
Professor Sir Ian Diamond | National Statistician

Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
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23 July 2021

Dear Minister,

Thank you for your letter of 15 July on the difficult and sensitive topic of suicide in the Higher Education (HE) student population. As National Statistician and Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority, and having previously served as a university Vice-Chancellor, I recognise the importance of having regular and timely figures on these key statistics.

As you know, back in 2018, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) published the first estimates of suicide among HE students in England and Wales, focusing on the academic years between 2000/01 and 2016/17. I have spoken with the responsible team, led by Ben Windsor-Shellard who represented the ONS at the HE Suicide Prevention Roundtable, and they have already started the necessary pre-requisites to update these figures.

In line with the previous publication, the updated analysis will be based on ONS death registration records, and will be linked with records from the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) to identify the HE population at risk. Such studies can take time, particularly when it comes to acquiring and linking data. The team anticipates starting this work after the next annual update to national suicide death registrations statistics in September, with dissemination of the findings planned for early 2022. I have also asked the team to investigate the feasibility of automating this work, to enable figures to be updated more regularly, for instance on an annual basis.

In addition, the team are working to expand the analysis to include students from other settings, including Further Education (FE). This analysis draws on multiple datasets from different organisations and, as such, is a longer term project. I have asked Ben and the team to keep your officials updated on progress on the update to HE figures as well as the wider work to include other types of students.

Yours sincerely,



Professor Sir Ian Diamond