



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

2nd June 2020

During the Education Select Committee session on 29 April, I offered to write to you to provide further detail on tuition fees for nursing students during the coronavirus pandemic and the procurement of Edenred for the food voucher system. I have also included some points of clarification.

Tuition fees for nursing students

The Government is extremely grateful to all students who are choosing to work in the NHS during this extremely difficult time and will be ensuring all students who do so are rewarded fairly for their hard work. Nursing students who volunteer as part of the COVID-19 response will receive a salary and automatic NHS pension entitlement at the appropriate band. They will continue to be required to pay fees for their final term and will continue to receive their student maintenance loan and Learning Support Fund payments as normal.

Universities will continue to provide support to students. The time that students spend in clinical practice will count towards the number of practice hours that they need to qualify.

Procurement of Edenred

The Department for Education made an award of a contract to Edenred pursuant to Regulation 32(2)(c) Public Contracts Regulations 2015 to provide extremely urgent deliverables as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The contract was let as a direct award using the terms of an existing Crown Commercial Service framework.

Due to the urgency and scale of the rollout of the voucher system, the department was unable to consider alternatives such as Wonde. The timescale to run a procurement, award a contract, and mobilise would normally take months to deliver a service of this nature. In light of the extreme urgency of the current situation we appointed Edenred because they have been a supplier to Government for the past five years, validated through a competitive tendering process.

We are working very closely with our supplier, Edenred, to improve the performance of the national voucher scheme, including in relation to the waiting times that parents have experienced when accessing the website to redeem their voucher codes, as well as the waiting times that schools have experienced in accessing the site to place orders.

Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies

I can assure you that the government is continuing to be guided by SAGE scientific and technical advice. The Children's Task and Finish Working Group, a sub-group of SAGE, has made key contributions to the recent decisions as the sub-group has looked at a range of issues regarding the wider opening of schools. SAGE's work will continue to help inform the Department's, and Government's, plans.

Social Work Together campaign

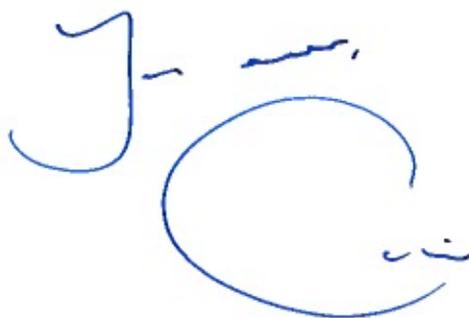
I would also like to clarify the position on the Social Work Together campaign. During the session I said that 1,000 social workers have come back into the service to assist during the coronavirus pandemic. However, the position is that while over 1,000 social workers have expressed an interest in returning to frontline practice through the LGA hosted matching platform. Local authorities are using this platform to match these social workers to their frontline service needs.

Students returning to their family home

Students still resident in student accommodation who wish to make a one-off move to an alternative residence may now do so providing precautions are taken in line with the government's COVID-19 recovery strategy and other published guidance on travel and social distancing.

Students should make sure to inform their accommodation provider of their intention to leave. Advice to providers on moving or collecting belongings can be found on gov.uk at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/actions-for-he-providers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak/actions-for-he-providers-during-the-coronavirus-outbreak>

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee, and I look forward to working with you in the future.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a large circular flourish at the end.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education