

Lowest paid set to receive sick pay for the first time

The government has started a consultation to transform support for sick and disabled staff and remove barriers for employers.

Published 15 July 2019 From: [Department for Work and Pensions](#), [Department of Health and Social Care](#), [The Rt Hon Amber Rudd MP](#), and [The Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP](#)



Today (Monday 15 July) Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd and Health Secretary Matt Hancock are setting out new measures to transform how employers support and retain disabled staff and those with a health condition.

Under the new measures the lowest paid employees would be eligible for Statutory Sick Pay for the first time, while small businesses may be offered a sick pay rebate to reward those who effectively manage employees on sick leave and help them get back to work.

Each year more than 100,000 people leave their job following a period of sickness absence lasting at least 4 weeks, new figures show.

The longer somebody is on sickness absence the more likely they are to fall out of work, with 44% of people who had been off sick for a year then leaving employment altogether.

Work and Pensions Secretary Amber Rudd said:

I want Britain to be an environment where disabled people and those with health conditions can thrive, not just survive – not only in work but every area of their lives.

With 3 in 5 employers facing challenges when supporting employees to return to work, it's time that we took a closer look at how businesses can retain staff.

Good work is good for our mental and physical health, and by working closely with employers we can help prevent the loss of talent when people unnecessarily leave the workplace.

Businesses and health providers will be asked for their views on how to remove the barriers in the current system which stop employers from taking action, with small employers expected to need the most support.

The majority of small employers reported a lack of time and capital to invest in support as the key issues.

The government will also consider whether to change legal guidance to encourage employers to intervene early during a period of sickness absence.

Health Secretary Matt Hancock said:

Too many still face challenges returning to work after sick leave. We need to remove the barriers that stop people with disabilities or health conditions from reaching their full potential – these steps will help us achieve that.

Businesses will also benefit from being able to retain talent, and build workplaces that support the physical and mental health needs of their employees.

While government can help create the right conditions, employers are best placed to take the small actions that help disabled people and those with health conditions to remain in work.

Evidence shows that early intervention by an employer is important in reducing the number of people leaving the workforce for health reasons. Employers can use simple, low-cost measures such as making flexible adjustments to someone's working pattern or keeping in touch with people while they are on sick leave.

CBI Chief UK Policy Director Matthew Fell said:

Managing sickness absence effectively and reducing it through proactive health and wellbeing initiatives and policies makes good business sense. Where this helps disabled people to contribute their best at work it can also be an important part of employers' diversity and inclusion efforts.

With the UK's productivity performance under the spotlight, many employers know that a well-thought-out health and wellbeing

strategy can help boost performance and make their company a better place to work.

Adding greater flexibility to statutory sick pay so it supports mental as well as physical health makes sense and reflects the reality that 1 in 4 people will experience such an illness each year.

Firms look forward to working with government to develop health and wellbeing approaches that work for business and for employees.

Prerana Issar, Chief People Officer, NHS England said:

Helping people manage their health while at work through common sense measures like sickness absence management and occupational health services, is good for employees, better for employers and ultimately supports both the NHS and the economy.

Today's consultation is an important step in helping businesses to support their workers' health and wellbeing, and while the NHS will continue to help people when they need it through our Long Term Plan, we will be able to do even more with strong backing from employers.

The consultation will also look at how to improve the capacity, value and quality of occupational health services and consider how to reduce the high costs, particularly for smaller employers.

The government wants to ensure all employers can access good advice and support so they understand and are able to act on their responsibilities to employees.

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[Ofsted: Let us inspect multi-academy trusts \(MATs\)](#)

Ofsted has today published a report: [Multi-academy trusts: benefits, challenges and functions](#), which looks at MATs' influence on day-to-day practice in their schools and the extent of their impact on leaders and teachers.

Three quarters of academy schools now belonging to a multi-academy trust and Ofsted wants to be able to inspect the trusts, as well as individual schools.

Ofsted research finds academy schools are strongly held to account by MATs, but there is weak accountability of the trust itself.

The report finds that many MATs play a central role in setting school policies, monitoring performance, recruitment, and training. They are also legally responsible for their schools and therefore for the governance of them. However, the report also finds there is weak internal accountability at trust level.

Currently, Ofsted can only carry out summary evaluations of the quality of education provided by a MAT by inspecting a sample of their schools. It cannot inspect the trust itself nor make graded judgements.

[Ofsted Chief Inspector, Amanda Spielman](#) said:

Three quarters of academy schools now belong to a multi-academy trust, whose job it is to make important decisions – not just about the financial management of their schools, but also what is taught in them, and how it is taught and assessed. Some MATs may control as many as 50 or more schools.

Given the power and influence of MATs, it's important that they are properly accountable to parents. The fact that Ofsted is unable to inspect trusts directly means parents and policy makers are only given a partial view of what is happening in our schools. This presents some very real risks, which we have seen highlighted by the recent failures of some academy trusts.

The report highlights that schools in larger trusts benefit from economies of scale, back-office support, training, career progression and recruitment.

However, size has its drawbacks, and some MATs took on a large number of schools in difficulty quickly, without always having the central capacity and leadership required to improve them.

The report also finds that schools in a MAT are able to share data and expertise, which many staff reported had particular benefits for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). However, getting everyone together in the same place can be costly, time-consuming and frustrating, particularly if the geographical spread of a MAT is wide.

The report recommends that trusts make full use of opportunities to standardise functions provided by the MAT structure. Developing subject curriculums, which may be beyond the capacity of individual schools, is one example where more trust-level activity could be beneficial.

For this research, Ofsted visited 41 MATs and 121 schools with a diverse range of characteristics.

Evidence was gathered from over 700 interviewees, including:

- MAT chief executive officers (CEOs)
- headteachers
- local governors
- middle leaders
- representatives from MAT boards

[Low-income households to be guaranteed trusted tradesmen for home energy improvements](#)

- New 'TrustMark' scheme will protect 300,000 low-income households a year supported through the Energy Company Obligation (ECO)
- scheme is investing £3.6 billion into upgrading peoples' homes to reduce emissions as the UK commits to becoming a net zero emissions economy
- quality mark can also help further protect around one million homeowners a year who improve the energy efficiency of their homes

Home energy improvements which cut emissions and bills for over 300,000 low-income families every year will only be done by trusted tradesmen, under new government plans.

The government's new quality scheme, delivered by 'TrustMark', will increase protection for low-income and vulnerable households, helped with free energy-saving measures like insulation and new boilers, under the Energy Company Obligation (ECO).

Emissions from buildings account for nearly 25% of overall carbon emissions, which the government is committed to reducing. Just weeks ago, the UK became the first G7 economy to put into law a commitment that Britain will reach net zero greenhouse gas emission economy by 2050.

Energy and Clean Growth Minister Chris Skidmore, said:

Driving up the energy efficiency of Britain's homes is key to us reducing emissions from households, saving people money on their bills as we legislate to become a net zero emissions economy and end our contribution to global warming entirely.

This new scheme will guarantee low-income households the peace of mind that workmen installing energy efficiency measures in their homes are trusted tradesmen.

Around 15% of households take an energy efficiency measure each year, with over one million installing additional or replacement loft insulation and over one million upgrading to double glazed windows.

The new 'Each Home Counts' quality mark will help reassure households having work done on their homes that the companies have met the appropriate standards for installing insulation and new central heating systems in their homes.

Consumers who want energy efficiency measures installed on their own homes will be able to search the [TrustMark](#) website for trusted and certified tradesmen, checking their installers are recognised before they start work on their homes.

The new mark builds on the well-established government-endorsed 'TrustMark' scheme, which vets businesses. It ensures they meet industry standards, have good technical competence and trading practices, and have a commitment to providing good customer service.

Customers can already access free and impartial advice on reducing their energy bills, making their homes warmer and planning green home improvements from [Simple Energy Advice](#).

Energy efficiency industry is worth £20.3 billion in Great Britain, employing nearly 150,000 and selling exports worth over £1 billion every year.

1. Respond to the [EC03 Improving consumer protection consultation](#).
2. The government commissioned [Each Home Counts Review](#) acknowledged the importance of consumers receiving trusted, impartial advice on energy efficiency. The review also made recommendations on how energy efficiency advice could be improved.
3. BEIS has worked closely with industry through an Industry led Each Home Counts Implementation Board and technical steering group to develop new standards.
4. View the latest [English Housing Survey \(EHS\)](#).

MHRA launches consultation on how to best engage patients and the public

The responses will help inform the MHRA's future engagement with patients and the public.

The MHRA wants to adopt a more systematic approach to listening to and involving patients. They want to make sure that the patient voice is more clearly heard when safety issues, concerning medicines or medical devices, are identified and in the licensing of new medicines.

The consultation will additionally look at how patients and the public would like the MHRA to communicate with them. It will also look at how patients and the public would like to communicate with the MHRA to raise concerns and how the MHRA can best respond.

The MHRA would like to hear from:

The consultation, [available online](#), will close at 11.45pm on Monday 7 October 2019.

Dr Ian Hudson, CEO, said:

"It is important that the MHRA continues to evaluate and improve how we can best communicate and engage with patients and the public.

"Patients are at the heart of everything we do and it's essential that we hear their concerns and opinions to inform our important work protecting public health.

"Every response received will help us gain a better picture of how patients and the public want to engage with the MHRA. We hope to hear from as many people and patient groups as possible."

Universities Minister sets out progress on access and participation

Thank you for inviting me to give a speech this morning at Birkbeck, University of London. I'm delighted to have just had the chance to tour the university and to visit the Birkbeck Babylab. When I visit universities, I usually get the pleasure of meeting staff and students, so it was certainly a

first for me today to be greeted by a room full of babies!

Since Birkbeck is a unique institution in our higher education sector, it makes sense I use this platform this morning to talk about access and participation.

Birkbeck has always been one step ahead when it comes to opening up access to university, with the first female students admitted to Birkbeck in 1830 – a good 40 years before either Oxford or Cambridge opened their doors to women.

But this commitment to widening access hasn't been easy. When George Birkbeck set up the University as an early pioneer of adult education, I hear he was accused of "scattering the seeds of evil".

Thankfully, we have come a long way since then. And I am delighted that next year will be a milestone year for Birkbeck – marking the 100th anniversary of its accession to the University of London.

Birkbeck now plays a vital role in offering people a different kind of higher education – namely through part-time, flexible study, taught in term-time on weekday evenings.

And it is thanks to institutions like Birkbeck and, of course, the Open University – which is celebrating its own milestone anniversary this year – that people are able to access higher education later in life and fit it around their existing commitments.

I am keen that we learn from this flexible, 'step-on, step-off' approach to higher education for the future. And I'm here today to see for myself how we can continue to bring down barriers to access, and enable more people to reap the benefits of our world-class universities and colleges.

Now, I know it's an odd time of the year to be visiting universities – after most undergraduate students have gone home for the summer and there's only a few dedicated postgrads and staff members left on campus. But, when I became Universities Minister at the end of last year, I made a pledge to visit as many institutions as I could. And there's no reason why that should stop now – particularly since I don't know if I'll still be Universities Minister in a few weeks' time!

And I'm not the only one awaiting my fate. Next month, thousands of young people across the country will find out how they did in their A-Levels or equivalent. And for those who have applied to go on to higher education through the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS), this will be the moment they find out which institution they are going to.

For some, this will be their first or second choice on their UCAS application forms. But for others, their final destination may indeed be somewhere they haven't even considered yet. But they will be helped to find it by dedicated support teams as part of the annual Clearing and Adjustment process.

If I'm fortunate enough to still be in post on 15th August, I look forward to joining teams at the UCAS headquarters on A-Level results day to see for

myself just some of the hard work that goes into finding applicants a higher education course that suits them. And I look forward to speaking to applicants themselves as they assess their options and plan their future direction.

This is all about students making choices, which are best for them. And that's why we're expanding the range of options available to students today.

For one, we are putting extra resources into higher technical education and apprenticeships. So, as well as offering a range of world-leading higher education courses, we'd like to ensure that vocational and technical training options of equal quality are available across the entire country, so that all 18-year-olds are able to select the pathway that best suits their aspirations and potential.

But of course, as you at Birkbeck know better than anyone, higher level education is not just for 18-year-olds. Here, at Birkbeck, we see the ultimate in flexible teaching models combined with high impact research, which all goes to show that part-time and mature students are right to expect the highest quality experience and outcomes.

This government recognises the importance of studying part-time and later in life, and the huge range of benefits it can bring to individuals, employers and the wider economy. We acknowledge there has been a 57% decline in the number of students in part-time higher education since 2010-11 – many of whom will be mature. And we recognise the need to rectify this since, as the world of work changes, it is important people are able to retrain and reskill as they need, so they don't get left behind.

According to research by the Centre for Social Justice, it is expected that anywhere between 10 and 35% of the UK workforce will need to reskill in the next 20 years. And this reskilling does not just lead to better and more secure jobs, but also higher pay – since the mean hourly wage for an individual qualified to Level 4 and above was 60% higher in 2014 than for those who stopped at Level 2 qualifications.

That's why we have made a number of changes to support part-time and mature learners. This academic year, part-time students are – for the first time ever – able to access full-time equivalent maintenance loans.

Plus, we have removed the “equivalent or lower qualification” restrictions – the so-called ELQ restrictions – for all part-time science, technology, engineering and mathematics degree courses. This means, students enrolled on these courses, who already hold a degree, can now access support through student loans.

But we know we still need to do more – both to encourage students to study part-time and later in life, and to encourage all higher education providers to develop their offers to appeal to those students. The Office for Students (OfS) has a duty to consider the promotion of choice and opportunity in the provision of higher education in England, including through part-time and lifelong learning. And I am particularly interested in seeing what the OfS

can do – through its work with providers on Access and Participation Plans – to encourage them to consider barriers and problems faced by mature learners, and how they can be overcome.

If applications data for the upcoming academic year (2019/20) is anything to go by, we are making good progress on our ambition to open up higher education to anyone who has the potential to benefit from it and succeed. Data released by UCAS just last week shows a record rate of applications from English 18-year-olds – 39.5% of whom applied for higher education this year ahead of the June deadline.

What's more, during the course of this government, we have rightly come to celebrate the record number of 18-year-old applicants to higher education from the most disadvantaged backgrounds.

In 2018, for the first time ever, over 20% of English 18-year-olds living in the lowest participation neighbourhoods entered higher education. That's testament to the great efforts made by many universities to attract disadvantaged students.

And the data just released on 2019 applications shows further significant progress, with applicants from POLAR quintile 1 increasing by another 3% on the 2018 figure. But, we cannot rest on our laurels.

As positive as the headline figures may be, the data nevertheless show that outcomes for certain groups remain lower than they should be. And we're still not getting the most disadvantaged students into the best possible courses for them.

Our widening participation data shows White boys on free school meals have the lowest progression rates to higher education.

And there are still significant regional differences to address across the country. We know there are large differences in progression to selective universities, with White disadvantaged pupils in the North East of England around a third as likely to progress to a selective university than their White disadvantaged peers in London.

I want to see a country where the same opportunities are open to everyone irrespective of where they live. For some, that will mean staying local. And it's great to see universities like Northumbria and Sunderland in the North East doing such a great job training people up for good professional and managerial jobs in the region. But we also need to see students from the North East and other regions being able to access the most selective institutions should they indeed be the right choice for them.

That's why I welcome recent efforts from some universities to make it easier for students to attend open days. I'm delighted to see that West Midlands Railway have confirmed they will pilot free travel to the University of Worcester's open days, along with First Bus in the region. And I hope this is just the start of things to come.

I also welcome the announcement from the University of Oxford, which will be

introducing a foundation year and a preparation scheme to provide additional opportunities for disadvantaged students from all over the UK. Efforts like these are absolutely what we should expect from our higher education providers today. And it is great to see world-leading institutions like Oxford standing up and doing what is right.

To make sure our efforts to improve access and participation are as effective as they can be, we need to be willing to look at the system as a whole, and to take a whole-system approach to outreach and widening participation activities.

This involves looking at the whole student body and to make sure we are not leaving certain student groups out of the picture. I want all institutions to reflect on their approach and to ask whether the way they do things can hinder some students even while helping others.

I'm thinking here about disadvantaged students. I'm thinking here about disabled students. And I'm thinking here about students with mental health issues.

It is for this reason that I have personally invested time and effort to speak to students from each of these groups over the past few months – including hosting a roundtable with visually-impaired students at the University of Birmingham.

It is also for this reason that I introduced the STEP framework in March this year – to get institutions thinking about how best to provide support for all these students and more during the three stages of Student Transition – Experience – and Progression.

The Transition phase received attention with the launch of our Education Transitions Network on University Mental Health Day. But the quality of experience is important too – in preventing drop-out and maximising attainment. As is addressing disparities in the employment outcomes of different student groups.

That's why we cannot offer just generic support. What we need is support tailored to different student groups – including commuter students, postgraduate students, mature part-time students, international students, care leavers and estranged students, disabled students, students from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds, and students from the poorest parts of our society. And let's not forget the need to support the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transsexual (LGBT+) students – particularly poignant after this month's London Pride celebrations on this, the 50th anniversary of the Stonewall riots.

In this day and age, nobody deserves to get left behind. And nobody should feel a university education isn't for them just because of their background or circumstance.

I want our universities and colleges today to be beacons of inclusivity. And to light the way when it comes to thinking about what different students

need.

Inclusion needs to be at the heart of all institutional policy. Because it is only when inclusion becomes mainstream that we will deliver a sea change in attitudes – putting an end to the old myth that university is only for a certain type of person, from a certain type of background.

That's why I welcome the review of admissions being undertaken by the Office for Students (OfS). This is a great opportunity to look at the way current practices are operating, and to ensure they work in favour of students, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds. As Universities Minister, I want to see the sector and the OfS doing all they can to ensure we make higher education in this country more accessible for all.

Experimenting with contextual admissions is one part of this. Contextual admissions involve universities reflecting on the circumstances within which students' attainment has been achieved; for example, the nature and overall performance of the school they attend, their socio-economic background, or perhaps a difficult personal situation. Most universities already do this to some extent, but I would like the most selective, in particular, to be more ambitious in making contextual offers to recognise the untapped potential that many disadvantaged students have. There is good evidence to show that students who have had offers reduced by several grades can make excellent progress at university, provided the right support has been put in place for them.

But I recognise the government has a role to play in this too. Just take data as an example:

Over recent years, this government has been concerned with increasing the collection and publication of data in the sector – not to increase bureaucracy as many of the critics would imply, but to tell us more about those areas which are in need of improvement, and to highlight the progress that is being made.

There's LEO data for a start. Over the last twelve months, the Department for Education has collaborated with the Institute for Fiscal studies to produce two reports on expected returns from higher education. This ground-breaking analysis allows us to estimate the financial returns for a student at age 29 compared with not attending university at all. Male students experience average returns to higher education of 6%, whilst for female students this figure is 26%. So, the financial returns of higher education are now clear for all to see.

Work is also under way to explore earnings differences over the lifetime, as well as outcomes from postgraduate study.

Then there's the Open Data Competition. Through this, we have supported the development of new, innovative digital tools for prospective students to help them better understand what outcomes they might expect from their higher education choices. And I was pleased to meet the people behind the two winning tools earlier this year, which are bringing data to life through apps

that act as a personalised careers assistant or enable prospective students to take part in a game which assesses different pathways.

And all this will be complemented by the OfS review of Unistats in autumn this year – where the plan is to launch a reformed student information resource, with the goal of supporting informed choice for all.

The OfS has also recently published its access and participation dataset, which provides a consistent and transparent way to evaluate and compare provider performance between different student groups and their peers. It also allows us to identify gaps in access and outcomes.

And the OfS is promoting and supporting greater and faster progress to support disadvantaged students into and through higher education. Whilst I know there are fantastic examples of good practice in the sector, all providers need to be able to access high quality evidence of what works to enable them to make a step change in closing the gaps between students – in access, experience, and outcomes. This is why the new Centre for Transforming Access and Student Outcomes (TASO) is so important.

Ensuring we are using the right data, measuring the right things, and using data in the right way is a key priority for me. That's why one of the first things I did as Universities Minister was announce the formation of a Data Advisory Committee to discuss some of the key questions around higher education data. This Committee met for the first time at the start of this month, and we agreed actions and key challenges that we can look to address. And whatever happens to my own role as Minister in the coming weeks, I'm proud to have established this network as an additional tool for future ministers and policymakers, to ensure we are making informed decisions and asking the right questions around data.

It's also great to see that UCAS are in the process of developing a new student hub, which will allow applicants to access much more personalised searches and advice.

As I said at the annual conference of the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) last month, student support is key to their success and, on my visits to various universities around the country, I've found the work of student unions to be outstanding in this respect.

Some examples that come to mind are the enthusiasm of the students I met at the University of Huddersfield's Students' Union, where I spoke to BME students about their efforts to improve the university experience for their peers.

There's also Loughborough Students' Union, which I know is unique among British universities in that it serves members from not only Loughborough University but also Loughborough College and the RNIB College Loughborough. It was a pleasure to see students from both higher and further education communities coming together in this way and see the Students' Union as a place where aspirations can be raised.

The principle of innovation is crucial here. As policymakers – both in government and in institutions – we should be constantly innovating policies to make sure we can keep up with trends and developments. At the Education Select Committee earlier this year, I called for a ‘paradigm shift’ in the way we think about the provision of post-18 education, and embracing innovation is most definitely at the heart of this.

And finally, let’s not forget the work we can be doing to support graduates into the world of work at the end of their studies. As I mentioned at the start of this speech, most students have already left campus for the summer or graduated from their courses. So, we shouldn’t turn a blind eye to the fact that it is at this point of the year that some students and fresh graduates fall prey to unpaid internships to gain experience and get a foot on the jobs ladder.

Recent research by the Sutton Trust showed that the minimum cost of carrying out an unpaid internship here in London is £1,019 per month. So, we should be doing everything we can to stop these work placements being a privilege of the rich and making careers support more visible on campus to steer students in the right direction.

Employability needs to be weaved into the system – not just by careers teams but also by academics, who equally have a role to play in making students aware of the transferable skills they are gaining from their higher education. It’s obviously not great news when almost half (49%) of young people aged between 17 and 23 believe their education has not prepared them for the world of work – as revealed by a survey from the CBI in November last year.

So, as we look towards the summer, I want to ensure we are all taking a step back and thinking of all those who are not just set to start university this autumn, but also those who are preparing themselves to return for their second, third or fourth years. And indeed those who are heading out into the big wide world of work.

And, as this may well be my last higher education speech as Universities Minister, I want to thank the sector for all I have seen and for all it is doing in continuing to make our universities and colleges accessible, inclusive and open to all.

And I want to end today by wishing you all, at whatever stage you find yourself in the student journey, the very best – whoever you are, wherever you come from, and whatever your background.

For those who are waiting to start university this autumn, I hope you will go on to achieve great things irrespective of the grades you end up getting next month. And I am confident that with the help and support of UCAS and our university sector as a whole, you will make the choice that is right for you.

Ensuring everyone fulfils their potential and succeeds is what higher education is all about. And it’s something we all have a responsibility for – this summer, next summer, and for all summers thereafter. Thank you.