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Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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Katharine Sacks-Jones, Chief Executive, Become
Jancis Andrew, Chair, National Association of Virtual School Heads
By email: katharine.sacksjones@becomecharity.org.uk

24 November 2020

Dear Ms Sacks-Jones

Thank you for your letter of 18 August regarding examination cancellations, the awarding of results in 2020, and care-experienced young people. I apologise for the delay in my response.

This has been an incredibly difficult time for students. Whilst universities are in charge of their own admissions, I have asked that they are as flexible as possible. The government will continue to make every effort to minimise the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic on young people's education.

We have been working closely with the higher education (HE) sector to ensure that the vast majority of students who have achieved the necessary grades to go to university this year are able to do so. In August I convened a HE Taskforce, to work with the sector on the challenges universities, colleges, and their students are facing, and to build capacity for extra students this year and next.

The government and the HE sector has agreed that all offers to students who meet their conditions should be honoured this coming year wherever possible or, if maximum capacity is reached, to offer an alternative course that the student is happy with or a deferred place as a last resort.

Many vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) results were not affected by the change in how grades were awarded, with the vast majority of results issued on time.

Most VTQs did not use a similar statistical standardisation to that which was used for GCSE and A levels. Results took into account coursework already completed. Centre assessment grades formed a small part of the final results, and the majority of the centre assessment grades were unchanged. However, following our decision on A Levels and GCSEs, Ofqual asked awarding organisations on 17 August to review their approach for VTQs where similar statistical standardisation to A levels and GCSEs was used.

We appreciate however that any delay will have been disappointing and frustrating for those affected and we are committed to ensuring every student receives the grades they deserve and have worked so hard for. UCAS has confirmed that a large proportion of VTQ students have been placed at their first choice HE provider, with many further education (FE) colleges allowing students to enrol without confirmed grades. FE providers are also being flexible with admissions allowing students to enrol where they have been waiting results.

For the very small percentage of students who had planned to study this year but are offered a deferred place, a package of support has been put together that will provide opportunities to gain new skills, undertake work placements in the public, private, and voluntary sectors, plus additional learning to support career development.

To help universities build capacity for additional students, the government is providing up to £10 million for which universities can bid to support their capital plans to increase intakes in the coming academic year. I understand the Chair of the British Property Federation's Student Accommodation Committee, David Tymms, advised on 10 September in a blog for the HE Policy Institute, that cities like London, Nottingham, Sheffield, Manchester and Edinburgh, where competition for purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) beds has traditionally been fierce, are projected to have hundreds of vacancies. Mr Tymms also advised that property consultancy Knight Frank, reported on A-Level results day that roughly 30% of private PBSA remained unlet, a substantially higher number than at the same point last year.

Children in care can receive extra support through their virtual school head to improve their educational attainment, including help to prepare for university. Once they leave care, they have access to a Personal Adviser to support their transition from care to independence, including in relation to education, employment, or training.

If care leavers attend university, local authorities are required to provide a £2,000 bursary. A number of universities also have a single point of contact to support care experienced students.

Care leavers who are under the age of 21 when they start their course, and who are planning to undertake a HE course but are still undertaking full-time FE may also be eligible to apply for Universal Credit (UC), though support available for prospective students will depend on circumstances. Further details on eligibility for UC and how to apply can be found on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

To ensure that all colleagues and stakeholders, both in Parliament and across the sector, have access to the most up-to-date and relevant information, I would ask you to consult the following pages on GOV.UK:

The government's central COVID-19 homepage: [tinyurl.com/QInk6ux](https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus).

The government's COVID-19 guidance for schools and other educational settings: [tinyurl.com/rhYncew](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-schools).

I hope this helps to clarify the situation. Thank you for writing on this important matter.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education