



2021-0024874MDPO

Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities

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Daniel Zeichner MP

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16 June 2021

Dear Daniel,

Thank you for your letter of 27 April, about quarantine measures for international students travelling from abroad.

This government absolutely recognises that this is a difficult and uncertain time for students, but we are working with the sector to make sure all reasonable efforts are being made to enable students to continue their studies.

The UK remains a world-leading destination for study and we are working closely with the higher education (HE) sector to ensure that international HE students are welcomed to the UK. We expect international students to be given the support they need upon arrival by their chosen university during these unprecedented times.

As you are aware, we have introduced new measures for international travel to combat the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Arrivals from overseas must now quarantine in a managed quarantine hotel if they have travelled from or passed through a country on the list where travel to the UK is banned. The list of banned countries is constantly under review and can be found on the GOV.UK website at: tinyurl.com/Y7N2YCBS.

We speak regularly with counterparts across Government, including with colleagues at the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC), about how various COVID-19 policies may affect students, with a view to minimising burdens for students while maintaining public health. As such, I have remained in close contact with DHSC Ministers responsible for the Managed Quarantine Service. As you will understand, quarantine in a managed quarantine hotel is a necessary measure taken in order to stop the spread of potentially harmful variants of COVID-19 into the UK.

India has been added to England's red list to protect the country against a new variant of COVID-19 and against other existing variants. The situation in India has deteriorated with an extremely rapid rise in cases detected, and the Indian variant has now been uprated to a 'variant of concern'. As such, students arriving from India will be required to quarantine in a managed quarantine hotel on arrival.

We have worked closely with the sector and colleagues across Government to ensure that UK residents, including international students due to their visa status, that face significant financial hardship are able to apply for a deferred repayment plan when booking their managed quarantine hotel room. Travellers who access hardship will be referred to a Government debt collection agency (“Qualco”), who will perform an independent financial assessment and determine their eligibility.

The government recognises that international students may have specific support needs whilst studying in the UK, particularly if self-isolating. Any student who experiences financial hardship as a result of measures introduced to combat COVID-19 can also speak with their provider about support. We have made an additional £85m of student hardship funding available to higher education providers in the 2020/21 academic year.

This is in addition to the £256 million of government funded student premium funding already available to HE providers to draw on for this academic year, 2020/21, and this support can include help for students, including international students and postgraduates. International students can be confident in expressing these concerns to their provider without any impact on their immigration status.

We have asked also providers to ensure students have ongoing access to first points of contact for COVID-19 queries, and to make wellbeing support available (including student support networks, mental health and academic support) where required. Student should speak to their providers for more information about these services.

With regard to the launch of the new Graduate route, the UK was one of the first countries to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic by introducing comprehensive immigration flexibility. Since the outbreak of COVID-19, the Government has implemented a number of concessions to assist visa holders in the UK who have been impacted by global travel and health restrictions. This has included offering extensions of visas for those whose leave expired, and relaxing the rules on switching in the UK.

Alongside our partners, we closely monitor future demand against available hotel capacity and adjust the number of hotels contracted to support MQS as needed. In addition, we are in discussions with a number of regional airports with a view to designating them as Red List arrival ports. This would increase capacity and help with pressures on ports of arrival in the south east.

In the meantime, student visa and immigration concessions allow for the ongoing provision of online learning for the duration of the academic year 20/21, meaning international students can continue studying from the UK or in their home country.

I hope this information is helpful in responding to your concerns. Thank you for writing 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 "M" and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities