

16 April 2021

Michelle Donelan MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Dear Michelle,

I'm writing to follow up on our email from 26 March titled 'Follow up from meeting with Students' Union UCL' and in response to your announcement of 13 April regarding Higher Education Providers and students returning to campus.

We feel the need to write to you on behalf of our members to describe our disappointment and shock that once again higher education students are being forgotten and left to cope with the prospect of another term of remote learning, isolation and loneliness. We're disappointed that students won't be able to return to on-campus education at what we feel is the earliest possible opportunity, and instead must wait until at least the 17 May before resuming on-campus study.

Your announcement this week that a *"return to in-person teaching [will be] alongside step 3 of the road map, when restrictions on social contact will be eased further and the majority of indoor settings can reopen"* means that university settings (seminar rooms, lecture theatres, specialist activity spaces) have been treated in the same way as pubs and restaurants. Whereas Further Education colleges and their seminar rooms, lecture theatres, and specialist activity spaces have been open since 8 March and have been operating safely – could you elaborate on the thinking behind this decision?

For many students at UCL, 17 May is too late in the year for any face-to-face teaching to take place as many students will have already taken their exams and completed the year. However, as we raised with you on 22 March, the wider social and extracurricular activity for students is exceptionally important. We asked for clearer guidance and more specific reference to extra-curricular activities that would have allowed us to resume in person society activity on campus in a safe, covid-secure way. However, the guidance published this week makes no reference to such activity, leaving us unable to provide essential social and skills development activities through our hundreds of clubs and societies. In your statement you said that *"the Government are doing all they can to help people who are at the start of their career journey"*, but this decision sets back the important work our activity programme can do with skills development. We know that we can deliver this activity safely and in a covid-secure manner as we have demonstrated throughout the pandemic. Currently, after-school clubs and other community activities for children have been given clear guidance that have allowed them to be organised in a safe manner. What is different for our setting and why can't our students benefit from the same extra-curricular activity?

This activity can help to alleviate the serious issues of loneliness and isolation being felt by so many at this time. Students are desperate to make the most of what little time there is left of the academic year, and we feel the value of social and extracurricular has simply been ignored.

Kind regards,

Carol Paige,
Democracy, Operations and Community Officer
Students' Union UCL