

# [Letter from Michelle Donelan to higher education providers](#)

[unable to retrieve full-text content]A letter from Michelle Donelan MP, Minister of State for Universities, to higher education providers about students' return in Spring 2021.

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## [Statement on attacks in Aden, Yemen](#)

News story

James Cleverly, Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, has issued the below statement condemning the attacks in Aden today.



James Cleverly, Minister for the Middle East and North Africa, said:

“I am appalled by today’s attacks in Aden following the arrival of the new Yemeni Government. This government leads a country facing horrendous humanitarian crisis, economic turmoil and ongoing conflict alongside the coronavirus pandemic.

“It has the UK’s full support and I strongly condemn today’s heinous acts, which have left innocent people dead and many more injured. My thoughts and sincere condolences are with all those affected.”

Published 30 December 2020

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# Prime Minister's statement on coronavirus (COVID-19): 30 December 2020

Today I want to begin with the good news: the approval of the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine which is a fantastic achievement for British science

And which will allow us to vaccinate more people, and also vaccinate them more quickly.

And there is one important development that's helping us to accelerate our vaccination programme across the whole of the UK:

We've had new advice from the Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation that the first dose can protect people against the worst effects of this virus

because the benefits kick in after two or three weeks.

And so from now on we will give a first dose to as many vulnerable people as possible,

with the second dose to follow twelve weeks later.

And what that means is we can vaccinate and protect many more people in the coming weeks.

I know everyone watching this will want to know when you can get your vaccine and all I want to say is we are working as hard and as fast as we can to get the supplies to you, and as soon as we have the supplies we will be getting them into people's arms

To summarise where we are

We have to face the fact we've got two big things happening at once in our fight against Covid –

One is working for us; and one working against us.

On the plus side we have two valid vaccines and we are racing, as I say, to get them out.

On the downside, there is a new strain of the virus which is spreading much faster and surging across the country.

And we have seen a 40 per cent increase in cases in England in the last week alone,

almost 15 per cent more patients in hospital – more than at the peak of the first wave.

And yesterday sadly we recorded almost a thousand deaths across the UK, for the first time since April.

So at this critical moment with the prospect of freedom within reach

We've got to redouble our efforts to contain the virus.

That's why the Health Secretary has announced that more areas of England will be moving into Tier 4 from tomorrow

And as I say again, no-one regrets these measures more bitterly than I do.

But we must take firm action now

and that's why we have to think very hard about schools.

Because today of course it remains the case that keeping children in education is a national priority

it remains the case that schools are safe.

But we must face the reality that the sheer pace of the spread of this new variant

requires us now to take even tougher action in some areas and that does affect schools

Let me set out for you what this means.

In most of England, primary schools will still reassemble next week, as planned for the new term.

But, in the areas we have just published today on gov.uk,

I am afraid the start of the new term will be delayed until at least January 18,

when the latest data on those infection rates will be reviewed.

That is because the rate of transmission in these areas is so high,

and there's just such pressure on the local NHS,

that extra action is required to control the spread of the virus.

The children of key workers, or those who are considered to be vulnerable, will still go back to primary schools from next week – wherever they live in England.

They are not affected by today's announcement.

In secondary schools, all vulnerable children and the children of critical workers will go back next week across England, as originally planned.

But we will ask exam year pupils in secondary schools to learn remotely during the first week of term

and return to the classroom from 11 January.

The remaining secondary school pupils, i.e. non exam groups will go back a week later, that is from 18 January – but I want to stress that depending on the spread of the disease it may be necessary to take further action in their cases as well, in as I say the worst affected areas.

To minimise disruption in schools and to fight the disease we are massively expanding our testing operation

ensuring that every secondary school pupil is tested as they return, and regularly thereafter.

Again I want to thank the teachers, pupils and parents who have worked so hard to keep schools safe and keep them open.

We are also asking universities to reduce the number of students who return to campus in January, prioritising medical courses and others requiring face to face teaching.

And in all cases, students should be offered two rapid tests when they return.

All of these measures are in the end designed to save lives and to protect the NHS.

And for that very reason,

I must ask you to follow the rules where you live tomorrow night

and see in the New Year safely at home.

That means not meeting up with friends or family indoors, unless they are in the same household or support bubble,

and avoiding large gatherings of any kind.

We are still in the tunnel of this pandemic

the light however is not merely visible:

thanks to an extraordinary feat of British engineering if you like

the tunnel has been shortened

and we are moving faster through it, and that gives me great confidence about the future in the Spring

So for now let's double our efforts, let's follow the rules,  
protect our NHS  
and together make 2021 the year we leave this tunnel behind us.

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## **Rail replacement vehicles: extension of non-accessible period, 30 September 2021**

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## **School contingency plans to be implemented as cases rise**

The government has today, Wednesday 30 December, responded to rapidly rising case rates due to the new, more transmissible variant of coronavirus by triggering the [education contingency framework](#) and pushing back the staggered return for secondary schools and colleges by one week.

Covid case rates are rapidly rising across the country and from tomorrow 78 per cent of the population will be in Tier 4. Between 18 and 24 December the weekly case rate in England rose to 402.6 per 100,000, a 32 per cent increase on the previous week.

In response to this concerning data, and to suppress the spread of the virus, protect public health and save lives, the contingency framework for education, first published in November, will be implemented in areas of the country with very high rates of incidence or transmission of the virus.

Where the contingency framework is implemented, secondary schools and further education colleges should only allow vulnerable children, children of critical workers, and exam students to attend. High-quality remote education should be provided for all other pupils.

The framework includes the option to move primary schools to remote education

should rates of incidence or transmission of the virus in a local area require it. Evidence suggests that transmission is limited between young children, and the decision to close primary schools will be based on higher thresholds than for secondary schools and colleges and will only be taken as a last resort. Early years will remain open nationally, as will alternative provision and special schools.

Escalation of areas into the contingency framework for education will be decided through the existing Local Action Committee and COVID Operations Committee structure, and will be communicated alongside Tier decisions. This process will be led by the Health Secretary and Education Secretary.

In areas not subject to the contingency framework, early years, primary schools, alternative provision and special schools will all return to face-to-face education from the start of term as planned, with individual special schools having some flexibility.

Evidence shows the new strain of COVID-19 is increasing in the South West, Midlands and parts of the North West. The majority of the cases identified in London, the South East and the East of England are of the new variant. Infection rates have increased faster than expected in these areas where the new strain has been circulating and stronger measures are required to get the virus under control.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

In the face of a rapidly changing situation, I am determined to act to preserve lives and the NHS, as we continue to protect education and put children first.

We are making changes to the start of term to give more time for the rollout of our first-of-its-kind rapid testing programme to identify students who have the virus but don't display any symptoms. On top of the existing protective measures in place, this will help keep education settings as safe as possible for all students.

The fact that we have kept education running so successfully throughout the entire pandemic is due to the incredible dedication of all our teachers, leaders and support staff and I want to thank them once more for everything they continue to do to keep children learning as safely as possible.

During the first week of spring term, beginning on or just after 04 January, secondary schools and colleges will focus on the rollout of rapid testing to help find asymptomatic cases. The provision of testing builds on the extensive protective measures already in place in schools and colleges to make them as safe as possible.

Secondary schools and colleges will continue with a staggered return but with one week's delay, providing face-to-face education for exam year groups from

11 January and the return of all students on 18 January. Vocational exams scheduled for the first weeks of January will go ahead as planned.

To support high quality remote education during this period, the government expects to deliver over 50,000 laptops and tablets to schools across the country on Monday 4 January, and over 100,000 in total during the first week of term. Over 1 million devices will be provided in total.

For universities, the courses where students are eligible to return in early January have been further restricted, prioritising medical and other courses where face to face teaching is necessary, to reduce the number of students travelling over this period. The wider return of students currently planned for the two-week period beginning 25 January will be kept under review.

All university students should be offered two rapid tests when they return.

The current plans for rapid testing in secondary schools and colleges remain in place, with two rapid tests available to all secondary and college students and staff at the start of term to identify asymptomatic cases.

The first starter packs of up to 1,000 test kits will arrive at all secondary schools and colleges on 04 January. The 1,500 military personnel committed to supporting secondary schools and colleges remain in place, providing virtual training advice and guidance on establishing the testing process with teams on standby to provide in-person support if required.

Daily testing of all staff and students that have been a close contact of a confirmed case, reducing the need for self-isolation, will continue to be available to all secondary schools and colleges from the first week of term, along with weekly rapid tests for all staff in secondary schools, colleges, special schools and alternative provision.

All students and staff are encouraged to consent to testing. Testing for primary school staff will follow in the second half of January.

The rollout of laptops and tablets to schools on this scale follows close collaboration between the government and its partner organisations, which has seen over 560,000 devices delivered to schools and councils since the start of the pandemic. With the further rollout this term, over one million will be provided in total – making the programme one of the largest of its kind in the world.