

House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

10 February 2021

**RE: Support for Students**

Dear Dr Spencer,

We hope that you and your loved ones are keeping safe and well at this difficult time.

We, the Sabbatical Officers at Royal Holloway Students' Union, are writing to you on behalf of students at Royal Holloway University of London in relation to the severe disruption and difficulties students have faced over the last 11 months due to the pandemic.

Throughout the last 11 months, students within Higher Education have received little support from the Government, not even warranting a mention during Boris Johnson's announcement of a new lockdown on 5 January nor any recognition regarding the impact this would have on them. Students have been continually forgotten and unsupported, despite the vast majority of students abiding to the lockdown rules in order to protect vulnerable members of society.

Whilst the University has worked hard to provide support in terms of online education and hardship funding, the University experience has been significantly reduced from that of previous years, despite all efforts by University staff. We are sure you are also aware that many students have faced significant financial hardship during this time, due to the loss of paid part time work, and the requirement for many to continue paying rent for private housing despite Government advice not allowing students to return to these properties. University staff have worked incredibly hard during this period, but this does not mean that students, and Universities themselves, do not need further support.

Students are continuing to pay tuition fees of £9250 for UK students, while international students pay significantly more, to receive a University experience that is dramatically reduced from previous years. Students have a right to a high quality University experience, in which they have made significant investment. In general, there are three fundamental aspects to a student experience; academic tuition (lectures, seminars, etc.), support services (library, careers, wellbeing, etc.), and the 'experience' or social side. It is clear this year that academic experience has been different, but it has been delivered by the University (although not in the face to face manner intended when students enrolled on the course, and with changes to practical experience). It is also true that the support services that run alongside academic work are available, albeit online and in a different format. However, on the question of whether students are receiving the experience they signed up for, it seems quite clear that the answer is no, it is fundamentally different, and students should not be asked to pay their full tuition fee for this experience.

The University themselves are unable to reduce their tuition fees without putting their financial security at risk. There are significant base costs that haven't changed in regards to the University's delivery of education, such as fixed costs associated with facilities, staff required to deliver the academic tuition, and all of the usual support services. Furthermore, there has been a significant increase in the cost associated with the IT provision required to continue to deliver these academic

and support services, as well as the much reduced revenue from Halls of Residences where rent has rightly been refunded. This has thrown all usual concepts of University budgets out of the window and means that Universities are running at a significant deficit.

Therefore we would like you **to raise the issue of tuition fees in Parliament and lobby for students to receive appropriate compensation and support directly from the government** due to the current situation.

Furthermore, many students are continuing to pay rent in private properties that they are not currently using due to the current lockdown. Our President, Kate Roberts, and Principal at Royal Holloway, Paul Layzell, have called for flexibility from local landlords during this difficult period for students. Additionally, we would like you **to raise the issue of private housing for students in Parliament and lobby for support from Government to allow students no-penalty early release from tenancy contracts or rent obligations**, which has already been implemented in Scotland.

Where financial support is required to implement rent reductions or holidays by landlords and accommodation providers, the Government should provide this financial support, because students should not be the ones to absorb the financial impact of the pandemic. In future, we would like to see the Government go further in ensuring greater protection for student tenants, however in the meantime we hope you can raise these immediate issues to Parliament.

We urge you to act on behalf of all students in your constituency and lobby the Government to enact these measures to protect students during the pandemic.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our letter, we would be grateful for your support and look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely,

Kate Roberts, RHSU President

Alissa Chohan, RHSU VP Education

Henn Warwick, RHSU VP Wellbeing and Diversity

Lucy Brown, RHSU VP Societies and Sport