



Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities

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27th April 2021

Dear Lord Wharton,

Guidance to the Office for Students: distribution of hardship funding

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Office for Students again for all its hard work in responding to the Covid-19 pandemic. Your efforts in successfully allocating an additional £70m of student hardship funding in the financial year just ended are greatly appreciated.

In light of the decision that all remaining students will be able to return to in-person teaching from 17 May at the earliest, alongside Step 3 of the Government's Roadmap, the Department for Education is now making available a further £15m of hardship funding for the current academic year. This funding will help with the continuing financial impacts of the pandemic on students, including the costs of dual accommodation and accessing remote learning.

This letter provides further guidance from me to the Office for Students under section 2(3) of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 and I confirm this guidance does not supersede or steer in any previous guidance.

Allocation and distribution of funding

As with the advice in my letters of 14 December and 2 February, I would like the OfS to use the existing student premium funding mechanism to distribute this funding, taking into account the following priorities:

- a) That funding is targeted towards those providers who recruit and support high numbers of disadvantaged students, reflecting where this funding is needed most to enable students to continue with their courses and achieve successful outcomes.
- b) That full-time and part-time students will both be at risk of experiencing hardship resulting from the pandemic, but full-time students may be particularly affected, e.g., due to changes in their location of study.

In distributing the funding, I would like you to make use of the same student premium splits that were detailed in my letter of 14 December 2020 for allocation of £20 million of student hardship funding.

Payment, terms and conditions and monitoring

I would also like you to put in place the following terms and conditions of funding when you allocate this funding to providers:

- a) The funding is distributed in full within this academic year to higher education students to address hardship that they face, particularly where it is needed to support continuation of study and successful outcomes. The funding must not be used to meet providers' own costs. You should recover funding that is not used in the time available for the purposes intended.
- b) Providers can have flexibility in how they distribute the funding to students in a way that will best prioritise those in greatest need. The funding can be distributed to a wider population of higher education students than those counted in the student premium funding methods including, for example, postgraduates (whether taught or research), international students and others that do not meet the definition of 'OfS fundable'. However, this funding should not be paid to individuals that are not studying at higher education level (level 4 or above) or towards a higher education qualification.
- c) The funding should also be available to help students that have already applied for hardship funding previously but now need additional support. I would also ask you to ensure that hardship funds are available on an equal basis to students who are on courses that Approved (fee cap) providers subcontract out for teaching by other providers.

As in my letters of 14 December and 2 February, I would like the OfS to monitor providers' use of this hardship funding through existing reporting mechanisms, including providers' audited financial statements. I would also like you, as before, to urge providers to alert students to the availability of the hardship funding and encourage providers to have sufficiently rigorous application processes to prioritise funding to those in greatest need, while avoiding bureaucracy that might deter applicants.

Finally, I would like again to express my thanks to the OfS for continuing to rise to the challenges resulting from the pandemic and helping ensure our students have the support they need and deserve.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Michelle Donelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities