



**Michelle Donelan MP**  
Minister of State for Universities

Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT  
tel: 0370 000 2288 [www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus](http://www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus)

11 September 2020

Dear Colleague,

While I understand this continues to be a uniquely challenging period for you, I would like to follow up on an important point in my letter of 28 August about the work I am doing to promote provision for care leavers in higher education.

This work is part of efforts across government that include looking at how care leavers can secure and maintain suitable accommodation, can have the mental health services of most benefit to them and opportunities to overcome the challenges of loneliness.

During this time of unprecedented uncertainty, it is more important than ever to recognise the additional challenges care leavers face in accessing and settling into higher education. I urge you in these circumstances to keep this particular group of disadvantaged young people in mind.

Latest data show that only 6 per cent of care leavers aged 19-21 currently go into higher education. Care leavers that do take up a degree are significantly more likely to drop out than their peers. Research tells us that there are many reasons for this, including financial pressures, a lack of personal support networks and practical problems, such as with accommodation.

Interestingly, research also shows that care leavers who complete their higher education journey are just as likely to get a First or 2:1 once entry qualifications and their demographic profile are taken into account; and they outperform their peers in terms of progression into highly skilled employment, or further study at a higher level.

## **HE Principles**

Last year, DfE published [guidance](#) to universities, setting out key areas where care leavers need additional support to access and succeed at university, with examples of best practice drawn from across the sector. This provides a useful framework to consider how you can improve your offer to care leavers.

## **Care Leaver Covenant**

The Care Leaver Covenant provides a way for organisations, including HEPs, to demonstrate their commitment by setting out an offer to care leavers. If you are

not one of the HE providers already signed up to the Care Leaver Covenant, I formally invite you to contact them about signing up.

Fifty-six institutions are already signatories and through their commitment share many examples of how they are providing for care leaver students. However, this is a long way short of the 400-plus providers currently registered with the Office for Students. We need to do more.

Signing up to the Covenant can help HE providers in the delivery of relevant commitments set out in their access and participation plans. More information about the Care Leaver Covenant can be found [here](#).

I would like to express my gratitude again for the great work that you are doing to make the new academic year a success. We shall continue to work with you to make sure students are supported throughout their studies, especially those who are most disadvantaged.

I shall be in contact soon to share cases of best practice towards care leavers from HEPs.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle Donelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, sweeping initial "M".

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## Agenda

<u>Item</u>	<u>Duration</u>	<u>Lead</u>
<b>Welcome and Introduction</b>	<b>5 mins</b>	<b>Minister Donelan</b>
<b>The OA approach to place-based working</b>	<b>10 mins</b>	<b>Robert Arnott</b>
<b>Case studies</b> How the OA place-based approach has enabled effective cross-Government working	<b>30 mins</b>	<b>OA Chair with Liz Franey, SRO for OAs</b>
<b>How we can work together</b> Identifying priorities for joint working to support vulnerable young people and families to recover from COVID-19 and deliver the levelling-up commitment	<b>40 mins</b>	<b>Minister Donelan</b>
<b>Closing remarks and next steps</b>	<b>5 mins</b>	<b>Minister</b>

Actions for officials re; joint proposals and agreement about timeframe		<b>Donelan</b>
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