

Press Release – 15th March 2021

Don't forget about Students...

The current Government support and response to students is simply inadequate and the recent budget did nothing to address this. SUSU (the University of Southampton Students' Union) is calling on local MPs to lobby Government to do more for students.

SUSU have written to local MPs in Southampton and Winchester, calling on them to lobby Government to do more for students. The COVID-19 pandemic has affected students in multiple ways including students from across the world who accepted offers from UK universities with the reasonable expectation of an in-person, on-campus experience for their studies and research. The reality is that students have had extremely limited on-campus engagement with other students and their lecturers and have been unable to benefit from wider University facilities for much of the year. Many overseas students have not even been able to come to the UK, despite paying many thousands of pounds a year for not only the tuition but also the chance to immerse themselves in British society and culture and experience the local community.

Since the start of the academic year, most students have had little to no face-to-face teaching and therefore, had no reason to be paying rent in Southampton or Winchester. In addition, and in line with Government guidance, many students returned home for the winter break in December, only to be instructed to remain at home, leaving many of them paying rent for rooms they no longer occupy. Students now face increasing uncertainty and stress as to where they stand in relation to rent payments. Many students rely on part-time work, especially in the hospitality sector, to cover their living costs (money that generally goes back to the local economy) and these jobs have obviously not been available in current circumstances.

Since December, many of these students have been studying in far from ideal conditions, often taking on extra caring responsibilities while sharing space and wi-fi connection with siblings being home schooled and parents working from home, whilst still paying rent for the accommodation they cannot use. Unsurprisingly, research by the ONS shows that [almost two-thirds](#) of students have indicated that their well-being and mental health has worsened since the start of the autumn term 2020.

We believe that the Government's response to the plight of students has been inadequate. The UK Government has released just £70m in additional hardship funds for England, which equated to less than £15 per student for the University of Southampton. This pales in comparison to the £40m for just 8 universities in Wales and £37.7m in Northern Ireland and is insufficient for the additional costs and lost income students have experienced this year. A recent All Party Parliamentary Group for Students report made several recommendations for the Government to implement, including an increased level of financial support and working with the private rented housing sector to ensure more flexibility from landlords but the Government has so far not acted on these recommendations.

The current Government response is simply inadequate and additional support for the sector is an urgent priority. We are calling on local MPs to lobby Government to recognise the impact of the pandemic on students and address this lack of support as a matter of urgency.