

Government support package for universities and students

New measures to protect students and universities, including temporary student number controls, have been announced by the Education Secretary today (4 May), answering sector calls on the Covid-19 response.

Gavin Williamson has announced the [package of measures](#), drawing on proposals from the universities sector, to stabilise university admissions this autumn and to help the universities and students are safeguarded at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

Through the plans, English higher education providers will be able to recruit full-time undergraduate UK and EU students for 2020/21 up to a temporary set level, which is based on their forecasts for the next academic year, plus an additional 5%. The Government will control these numbers through the student finance system.

The Government will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places, with 5,000 ring-fenced for nursing, midwifery or allied health courses to support the country's vital public services.

The measures aim to allow students, who want to go to university and meet their entry requirements, to access higher education while avoiding competition among providers taking a form which would go against the interests of students and the sector.

Through the proposals from Government and the sector, students will benefit from a new proactive and personalised [UCAS Clearing process](#) this summer, which will help to broaden their horizons, and funding to support those in financial hardship.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway has also announced that £100m of public funding will be brought forward to this academic year to help protect vital university research activities. On top of that, an estimated £2.6bn of tuition fee payments will be bought forward to help universities better manage financial risks over the autumn, including taking steps to improve efficiencies and manage their finances in order to avoid cash flow problems further ahead.

The Government has also confirmed that providers are eligible to apply for its support packages, including business loan support schemes, which the Office for Students (OfS) the regulator in England, estimates could be worth at least £700m to the sector, depending on eligibility and take up. The Government has also published further guidance about how providers should access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to safeguard staff jobs, in particular stating that any grant from the scheme should not duplicate other sources of public funding where these are being maintained, such as UK home student tuition fees.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

We are committed to supporting our world class universities and students through this unprecedented challenging time. So we are putting measures in place to help protect students and staff from the impact of coronavirus.

I know this is an unsettling time for all involved, and we are working tirelessly with the sector to do everything we can to stabilise admissions and protect a vital part of our country's economy and society.

I am very grateful to universities for their innovation and dedication in their frontline response at this time.

Universities Minister Michelle Donelan said:

I know this is a very difficult and anxious time for students, universities and higher education staff, and we are working determinedly with the sector and my counterparts across the UK, to support them during this time.

Universities have an integral part to play in our economy, society and culture, which is highlighted now more than ever through their important role in the fight against the virus.

That is why we are introducing a package of measures to boost support for students, stabilise the admissions system and ease pressures on universities' finances.

Science Minister Amanda Solloway said:

The UK is home to some of the world's leading scientists and researchers. From the study of disease to vaccine development, their work has already proved itself to be invaluable to our response to coronavirus.

This £100 million we are bringing forward will provide immediate help to ensure the excellent research taking place in our universities continues throughout this period of uncertainty.

The full range of measures, bringing together collective action from the Government and sector organisations to help mitigate the impact of coronavirus, include:

- Stabilising admissions – Temporary measures mean providers will be able to recruit full-time, domestic students up to 5% above their forecasts in the next academic year, which is in line with proposals originating

from the sector, to help reduce volatility and ensure a fair and orderly admissions. The Government will also have the discretion to allocate an additional 10,000 places, with 5,000 ring-fenced for nursing, midwifery or allied health courses to support the country's vital public services.

- Preventing exploitative admissions practices – The OfS will consult on a [new temporary registration condition](#) so it can intervene if providers take actions that are harmful to the sector and students.
- Enhanced Clearing process – UCAS is developing a new, personalised Clearing system for students this summer. This includes Clearing Plus, a new service which matches students to universities or other opportunities based on their achievements and course interests. If students' calculated grades exceed their predicted ones, it can suggest alternative courses with higher entry requirements.
- University research funding – The Government is bringing forward £100m of [Quality-related research funding](#) (QR) for providers in England into this current academic year as immediate help to ensure research activities can continue during the crisis.
- Research sustainability taskforce – DfE and BEIS Ministers will set up an advisory sector working group with the Devolved Administrations to consider how best to respond to the challenges universities face on research as a result of Covid-19, and so university research can continue to support the UK's economic recovery following the crisis.
- Government business support – The Government has confirmed that universities are eligible to apply for the Government support schemes, including business loan support, which the OfS estimates could be worth at least £700m, depending upon eligibility and take-up. Providers can also access the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme to safeguard staff jobs, including for those with short-term contracts.
- Changes to tuition fee loan payments – The Student Loans Company will bring forward tuition fee payments of students in the in the 2020/21 academic year to providers, expected to be worth £2.6bn, to help cash flow. This will not affect the loan liability, amount of interest charged to students or the timing of their maintenance loan payments.
- Financial opportunities – As part of existing programmes and using established procedures, the DfE will consider purchasing assets, such as land and buildings, where they can be used for new or expanding schools and colleges. This financial year the DfE has budgeted for up to £100m to acquire sites for planned projects across purchases from suitable vendors, including higher education providers among others.
- Financial help for students – The Government has worked with the OfS to help clarify that providers can use existing funds, totalling £46m across April and May, to boost their hardship funds for students in financial difficulty. This can include help for IT equipment and internet access.
- Supporting international students – The UK continues to welcome overseas students, and Ministers are working across Government as a priority to ensure universities can continue to attract international students. DfE and DIT Ministers will also chair a group, including key sector representatives, to consider how the International Education Strategy can be updated to respond to the impact of the coronavirus outbreak. The student number controls will only apply to domestic and EU domiciled

full-time undergraduate students in the 2020/21 academic year.

The OfS is proposing a new temporary condition for registered higher education providers in England, allowing it to intervene if universities and colleges act in ways which puts at risk students' interests, or the stability or integrity of the sector. This could include making unconditional offers or pressuring students to accept places that would not be in their best interest through incentives, such as free laptops.

The Government continues to work closely with the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales, to mitigate the challenges the entire UK sector faces as a result of coronavirus.

It also continues to support the recruitment of critical workers, such as nurses and doctors, during this important time and aims to use this summer's enhanced Clearing to help this.

In January the Education Secretary wrote to the OfS asking it to prioritise funding through the teaching grant to STEM and specialist subjects. This move will be of more importance in responding to coronavirus.

The research funding plans follow the announcement by Government earlier this month that UKRI-funded PhD students whose studies have been disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic will receive further support, including additional grants of up to six months.

The Government's key focus will be on ensuring the country's world-class higher education system delivers for all students and the wider economy. As part of this, it expects all providers and their creditors to behave responsibly.

The Government expects access to the business support schemes, reprofiling of public funding and student number controls should be sufficient to help stabilise most providers' finances, and that should certainly be the first port of calls for providers. Should that not be sufficient, such that a higher education provider finds themselves at risk of closure, the Government will only intervene further where we find there is a case to do so, and only where it believes intervention is possible and appropriate, and as a last resort. In such instances, the DfE will be working with HMT and other Government departments to develop a restructuring regime, through which we will review providers' circumstances and assess the need for restructuring. Where action is required, this will come with attached conditions. The Government will work with the Devolved Administrations on this approach.

PM: 'It's humanity against the virus'

- The Prime Minister will call on countries to come together in a “truly global effort” to defeat coronavirus at a virtual international coronavirus pledging conference today
- Pledging event today kickstarts a month-long international investment drive ahead of the UK-hosted Global Vaccine Summit on 4 June
- The UK is already the biggest donor to the global fund to find a coronavirus vaccine

Prime Minister Boris Johnson will today (Monday, 4 May) co-host a major international conference to drive forward the global race for coronavirus vaccines, treatments and tests – and call on other countries to step up their efforts and work together on the “most urgent shared endeavour of our lifetimes”.

The Prime Minister’s call to action will come during the virtual Coronavirus Global Response International Pledging Conference, which is co-hosted by the UK and eight other countries and organisations.

He will confirm the UK’s pledge of £388 million in UK aid funding for research into vaccines, tests and treatments – part of a larger £744 million existing UK aid commitment to help end the pandemic and support the global economy.

This includes £250 million for the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) to develop vaccines against coronavirus – the biggest such donation to the fund by any country.

Speaking to the conference, the Prime Minister will say:

To win this battle, we must work together to build an impregnable shield around all our people, and that can only be achieved by developing and mass producing a vaccine.

The more we pull together and share our expertise, the faster our scientists will succeed. The race to discover the vaccine to defeat this virus is not a competition between countries, but the most urgent shared endeavour of our lifetimes.

It’s humanity against the virus – we are in this together, and together we will prevail.

International Development Secretary, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, said:

It is only by working together that we will prevent future waves of infection and end this pandemic as quickly as possible.

By strengthening developing countries' health systems and working to find a vaccine, the UK is playing its part in stopping the global spread of coronavirus to save lives everywhere and protect our NHS.

Tackling coronavirus globally is crucial to preventing a second wave of the virus re-emerging in the UK, which would put even further pressure on the NHS. It will also ensure that life-saving vaccines, treatments and diagnostic tests are available as soon as possible.

In the UK, work is progressing at pace on vaccine development – on Thursday the University of Oxford and AstraZeneca announced a partnership to support large-scale manufacture and potential distribution of a vaccine currently being trialled by the university.

On the 4th June, the UK will host the Global Vaccine Summit, bringing together countries and organisations to follow the UK's lead in investing in the work of Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

Last week International Development Secretary Anne-Marie Trevelyan announced a funding pledge equivalent to £330 million a year over the next five years to Gavi. This will help immunise 75 million children in the world's poorest countries.

Notes to editors:

The UK has so far provided £744 million of UK aid for the global response to coronavirus.

Today's pledge towards the \$8bn target is made up of the UK's previously announced £388 million support for new vaccines, tests and treatments:

- £250 million to the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, the biggest contribution of any country, to this fund to research a coronavirus vaccine.
- £40 million to support the Global Therapeutics Accelerator, a fund for the rapid development of coronavirus treatments.
- £23 million to support Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics to develop rapid tests for the virus to help identify and slow its spread.
- £75m for the World Health Organization's critical health systems response.

The UK has also pledged the equivalent of £330 million a year over the next five years to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance.

The UK is co-hosting today's summit with Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Norway, Saudi Arabia, and the European Commission.

Statement by Media Freedom Coalition on World Press Freedom Day

The undersigned members of the Media Freedom Coalition today issued the following statement for World Press Freedom Day:

Today, we celebrate the fundamental principles of press freedom around the world.

The protection and promotion of a free, independent and diverse media, online as well as offline, is critical to the functioning of inclusive, peaceful and democratic societies. Journalists and media workers provide the public with critical information, broaden our view of the world, and help us hold individuals and institutions to account.

As the world responds to the COVID-19 pandemic, these principles have seldom been more urgent or important. As recognised in the recent statement from the Executive Group of the Media Freedom Coalition, journalists and other media workers reporting from the front lines of this health crisis keep societies informed, promote proper health measures and counter false or misleading information. We commend their work.

In times of crisis such as these, the role of a free press is more important than ever.

Unfortunately, many states continue to restrict and censor the media and journalists face increasing danger in a growing number of countries. Too often, journalists and media workers are threatened, intimidated, and even killed – often with impunity – just for doing their job. Today and every day, we pay tribute to those we have lost, and commit to a world where every journalist and media worker can report without fear.

To counter threats to media freedom, all states must take action at a national level to ensure these fundamental rights are upheld within their own borders, and advocate for these rights elsewhere in the world.

The coalition is a partnership of countries, civil society and other stakeholders working together proactively to advocate for media freedom and safety of journalists. It responds to the need for ensuring better cooperation and coordination through an international and multi-stakeholder approach.

We commend those governments that have taken bold and decisive action to strengthen the protection of media freedom. At this critical time, journalists and media professionals need our support and protection. We welcome the launch of the first call for proposals from UNESCO's Global Media Defence Fund that was set up with contributions from our members.

Together, we remain committed to promoting media freedom and standing against any efforts to undermine it.

Letter from Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to Shadow Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster: 2 May 2020

- Only go outside for food, health reasons or work (but only if you cannot work from home)
- If you go out, stay 2 metres (6ft) away from other people at all times
- Wash your hands as soon as you get home

Do not meet others, even friends or family.

You can spread the virus even if you don't have symptoms.

Communities Secretary's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 2 May 2020

Good afternoon,

Welcome to the Coronavirus press conference from Downing Street.

I'm joined by Dr Jenny Harries, Deputy Chief Medical Officer for England.

Today's data shows that:

- 1,129,907 tests for coronavirus have now been carried out in the UK, including 105,937 tests carried out yesterday.
- 182,260 people have tested positive, that's an increase of 4,806 cases since yesterday.

- 14,695 people are currently in hospital with coronavirus, down 15,111 from the previous day.
- And sadly, of those tested positive for coronavirus, across all settings, 28,131 have now died. That's an increase of 621 fatalities since yesterday.

These are heart-breaking losses for every family affected, and our thoughts and prayers are with their families and their friends.

Jenny will provide an update on the latest data on Coronavirus.

But first, as Communities Secretary, I want to update on the steps we are taking to protect some of the most vulnerable people in our society.

As the Prime Minister set out this week, we have now passed the peak of this virus.

And he will provide more details on how we will address the second phase of this battle next week.

We all know that the restrictive measures – as necessary and as lifesaving as they are – are difficult for everyone.

All of you watching at home this afternoon have made sacrifices big and small, and I want to thank you once again for all that you are doing.

You are helping us as a country to turn the tide on coronavirus.

But for some in our society these measures involve sacrifices that none of us would wish anyone to bear.

For victims of domestic abuse, it means being trapped in a nightmare.

The true evil of domestic abuse is that it leaves vulnerable people, including children, living in fear in the very place where they should feel most safe and secure – inside their own home.

Though domestic violence can leave physical marks, the true extent of the inflicted pain is much deeper than those marks – it can be invisible, these are emotional scars.

Scars that may never heal and which can even pass to the next generation, whose young eyes see things that they never should.

And hear things that none of us would wish our children to witness.

As a father of three girls, I cannot even imagine women and young children being put in this situation.

But they are, and we must be alive to the reality of what is happening on all too many homes across the country.

I want us to defend the rights of those women and children wherever we can, and that is what we are going to do.

And this is not a crime inflicted solely on women: it affects men too.

This Government has already prioritised tackling domestic abuse.

The Domestic Abuse Bill, which had its second reading in Parliament last week, is a landmark piece of legislation which will create the first ever legal definition of domestic abuse.

And this is important because it holds those responsible to account and gives those suffering at the hands of others more confidence that action will be taken and perpetrators brought to justice.

Today, I can confirm that through the Domestic Abuse Bill, the government will also be ensuring that victims of domestic violence get the 'priority need' status they need to access local housing services much more easily.

This is a fully funded commitment which will mean that no victim of domestic violence has to make the unbearable choice between staying somewhere where they know is unsafe or becoming homeless.

This Government has been clear that we are determined to break the silence that surrounds victims, to stamp out the stigma and strengthen our support for survivors.

We have already announced an extra £15 million to strengthen our support, and an extra £16 million is going directly to refuge services.

But we recognise that the extra pressures that are being created due to COVID-19 and that necessitates more support.

While the necessary social distancing measures remain in place, it is harder than before for victims of domestic abuse to reach out to their friends, to their family, to colleagues, and neighbours for the support that they urgently need.

Today I can announce a package of over £76 million in new funding to support the most vulnerable in society during the pandemic.

This funding will help charities support survivors of domestic and sexual abuse, it will support vulnerable children and their families and victims of modern slavery.

This additional support will ensure more safe spaces and accommodation for survivors of domestic abuse and their children and the recruitment of additional counsellors for victims of sexual violence.

And this funding will also help front line charities to be able to offer different ways of supporting those in need, including through virtual or phone based services.

We know that some refuges have had to reduce or even to cancel their services they would want to provide during this pandemic.

This funding will help them to meet the challenges posed in this national emergency and to continue to help those that desperately need support.

I'd like to say a word of thanks to domestic abuse charities who are doing so much at this time to help so many people.

The Women's Aid refuge in my constituency is one example.

I'd like to thank Marlene and her amazing team in Newark. People like that do incredible work and deserve all our thanks and gratitude now more than ever before.

Where refuges don't have enough capacity to support those in need during the pandemic, some have asked if they could use hotels or other accommodation nearby on a temporary basis.

For example, as move-on accommodation, where they judge it to be safe and appropriate to do so. We will work with refuges to make this option available to them, if they judge it to be the right one where it's necessary.

And thank you also to pharmacies, such as Boots, who are providing a safe space for victims of domestic abuse in some of their shops, and are training more of their staff to be able to support those people when they come into the stores, so they can safely provide support and contact services for help and advice.

For any victims of domestic abuse watching at home this afternoon, let me say once again that you are not alone.

You do not have to stay at home. You can and should leave the home if you are in danger.

Victims should call 999 if in an emergency or if you are in danger and unable to talk call 999 then press 55.

Our outstanding police will be there for you. They will help you.

And if you need support please call the national domestic abuse helpline on 0808 2000 247 at any time.

Secondly, we have also been working with councils and charities to protect those sleeping who have been sleeping on our streets; a group particularly vulnerable to COVID19.

We set out to bring people in from the streets.

So far, more than 5,400 rough sleepers known to councils have been offered safe accommodation in just under a month – ensuring some of the most vulnerable people can stay safe during the pandemic.

This means that over 90% of rough sleepers known to councils have been offered accommodation where they can self-isolate during the crisis.

This country is viewed around the world as having taken one of the most intensive and successful approaches to protecting rough sleepers during the pandemic.

This was the right thing to do.

By working with charities, local council, churches, faith groups and volunteers, we have helped to protect thousands of lives.

I am extremely grateful to everyone who has been involved in this phenomenal national effort.

Today I am announcing that Dame Louise Casey, who is already leading a review into rough sleeping and advising the Government on ending it within this Parliament, has been appointed by the Prime Minister and I to spearhead this new Government initiative and she will lead a new taskforce.

In this role, she will oversee our national effort to ensure that thousands of rough sleepers now in safer accommodation continue to receive the physical and mental health support they need, while they self-isolate during the pandemic.

And she will work hand-in-hand with councils and with other groups across the country to plan how we can ensure as many people as possible can move into long-term, sustainable and safe accommodation they deserve once the pandemic is over.

We are determined that as few people as possible return to life on the streets, and I can think of nobody better than Louise to help us to achieve this.

This is a major challenge and I don't pretend that this second phase will be easy or that we will succeed in every case.

But we will apply the same energy and commitment and determination to this national effort as we did to the first.

And I am certain that the charities, the councils and the volunteers the people across the length and breadth of the country that have achieved so much in the last month will do the same job again.

Thirdly, and in closing, I'd like to update you on our shielding programme.

For those who have been identified by the NHS as being extremely clinically vulnerable due to underlying health conditions, that's now 1.8 million people in England alone.

They have been asked to stay at home with no face-to-face contact outside their household, except for their carers, for those people in the shielding group who don't have family or friends to support them, we've offered to

provide a basic weekly package of food and essentials.

I'm delighted to say today that we expect that the 1 millionth shielding package will be delivered in the next few days.

This service is entirely without precedent – nothing on this scale has been attempted in this country at least since the Second World War.

I am incredibly proud of the team who helped us deliver it.

I have loved reading the emails I have received from people who have got the boxes and seeing the photos that have posted on social media.

I said at the start of this process that there are many people who we are asking to be at home for a prolonged period of time as a result of the virus.

Not least in the shielded category but that we as a Government and as a country that they may be alone at home but that they shouldn't feel that that they are on their own.

You are not, and never will be.