www.suttontrust.com/our-research/covid-19-impacts-university-access/>



Admissions and Recruitment

Competition and Markets Authority guidance on contracts and Covid-19

Last week the CMA published [guidance](#) relating to consumer contracts, cancellation and refunds as a result of Covid-19.

Not specific to HE but addresses consumer contracting and when a consumer might expect a refund for a service more broadly.

“Where the business reasonably expects to provide the service as agreed, the CMA’s view is that, in general, the business can require consumers to carry on making these payments for the time being. That could be the case, for example, for some services due to be provided later in the year. Consumers’ rights to refunds will depend on whether the services can be provided when the time comes.”

Joint CMA and OfS statement expected.

For more information read Smita Jamdar's excellent blog and ask her questions today!

<http://independentthe.com/archives/consumer-protection-and-students-where-are-we-now>



Devolved nations

Scottish research funding

- <https://news.gov.scot/news/minister-announces-gbp-75m-boost-for-university-research>
- One-off £75 million boost



Devolved nations

HEFCW update for Welsh providers

Circular update sent to providers 4 May

- Temporary lighter touch regulation of funded providers
- Comment on providers with specific designation:
 - *“We do not have the capacity to assess and report to Welsh Government on how providers with specifically designated courses are planning, financially, to respond to the current crisis.”*
 - *“Welsh Government to review urgently specific course designation, in view of the impact of COVID-19.”*
 - *“Welsh Government to work with HEFCW and give further guidance on how to proceed in the current context.”*



HE Sector

UKRI updated guidance for the research and innovation communities

UKRI acknowledges that commencing grants at this time is challenging and therefore a flexibility is being added to the current policy for responsive mode grants and fellowships.

The current policy allows a start date to be delayed for up to three months of the announced start date, this is now being extended to six months.

<https://www.ukri.org/news/coronavirus-impact-on-ukri-supported-research/>



Student Welfare and Support

The Association of Colleges has [predicted](#) that half of the new labour market entrants (approximately 100,000 16 to 25 year olds) will struggle to find meaningful employment as the economic shocks of Covid-19 continue to be felt.

Have called on Education Secretary Gavin Williamson to deliver a new 'September Promise' guaranteeing access to high quality education or training places this Autumn to every young person who wants one.



Resources

Dodds podcast on the impact of Covid-19 on Higher Education

<https://soundcloud.com/dods-monitoring/higher-education>



Governance and Management

Summary of guidance from OfS and Government

*Welcome Smita Jamdar, Partner and Head of Education,
Shakespeare Martineau LLP*



Guidance from Government

- Providers, like any business, need to carefully document decisions made to furlough staff. For HE providers it is even more important to include decisions on the furlough of staff normally engaged in teaching or supporting students who are still learning.
- Governing bodies should consider how eligibility for government schemes may be impacted if they are part of a connected company.
- Applications for CBLIS need to have strong justification and providers need to have evidence ready (should they be asked for it) that their organization:
 - would be viable were it not for the pandemic
 - has been adversely impacted by the coronavirus
- Those who are charities may need to consider how their charitable conditions might impact their ability to access some of these funds. (Let IHE know if you have a concern in this area)



Guidance from OfS

Guidance for providers about quality and standards during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic

- There are changes to reportable events, some new, some removed. Governing bodies should be made aware of these and this should be documented
- Academic decisions must be “sound” and be underpinned by clear academic rationale: Evidenced decisions, documentation of decision
- Everyone is making changes. Can you evidence that your governing body approved of these changes and were aware of their impact on students?
- Managing changes: Have you told students the changes in advance, the reasons, the possible impact, and the options available for them to avoid the changes?
- How are you managing complaints and appeals? Is your governing body aware of the type and nature (if this has changed) Do you have a consistent process documented and evidenced?
- <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/f351a739-6cd6-4310-8f98-a6aa603f17f4/quality-and-standards-guidance-during-coronavirus.pdf>



New OfS Consultation

Consultation on the integrity and stability of the English higher education sector

- OfS proposes a new condition in the Governance and Management section (E). Annex C outlines OfS' approach to regulating the management and governance of providers for this condition.
- Governing bodies must now consider how the actions of the provider will impact the sector stability, including reputation.
- Increased focus on how governing bodies manage admissions processes
- Governing bodies decisions to access government funding:
 - “seeking financial support from government lending schemes at the same time as paying dividends to shareholders”
- Monetary penalties could be imposed for each breach
- https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/aad2441c-6fd5-43f9-a2d7-f07e0f517ce2/consultation_reg_condition_finalforweb.pdf



New OfS Consultation

The short-term stability of English higher education providers

International student number decline may prompt providers to draw domestic students from other providers, exposing them to financial risk.

Recruitment practices that are not in the interests of students

Incentives, gifts or discounts; switching conditional offers to unconditional ones or very low conditions; lowering academic or language requirements for international students

Providers seeking to obtain an unfair advantage over other providers

Using the epidemic to take advantage of a temporary reduction in regulatory requirements

Making misleading statements about other providers or failing to comply with public commitments.

The wider interests of students and the public interest.

“seeking financial support from government lending schemes at the same time as paying dividends to shareholders”

Behaviors can be found in Annex A



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