

Rt Hon Boris Johnson
Prime Minister
10, Downing Street
London, SW1A 2AA

29 March 2021

Open letter to the Prime Minister from University Alliance Chancellors, Chairs of Board, Vice-Chancellors and Presidents of Students' Unions

Dear Prime Minister

On behalf of all our students, we strongly urge you to allow a return to campus for all higher education students now, and fulfil the public commitment you made to the nation that education would be the first sector to re-open after the national lockdown. As it is, all primary, secondary and further education students have been allowed to return to in-person teaching, but this has not been the case for higher education students.

This current generation of students have displayed exceptional resilience throughout this crisis, but we must not take this for granted, and we must ensure they are given the best chance to succeed after the most challenging year.

Allowing a return to campus would enable universities - in accordance with government guidance – to offer students, particularly those graduating, additional employability support and development activities. This will be vital in aiding preparation for entering an uncertain job market and ensuring this generation of students is not further disadvantaged as a result of this pandemic, and equip them to best support our national renewal efforts.

More seriously, any further delay to a return to campus has huge and worrying ramifications for the mental health and wellbeing of our students, who have already experienced significant increases in anxiety and isolation as a result of the absence of in-person teaching and interaction with their peers. Should students continue to be prevented from accessing in-person teaching and on-campus facilities and experiences, we fear the damage being done to our students' mental health and wellbeing will be long-lasting.

We absolutely appreciate the fine balance that you and your government is having to take to allow society to re-open whilst maintaining declining levels of Covid, but this next stage must include re-opening the remaining areas of education.

As leaders of our institutions we take our collective responsibilities for our students, staff and communities extremely seriously and have invested millions of pounds to ensure our campuses are Covid safe and secure. Data from over the last year will attest that this has been successful, and where outbreaks have occurred these have been managed quickly and efficiently with little to no transmission into the wider community.

As we face up to the challenges and opportunities of the months and years ahead of us, with the recovery from Covid and chance to forge a new path in the world post-Brexit, it is surely the talent and skills of this generation of graduates who will help build back Britain better. We should be giving our brightest minds and our future workforce the best start, so that in return, Alliance universities and our students can help power our economic, social and cultural future.

Please act now and allow the re-opening of university campuses and the resumption of in-person teaching for all higher education students and in so doing give this generation of students the best hope of supporting our national renewal in the months and years ahead.

Yours sincerely

Members of the University Alliance

Signed

Lord Ribeiro	Chancellor Anglia Ruskin University
Dr Keith Attwood	Chair of the Board Anglia Ruskin University
Professor Roderick Watkins	Vice-Chancellor Anglia Ruskin University
Avinash Miriyam	President of Students' Union Anglia Ruskin University
Sir Lenny Henry	Chancellor Birmingham City University
Mark Hopton	Chair of the Board Birmingham City University
Professor Philip Plowden	Vice-Chancellor Birmingham City University
Victoria Bennett-Salvador	President of Students' Union Birmingham City University

Mark Burch	Chair of the Board University of Brighton
Professor Debra Humphris	Vice-Chancellor University of Brighton
Sihem Ziada Sihem	President of Students' Union University of Brighton
Dr Margaret Casely-Hayford CBE	Chancellor Coventry University
Keith Bissett	Chair of the Board Coventry University
Professor John Latham CBE	Vice-Chancellor Coventry University
Augustine Nwosu	President of Students' Union Coventry University
Lord Boateng	Chancellor University of Greenwich
Bronwyn Hill CBE	Chair of the Governing body University of Greenwich
Professor Jane Harrington	Vice-Chancellor University of Greenwich
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