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**Michelle Donelan MP**  
Minister of State for Universities

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Rt Hon Sir George Howarth

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Dear Sir George,

Thank you for your email of 20 August, addressed to the Secretary of State, raising concerns about space limitations and the financial implications of centre assessment grades (CAGs) for universities. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area, and I am sorry for the delay in responding to you.

The government understands that this is a difficult time for students and the wider higher education (HE) sector. We are very grateful for the work HE providers are doing in the fight against coronavirus – from supporting students to ground-breaking research and providing specialist equipment.

HE providers are autonomous institutions and we expect them to make their own judgements based on the latest public health guidance. We are working with the HE sector to identify guidance and best practice that will help providers make informed decisions about their provision. This includes how they can make their buildings and campuses accessible again for staff and students, as long as this can be done in a way that minimises risk and is in line with public health advice.

We expect HE providers to be open for academic year 2020 to 2021, although there may be some differences from previous years, reflecting the measures that you are putting in place to ensure that you are minimising the risks to students and staff, in accordance with public health guidelines. The latest information about universities reopening is on GOV.UK and can be accessed here: <https://tinyurl.com/Y9R2ZLE5>.

Each HE provider will need to translate this into the specific actions they need to take, depending on the demographic profile of your staff and student bodies, the nature of their institution, including the size and type of institution, and how the institution is organised and operated.

This is complemented by guidance issued by Universities UK (UUK) for reopening campuses to students and staff, and you can find this on the UUK website at: [tinyurl.com/YBKLAGRN](http://tinyurl.com/YBKLAGRN).

On 4 May 2020, the Secretary of State announced a package of measures, including the introduction of temporary student number controls (SNCs). These measures aimed to stabilise university admissions; support the higher education (HE) system in England; and to continue to deliver for all students and the wider economy.

We recognise that the change to CAGs has implications for universities, and we therefore intend to remove the temporary SNCs for academic year 2020/21 to help ensure that there are no additional barriers to students being able to progress to higher education. Temporary SNCs that were previously notified to providers will no longer apply.

We are working closely with the sector to create additional capacity and ensure providers are as flexible as possible. As part of the government's Higher Education Taskforce, universities agreed to honour all offers across all courses to students who meet the conditions of their offer this coming year. If maximum capacity is reached, they will endeavour to offer a suitable alternative course that students are happy with or a deferred place at the same university.

Students who previously missed an offer and will now meet it on the basis of their centre assessment grades should get in contact with the university. Those who have accepted another offer will be able to release themselves if they have their preferred choice reinstated.

However, I would like to assure you that the Secretary of State has announced a package of measures, drawing on proposals from the universities sector, to stabilise university admissions this autumn and ensure sustainability in HE at a time of unprecedented uncertainty.

Universities and colleges that are registered with the Office for Students (OfS) are regulated by them and must meet certain conditions. The OfS has the powers to introduce new conditions of registration, provided they have regard to OfS' general duties set out in legislation. The OfS consulted on this and the consultation closed on 26 May. The OfS considered the responses before introducing the condition and in these instances the OfS believe the introduction of a temporary registration condition (designed to address specific circumstances relating to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic) is necessary and proportionate. The OfS has published its response which can be accessed at: [tinyurl.com/YA5SQ3K4](https://tinyurl.com/YA5SQ3K4).

On 4 May, the government announced a major package of support for HE providers. As a part of this, we announced a reprofiling of Quality-related Research (QR) funding in England, bringing £100m forward as a short-term measure to help safeguard university research and act as a reassuring signal to the research sector.

The government has also: pulled forward tuition fee payments, expected to be worth £2.6 billion, for providers so that they receive more cash in the first term of academic year 2020/21; confirmed providers are eligible to apply for the government financial support schemes estimated by the OfS to be worth at least £700 million to the sector; and announced a joint BEIS/DFE Ministerial Task Force on the sustainability of university research to identify and assess impacts facing universities and consider approaches to help address these. Additionally, on 27 June, the government announced two new support packages to protect research jobs and ground-breaking research projects impacted by coronavirus.

From this autumn, UK universities will be able to access a series of government grants and long-term, low interest loans covering up to 80% of their income losses caused by an expected decline in international students, ensuring that their crucial research can continue. Further, around £280 million government funding will be made available to universities impacted by coronavirus. This will fund extensions to grants, allowing them to continue developing ambitious and innovative research projects, funded through UKRI and the National Academies, including supporting researchers' salaries and other research costs like laboratory equipment and fieldwork. More details can be accessed at: [tinyurl.com/YAMVULLP](https://tinyurl.com/YAMVULLP).

We expect access to the business support schemes, reprofiling of public funding and student number controls should help stabilise most providers' finances, and that should certainly be the first port of call for providers. This department is working closely with the Treasury and other government departments to develop a restructuring regime for HE providers in England. We will only intervene where we find there is a case to do so, and only where we believe intervention is possible and appropriate, and as a last resort.

On 16 July the Secretary of State for Education also made an announcement providing more details on the HE restructuring regime. This scheme will review providers' circumstances and assess the need for restructuring, financial support and come with strict any attached conditions to align with wider government objectives. We are discussing our approach with the devolved administrations. Additionally, the OfS is continuing to monitor the financial health of institutions.

Universities have an integral part to play in our economy, society and culture, which is highlighted now more than ever through their leading role in the fight against the coronavirus outbreak. That is why we have introduced this package of measures to boost support for students, stabilise the admissions system and ease the pressures on universities' finances. I have written to all Honourable Members, with full details of the package, which is also available on GOV.UK at: [tinyurl.com/Y7V2LXZH](https://tinyurl.com/Y7V2LXZH).

I would like to thank you both for taking the time to write on this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle Donelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping flourish at the end of the name.

**Michelle Donelan MP**  
**Minister of State for Universities**