

PROSPECTIVE INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS MESSAGING SCRIPT – PHASE TWO

PURPOSE

The six core messages below were drafted for use in conversation/correspondence with contacts in key recruitment markets – both with host country officials and higher education stakeholders. This second iteration of the script provides:

- Updates to core lines, where they were no longer in line with the UK government policy position; and
- An opportunity to convey three new policy announcements, which – we hope – will help international students make a decision on whether to study in the UK from the autumn.

The UK Government (HMG) and the Devolved Administrations' (DAs') – Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland – positions are that, despite the disruption created by COVID-19, the UK continues to be overwhelmingly in favour of international students, and would like to encourage them to consider the UK as a place to study for the upcoming academic year (AY 2020/21) and beyond. The latest announcements detailed below should address some student concerns and encourage them to study in the UK.

These lines have been prepared and circulated to ensure that messages from HMG and DA representatives to international students in priority recruitment markets are consistent.

AUDIENCE

These messages are designed to reach international students themselves, as well as their key 'influencers' (parents, guardians, schools etc).

New policy updates impacting international students

Since this script was last circulated, the following policy mitigations have been announced, further details can also be found in the messages below:

Visa mitigations

- We have been clear that migrants will not be penalised for circumstances beyond their control as a result of Covid-19; this is why we have published extensive guidance for international students and their sponsors to provide the support they need at this time.
- On 16 June, the UK government confirmed that distance/blended learning will be permitted for the 20/21 academic year provided student's sponsors intend to transition to face-to-face learning as soon as circumstances allow.
- UK Government also confirmed that those studying by distance/blended learning will be eligible to apply for the Graduate route provided they are in the UK by 6 April 2021 and meet other requirements of the route.
- Further public lines to be found under 'messages 3 and 4'.

Online learning and quality

- The Office for Students has added to [existing advice](#) confirming that "The OfS continues to regulate all registered providers in England, regardless of whether their current provision is online or not."

- The Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, as the regulator for higher education in Wales, has similarly published a [circular](#) which reaffirms its expectations that providers will continue to meet their obligations for quality and standards
- In Scotland, the Scottish Funding Council is working closely with the Quality Assurance Agency and Education Scotland to monitor the quality of the student experience.
- This provides reassurance to international students that the quality of their UK qualification will not change and will continue to be valuable whether delivered face-to-face or online
- Further lines for public messaging can be found below under 'message 3'.

Public health measures at the border (self-isolation)

- To keep number of transmissions in the UK as low as possible, and to protect UK residents and international students in the UK, all international arrivals are now required to supply their contact and accommodation information and self-isolate in their accommodation for fourteen days on arrival into the UK.
- We are working with the higher education sector to ensure that students are welcomed to the UK and are supported on arrival by their chosen university during these unprecedented times. Further guidance on these measures is available here.
- Further public lines can be found below under 'message 6'.

KEY MESSAGES

Message 1: The UK offers a world-class university education

- UK higher education has a well-established reputation for high quality – our universities are among the best in the world.
- UK degrees are of a high standard and are internationally valuable whatever form they take – whether they are delivered in person or online. There are some fantastic and innovative examples of high-quality online learning being delivered by institutions across the UK, and the sector is already working hard to prepare learning materials for the summer and autumn terms.
- UK higher education providers are globally recognised, with 4 providers in the top 10, and 18 providers in the top 100; they also have a stellar reputation for world-class research.
- UK higher education providers are renowned for choice and flexibility – students can choose from over 50,000 undergraduate and postgraduate courses, including a number of world-leading STEM, finance and business subjects, among many others. UK courses are also generally shorter than those in other countries, helping to reduce overall tuition fees and accommodation costs.
- UK higher education degrees and qualifications, as well as the research conducted by our world-class universities, are recognised by employers and academics worldwide, and produce top graduates. Over 50 serving world leaders have benefited from a

British education, and 83% of international graduates surveyed by Universities UK International (UUKi) said their UK degree helped them get their job.¹

- From summer 2021, international students will be able to benefit from two years' work experience in the UK upon graduation via the new Graduate immigration route.
- English is the dominant global language. It is spoken by around a quarter of the world's population as the primary language for international business, science and academia. It is predicted to continue growing in importance, proliferated via film, TV and social media. Estimates suggest that over half of the Internet's information is stored in English.

Message 2: The UK cares about international students

- We are proud that so many international students choose to study in the UK, but understand that the COVID-19 outbreak will have a significant impact on the higher education sector as a whole.
- Our world-leading universities, which thrive on being global institutions, will always be open to international students. Both HMG (with governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) and the higher education sector are working together to ensure existing rules and processes are as flexible as possible under the current unprecedented circumstances to ensure that international students planning to study in the UK from autumn 2020 can do so.
- UK universities are committed to supporting all students, including international students already in the UK, as well as those considering studying in the UK from autumn 2020.
- International students should get in touch with their current or prospective UK university if they have any concerns about the support they are receiving or are due to receive. Many providers will have hardship funds to support domestic and international students in times of need, including emergencies and can help signpost to additional support
- The Government has worked closely with the Office for Students to help clarify that providers in England can draw upon existing funding to increase hardship funds and support disadvantaged students impacted by COVID-19. Providers are able to use the funding – worth around £23 million per month for June and July – towards student hardship funds, including the purchase of IT equipment and mental health support, as well as to support providers' access and participation plans.
- The Scottish Government's Student Support Action Plan provided emergency funding of £5 million for students in hardship across Further and Higher Education.
- The UK has a highly tolerant, multicultural society, with a rich diversity of cultures, languages, and faiths. International students contribute significantly to this enriching environment, which makes the UK such a brilliant place to study.
- UK higher education providers consistently do their utmost to ensure international students feel welcome on university campuses; they are clear that everyone with the talent and potential to succeed in higher education has the opportunity to do so, regardless of nationality, ethnic or national origins.

¹ <https://universitiesuk.ac.uk/igo>

Message 3: The UK is 'open for business' and recruitment is happening now

- On 16 June, Government made further important concessions for international students considering study in the UK, including confirming that distance/blended learning will be permitted for the 20/21 academic year provided students intend to transition to face-to-face learning as soon as circumstances allow.
- We recognise that embarking on a course of study at a UK higher education institution is a significant commitment which is why we want to reassure international students who are considering study in the UK that we are committed to ensuring that international students can apply for, and will receive, their Tier 4 visas in good time before commencing their programme of study in the UK.
- The UK higher education system demands high quality teaching – this is how the UK higher education system maintains its internationally renowned reputation. Any mitigations put in place by UK universities due to COVID-19 will have to adhere to the same high-quality standards as usual, as explained by the Office for Students in its recent advice to English providers. This is the case whether teaching takes place in person or online.
- The Office for Students have added to [existing advice](#) stating “The OfS continues to regulate all registered providers in England, regardless of whether their current provision is online or not. We have published guidance that sets out our expectations for providers in maintaining quality and standards during the period of disruption resulting from the coronavirus pandemic.”
- OfS consumer protection guidance requires providers to be clear about their plans for next year and the OfS will be polling students to identify any providers or courses that are a cause for concern.
- UK degrees are of a high standard and are internationally valuable whatever form they take – whether they are delivered in person or partially online. There are some fantastic and innovative examples of high-quality online learning being delivered by institutions across the UK, and the sector is already working hard to prepare learning materials for the autumn term.
- The UK Government has worked closely with the Office for Students, the independent higher education regulator in England, to ensure students are able to continue their studies, receive good quality provision and work towards a degree that they and future employers value.
- Although admissions processes and modes of teaching might look slightly different this year, the UK’s world-class universities are continuing to recruit international students and they are encouraged to apply even if students are unable to travel to the UK to meet usual timelines.
- International students considering studying at a UK higher education provider from September 2020 should contact their chosen university to find out how they are adapting to COVID-19, including how international students can prepare themselves for an autumn start.
- While the Government is working with the UK higher education sector to minimise disruption, some universities might introduce later start dates than usual for this coming academic year, and others may start high quality teaching online initially, with in-person teaching resuming some weeks later.

- The vast majority of UK universities are planning to provide in-person teaching this autumn, a new survey from Universities UK has revealed. 97% of universities surveyed confirmed that they are planning to provide some form of in-person teaching at the start of term this year, with 78 universities (87%), also stating that they will offer in-person social opportunities to students, including outside events and sporting activities, all in line with government and public health guidance.

Message 4: International students will be eligible for the two-year Graduate route, which will be launched in summer 2021

- Government is absolutely committed to introducing the new, internationally competitive Graduate immigration route for international students in summer 2021.
- On 16 June, the UK Government made further important concessions for international students considering study in the UK, and we have confirmed that international students studying by distance/blended learning will be eligible to apply for the Graduate route provided they are in the UK by 6 April 2021 and meet the other requirements of the route.
- Applicants on the Graduate route will have to pay an application fee and the Immigration Health Surcharge. The exact fee will be set out in due course.
- The Graduate route will be available to international students who have existing leave as a Tier 4 student at the time of application and have completed a degree at undergraduate level or above at a higher education provider with a track record of compliance.
- Successful applicants on this route will be able to stay and work, or look for work, in the UK at any skill level for a period of two years. Graduates will be able to switch into skilled work routes if they have found a suitable job.
- The new route will be launched in the summer of 2021, meaning that any eligible student who graduates in the summer of 2021 or after will be able to apply for the route. This includes students who have already started their courses, even if, due to COVID-19, they have needed to undertake some of their learning remotely.

Message 5: Although Visa Application Centres are currently closed, international students can prepare themselves now

- Despite COVID-19 disruptions to visa processes and exam timetables, international students can still get started with the process, even if Visa Application Centres are not yet open, for example by familiarising themselves with UK visa requirements and talking to their chosen university about evidence they will need to supply for a visa application.
- Government will continue to monitor worldwide border, travel and public health restrictions and are resuming normal services as soon as we are able. Some Visa Application Centres have reopened, with more to follow over the coming weeks. We recognise the importance of international students, and as local restrictions lift and application centres begin to reopen we will look to process applications as quickly as possible.

- The visa grant rate for international students is extremely high: over 98% of Tier 4 (General) student visa applications made by international students were granted in the last year.

Message 6: The UK is a safe place to study, and UK universities are prioritising students' safety and wellbeing

- To keep number of transmissions in the UK as low as possible, and to protect UK residents and international students in the UK, all international arrivals are now required to supply their contact and accommodation information and self-isolate in their accommodation for fourteen days on arrival into the UK.
- We are working with the higher education sector to ensure that students are welcomed to the UK and are supported on arrival by their chosen university. Further guidance on these measures is available here.
- These measures will be reviewed regularly, to ensure they are in line with the latest scientific evidence and remain effective and necessary.
- Many UK universities are already demonstrating how seriously they are taking their responsibilities to students, in ensuring they are safe and well cared-for both upon arrival and for the duration of their stay.
- International students who are considering studying at a UK higher education provider from September 2020 should contact their chosen university to find out how they are preparing for the autumn term.
- The national and global response to the spread of COVID-19 continues to develop quickly and our collective knowledge of the virus is growing.
- The Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE) regularly publishes papers outlining the scientific advice provided to the government. HMG and governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are adhering closely to this guidance, and our advice will change to match the level of the threat. In doing so, the UK's top priority remains the health and safety of all UK nationals and overseas nationals in the UK, including international higher education students in the UK.
- The UK higher education sector has gone above and beyond to ensure that international students' physical and mental health are prioritised. If students have any concerns about the services they can access, they should get in touch with their university directly.

Health services available to international students

- Our amazing National Health Service (NHS) has taken care of people from around the world during this global pandemic and will continue to do so. In addition to support from their universities, NHS services are available to both domestic and international students.
- No charges apply to testing for coronavirus, even if the result is negative, or to any treatment provided in relation to coronavirus if the result is positive or up to the point that it is negatively diagnosed.
- The NHS can also provide international students with specific COVID-19 advice through a new COVID-19 online service www.111.nhs.uk/covid-19 or by calling 111.

- International students will always be able to access treatment that clinicians consider is immediately necessary or urgent at no upfront cost.
- The UK government has published the essential health and safety requirements that apply to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) used in the UK, and clear guidance on appropriate PPE, which is consistent with World Health Organization (WHO) guidance for protecting from COVID-19.

International travellers and managing transmission rates

- To keep number of transmissions in the UK as low as possible, and to protect UK residents and international students in the UK, the Government has introduced a series of measures and restrictions at the UK border.
- First, alongside increased information about the UK's social distancing regime at the border, the Government will require all international arrivals to supply their contact and accommodation information.
- Second, the UK Government will require all international arrivals not on a short list of exemptions to self-isolate in their accommodation for fourteen days on arrival into the UK. If international travellers are unable to demonstrate where they would self-isolate, they will be required to do so in accommodation arranged by the Government at their own expense. The UK Government is working closely with governments in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland to coordinate implementation across the UK.
- These international travel measures came into force on the 8 June, but international students should not worry; Government will work with universities to ensure they are welcomed to the UK and are supported on arrival. Further guidance on these new measures can be found [here](#).
- Importantly, if international students are committed to studying in the UK, we are committed to ensuring that they will be able to do so. If students have any concerns about these new measures, they should contact their chosen university to find out how they are adapting and preparing for the autumn term.

New guidance on face coverings in England and Scotland

- As more people return to work, there will be more movement outside people's immediate households.
- This increased mobility means it is now a legal requirement to wear a face covering on public transport in England and across the UK you are encouraged to wear a face covering in other enclosed public spaces where social distancing isn't possible and where you will come into contact with people you do not normally meet.
- Face coverings will be mandatory on public transport for the majority of passengers in Scotland from 22 June.
- Face coverings do not replace social distancing, where this is possible, and individuals, and their households, should follow advice on self-isolation if they do have symptoms of COVID-19 (such as cough and/or high temperature). Further information on face coverings, and other advice on how to stay safe in the UK, can be found online here: www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-

outside-your-home. The latest from the Scottish Government can be found here:
<https://www.gov.scot/coronavirus-covid-19/>

ANNEX A: UNIVERSITIES SUPPORTING STUDENTS DURING COVID-19 – EXAMPLES

- **Solent University** is running a food bank and working with a catering supplier to deliver parcels of grocery essentials to students remaining in their halls and to those who have been self-isolating.
- **The University of London** is providing fact-checked news updates for students. They are also giving guidance on wellbeing, from helping students reframe the situation to boredom busting and fitness guides.
- **The University of Surrey** has extended its student financial hardship fund, with additional support for widening participation students. It has also run the Emergency Student Support Appeal, designed to support students adversely affected by COVID-19, and which has raised £240,000 to date.
- **Glasgow Caledonian University** has implemented a dedicated helpline for students, which operates 7 days a week. They have introduced a fund to support students through the COVID-19 crisis, have refunded all student residents' rent for April and May and are offering free accommodation to students should they need it at this time. All Glasgow Caledonian University student services are now available online, to ensure all students can access them.
- **University of Bath** has moved all students in university owned accommodation around the city into campus accommodation. They have tried to ensure that all students have en-suite bathrooms in case they need to self-isolate. Social distancing has been set up in the library for those who wish to work outside their rooms. The university is providing three free meals a day to all students who remain on campus. For those students who require access to counselling and student welfare services, Bath's student services team are operating a 24/7 helpline.
- **Ulster University** has individually phoned every international student remaining in Northern Ireland to understand both their wellbeing and academic needs. Real-time, agile solutions have been put in place as a result, such as a local grocery delivery map, free wellbeing, mental health sessions and services and daily peer-to-peer sessions hosted by our Go Global Ambassadors. This initiative allows students to extend their personal networks and interact with one another through activities such as cooking lessons and virtual music jam sessions.
- **Queen's University Belfast** has pro-actively reached out to all international students both on and off campus to offer guidance and support at this time. Students were able to leave their accommodation contract from 27 March at no financial detriment, and for those students who have had to go home without time to pack their belongings, the university has packed and couriered home their belongings at no cost to the student.
- **14 day self-isolation:** We have been clear that universities are responsible for, and must support their students on arrival to the UK. Many UK universities are already demonstrating how seriously they are taking their responsibilities to students, in ensuring they are safe and well cared-for both upon arrival and for the duration of their stay.
- **Wellbeing and lifestyle:** **Aberystwyth** and **Cardiff Metropolitan Universities** highlight some of the many initiatives UK universities are putting in place to support students' mental wellbeing during the pandemic, putting on online sports and music

weeks and online gaming tournaments for students. Universities across the UK are putting on activities like these to support students to keep active and continue to socialise, as well as providing online support groups such as the 'ARU Together' group at **Anglia Ruskin University**.

ANNEX B: USEFUL RESOURCES

- **Home Office COVID-19 guidance for international students:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-tier-4-sponsors-migrants-and-short-term-students>
- **Tier 4 visa application:** <https://www.gov.uk/tier-4-general-visa>
- **Graduate immigration route Q&A:**
<https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2019/10/14/fact-sheet-graduate-immigration-route/>
- **Office for Students on quality and standards:**
<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/guidance-for-providers-about-quality-and-standards-during-coronavirus-pandemic/>
- **HEFCW Higher Education Funding Council for Wales on quality and standards:**
https://www.hefcw.ac.uk/working_with_he_providers/coronavirus/coronavirus.aspx
- **Government advice regarding face coverings:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/staying-safe-outside-your-home/staying-safe-outside-your-home#face-coverings>
- **Scientific advice and guidance:** www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-scientific-evidence-supporting-the-uk-government-response
- **Our plan to rebuild: The UK Government's COVID-19 recovery strategy:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/our-plan-to-rebuild-the-uk-governments-covid-19-recovery-strategy>
- **General COVID-19 guidance:**
<https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-list-of-guidance>
- **Students coming to study in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland should check the following links for the latest COVID-19 guidance:**
 - <https://www.gov.scot/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance/>
 - www.gov.wales/coronavirus
 - <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/coronavirus-covid-19-overview-and-advice>