

# Education Secretary at HEPI conference: learning from the crisis

Hello, it is a such pleasure to be joining you today for this conference and I am honoured to open the debates, which I know are going to give us all a great deal of valuable insight.

You couldn't have chosen a more vital theme than learning from the Covid crisis and before I go any further, I want to take this opportunity to thank those of you from our universities and the wider higher education sector for all that you have done.

The way you have made sure students were able to carry on with their studies, the way you harnessed cutting edge resources and research to tackle the virus. It has been an outstanding effort and is one the entire country is extremely proud of.

I know this innovation and resilience is not going to be wasted as we prepare to put the worst of the pandemic behind us. It is something that will undoubtedly shape learning for the future.

And this is what I would like to talk to you about today. How do we future-proof this most vital jewel in our education crown and strengthen our national recovery at the same time. The two, I would suggest, very much go hand in hand.

An independent panel chaired by Sir Philip Augar made recommendations on the reform of both further and higher education. This has given us an excellent starting point and we have already addressed many of the recommendations that Sir Philip put in his report.

Despite the uncertainty of the past 18 months, there is much to be cheered by in our higher education sector. We continue to see fierce competition for places on undergraduate courses; our world-leading research, led to that incredible vaccine breakthrough in the battle against Covid.

Our universities provide the world with Nobel-winning scientists, innovators, engineers and creative artists. All of this is a sign of a sector in great health.

But we cannot and must not be complacent.

As the Augar report noted, the post-18 provision has not been delivering enough of the kind of opportunities we need, for the society that we want.

That society will increasingly expect more flexible ways to learn, including more modular, technical, and part-time learning, just as after the pandemic, it expects more flexible ways to work. This is a challenge that the government and the sector must rise to.

Last autumn the Prime Minister announced the Lifetime Loan Entitlement as part of the Lifetime Skills Guarantee. This recognises the realities of a fast-moving economy and the changing world of work. People need and want to be able to study and train in different ways and at different times of their lives.

This will give people a loan entitlement to the equivalent of four years of post-18 education to use over their lifetime and will make it easier for students to access courses more flexibly. It will enable people to study in a modular way or in full years of study, and fit study around work, family and personal commitments, or equally, to retrain and upskill as both their circumstances, but also the economy changes.

This is an opportunity for colleges and universities to reconsider how they can work much more closely together – to work with employers to create course content that responds to gaps in our labour market, to deliver the technical and academic skills our society so desperately needs.

I do not believe this can be done just by recycling existing approaches, and it will require a fundamental rethink of how institutions approach further and higher education provision, building on the approach some providers are already offering.

Delivering this vision is going to need action from both government and the sector to adapt to this new model, but it is a change we must make to bring true flexibility to lifelong learning.

We have already been rolling out new employer-led apprenticeships and T levels, our new technical qualifications, while our Skills for Jobs White Paper will change the entire landscape of post-16 education. Because we must never forget that the purpose of education is to give people the skills that will lead to a fulfilling working life.

The Augar report looked at how we can give our employers the skilled workforce they and our economy need and at the same time provide good value for money. As a Government, we have begun to take steps to remove perverse incentives, such as the bizarre circumstances whereby media studies is funded at a higher rate than mathematics.

The Augar panel was clear about the need for universities to increase the number of courses which are aligned with the economy's needs. And in this respect, we need universities to go further and to act faster.

They must support and drive regional growth and productivity, particularly where that is weak. And to do this, they'll need to change, and we will not be slow to step in if those changes are not happening.

But so often we see universities around the country doing this, but we need more of you to do this more regularly. It is time for universities to follow the lead of Further Education college and look beyond what has worked in the past.

Increasingly they will need to offer more higher technical qualifications and

apprenticeships. These should be geared to real jobs and the actual skills needs of local employers and the economy.

I am sure you are all familiar with the Office for Students' Proceed statistics which were published for the first-time last month. These project the likelihood new students will find some kind of professional employment or take up further study in the year after they graduate.

And while higher education remains a good investment for most, at 25 higher education institutions, fewer than half the students who begin a degree will go on to graduate employment or further study.

I want to be clear that this is not an attack on the arts. Many of our arts institutions are world leaders and every subject can be taught well, and so many universities do teach it well, and every subject can lead to good outcomes. But this is not always the case.

For example, while there are many are many good psychology courses, at one university only 39% of those who enrol in psychology go on to graduate employment or further study. This is not good enough.

While there are many good bio-science courses, at one university only 38% of those who enrol in bioscience go on to graduate employment or further study. This is not good enough.

While there are many good computing courses, at one university only 35% of those who enrol in computing go on to graduate employment or further study. Again, this is just not good enough.

This is clearly not providing the kind of outcomes that students and taxpayers would expect.

We want every student, particularly the most disadvantaged, to know that when they undertake a higher education course, they can be confident that it has a strong chance of improving their life outcomes.

As I have said, our universities are already a byword for excellence around the world. Where we lead, others follow, but the challenge for us is to make sure that no one starts overtaking us.

I welcome the Office for Students' consultation on regulating quality and standards in higher education which sets out clear foundations for driving up quality. And I expect it to lead to real results.

I want to be clear that certain practices, such as the lowering of literacy standards in degree assessments, are unacceptable and must come to an end. If a graduate begins a job without basic literacy, this serves no-one – not them, not their peers, not the employer and not the nation. It undermines the value of the British honours degree. High standards are the bedrock on which our universities' reputation rests, and they must be maintained.

We owe it to all our students, whatever their background, that at the very least they can expect a minimum standard of excellence that is going to lead

to a qualification that will improve their future prospects and help them achieve their life goals.

We know this can be done because of the sheer number of providers who are already doing it and delivering high-quality courses to students from disadvantaged backgrounds with results that are far above minimum standards.

But the same cannot be said of all providers and not all students will be able to say at the end of their course that that was time and money that was well spent.

We continue to work closely with the Office for Students on ensuring that standards remain high.

I also welcome Lord Storey's Private Member's Bill that seeks to put an end to the scourge of essay mills, and we would like to work with Lord Storey to see if we can deliver it.

We expect the same rigour in admissions as we do in every other aspect of the higher education experience. Is it really in anyone's interests if entry requirements are relaxed so much that an 18-year-old who has not yet passed their English or maths GCSEs should progress straight to an honours degree?

We have to make sure that those with an ability can go to university if they have the desire and application to do so, as long as they can prove they are up to it.

In recent years, we have seen far too many unconditional offers and other practices which undermine the reputation of some of our institutions.

Which brings me to schools. One way which universities can better support their community is to work with schools, whether that's by sponsoring schools, or supporting a robust curriculum, or running summer camps.

Genuine social mobility, the ability to break away from the restrictions of social or geographical disadvantage, doesn't just begin and end with helping students get the grades they need to get into university, but by inspiring them to want to go in the first place, by inspiring them to achieve so much more for themselves and then by giving them much more support when they're there.

I know that some universities already do this, but we want it to become the norm, the default setting for every university.

We have seen some fantastic initiatives from universities to drive up opportunity, from Cambridge's new foundation year to Nottingham Trent's outreach initiative in Mansfield. But there is still a widely held view that our current admissions system is not working as well as it should and could.

What we need is equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome. As the Chair of the Office for Students said in a recent speech, widening admissions is never an excuse for lowering standards. And I have been clear in the job advert for the new Director for Fair Access and Participation that a key

priority for them will be to challenge courses not delivering positive outcomes for students.

I have spoken about the fact that our universities justifiably have a reputation for excellence around the world. Our academics deliver for us on so many levels, whether that's in their research, their teaching or their innovation. But I want to make sure that they are not struggling to do all this with one hand tied behind their backs.

Universities need to constantly question the way they do things, especially if processes are starting to make life more complicated rather than the reverse.

So, I want you to be ruthless in your housekeeping: let us do away with the monitoring and form filling, the targets, the processes, the endless external schemes, the creeping managerialism.

Let us free academics to do what they do best – world-class teaching and world class research.

I've made clear to the OfS that I want them to be doing the same thing in their work, and I know that Lord Wharton is absolutely committed to doing so.

Despite all that, despite all that has happened over the past year, we are as committed as ever to our manifesto pledges and are determined to support and improve an excellent education system to help level up society, right across the country.

For me universities play such a vital and pivotal role in achieving that aim. We need to be changing what we did before. We need to adapt and to embrace new ways of working. We are going to ensure the global prestige of our universities will continue to shine undimmed throughout the world. You are so important to our nation, to our future, to the delivery of the government aims, and I know that working together we can rise to that challenge. Thank you.

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## [New advertising rules to help tackle childhood obesity](#)

- These restrictions will help protect children from developing long-term unhealthy eating habits and improve nation's health, and forms just one part of wider plans to tackle childhood obesity.
- Latest measures to tackle childhood obesity could wipe over seven billion calories from the national diet every year.

The health of children across the UK will be improved as new restrictions will mean they are less exposed to advertising of unhealthy foods, the government has announced today.

Following a public consultation, regulations will come into force at the end of next year to introduce a 9pm watershed for advertisements of foods high in fat, salt and sugar (HFSS).

The new rules apply to TV and UK on-demand programmes, as well as restrictions on paid-for advertising of HFSS foods online as part of the government's ongoing commitment to tackle unhealthy eating habits at source.

The watershed will apply from 9pm to 5.30am, meaning HFSS adverts can only be shown during these times. A total of 79% of public consultation respondents supported a 9pm watershed on TV while 74% agreed with the introduction of

further HFSS advertising restrictions online.

Childhood obesity is a complex problem, caused by different factors, and the government is committed to a wide set of actions. Today's vital change represents another important step forward in the government's drive to reduce childhood obesity and level up health inequalities across the nation.

Public Health Minister, Jo Churchill, said:

We are committed to improving the health of our children and tackling obesity. The content youngsters see can have an impact on the choices they make and habits they form. With children spending more time online it is vital we act to protect them from unhealthy advertising.

These measures form another key part of our strategy to get the nation fitter and healthier by giving them the chance to make more informed decisions when it comes to food. We need to take urgent action to level up health inequalities. This action on advertising will help to wipe billions off the national calorie count and give our children a fair chance of a healthy lifestyle.

In order to keep the restrictions proportional, these new regulations will apply to food and drink products of most concern to childhood obesity and will ensure the healthiest in each category will be able to continue to advertise. This approach means foods such as honey, olive oil, avocados and marmite are excluded from the restrictions.

The restrictions will apply to all businesses with 250 or more employees that make and/or sell HFSS products, meaning small and medium businesses will be able to continue advertising. The government recognises these companies may be some of the hardest hit by the pandemic and rely on online media as the sole way to communicate with their customers.

Online restrictions will be limited to paid-for advertising, ensuring brands can continue to advertise within 'owned media' spaces online; such as a brand's own blog, website, app or social media page.

The TV and online restrictions could remove up to 7.2 billion calories from children's diets per year in the UK which, over the coming years, could reduce the number of obese children by more than 20,000.

One in three children leave primary school overweight or obese, with obesity-related illnesses costing the NHS £6 billion a year.

COVID-19 has further highlighted how important it is to tackle obesity, with excess weight being a risk factor for more severe disease.

Evidence shows exposure to HFSS advertising can affect when children eat and what they eat and, over time, excess calorie consumption can lead to children becoming overweight or obese.

The government estimates there were around 2.9 billion child HFSS TV impacts and 11 billion impressions online – defined as an individual seeing a single advert one time – in the UK in 2019.

Restricting the amount of these products advertised will encourage healthier food choices and will help to reduce the number of children living with obesity and going on to develop conditions associated with excess weight, such as type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, colorectal cancer, liver disease and breast cancer later in life.

The Office for Health Promotion – launching fully later this year – will lead national efforts to improve and level up the health of the nation by continuing the fight against obesity, improving mental health and promoting physical activity.

Current advertising regulations are not going far enough to protect children from seeing a significant amount of unhealthy food adverts on TV and existing regulation does not account for the increasing amount of time children are spending online.

Analysis from September 2019 demonstrated that almost half (47.6%) of all food adverts shown over the month on ITV1, Channel 4, Channel 5 and Sky1 were for products high in fat, salt and sugar, rising to nearly 60% between 6pm and 9pm. Ofcom research suggests that children's viewing peaks in the hours after school, with the largest number of child viewers concentrated around family viewing time, between 6pm and 9pm.

The measures set out today form part of our legislative response to tackling obesity. The government is committed to working alongside industry and will issue guidance to help them prepare for this transition.

The [policy documents published](#) include:

- government's response to the 2019 and 2020 consultation
- an equalities impact assessment
- an impact assessment

The 7.2bn figure is derived from the multiplication of the predicted calorie reduction (taken from the impact assessment) and the estimated number of children positively influenced by HFSS advertising restrictions.

In TV advertising, an impact is defined as an individual seeing a single advert one time. For example, if 1 million children are watching a TV advert simultaneously this would result in 1 million child impacts for that advert. In online advertising, an impression is defined as an individual seeing a single advert one time. For example, if 2 million children were served the same advert (at any time) this would result in 2 million child impressions for that advert.

Products in scope of the advertising restrictions will include those of most concern to childhood obesity, defined as high in fat, salt and sugar and are determined through a two-step process. First the products will only be subject to the restrictions if they are in a narrowed set of categories

listed in Annex 1 and 2 of the consultation response (based on Public Health England's sugar or calorie reduction programme or the soft drinks industry levy). Secondly, the 2004 to 2005 Nutrient Profiling Model (NPM) will be used to define whether a product is HFSS.

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**[UN Human Rights Council 47:](#)**  
**[Interactive Dialogue with the Special](#)**

# Rapporteur on Health

World news story

The UK delivered this statement during the interactive dialogue with the Special Rapporteur on health.



The Human Rights Council takes place in Geneva.

Thank you, Madam President.

The United Kingdom would like to thank the Special Rapporteur for her report on this important agenda and in particular her focus on ensuring the enjoyment of sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

The UK remains strongly committed to defending and championing comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights globally. We will continue to use our voice on the world stage and work with others to defend and promote these fundamental rights for all. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and has put the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women, girls, adolescents and other marginalised groups at real risk. The UK therefore welcomes the Special Rapporteur's plans to build on her predecessors' report on the right to highest attainable standard of physical and mental health of adolescents.

COVID-19 related school closures have put many adolescent girls at risk as schools provide an important entry point for education and raising awareness of sexual and reproductive health and rights. The UK is committed to dismantling barriers to girls' education by addressing discriminatory gender norms, keeping girls safe from violence and providing life skills including sex and relationships education.

Special Rapporteur,

How can Member States best support your work on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of adolescents?

Thank you.



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