



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Royal Holloway University Students' Union
Royal Holloway
University of London
Egham
Surrey
TW20 0EX

Our reference: BS11954

17 February 2021

Dear Kate, Alissa, Henn, and Lucy,

Thank you for contacting me on behalf of Royal Holloways' Student Union regarding the impact of the pandemic on university education.

The covid pandemic has affected everyone, however I recognise it has transformed the university experience so many students had hoped for. University should be a time of discovery, the first step for many young adults to live independently, pursue their own interests and forge friendships which can last a lifetime. And of course a time for academic pursuits which will form the foundations for many successful careers.

The pandemic has meant students have been prevented from many of these experiences, however I know that Royal Holloway have been working extremely hard to maintain the quality of education throughout the pandemic, even where that is required to happen remotely. As you highlight, students now pay a large amount of money for their education. This forms a contract between students and the University. Students who are not satisfied with the support they are receiving should contact the University of London in the first instance. However, where issues remain unresolved and if students do not feel they are receiving value from their courses they do have the right to submit a formal complaint.

Since March 2015, the CMA (Consumer and Marketing Authority) has regulated how Universities comply with consumer law. However, given the unprecedented nature of the events of the past year, and the number of people affected, I believe students should have a right for these complaints to be reviewed independently to ensure a consistent standard is adopted.

I recently wrote to the Universities Minister about the possibility of an independent mechanism to review the value provided by higher education courses during the pandemic. Please find attached their response. I hope that this response is useful in outlining the financial support and compensation options available to Royal Holloway students who have been adversely affected by the pandemic. That said, I am disappointed that there appears to be no plans for an independent review mechanism or a consistent approach in reviewing complaints from students. As such, I will make further representations to the Department for Education on this matter.

You also raise concerns over the cost of university accommodation for students, many of which will have signed year long contracts which they now do not need. I am aware that Royal Holloway are providing rent removal for students who have contracts with university-run accommodation. Where students arranged accommodation through private landlords, they are advised to contact the landlord directly. Government advice is for landlords and tenants to aim to negotiate an amicable solution, and for landlords in particular to be open to these discussions.

If you or other students from Royal Holloway have experienced difficulties in contacting or discussing the situation with your university or landlord, I would be happy to look into this. If you would like me to do so, please could you provide the details of your arrangements and the contact you have had to date.

If you would like to discuss these issue further with me please let me know and we can set up a zoom meeting.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to be 'Ben Spencer', written in a cursive style.

Dr Ben Spencer MP
Runnymede and Weybridge