



Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities

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2nd November 2020

Dear colleagues,

I write following the Prime Minister's announcement on Saturday, outlining the new national restrictions due to come into place on 5 November 2020.

Thank you to those of you who have already shared your questions with me. I want to reassure you that I recognise the implications of this decision for universities, students and staff.

I spoke to Universities UK and mission groups yesterday and I shall continue to work as closely as possible with the sector to support you – as always, my door remains open and I am happy to meet virtually on a one-to-one basis.

We are in the process of finalising guidance on what these new restrictions will mean for Higher Education and this will be available shortly.

This guidance will make clear that:

- We are prioritising education to limit the gaps in students' academic journey and lives.
- As for everyone under the new national restrictions from 5 November, students should stay in their current home. This means they should not leave their term time address to return to their parents or carer's home until at least 2 December - and should continue to learn at university for the remainder of this term.
 - The reason we are asking students to remain where they are and not to travel home before the new restrictions come into place is to prevent any further spread of COVID 19 – any movement around the country will risk the lives of our loved ones.
- I have urged students to stay where they are in order to save lives and I ask you to repeat this request to them. I know just how hard HEPs have worked to put in place measures to ensure teaching and learning is provided in COVID-secure environments, and we have not seen evidence of increased

transmission within these environments. This supports our decision to keep universities open.

- We expect you to continue to make informed decisions with your local public health teams on the level of face-to-face teaching and learning to provide, based on appropriate risk-assessments and the needs of students and staff.
- We do not, however, want or expect to see a transition to full online learning during the new national restrictions – this could jeopardise the learning that students receive, as well as risk their mental health and wellbeing. We want you to make informed local decisions whilst ensuring all students have some form of face to face learning, where possible and safe to do so.
- Universities should continue to agree with their local public health teams the appropriate balance of online and in person teaching, based on the overall assessment of the public health risks, including to the mental health of students and the status of local outbreaks.
- As a Government we also expect libraries and study spaces to remain open, where appropriate, with COVID-secure measures in place to support students to continue their studies.
- We have been clear throughout this pandemic that HEPs must at all times maintain the quality of their tuition. If more teaching is moved online, providers must continue to comply with registration conditions relating to quality and standards. This means ensuring that courses provide a high-quality academic experience, students are supported and achieve good outcomes, and standards are protected. We have worked with the Office for Students who are regularly reviewing online tuition. We also expect students to continue to be supported and achieve good outcomes, and I would like to reiterate that standards must be maintained.
- This year has been very hard for students and university staff and for this very reason I remind you again of your responsibility when delivering services, including the provision of pastoral support, and taking steps to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of students and staff. I truly believe you are best placed to provide this support and it is vital that these services stay open and available to students in the coming weeks.

We will also continue to work on finalising guidance to set out how students will be able to return home safely at the end of the period of national restriction.

I want to thank you again for everything you are doing to support students during these unprecedented times. I encourage you to contact me or my team if you have any questions or any need further information.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle Donelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end of the name.

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