



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

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Sir Ian,

I would like to extend my gratitude to your officials for their input into our recent Higher Education (HE) Suicide Prevention Roundtable on 28th June, which I chaired with Steve West, the incoming President of Universities UK. I am writing to you to ask that you consider publishing the linked data analysis of deaths by suicide for HE students on an annual basis to support HE Providers in targeting their suicide prevention activities.

The intention of the roundtable was to support engagement in suicide prevention across the HE sector through: firstly, developing a better understanding of the data and trends underpinning suicide in the HE student population, including current and future reporting from ONS and PHE; secondly promoting the adoption of the [Suicide Safer Universities](#) framework in HE, highlighting effective practice in prevention, intervention, and postvention through institutional case studies, including publishing resources for the sector. The roundtable was attended by leading researchers in suicide prevention, colleagues across government, charities, HE providers, and bereaved family members.

As you know, Ben (Shellard-Windsor) from ONS presented findings from [the linked data analysis](#) (coronial data linked with HESA data) published in 2018 which provides insight into the trends in suicides of HE students. Professor David Gunnell from the Bristol Medical School provided a commentary on the data based on his linked research paper. My officials have recently met with ONS colleagues to discuss the regularity of the publication of data on student suicides and I understand that it is currently on the ONS workplan to produce an updated dataset and analysis in autumn 2021.

The mental health and wellbeing of students, including suicide prevention, is very much a priority of mine and I have been working closely with higher education and health colleagues to improve practice in this important area and ensure that students are better supported. It is of the utmost importance that university leaders actively engage with suicide prevention in their institutions, and insights into the national picture including trends provides valuable insights into risk factors in their own student communities. Notwithstanding the unavoidable registration delay with these categories of deaths, it is vital that the HE sector has access to timely data and insights into risk factors in relation to suicide of HE students.

To this end it would be beneficial for the ONS to conduct and publish this linked data on an annual basis to give HE providers additional insights into groups most at risk and thus target their mental health support and suicide prevention activity more effectively. We have discussed this with your officials and understand that a more frequent linked dataset is likely to be more efficient to produce, and of course it will be hugely helpful to have more timely data for the HE sector.

Thank you again for the important contribution to the roundtable from your officials, and I look forward to hearing from you.

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' and a long, horizontal flourish at the end.

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