

18<sup>th</sup> May 2020

**Rt Hon Rishi Sunak  
Chancellor**

1 Horse Guards Road  
London  
SW1A 2HQ

**cc. Gavin Williamson, Secretary of State for Education**

Dear Chancellor,

We are writing to you together as leaders in the UK's student bodies, universities and colleges collectively to ask you to protect students in the tertiary education sector across the UK. We need investment in institutions and support for students to get through this crisis, and ask you to release money from the Treasury to fund additional student hardship, action on tuition and college fee debt and to explore options for financial support for those leaving education this year.

We are all aware that the Covid-19 pandemic has caused huge shortfalls in education. According to analysis by London Economics for the University and College Union universities will be hit by a £2.6 billion shortfall in the next academic year. The Association of Colleges' 2020 Covid-19 survey has revealed that colleges stand to lose £150 million by the next academic year due to the pandemic. Across our sector, we are concerned that this means we will not have the resources to support students across the next year.

As leaders in our student bodies, we have heard frequently from students whose lives have been severely disrupted by the pandemic. They have returned home to take on new caring responsibilities, balanced their postgraduate research with parenting and in some cases struggle so much to access quiet space to learn that they have to work in their cars. Despite this, our students are trying against all odds to support their communities, families and loved ones: research by the National Union of Students (NUS) showed that 60% of the 10,000 respondents were volunteering or providing care and support for others.

Students are now in a financial storm. Research by NUS' shows that 80% of students are worried how they will manage financially as a result of coronavirus, and 72% are worried about their ability to pay rent. Without access to unemployment benefits, students who rely on part-time work to support them through their studies have been particularly hard hit. Of these students, up to 87% have had to make adjustments to their working since the start of the coronavirus pandemic, leading to a reduction of income, with 11% being made redundant. This particularly impacts current students, who are not eligible for Universal Credit and must find financial support elsewhere.

Students have been central to the response to the pandemic. They will also provide the workforce to get the economy running again in the coming years. Thousands of nursing and medical students have finished their studies early and joined the workforce to support the NHS. Researchers in over 25 universities across the UK are working at unprecedented speed to find better testing methods, potential cures, and that all-important vaccine.

We know that the Westminster government's bailout package will go some way to stabilise the sector, however the pandemic has also exposed the stark fragility of the financial circumstances of students in this country. We would urge you to look again at the support in place for students. We have welcomed attempts in Scotland and Northern Ireland to release additional funding for hardship and wish to see the Westminster Government release funding for each national government to do this.

Further funding for education from government is crucial if we are to support students through this crisis and address their concerns. We would like to see a commitment to releasing additional funds for the education system to ensure that the government, universities and colleges across the UK can undertake:

- Additional hardship funding totalling £60m to support students across the Summer, where they would otherwise have found work
- Debt relief for home students, and funding for higher education institutions to reimburse a portion of the higher education fee for those who have paid up front
- A targeted relief package for those completing their qualifications this year, to fund further training and skills development.

We would welcome a meeting between NUS and Treasury officials to discuss this package further.

Yours faithfully,

Zamzam Ibrahim, NUS President