

# Universities Minister sets out support for international students

Measures to support international students and the higher education sector against the global challenges coronavirus poses were outlined by the Universities Minister today (5 June).

Speaking at the British Council's Going Global online event today, Michelle Donelan emphasised that the UK's world-leading universities remain open to international students, and the Government is working as a priority to make processes as flexible and easy as possible to allow them to study at UK institutions under the current circumstances.

The Minister highlighted a range of support measures for students, including flexibility on visa regulations, as well as announcing the appointment of Sir Steve Smith as an International Education Champion to boost the numbers of international students in the UK.

The role of the Champion will be to work with organisations across the breadth of the education sector, including universities, schools, the EdTech industry, vocational training, and early years schooling providers. The Champion will also target priority regions worldwide to build networks and promote the UK as the international education partner of choice.

The appointment of Sir Steve Smith fulfils a headline action from the International Education Strategy, published by DfE and DIT in March last year. The former Exeter University vice-chancellor will spearhead overseas activity and address a number of market access barriers on behalf of the whole education sector, including concerns over the global recognition of UK degrees.

Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan said:

"International students are an integral part of our society, culture and economy and we are proud that so many international students come here every year to study. That is why I want to stress to overseas students at this unprecedented time that they will always be welcome in this country.

"Supporting international students is one of our top priorities and we are working hard to make sure we are as flexible as possible and make processes as easy as they can be, including around current visa regulations.

"Now, more than ever, it is critical we work together internationally, sharing our knowledge to mitigate the challenges we all face. I am delighted to announce Sir Steve Smith as the International Education Champion, a role that will be integral to our outward-looking approach to international education, from early years through to higher education."

Minister for Exports, Graham Stuart MP:

"I'd like to extend my congratulations to Sir Steve Smith on his new role as International Education Champion. I'm proud to lead the Department for International Trade's education work and to have published our International Education Strategy with the appointment of a Champion at its heart. The UK's education sector is world leading and world class, and we need to ensure that it stays that way.

"Education spending will continue to rise around the world and the UK is well placed to grow its exports and contribute to millions of lives. I look forward to working with Sir Steve to promote and highlight the UK as the international education partner of choice.

"International trade is critical to the UK's coronavirus recovery plan and we need to ensure that our education sector plays a full role in meeting global need and helping both the UK and its partners to come back from the economic impacts of the virus."

In his new role, Sir Steve Smith will also highlight exporting opportunities for the sector and help to address any challenges and barriers to growth. Education exports are currently valued at more than £21 billion per year and help to forge global and meaningful relationships. These underpin opportunities for the UK and international partners to develop, trade and collaborate. This will prove crucial as the UK begins to recover from the economic impact of coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Universities Minister acknowledged the vital part international students play in the UK's higher education agenda and highlighted the work from the Government and institutions to ensure the safety and wellbeing of current and prospective international students, as well as ensuring access to high quality teaching and learning.

A letter from the Universities Minister to international students last month detailed a number of measures designed to safeguard students from the impacts of Covid-19 and enable them to continue their studies as planned.

These include temporary concessions to mitigate the impact of Covid-19 and ensure the immigration system is as flexible as possible, the launch of the new points-based Student route later this year and the new Graduate Route in the summer of 2021, which will enable international students who have been awarded their degree to stay and work in the UK at any skill level for two years.

The Government has also worked closely with the Office for Students, the independent higher education regulator in England, to ensure students are able to continue their studies, receive good quality provision and work towards a degree that they and future employers value.

Sir Steve Smith will join the role from Exeter University, where he was Vice-Chancellor for 18 years, following over 20 years of university leadership both in the UK and internationally.

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# Destination UK: Supporting international learners through coronavirus

Good afternoon everyone.

I am so pleased to be talking to you today and I would like to start off by thanking the British Council for enabling this to happen.

It is really rather slightly ironic that we are having to take such pains to stay away from one another, when the British Council came into being to show people the importance of those relationships and coming together.

As you know it was launched at a time when the world was also in the grip of a terrible crisis. Back in 1934 as countries pulled away from one another in mistrust and self-interest, the British Council was brave enough to see that by reaching out, we would help one another to move forward and develop.

This is something we all need to keep in mind now more than ever and it is at the core of what I would like to talk to you about today.

We all feel distanced in so many ways right now but as a nation we want our doors to remain open, and that remains the case for the hundreds of thousands of young people who are part of Destination UK and who choose to study here.

We have built a reputation as a tolerant and inviting place, whether you're studying, travelling or doing business.

Just like the British Council, our universities embody the spirit of cultural friendship and the global exchange of ideas that goes back through the centuries.

The reason that international students flock to destination UK is not just because the education that they receive is second to none, but also that they know they will be welcome here. And that they will find a home away from home here, plus they will enrich their lives here.

And in return UK national students find they look at the world with fresh eyes. Our international campuses are culturally richer and more varied, our communities grow, our businesses flourish. And all through the expertise and contribution of these young minds.

In short, the international student community is vital to Britain's national interest not just economically but because they are so very much a part of the fabric of this nation.

So turning to recent times, we are all too aware that the coronavirus

pandemic has caused hardship and grief all over the world. We have seen suffering to individuals, businesses and communities alike. And the world's Higher Education sector has not been immune.

But I want to stress how very proud I am of the response by the UK's HE sector to both help with the fight back against Covid 19 and also to ensure that students are supported whilst having access to flexible and high quality online learning.

As we begin to win the battle against Covid-19 and fully open up our education institutions once again, I would like our international student community to know that we are still the same welcoming and first class academic destination we have always been.

So how can we reassure the student community and of course their families, that the UK still offers them a safe and nurturing place to study?

I think the best way to reassure them is with the facts – and the fact is that throughout the Covid-19 outbreak, the UK has continued to support international students.

Let me clear those who planned to come here in the autumn can still do so.

In fact this week, we issued guidance to help universities decide how to reopen their campuses and buildings in ways that also protect the health & wellbeing of both students & staff.

It is no surprise that UK Universities have risen to the recent challenges. They have always been hubs of invention and innovation.

I have been proud to hear of institutions going above and beyond to support their students but to be honest we expected nothing less from our UK institutions.

The list of examples is too long to highlight them all here, but to mention just one, Queen's University Belfast, for instance, has been reaching out to all international students both on and off campus to offer guidance and support at this time.

Students could leave their accommodation contracts and not lose out financially. In addition, the university has couriered belongings home at no charge.

Our universities have all been developing ways to create stimulating and engaging ways online content. And as we enter a new academic year, institutions will in the main be developing combined approaches to prioritise safety meaning courses may be delivered partly using innovative online provision and partly through traditional face-to-face means. This will be done while maintaining the educational benchmarks that are known and envied throughout the world.

In addition, the Government is working very hard to ensure that international students do not have to jump through hoops to come here and that immigration

regulations are as flexible as they can be.

And today I can assure you we'll keep this under review for as long as we need to. I want to use this opportunity to highlight and remind everyone that last year we announced a new Graduate Route to enable international students who had been awarded their degree to stay and work here for up to two years, this will be introduced in Summer 2021.

I want to be utterly clear – this means students who start UK courses from this autumn onwards will be able to benefit from this, and we look forward to them doing so.

But I want to underline our commitment to our international students further. So today, I can announce today that I have appointed an International Education Champion and am delighted to tell you that Sir Steve Smith has accepted the role.

As many of you will already know, Sir Steve has huge experience in the higher education sector, holding a number of prominent positions, most notably as the Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of the University of Exeter.

I have no doubt that his energy and passion for the role will mirror that of the UK's towards international students.

Before I finish, I really would like to mention one aspect of coming to study in this country that I think is absolutely vital.

We are all sadly too aware that people around the world have suffered and many have lost friends or loved ones. This will put young people under even greater pressure and emotional stress.

But let me be clear student wellbeing is at the heart of the UK higher education experience and all our universities and other providers are now focused on their pastoral role now more than ever. So whether that's in finding students accommodation, or helping them manage the step up from school, or providing mental health support and also in coping with the aftermath of Covid-19.

My guarantee today to any young person who is thinking about coming to the UK to study (plus those who love them) is that you will be shown exactly the same kind of care and consideration as any other British national students will!

Parents and carers here would expect no less for their children and neither should those from anywhere else.

I would like to finish by sharing an observation by the American author Henry Miller who said:

"One's destination is never a place but rather a new way of looking at things".

Destination UK is an ambition for many international students but it is only

when they arrive here that they will recognise:

- the incredible support network we offer
- the innovative and exciting approach taken to the next step of their academic journey and fundamentally the springboard to their future career
- And that there is no substitute for some of the world's best courses as well as a world class student support system and not even Covid-19 can stop that.

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## National Drought Group – June 2020 statement

The National Drought Group, chaired by Environment Agency (EA) Executive Director Harvey Bradshaw, met on Friday 5 June 2020 to review the latest situation and ensure that all parts of the water sector are pulling together to manage the impact of dry weather and increased water demand.

The National Drought Group (NDG) in England brings together government departments, water companies, environmental groups and others by coordinating action to maintain water supplies and protect the environment during dry weather.

The Environment Agency is striving to limit the damage of drought and ensure water supplies are sustainable even during the droughts forecasted by the most extreme future climate change scenarios. Evidence shows that periods of [extended high rainfall](#) and [extended low rainfall](#) are becoming more common. This is backed up by [recent Met Office data](#) indicating that some parts of England have seen record-breaking levels of sun during May. This all points to the need for further public awareness about using water efficiently to protect our precious natural environment, not only now but in the coming years and decades.

We know that if we don't take action now many areas of England will face water shortages by 2050. This is why we have introduced our [National Framework for Water Resources](#), setting out what is required to preserve our water supplies and protect the environment for future generations.

## Current situation

Following the extremely wet winter which replenished depleted groundwater aquifers, a period of prolonged hot and dry weather has rapidly reduced river flows and dried out soils. This is particularly the case in areas such as north-west England which are more reliant on surface water supplies, making them naturally less resilient to exceptionally low rainfall. We are monitoring the situation closely and working with water companies to encourage the public to make small changes to use less water while also following government guidance around handwashing.

## Position of the water companies

Almost all water companies have seen elevated demand due to both the recent hot, dry weather and the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. In some cases this has created a challenge for companies to treat and distribute enough water to meet demand. This is expected to continue as more people stay at home over the summer compared to previous years. Water companies will need to continue to focus their efforts on driving down water demand, driving down leakage and maximising their networks. They will continue to work with agriculture and other sectors to share the water that is available.

## The Environment Agency

The Environment Agency is:

- Actively planning to safely carry out environmental monitoring and incident response through the summer, prioritising sites impacted by both the current dry weather and those recovering following the 2018-19 period of prolonged dry weather
- Working closely with all water companies throughout the year to ensure their drought plans are up to date and activated as needed
- Following its own drought plans to manage our response to the dry weather and minimise unnecessary impacts on the environment
- Carrying out fish rescues where fish are in distress due to low flows. Last month we carried out fish rescues on the River Teme and River Redlake in Shropshire to prevent or reduce the loss of species
- Issuing regulatory guidance for public water supply and non-public water abstraction around the issue of coronavirus. This will take account of the impact of the virus on water abstraction activity to ensure it can continue to comply with critical regulatory requirements and minimise unnecessary environmental damage
- Engaging with agriculture and horticulture abstractors and representative groups to keep them informed of the situation. We have updated our [irrigation prospects report](#) and are working with farmers, businesses and other abstractors to ensure they get the water they need to be resilient, while also protecting the environment
- Driving activity to protect our water resources for future generations through our [National Framework for Water Resources](#). The framework will help reduce demand, set strategic direction to halve leakage rates,

develop new supplies, move water to where it's needed and reduce the need for drought measures that can harm the environment. All of this is designed to increase resilience and maintain stable supplies for families and businesses into the future

- Delivering with partners river and habitat restoration projects making them more resilient to extreme weather Agriculture

Hands off flow conditions are being reached on some agriculture abstraction licences and more of these are likely to be triggered with continued dry weather. A hands off flow condition allows us to instruct the abstractor to reduce or cease abstraction to help protect river flows and the biodiversity they sustain.

There may also be animal health and welfare issues if livestock drinking water is not available due to streams drying up or disruption to mains supplies. The Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board (AHDB) has produced guidance for farmers on what to do if the water supply for their livestock is at risk. It is available on the [AHDB website](#).

## **Environment**

Today is World Environment day and we celebrate the crucial role water plays in maintaining the health of our natural environment. Throughout the summer we will continue to report and respond to incidents and watch closely for signs of environmental harm. We also recognise that after three years of prolonged dry weather the winter rainfall has provided a fragile recovery. In our chalk streams, the groundwater recharge has enabled flows to return and a positive potential buffer for drier months ahead, but there are still hotspots where rivers are dry and receding. In surface water-dominated catchments in the north and south west, current low flows present an environmental risk.

## **Advice to the public**

As today is World Environment Day we urge everyone to think about where your water comes from and how you can use it more efficiently. Water keeps our local rivers, reservoirs, lakes, and taps flowing. It provides life to nature as well as to ourselves and livelihoods to farmers.

This is critical not only in the next few weeks and months but also the coming years and decades to ensure we have the necessary water resources to continue to sustain wildlife and habitats.

### **We can all do our bit:**

While we enjoy the hot and sunny days please consider your water use:

- Now is a great time to install a water butt to capture the rain when it returns. Plants prefer rainwater to mains tap water
- Instead of using a hose wash the car using a bucket and sponge
- Unless you have laid new turf, grass doesn't need watering so save some

- money and help the environment by turning off your garden sprinkler
- We care for our plants in the garden, so give them what they need using a watering can rather than a hose. If you do use a hose, then fit a trigger control so you are only using it when you need to. Remember a constantly-running hose uses 1,000 litres in one hour.
  - If you have used a paddling pool, use a bucket to reuse the water on your shrubs and flowers rather than just pouring it onto your lawn.
  - Go to the [Waterwise website](#) for further advice on water efficiency measures.

Your environment needs your help! Report environmental incidents to the Environment Agency to ensure that we can protect our water resources for future generations.

While we ask people to use water wisely, they should [follow current NHS advice on helping to stop the spread of coronavirus](#) by washing your hands.

## Conclusions and next steps

The NDG reviewed the lessons from the previous three years of drought conditions and made a commitment across the sector to work together to ensure that there is enough water for the public, industry and agriculture. It also pledged to respond quickly to emerging situations and agreed to meet throughout the summer to monitor further developments.

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## [COP26 President speech at Race to Zero campaign launch](#)

Ladies and gentlemen,

All of us here know that failing to act on climate change will cause irreversible consequences.

As temperatures continue to rise, droughts and heatwaves will become more common.

This will devastate nature and biodiversity. And exact a catastrophic economic cost.

So it is great to see cities and countries, businesses and investors, uniting against this global threat.

Last week, the COP Bureau of the UNFCCC, with the UK and our Italian partners, agreed that COP26 will take place between 1st and 12th November 2021.

COP26 can be a moment where the world unites behind a fairer, greener recovery from the effects of Covid-19.

A recovery which delivers for both our people and our planet.

In recent years, the UK has shown that green growth is absolutely possible. Since 1990 we have grown our economy by 75% whilst cutting emissions by 43%. And in doing so, we have built entirely new industries.

20 years ago the UK had two offshore wind turbines powering just 2,000 homes. Fast-forward to 2020, and the UK has more offshore wind capacity than any other country in the world.

Earlier this year construction began at the world's largest offshore wind development, Dogger Bank. A project which, when complete, will be able to power 4.5 million UK homes.

Globally, the cost of wind power has fallen by 49% and that of solar power by 85% since 2010.

Renewables are already cheaper than coal power in two-thirds of all countries in the world.

This progress was made possible by the countries, companies, cities and regions who led the way.

Shifting investment, spurring innovation, scaling-up technologies and driving down costs.

And in the lead up to COP26, we have defined five areas which need particular attention:

Clean energy, clean transport, nature-based solutions, adaptation and resilience and, bringing it all together, finance.

From releasing capital for green projects, to making electric cars cheaper to buy, the opportunities of the green economy are broad.

And by working together, we can make progress faster.

That is why the UK, in partnership with Chile and the UN, is leading the Climate Ambition Alliance.

Bringing together 120 countries, 1,000 businesses, 36 investors, nearly 500 cities and regions, and more than 500 universities.

The Alliance is the largest ever coalition of leaders committed to reaching net zero by 2050.

It already represents over half of global GDP and covers nearly a quarter of CO2 emissions.

But we must go further.

So today the High-Level Champions for the UK and Chile, Nigel Topping and Gonzalo Munoz, are launching the 'Race to Zero'.

Urging businesses, investors, cities and regions around the world to commit to reaching net zero by 2050.

We are off to a great start.

It is great to see big names like Diageo and Rolls-Royce joining the 'Race to Zero' today.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Whether we live in the South, the North, the East or the West, we share one life-giving but fragile planet.

And as we recover from the Coronavirus, the world has an opportunity to not just rebuild what went before, but to build back better.

Uniting behind a green global recovery.

We must all do our part.

And I would urge everyone involved in today's event to join the 'Race to Zero' and commit your region, city or company to reaching net zero by 2050 at the latest.

Thank you.

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## **Homeowners need to check before starting work near flood defences**

Press release

The Environment Agency is reminding riverside residents in the East Midlands they may need a permit to carry out improvements to their homes.



Riverside homeowners should check whether they need a permit to carry out work

Many people have turned their attention to home improvements during lockdown.

But some may need a flood risk activity permit and should check on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

A spokesperson for the Environment Agency said:

Residents next to a main river could have flood defences near them or in their back gardens.

Works that may require a permit include building structures on or near a raised flood embankment (eg fencing or sheds), works on the river bank (eg repairs or re-profiling) and gardening (eg digging into and/or planting trees) on or near the raised flood embankment and wall.

We really appreciate the continued co-operation of residents to ensure that the flood defences are accessible for our staff at all times, which will help us to maintain them properly.

It's our priority to do everything we can to protect people from flooding. Homeowners are responsible for gaining permissions and may face enforcement action if they do not.

## **Further information**

We are prioritising our flood recovery work and have £120 million to repair assets damaged in the autumn and winter flooding 2019/20.

We are continuing to deliver all of our flood and coastal risk management projects where it is safe for our teams and delivery partners to do so.

We are following the latest guidance from Public Health England regarding safe working on construction sites.

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