

Government announces £50 million to support students impacted by Covid-19

Thousands of students will benefit from an additional £50 million to support them with financial pressures from the pandemic, the Universities Minister has announced today (2 February).

Today's announcement is in addition to the £20 million announced in December, bringing the total to £70 million for this financial year.

The new funding means that universities will be able to help students impacted by the pandemic, for example those facing additional costs for alternative accommodation, loss of employment, or extra costs to access their teaching online. Universities will distribute the funding and will be able to prioritise the funding to those most in need of help.

The increased financial support comes as the majority of students have been asked to continue their studies remotely, as part of measures to reduce the transmission of coronavirus.

This announcement follows the decision from many universities and accommodation providers to offer rent rebates for students who need stay away from their term-time address. The Government has encouraged others to join them and offer students partial refunds.

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan said:

This continues to be an incredibly difficult and challenging time for our students, and I am hugely grateful to all the university staff working hard to prioritise their health, wellbeing and learning during this pandemic.

The additional £50 million that we are announcing today will mean we have distributed £70m for hardship in this financial year alone – on top of the £256m of government-funded student premium which universities can use for student support this academic year.

This additional support will provide real, tangible help for those students struggling financially as a result of the pandemic.

We will continue to prioritise a full return to education as soon possible, in line with public health advice. I am also working with universities and professional bodies to ensure students can graduate as planned.

The Government also welcomes the decision from many universities and accommodation providers to offer rent rebates for students who need stay away from their term-time address, and encourages other to join them and offer

students partial refunds. It asks all providers of student accommodation including universities, to make sure their rental policies have students' best interests at heart and are communicated clearly.

The funding will be distributed by the Office for Students directly to universities, which are best placed to assess student hardship locally. Universities will be able to help students, including international students, impacted by the pandemic, for example those facing additional costs arising from having to maintain accommodation in more than one location, or an inability to maintain employment, such as a job based close to their term-time accommodation for which they cannot access the furlough scheme, or to support students to access teaching remotely.

The Government continues to monitor the situation and the impact of the funding.

Students facing financial hardship are encouraged to contact their university or higher education provider if they find themselves facing financial difficulties related to Covid-19.

British Ambassador visits Chiquimula

World news story

The British Ambassador in Guatemala, Nick Whittingham, visited the eastern part of the country to keep abreast of challenges posed by climate change, the COVID-19 pandemic and immigration.



This is the first visit of the Ambassador to Chiquimula. Last year, the department suffered the impact of two storms, which destroyed key infrastructure and damaged livelihoods. Most recently, the department saw the arrival of many Honduran immigrants travelling north, whilst the authorities also are coping with the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ambassador Whittingham discussed these issues in meetings with local

authorities. He met with the Governor of Chiquimula, Ferlandy Mario Roberto Caceres Palma; the Mayor, Rolando Aquino; and representatives of the academic community, including the National University's Eastern Centre (CUNORI).

The Ambassador stressed the UK's commitment to keep working with Guatemala on tackling climate change to prevent and mitigate the impacts of extreme weather. This will be critical during this year's Global Conference on Climate Change (COP26), hosted by the UK, and an opportunity to explain Guatemala's vulnerabilities and environmental commitments.

Finally, Ambassador Whittingham emphasised the importance of bolstering free trade between our economies to overcome the impacts of the pandemic, whilst we continue protecting our populations. As from 1 January of 2021, the UK has in force a free trade agreement with Central America due to further spur Guatemalan exports, such as well-demanded fruits produced in this part of the country.

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[Joint Statement Following Quad Meeting](#)

Press release

Today the Minister of State for Northern Ireland Robin Walker MP and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD, jointly chaired a conference call with the First Minister Arlene Foster, deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, Health Minister Robin Swann and Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly to discuss the ongoing response to Covid-19.



Today the Minister of State for Northern Ireland Robin Walker MP and the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Simon Coveney TD, jointly chaired a conference call with the First Minister Arlene Foster, deputy First Minister Michelle O'Neill, Health Minister Robin Swann and Minister for Health Stephen Donnelly to discuss the ongoing response to Covid-19.

All of the participants acknowledged the very difficult situation being experienced by many in the recent weeks, especially those who have lost family members and loved ones to Covid-19. They expressed their deep gratitude for the continued remarkable dedication and efforts of health workers, front line workers and all working to respond to this pandemic.

They discussed the latest developments in the collective effort to combat the pandemic, and the need to continue the close cooperation between the Northern Ireland Executive, the Irish Government and the UK Government in order to best manage the increasingly serious pressures facing healthcare, and the importance of providing clear messaging to the public.

They considered the latest positions in terms of Covid-19 restrictions with a view to adopting similar approaches wherever possible.

They reaffirmed the need for continued cooperation and coordination, including with regard to international travel restrictions, in order to limit the spread of Covid-19.

All participants agreed to continue to meet regularly in this format, in addition to the ongoing regular engagement between Health Ministers, Chief Medical Officers and relevant Ministers on specific issues.

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Myanmar Ambassador summoned in response to military coup and unlawful imprisonment of civilians

Press release

The Myanmar Ambassador to the UK was summoned to the FCDO today (1 February 2021).



A Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office spokesperson said:

Today the Myanmar Ambassador, Kyaw Zwar Minn, was summoned to the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office. The Minister for Asia, Nigel Adams, condemned the military coup and unlawful imprisonment of civilians, including Aung San Suu Kyi. Minister Adams requested assurances of the safety of all those detained and called for their immediate release.

The Minister for Asia made clear the democratic wishes of the people of Myanmar must be respected, and the National Assembly peacefully re-convened. He also said that the UK would work with like-minded partners and pursue all necessary diplomatic levers to ensure a peaceful return to democracy.

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[Health and Social Care Secretary's statement on coronavirus \(COVID-19\): 1 February 2021](#)

Good afternoon and welcome to Downing Street for today's coronavirus briefing.

And I'm joined by Professor Steve Powis, the Medical Director of NHS England. And Dr Susan Hopkins, who is the Chief Medical Advisor to Public Health England and to NHS Test and Trace.

I've got quite a lot of news to bring you up to speed on. Right at the start, I wanted to tell you where we are with our vaccine programme.

I'm so proud of the team, who've now vaccinated 9.2 million people across the

UK, that includes 931,204 vaccinations just this weekend.

And to put that into context – that's one in every 60 adults in the whole United Kingdom vaccinated in one single weekend. It's a mammoth effort.

I know how much these jabs mean to people. And I'm so grateful for all the messages that we get, and all the pictures that I'm sent of people being vaccinated.

It fills me with pride that so many people are doing so much to help for this roll out to happen so smoothly and I want to say thanks to you all.

Care homes

Getting vaccinated is an emotional moment for so many people and that's because it is about protecting those who are most vulnerable to COVID.

We've now vaccinated almost 9 in 10 of all over 80s in the UK and now, as of today, we've vaccinated over half of all people in their 70s.

And, I'm delighted that I can tell you we've visited every eligible care home with older residents in England, and offered vaccinations to all their residents and staff.

This has been an incredible example of health and social care working together, working side-by-side to protect people most in need.

As Professor Martin Green, the Chief Executive of Care England said today, this is a "wonderful achievement and one that is testament to the hard work of care home staff and our colleagues in the NHS and local authorities."

And, I want to thank every single person who's helped us to get this far.

Vaccine supply

I also want to let you know some good news on vaccine supply. Today we've ordered another 40 million vaccine doses from Valneva.

As we have all along, we've invested early and at risk, before we know for sure if it will come good because from the start, we've taken a no regrets attitude to backing vaccines. We've tried to leave nothing on the table.

If this gets regulatory approval, the Valneva vaccine, like many others, will be made right here in the UK.

The Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is made in Oxford, and Staffordshire, and Wrexham. The Novovax vaccine is being manufactured on Teesside. And if approved, this Valneva vaccine will be manufactured in Livingston, in Scotland.

We didn't start this pandemic with a large-scale on-shore vaccine manufacturing capability, so we're building one, all across the United

Kingdom.

The vaccine programme just goes to show how important it is to have the UK working as one, together.

International

We now have over 400 million doses of vaccines on order. This is obviously more than the UK population needs. And my attitude has always been we protect every UK citizen as fast as we can. And at the same time, we're generous around the world.

I want to say this to our international partners. Of course, I'm delighted about how well this is going at home. But I believe fundamentally that the vaccine roll out is a global effort.

One of the many reasons that I'm so happy with the AstraZeneca contract is that it not just that it gives us a strong supply here but because it is the only vaccine being deployed that's available to the whole world at cost.

And because it's logistically straightforward, it can be practically deployed in the poorest parts of the world too.

So, we will protect UK supply and we'll play our part to ensure the whole world can get the jab.

New variants

Another area where we're helping around the world is in spotting new variants.

Our global leadership in genomic sequencing has helped us to spot new variants here in the UK, and quickly alert the rest of the world. But there are other countries that don't have the capacity they need.

Last week, we offered our capacity and expertise to other nations through our New Variant Assessment Platform, because a mutation in one part of the world is a threat to people everywhere.

For example, our South African colleagues spotted a new variant through their high quality genomic sequencing and rightly notified the world, as we did with the variant that we discovered here in the UK.

We've now identified 105 cases of this variant here. Eleven of those cases don't appear to have any links to international travel.

There's currently no evidence to suggest this variant is any more severe, but we need to come down on it hard and we will. We've already made sure that all these cases are isolating and that we've done enhanced contact tracing of all of their close contacts.

We are surging [extra testing into the areas where this variant has been found](#)

and sequencing every single positive case.

Working with local authorities, we are going door-to-door to test people in the local area. These cases have been identified in the following postcodes:

- W7, N17, CR4, WS2, ME15, EN10, GU21, and PR9

If you live in one of these postcodes where we're sending in enhanced testing, then it's imperative that you stay at home. And that you get a test, even if you don't have symptoms.

This is so important so that we can break the chains of transmission of this new variant. And we've got to bring this virus to heel.

So there's lots of good news, but this is a stark reminder that the fight against this virus isn't over yet.

Every day, we're protecting more people and getting ourselves one step closer to normal life. But this is no time to let things slip. So let's, all of us, do what we must to get this virus under control.