

COVID-19 supporting resources

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Admissions and Transitions: Signpost to Information and Resources

Introduction

This paper provides links to information and resources for admissions and transitions in four tables:

- Regulatory guidance for providers in England
- Guidance for providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- Supporting resources
- Comment, opinion and background.

Regulatory guidance for providers in England

Note: This summary of Office for Students (OfS) and Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) publications related to COVID-19 is not exhaustive. Providers seeking a fuller account of OfS publications and/or consumer law advice for higher education should refer directly to the [OfS](#) and [CMA](#) websites respectively.

Source	Date (2020)	Document
OfS	17 March	<p>Update from the Office for Students on coronavirus (COVID-19)</p> <p>This letter to providers' accountable officers follows the initial letter of 9 March and sets out the three key objectives from the OfS and describes its approach to regulatory requirements, as follows:</p> <p>Our approach to regulatory requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In this unprecedented environment it would not be appropriate for us to continue to operate the regulatory system as we would in normal times so we will adapt our approach to support providers as they seek to protect the interests of their students. • We are not setting out particular approaches that providers should adopt because we recognise that understanding the local context for these difficult decisions is essential. In practice, this means that we are unlikely to draw negative conclusions about the actions a provider has taken - or not taken - where it is clear to us that it has properly considered the needs of its students and has made a reasonable decision. For significant decisions, this could mean recording the reasons for the decision clearly.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Providers' governing bodies and leadership teams will need to make good judgements about the actions necessary to protect the interests of students and, in particular, to ensure that students have effective pastoral support. This is consistent with our routine approach to management and governance matters. We expect to write again to accountable officers shortly with more detailed guidance about routine regulatory requirements, including a reduced requirement for reportable events. We intend to limit our requirements to the minimum necessary to ensure that students' interests are protected as far as is reasonably practicable in the current environment.
OIA	18 March	<p><u>Complaints arising from Coronavirus (COVID-19) disruption</u></p> <p>This briefing note for providers from the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA) includes information on a range of complaint scenarios relating to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Halls of residence and accommodation Teaching (eg the provider cannot deliver teaching, or wishes to extend or intensify teaching) Assessments (eg the provider has to cancel exams; creative and performing arts students may miss opportunities to exhibit or showcase their work) Cancellation of placements (eg placement providers stop offering placements) Requests for special consideration (eg students can't sit exams or complete assessments for good reason) Study abroad (eg students studying abroad are affected by local restrictions, or students intending to study abroad have their plans disrupted) Behaviour (eg students are victimised or abused) Communication and reassurance (eg poor communication increases anxiety) Supporting students (eg some students are more seriously affected than others, or the provider's student welfare systems are overwhelmed) Process delays (eg the provider cannot manage internal processes such as holding hearings because of staffing delays or because students cannot attend) <p>See also: <u>Coronavirus FAQ for students</u></p>
CMA	20 March	<p><u>CMA COVID-19 taskforce</u></p> <p>Information about the taskforce established by the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) to protect consumers against businesses seeking to exploit the exceptional circumstances brought about by COVID-19.</p>

OfS	25 March	<p><u>Regulatory requirements during the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic</u></p> <p>Letter to providers from Susan Lapworth, Director of Competition and Registration, OfS, with an appendix (Annex A) detailing the temporary changes being made to regulatory requirements from 25 March until further notice. The letter states:</p> <p>Approach to teaching and assessment: Our expectation is that providers should make all reasonable efforts to enable students to complete their studies, for achievement to be reliably assessed, for qualifications to be awarded securely, and to enable a fair and robust admissions process for 2020-21 entrants.</p> <p>Providers will already be making these arrangements and we expect only to take regulatory action where we consider that reasonable efforts have not been made or where standards have been compromised. We will not prescribe a particular approach and are working with the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) to provide models of good practice that providers may find helpful.</p> <p>Consumer rights: It will continue to be necessary for providers to provide clear communication (eg by email) to students to notify them about the changes in advance of them taking effect, the reasons for these, the impact the changes are likely to have, and the options available to students to avoid the changes without being adversely affected.</p> <p>Admissions: We do not expect to see changes to offers already made to applicants for 2020-21 as a result of coronavirus. In particular, we do not consider that changing a conditional to an unconditional offer in response to the current situation is likely to be in the best interests of students. Where we see such practices taking place we will take such action as we deem appropriate to protect the interest of students.</p>
OfS	25 March	<p><u>Guidance for providers about reportable events during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic</u></p> <p>This guidance introduces two 'narrowly defined reportable events': short-term financial risk and a requirement to report 'significant changes' to delivery of higher education.</p> <p>The latter covers the suspension or cessation of delivery of higher education, the loss of professional and statutory regulatory body accreditation, the inability to award credit or qualifications, the transfer of students between teaching sites, and the withdrawal of offers that have already been made. However, a provider does not have to report that it:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has moved teaching and assessment to an online or other delivery method • has temporarily closed a campus or the provider as a whole, as long as teaching continues to be delivered • has postponed the planned start date of a course • has transferred offers to an equivalent course due to start in 2020-21 (paragraph 23).

OfS	26 March	<p><u>Uni Connect programme: An update from the Office for Students</u></p> <p>This update relates to Uni Connect partnerships designed to encourage participation in higher education by bringing together universities, colleges and other local partners. Partnerships are expected 'to explore alternative modes of engagement and delivery, in particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how your approach could support broader groups of underrepresented students, not just those in your target schools and wards • the information, advice and guidance needs of students applying to higher education in the current admissions cycle.'
OfS	3 April	<p><u>Quality and Standards guidance during coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic</u></p> <p>This substantial piece of guidance is best read in its entirety. It provides information on the interpretation of the regulatory framework, particularly its 'B conditions' (B1-B5) covering quality and standards during the pandemic.</p>
OfS	3 April	<p><u>Extension of moratorium on unconditional offer-making</u></p> <p>This letter to accountable officers includes the following comment on calculated A-level grades and admission to higher education:</p> <p>The Department for Education and Ofqual have today published guidance for schools, pupils and parents to provide clarity about the process for the award of A-level qualifications this year. The guidance is clear that the grades awarded to students will have equal status to those awarded in other years and should be treated in this way by universities and colleges. The date for A-level results will be announced shortly. This means that the admissions process for 2020-21 will run in a similar way to previous years. There is therefore no reason for providers to make unconditional offers or to make changes to existing offers for those applicants awaiting their Level 3 qualifications and for whom admissions decisions are normally predicated on these qualifications.</p>
OfS	17 April	<p><u>Further extension to moratorium on unconditional offer-making</u></p> <p>This letter to accountable officers sets out details of a second extension to the moratorium on unconditional offers.</p>
OfS	22 April	<p><u>Coronavirus briefing note on student accommodation</u></p> <p>This briefing note concerns providers' responsibilities to students who were unable to return home before lockdown commenced on 23 March 2020, and the mitigation of rent arrears in both provider-managed and private sector accommodation.</p> <p>If students believe their accommodation provider is behaving unfairly during the pandemic, they can report them to the Competition and Markets Authority.</p> <p>It has relevance in terms of planning for next year and accommodation considerations, particularly if we see restrictions being lifted and then imposed again.</p>

OfS	30 April	<p><u>Supporting student mental health</u></p> <p>This briefing note references the OfS regulatory guidance published at the beginning of April 2020 (see above) which stated that 'all students are likely to require increased pastoral support and resources to support their wellbeing' during this period, and made clear the OfS expectation that universities and colleges should take 'reasonable steps to put in place equivalent alternative arrangements for such support for all students'. The briefing note provides examples of the practical steps universities and colleges are taking to support their students' mental health and wellbeing in challenging circumstances. In doing so, it considers how they are supporting the mental health and wellbeing of the general student population, students with a declared mental health condition and others who may be particularly vulnerable during this time. There are four main sections:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the mental wellbeing of the general student population • Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of students most vulnerable to the impact of the pandemic • Supporting the mental health and wellbeing of healthcare students moving into clinical practice • Supporting the mental health of students with declared mental health conditions. <p>The penultimate section 'Looking Ahead' includes the following information about transitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New students: the transition from school to higher education in the 2020-21 academic year will be very different from the usual pathway. The closure of schools from March 2020 and the cancellation of GCSE, A-level and BTEC exams means that students entering higher education over the coming years may have missed out on key aspects of their academic and personal development. Some may struggle academically in their first term or beyond. This may be a particular issue for students from underrepresented groups, as much of their outreach activity will have been delivered in different ways during this period. • Current students: depending on how a university or college's learning and teaching arrangements are running during the lockdown period, students may have missed out on academic learning or other student experiences. This broad group includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Students returning from planned placement years, or years abroad, may have missed key elements of their courses. ○ Healthcare students (non-final year) may experience significant changes to their clinical placements during the pandemic and beyond. Those undertaking placements may have been exposed to challenging and distressing situations. ○ Postgraduate research students may have paused their studies, including because it has not been safe to conduct research activities. ○ Graduating students are likely to experience high competition for employment, potentially the withdrawal of job offers and potentially delays to the start of postgraduate courses. <p>Given the disruption to normal study patterns, and potential longer-term changes to higher education as a result of the coronavirus pandemic, it is</p>
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		possible that universities and colleges will see new patterns in their students' mental health and wellbeing emerge.
OfS	4 May	<p><u>Regulator warns of penalties for recruitment practices that undermine student interests and stability of higher education</u></p> <p>This media release states:</p> <p>'Applicants need to have confidence that the admissions process will be conducted as fairly and transparently this year as it would be in any other year. Current students need to know that their university will be able to continue delivering high quality courses. And potential future students will be best served by a higher education system that continues to offer a wide range of course options. We are especially concerned that any unfair practices during this crisis could particularly harm the chances of those who are already more vulnerable, at a time when information, advice and guidance is less readily available than might normally be the case'.</p> <p>(Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive of the OfS)</p>
OfS	4-26 May	<p><u>Consultation on the integrity and stability of the English higher education sector</u></p> <p>This material provides information about the launch of the OfS consultation on proposals for a new condition of registration lasting one year in the first instance and enabling OfS to impose substantial financial penalties on universities and colleges that change their admissions strategies because of financial pressures related to the coronavirus pandemic. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • changing student recruitment practices in an effort to increase student intake beyond normal levels, for example, by converting existing conditional offers to unconditional, lowering academic or language requirements for international applicants, offering incentives for students to accept offers, or engaging in aggressive marketing activity designed to attract students away from other choices • making misleading statements about other universities in an attempt to discourage students from attending them, for example, by claiming that other universities are failing to support or provide tuition to their students during the pandemic • making decisions that do not demonstrate high standards of good governance and could undermine public trust and confidence in higher education, for example, by using government financial assistance for purposes that do not serve the interests of students or the public • failing to comply with public commitments, for example, by publicly agreeing to abide by voluntary requirements (such as a Code of Practice) and then failing to do so • bypassing UCAS admissions processes where they would normally use them.

Guidance for providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Source	Date (2020)	Document
Scottish Funding Council (SFC)	5 May	www.sfc.ac.uk/news/2020/news-79329.aspx A dedicated COVID-19 page provides links to a range of information for providers including sector communications and FAQs
Scottish Public Services Ombudsman (SPSO)	Accessed 16 May	www.spsso.org.uk/covid-19-update-for-public-service-organisations Information on complaints handling and FAQs during COVID-19
Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)	Accessed 16 May	www.hefcw.ac.uk/working_with_he_providers/coronavirus/coronaviruses.aspx Information including a link to a Circular letter (dated 4 May) to heads of higher education institutions on the impact of COVID-19 on higher education providers in Wales. Information in the Welsh language can be accessed from the home page at www.hefcw.ac.uk
Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA)		www.oiahe.org.uk Information from the OIA also applies to providers in Wales (see first table for specific links)
Northern Ireland Direct Government Services	Accessed 16 May	www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-advice-schools-colleges-and-universities Information on schools, colleges and universities during COVID-19

Supporting resources

Source	Date (2020)	Document
QAA Scotland		<p><u>Completed Enhancement Themes: Student Transitions</u></p> <p>A range of resources from the Enhancement Theme on student transitions. Developed during 2014-17 the resources include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a transitions map • transition skills and strategies (summarised in a blog on the QAA COVID-19 pages) • equality and diversity • experiences and needs of international students. <p>Three inter-institutional collaborative projects focused on student skills development and the use of technology and online resources</p>
Wrexham Glyndŵr University		<p><u>The Confident Learner - Online Course</u></p> <p>This free course offered by Wrexham Glyndŵr University aims to support students transitioning to university and is advertised as being for anyone who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'is transitioning between Level 3 and 4 • is starting university in September (regardless of university) • is thinking about starting a part-time or professional course but is not 100% sure due to low qualifications • has already applied to university but needs to increase their entry grades.' <p>It offers 20 credits at Level 4 and is assessed via a portfolio and a presentation.</p>
QAA Scotland	1 April	<p><u>Focus on: Technology Enhanced learning</u></p> <p>(Note: this is also available on our COVID-19 pages)</p> <p>This is one of the QAA Scotland's 'Focus On' projects deriving from Scotland's Enhancement-led Institutional Review (ELIR). It was developed in 2019-20 with a Technology Enhanced Learning Sharing Practice online event on 1 April 2020. It contains an extensive Resource Hub intended to support the transition from physical to online learning, organised into sets of materials covering:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting your teaching online • lecture recording • enhancing inclusions and accessibility • student participation in co-creation • policy and strategy development.

		Included with the Resource Hub is Heriot Watt University's ' Rapid Response Toolkit ' designed to help university staff move rapidly to support online learning.
QAA Scotland	Accessed 16 May	<p>Distance and a sense of belonging in online distance learning</p> <p>This project, supported by QAA Scotland, involved a collaboration between five Scottish universities and created a sense of belonging toolkit which can be access at: www.open.edu/openlearncreate/course/view.php?id=4183</p> <p>It contains practical suggestions for tutors seeking to engage students studying at a distance.</p>
Advance HE	April-May	<p>Advance HE's 'Creating Socially Distanced Campuses and Education'</p> <p>This project aims to tackle the challenge of the 'socially distanced campus' and comprises: information sharing and exchange, a series of international workshops and of leadership intelligence reports.</p>
OIA		<p>Resources and publications: Case summaries</p> <p>The OIA publishes case summaries under a number of themes, one of which is complaints pertaining to consumer rights. A number of these are from the last couple of years and, while not related to the current pandemic, the matters that are raised in some are also pertinent to the challenges faced by providers in the current situation, for example, courses not being delivered as advertised and provision of adequate academic and pastoral support.</p>

Comment, opinion and background

Note: the following literature review makes no claim to be complete and, inevitably, stops at a moment in time (mid-May). Many more articles will appear over the coming weeks. It is included here for interest and for the value that it may offer at the time of publication, particularly as many of these publications present questions and reflections that could contribute to higher education providers' immediate planning.

Source	Date (2020)	Document
Times Higher Education (THE)	17 March	<p><u>Tips for studying online and at home for university students</u></p> <p>Seeta Bardwell writing for the THE, providing tips for students that might support them engaging successfully in online learning. Potentially useful for thinking about how to support students next year, whether continuing/returning or new.</p>
THE	20 March	<p><u>Educating despite the COVID-19 outbreak: lessons from Singapore</u></p> <p>This article by May Lim includes some reflections that might also be useful for managing the 2020-21 academic year in the UK and supporting continuing and new students in a range of possible scenarios.</p>
Eurydice	20 April	<p><u>How should students be admitted to higher education this year?</u></p> <p>A short article by David Crosier and Nikol Vasilieiou containing reflections on challenges around fair and transparent admissions for higher education institutions across Europe in the context of COVID-19. This includes reference to the approaches being in taken in different countries, including the UK, and the implications of those different approaches. The article references earlier EU research on admissions and transitions:</p> <p><u>Study of the impact of admissions systems on higher education outcomes</u></p> <p>This study comes in two volumes - Volume I is a comparative report and Volume II comprises eight national case studies. The study contains interesting reflections on the types of transitions involved throughout compulsory and post-compulsory education and, specifically, on the transitions from school to higher education, and those within higher education itself.</p>
Education Space Consultancy	24 April	<p><u>The impact of social distancing on teaching delivery</u></p> <p>The first in a projected fortnightly series from Ben Moreland (Director, Education Space Consultancy). This article provides an overview of the potential impact of COVID-19, on campus management and, in particular, on teaching space including dance studios, science laboratories, computer rooms and lecture theatres. There are implications for student movement (eg one-way corridors), teaching activities (eg group size), loss of teaching space (which could result in</p>

		80% less space in some cases), and timetabling (reduced room capacity/less movement between classes).
WonkHE	26 April	<p><u>What is the Covid cohort saying about applying to university?</u></p> <p>This piece by Clare Marchant, Chief Executive of UCAS, provides a summary of applicants' behaviours, noting some of the implications for this year's applicants in terms of an atypical educational experience prior to higher education. It emphasises a need for effective communication with applicants.</p>
THE	27 April	<p><u>Could online exams transform how we think about learning?</u></p> <p>It is not just students who will be transitioning next academic year. There is the very real possibility it could be staff as well. This article by Joyce Lau and John Ross provides some thought-provoking examples of what has already been learnt and what it might mean for how higher education operates in the future.</p>
Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI)	29 April	<p><u>Scaling up online education? More haste less speed.</u></p> <p>Guest blog from Professor Neil Morris, Chair in Educational Technology, School of Education, University of Leeds. This blog considers the implications of COVID-19 in the context of the findings of a joint project '<u>Unbundled University</u>' by the University of Leeds and the University of Cape Town, funded by ESRC (UK) and NRF (South Africa). A free course entitled 'The Unbundled University, the Market and Digital Technology' which explores the findings is available at <u>FutureLearn</u>.</p>
Education Space Consultancy	1 May	<p><u>The impact of social distancing on student contact hours</u></p> <p>The second article from Ben Moreland looks in considerable detail at timetabling challenges, modelling scenarios using a range of criteria including type of activity, size of group, delivery hours and onsite contact hours, all set against a background of a very substantial shortfall in teaching space caused by social distancing guidelines. For the example institution used for the modelling, the following changes would be necessary:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All lectures will need to be delivered online. • Students can now only expect 50 minutes of onsite seminar contact time, for every two hours previously targeted. • Students can now only expect one hour of onsite practical contact time, for every three hours previously targeted. • The teaching week will increase by <u>21 hours</u>.
WonkHE	3 May	<p><u>COVID-19 does discriminate - so we should tackle its impact on BAME students</u></p> <p>This piece by Gurnam Singh includes ways to support BAME students, with advice around creating inclusive learning environments and particular reference to the need to be sensitive to 'imposter syndrome'</p>

		<p>in non-traditional students. It raises some interesting points relevant to managing the successful transition of these students into higher education in the coming academic year.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is true that nobody is immune to catching the virus, but there is strong evidence of disproportionate impact in BAME communities with statistics suggesting that, despite making up 13% of the population, nearly 35% of the most critically ill patients are from BAME backgrounds. • Rates of poverty among BAME communities have been estimated at double that of white people. Given their socio-economic status, BAME students are more likely to be vulnerable to the economic fallout triggered by COVID-19 and, among other things, this may adversely impact their ability to engage with and complete coursework and assessment tasks, eg access to suitable and reliable equipment and broadband facilitates. • The key to creating inclusive learning environments is to reduce student anxiety and, for non-traditional students, the effects of an 'imposter syndrome' or a feeling of less worth, being an outsider and harbouring doubts about one's ability.
Improving the Student Experience in Higher Education	3 May	<p>Proposal for a staggered return to higher education for new and returning students in the UK</p> <p>An alternative plan by Michelle Morgan intended to maximise recruitment, progression, retention and the success of students including the mapping of the academic year. This comprises a proposal and a mapping of the year.</p> <p>A summary of the proposal is also available on WonkHE (7 May).</p>
HEPI	7 May	<p>Above and beyond predictions - No exams presents an opportunity for innovation in contextual admissions</p> <p>This blog (contributed to the Higher Education Policy Institute by Claire Marchant, Chief Executive of UCAS), provides some statistics around applicant outcomes in comparison to predicted grades. The case for contextualised admissions is considered against this backdrop.</p> <p>'Across the UK last year, nearly 13,000 18-year old UCAS applicants were under predicted in their A levels. That's around 1 in 12.</p> <p>These students, in more conventional times, would seize the moment when taking their exams and excel beyond their teacher's predictions. It's imperative that we as a sector do not overlook them. While some of our new survey work shows applicants are still fixed on their university selections and are keen to do what it takes to get to their dream university, some feel that they have lost their chance to shine by not sitting an exam.</p> <p>These are the students that universities and colleges should now have at the forefront of their mind as the admissions cycle works through to its conclusion. These are the students who could've previously shone</p>

		in a traditional exam setting. These are the students with a clear potential to flourish, but only if the sector plays its part.'
WonkHE	12 May	<p><u>What would a socially distant student experience be like?</u></p> <p>This article by Jo Walters considers the difference between what one is allowed to do, what one is able to do, and what one is willing to do, then applies these to two different hypothetical students. This prompts questions around some of the planning that might be necessary to mitigate the disparity in student experiences based on differing circumstances.</p>
WonkHE	13 May	<p><u>The admissions problem isn't just about 'prediction'</u></p> <p>This article by Hollie Baker, a Widening Participation and Outreach Manager within the sector, suggests that the process by which applicants will be awarded the results that will be critical for their entry to higher education this year will exacerbate the disparity already in the system, increasing the disadvantage to the most disadvantaged students.</p>

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