



Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities

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30th June 2020

Dear Members of the Petitions Committee,

Thank you for asking me to attend the petition committee session on the 11. June

As you will recall I agreed to provide additional information requested by committee members.

1. The number of complaints the OfS have received (and any breakdown of these complaints, by category, year).

I would like clarify that the Office of the Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIA) was established to consider unresolved student complaints and the OfS has a notifications process. Therefore, I have separately attached a letter from the OIA which responds to the question raised at the Petition Committee, and below have included information on OfS notifications.

The OfS encourages students and other third parties to notify them of any concerns about the arrangements put in place by an individual provider using its online notifications process. Such notifications support the OfS to identify any providers that may not have made reasonable efforts to protect the interests of their students. Between early March and late June 2020 the OfS had received 58 notifications from students, around half of which related to teaching or assessment. This number will naturally be subject to change, and does not include reports from providers to the OfS of reportable events, or intelligence from other sources including direct contact between the OfS and providers

2. Information on the cross-ministerial task force on research, and its meetings to date

I have the pleasure of co-chairing the University Research Sustainability Taskforce which brings together Ministers at DfE and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to work with the Devolved Administrations and sector stakeholders.

The taskforce provides an advisory forum for Ministers to engage with university research sector and aims to identify what support is required to retain research talent and ensure the long-term sustainability of UK's world-class research and development sector.

The taskforce, in executing this role has supported the development of the

research support package which was announced by Government on 27 June, to support universities to continue research and innovation activities. Further details of the package can be found at the link below:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-to-protect-uk-research-jobs-with-major-support-package>

We will be convening our fifth taskforce meeting later this month and will be discussing the next steps involved in delivering this support package.

3. Plans to support university graduates affected by coronavirus

We are working with the universities sector to identify the overall range of support offered to graduates who are looking to enter the labour market or continue their studies at this challenging time. We will send through more information on the steps we have taken once they have been rolled out.

4. Corrections

I would, if possible like bring to the attention of the committee a correction to the response I provided to Q112, final paragraph which states “If they do not get to a satisfactory resolution, they can go to the Office of the Independent Adjudicator, **which we set up.**” I would suggest removing the highlighted text as what I wished to emphasise was the government issued clear advice, and set up a means of communicating that advice, to students who wish to lodge complaints to institutions concerning tuition during Covid19 –I did not mean to imply that this present government setup the OIA.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle Donelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

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Minister of State for Universities



office of the
independent
adjudicator

'for students in higher education'

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25 June 2020

Dear Minister,

We understand it may be helpful if we provide some information about the number of complaints we as the independent ADR body for student complaints have received to date related to Covid-19. We are happy for you to share this with the Petitions Committee.

We should first explain that it is very early days in terms of complaints reaching us. Students need to raise their concerns with their higher education provider and pursue them through the provider's internal complaints process before they can come to us. These internal processes usually take some time (under our guidance providers have up to three months to complete the internal processes), and in the present context are likely to take longer than usual. Students then have a year, in line with ADR regulations, from when the internal processes are complete to bring their complaint to us.

We have to date received fewer than 20 complaints relating to Covid-19 disruption. It is to be expected that numbers would be very small at this stage given that there is usually a significant time lag between the cause for complaint arising and a complaint reaching us, so the low numbers should not be taken as an indication of the scale of likely future complaint numbers.

We hope this provides some useful context for you and for the Committee's considerations.

Yours sincerely

Ben Elger
Chief Executive

Felicity Mitchell
Independent Adjudicator