

University Response to SUSU correspondence

Issue 1: All students, particular international students, should receive a refund for the academic year 2020-21.

The University is not planning to offer refunds of fees to students. However, the University does recognise how different this year has been and the difficult choices that have had to be made by students and staff members alike. There are a number of reasons for not taking a blanket position:

- i. The University has a well-established and rigorous complaints procedure for any student to follow should they feel that the education that they have received not be in line with the commitments that have been made. This allows for the very individual experiences to be articulated and explored and can, if resolution is not reached through the internal process, lead to an independent judgement through the Office of the Independent Adjudicator. We believe that using this procedure where appropriate is the fairest approach as each individual will have been affected in very different ways, and it also allows for an independent perspective should this need be present.
- ii. The University recognises that the experience of our students over the last year has been very significantly affected in many ways by the public health crisis we have all been working in. However, we have been determined to ensure that despite this, our students have been supported in ways that allow them to meet the learning outcomes of their programmes of study, and so to progress through those programmes. In the case of finalists, our approach has been to ensure that they complete and graduate with an award that is recognised worldwide as valuable and will continue to hold its value in years to come.
- iii. To deliver education to our students, members of staff across the University have worked tirelessly to ensure that students have had access to high-quality teaching, often to having to adapt at short notice the blend of face-to-face in-person and on-line education. We recognise the disruption this has caused all parties in needing to respond to external health advice, but nevertheless we have ensured that students have been able to continue with their studies.
- iv. All of our programmes of study and the services which tuition fees fund – including libraries, Enabling Services and the Employability and Careers Services have been adapted and have remained available to students. In order for these services to continue to be available as best as possible the University has invested significantly to increase our digital offer. This includes investment in a range of things such as increasing and enhancing our online education, adding temporary buildings to our campuses to maximise in-person teaching and study, the introduction of enhanced cleaning regimes and a range of other safety measures. The University would also particularly highlight the real effort (and cost) in delivering our sector-leading comprehensive weekly testing programme from September, where we were one of the very few UK universities to introduce this, which ensured all students had access to campus and face to face teaching within Covid constraints in the first term that has contributed to making our campuses among the safest in the country.
- v. The University has also offered over £500,000 in online learning grants to students to ensure that those who need support to access their learning get it.
- vi. To enable the University to deliver this programme of investment in the experience and education of our students we took the difficult decision to operate with a deficit budget in the

2020/21 financial year. Offering blanket refunds of fees to students would mean that we would have no option but to cut the services that we have been pleased to be able to offer. Any such cut would significantly affect the student experience directly and immediately.

2. Issue: Students who cannot or do not wish to return to campus from 8th March or 12th April should receive an equivalent learning experience (with the exception of those students who are required to attend a face-to-face component of their course in order to progress/graduate). Those students not wishing to return should not be disadvantaged as a result.

The University has been clear that it does not (with a very few exceptions) offer distance-learning programmes, and that we expect our students to be available to engage with teaching on-campus as and when we are able to provide it.

We have always been clear that we want to get students back to in-person teaching and learning as soon as it is safe to do so because we understand the benefits that brings and because so many of our students have told us that it is what they want. As indicated in the response above we have invested significantly in safety measures including the weekly testing programme, the provision of appropriate face coverings, carefully managing numbers to ensure social distancing, and the addition of new space to enable safe social distancing during teaching sessions. We believe that these measures mean that students can come back to the University with confidence.

With regards to students who are unable to return to campus to engage with in-person teaching, we will – as we would in any year – endeavour to support them and to make appropriate reasonable adjustments in individual cases. However, we cannot (and nor could any university) guarantee ‘an exactly equivalent learning experience’ for students in this position. Students who are on campus engaging with other students and their lecturers will have opportunities that students who are not on campus will not have. We would also want students to benefit from the wider facilities that we are making safely available on campus.

Issue 3: Students who cannot or do not choose to return to campus when they are allowed to should be released from their Halls contracts with no charge incurred for Term 3.

Students who choose not to return to their accommodations are able to request release from their contracts within the standard contractual terms which allow for students to terminate their contract with 28 days’ notice on provision of information stating the reason for being unable to return.

The rent rebate that has been offered to students who have not been able to access their accommodation between the 4th January and the 11th April stands and this is separate to whether students return to their accommodation. Student will be eligible for this refund even if they do not return and choose to cancel their contract.

Given the plans for the University to reopen to students, and for those students to be here, we believe that it is fair to operate within the standard contractual terms which allow for students to terminate their contract with 28 days’ notice on provision of information stating the reason for being unable to

return. Students who choose not to return to campus when then are allowed to should ask for an Early Release from their Halls contract. Early release requests will be considered individually and may require students to provide some information on the reasons they have chosen not to return.

Issue 4: The University should commit to continuing to work with SUSU and our academic reps to address issues of the consistency of quality of all aspects of this year's learning experience, including assessments and feedback. In due course, we would also like to explore the positive aspects of this year which are worth retaining in future years, even when a return to our previous normality is possible (the flexibility offered by recorded lectures, for example, as well as the use of Teams).

The University welcomes this request and remains committed to working with SUSU and student academic representatives. Reflecting on the experience of students and staff this year will be a key element of our programme monitoring processes, and we share your determination to learn from the very different ways of engaging this year and to continue with the things that we know have worked for students and staff. We will maintain dialogue with SUSU about all these matters.