

# The All-Party Parliamentary **University Group**

7 July 2021

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This briefing document has been produced by Universities UK which provides the secretariat for the University APPG.

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## Agenda

This meeting of the All-Party Parliamentary University Group is being held to discuss preparations for the next academic year, including student support, educational recovery, Covid-planning and admissions.

- 5:00pm Daniel Zeichner MP, Chair, All-Party Parliamentary University Group
- c5:05pm Professor Debra Humphris, Vice-Chancellor, University of Brighton and Chair, University Alliance
- c5:15pm Geoff Barton, General Secretary, the Association of School & College Leaders (ASCL)
- c5:25pm Chris Havergal, News Editor, Times Higher Education
- c5:35pm Vivienne Stern, Director, Universities UK International
- c5:40pm Questions, comments, and discussion with university leaders, MPs and peers
- 6:15pm Meeting concludes

## Speaker Biographies

### **Professor Debra Humphris, Vice-Chancellor, University of Brighton and Chair, University Alliance**



Professor Debra Humphris joined University of Brighton in December 2015 from Imperial College in London, where she held the positions of Pro-Rector (Education) and Vice-Provost (Education) between 2012 and 2015.

She earned her doctorate on the implementation of policy into clinical practice in the NHS in 1999 and from 2000-2012 she worked at the University of Southampton, progressing through a number of director roles, including director of the Healthcare Innovation Unit, to Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Education and Student Experience). Whilst at the University of Southampton she chaired the Employment and Skills Board for the Solent Local Enterprise Partnership.

Debra has served as chair of University Alliance since September 2019. She is Chair of the UCEA Clinical Academic Staff Advisory Group (CASAG) and is also a member of the Coast to Capital (Local Enterprise Partnership) Board.

In all of her roles, Debra has championed quality of student experience, and communication and advocacy of the institution and its engagement with internal and external communities.

### **Geoff Barton, General Secretary, the Association of School & College Leaders (ASCL)**



Geoff studied English and Linguistics at the University of Lancaster, then trained to teach at Leicester University. From 2002 to 2017 he was headteacher of King Edward VI School, Bury St Edmunds, a comprehensive school of 1,650 students.

He is a Founding Fellow of the English Association and writes for a range of newspapers and journals. He has worked with various organisations, including the Department for Education, on leadership and literacy.

Geoff was a longstanding member of ASCL Council, former chair of its Pedagogy Committee, is Patron of the English and Media Centre, and a 'Leading Thinker' for the National Education Trust. He became General Secretary of ASCL in April 2017.

### **Chris Havergal, News Editor, Times Higher Education**



Chris Havergal has been news editor since February 2017. Previously he was a reporter who covered areas including teaching and learning, access, and internationalisation. Chris started his career as local government correspondent at the *Cambridge News* and holds a BA in history and an MA in medieval studies from the University of York.

### **Vivienne Stern, Director, Universities UK International**



Vivienne has over 20 years' experience of working in higher education policy and politics at national and international level. Prior to her role in UUKi, Vivienne was Head of Political Affairs at Universities UK, and led the sector's response to several major pieces of legislation relating to universities. Before that she worked for the Chair of the House of Commons Education Select Committee, and as policy specialist working on topics including quality, student experience, innovation and university-business links.

She is a member of several Boards and advisory committees, including the Education Sector Advisory group of the Department for Education /Department for International Trade; the Board of UKRI's Fund for International Collaboration; the British Council's Education Advisory Group.

She is a graduate in English Literature from the University of Cambridge.

## 2021 exam arrangements

### England

In February 2021, the exams regulator Ofqual and the Department for Education (DfE) published plans for assessments in summer 2021. This confirmed that GCSE, AS and A level grades will be awarded based on teacher assessment, with students given a grade based on work they have produced and been taught on. Teachers will be able to draw on a range of evidence when determining these grades. Private candidates will need to work with a recognised exam centre and will be assessed in the same way. Exam boards will provide schools with guidance on how to make fair and consistent judgements. Quality assurance processes will be in place with internal checks by head teachers and external checks by exam boards.

A two week consultation was conducted to seek views on how best to provide alternative arrangements to this year's exams. A joint consultation was held at the same time on how to award vocational, technical and other general qualifications.

Results day for A/AS levels has been confirmed as Tuesday 10 August 2021 and Thursday 12 August 2021 for GCSEs. Awarding for vocational qualifications will depend on the progression route of the qualification. For those that are linked to progression to further or higher education these will not include exams and results will be issued to students on or before these dates. Students will be able to appeal and prioritisation will be given to those cases where outcomes determine progress to the next stage of education or training.

More information is available [here](#).

### Northern Ireland

Education Minister Peter Weir confirmed on 25 February that students in Northern Ireland will also receive their results on 10 August for CCEA AS/A Levels and 12 August for GCSEs. GCSE, AS and A level grades will be calculated using teacher professional assessments, known as Centre Determined Grades, following a set procedures, training and guidance provided by the Northern Irish exams regulator, CCEA.

More information is available [here](#).

### Scotland

Higher and Advanced Higher exams will not go ahead and instead will be replaced with awards based on teacher judgement of evidence of pupils' attainment. This judgement will be based on evidence of a students performed which is measured against published subject requirements. The National Qualifications 2021 group have provided the model for certification in 2021. Final results will be released on 10 August. Further information on appeals is expected to be released in due course.

More information is available [here](#).

### Wales

Learners undertaking GCSE, AS and A levels approved by Qualifications Wales will have their qualifications awarded through a Centre Determined Grade model. This means that grades will be determined by their school or college based on an assessment of the learner's work. Schools and colleges will be able to use a range of evidence to determine the grades to be awarded to their learners, including NEA elements, mock-exams, and classwork. Qualification Wales announced that results days will be 10 August for AS/A levels and 12 August for GCSEs. There will be a three-stage process to appeals with schools/colleges providing learners with provisional grades in stage 1. At this stage learners are able to appeal to the school to review these grades and check for procedural errors. Stage 2 appeals are to be sent to the Welsh exams board, WJEC, once final qualification

grades are released. Stage 3 occurs when a Stage 2 appeal is completed and learners can request an Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) review from Qualifications Wales to check WJEC procedures were followed.

More information is available [here](#).

## **Universities' approach to admissions**

The cancellation of A-level exams and the impact of the pandemic on prospective students means that Covid-19 has had implications for undergraduate student recruitment process for the upcoming 2020/21 academic year.

Universities are well-placed to deliver for applicants this year, despite the ongoing uncertainties created by the pandemic.

Earlier this year, [UCAS' January deadline](#) was pushed back by two weeks from 15 January to 29 January 2021. This was done in recognition of the disruption some applicants might have faced as a result of schools closing from early January.

Other key dates in this year's admissions cycle can be found on UCAS's website [here](#).

In England, university admissions teams must continue to abide by the Office for Students' temporary [condition of registration](#), which remains in place until September 2021. Among other things, this condition prohibits the use of 'conditional unconditional' offers, (where an offer is only unconditional if the applicant makes that university or college their firm choice).

Universities UK have a proposed '[fair admissions agreement](#)' – a set of principles and behaviours that demonstrate how the sector places the student interest at the heart of admissions decision-making processes, recognising the additional pressures on students during this difficult and disruptive time.

## **Medical and dental places**

Due to last year's disruption from COVID-19 and the impact on A-level results in 2020-21, there was an increased number of students eligible to take up their offer at a medical or dental school. In response to this, the government asked the OfS to suspend the use of the intake controls during the 2020-21 academic year.

As a direct result of the impact on A-level outcomes in 2020, many students either deferred their entry from 2020-21 by one year or were able to secure a place for 2021-22 by sitting their A-levels in Autumn and meeting the conditions of their 2020-21 offer. As a result of this, Universities Minister, Michelle Donelan MP, [wrote](#) to the OfS to update the intake targets for 2021-22 so that new entrants will not be disadvantaged by last year's disruption.

## **Support for students starting in 2021-22**

Universities have put in place extensive support for students starting their studies in the new 2021-22 academic year. Preparations are well underway to ensure that new students experience a positive transition into university life, with tailored support and activities that recognise the disruption they have faced during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Students have been extremely resilient in the face of significant uncertainty and universities have been working closely with their existing students to learn from their experiences and adapt their approaches for the next academic year.

This [collection of case studies](#) highlights some of the skills development, transition, and wellbeing initiatives and advice that universities are planning, in addition to their usual comprehensive student support services and welcome programmes.

## **Student returns**

On 4 January 2021, the Government announced a third national lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic. Prior to the lockdown, Higher Education (HE) students were planning for a staggered return to campuses from 25 January 2021.

The lockdown rules prevented the majority of students from returning to campuses. Only HE students taking specific courses relating to key health areas or taking vocational courses that were about to be completed where assessments could not be done remotely were allowed to return for teaching. The remainder of courses reverted to online delivery.

On 28 January 2021, the Education Secretary Gavin Williamson announced that colleges and universities would return from 8 March at the earliest. On 22 February 2021, the Prime Minister announced a roadmap for ending lockdown restrictions in England. The roadmap set out that from 8 March all schools and colleges would be able to fully open, while students on HE courses requiring practical teaching and specialist facilities would also be able to return to campus.

In March 2021, the DfE issued updated guidance for Higher Education Institutions that confirmed that from 8 March they would be able to resume in-person teaching and learning for students who were studying practical or practice-based (including creative arts) subjects requiring specialist equipment and facilities. Higher Education Institutions with high numbers of returning students were asked to consider staggering their return. Where community testing facilities were available, students were encouraged to test themselves before they travelled back to university. Once students had returned to their term-time accommodation they were to remain living there, but they could return home for their Easter break.

On 13 April 2021, the Universities Minister Michelle Donelan MP announced that remaining HE students would be able to return to in-person teaching from 17 May at the earliest.

### **Guidance for the 2021/22 academic year**

At the time of publication no guidance for step 4 of the roadmap (19 July) has been published by the Department for Education, but it is expected imminently.

Universities are expecting that the Department for Education will issue guidance covering the 2021/22 academic year in the near future, which should cover student returns, social distancing, any limits on in-person activities and other non-pharmaceutical interventions.

Universities are looking to offer as much in-person provision as possible within the limits of public health guidance, and ensuring that planning for different scenarios is as robust as possible. It is important that government guidance is published as soon as possible to enable universities and students to plan and manage expectations.