

Dear Dr. Bradshaw and Russell Group Vice-Chancellors,

Re: International Students' Tuition Fees

We are writing on behalf of over half a million International Students at UK Universities that we represent. Since the start of the pandemic, International Students have continued to face varying challenges due to travel bans, working through time differences, spending additional finances to access teaching, learning from home, incurring avoidable expenditure due to the erratic and ambiguous government Covid guidelines, lack of access to campus facilities, and not having the social support of their friendship groups. This has led to an increase in anxiety, burn-out, and other mental health issues, the impact of which will last longer than just this year. We appreciate and note the work that Universities have been doing to support students, and also understand the financial challenges facing each institution. However, the peculiar situation International students are experiencing still remains unaddressed. Therefore, we would like to request a discussion with yourselves, particularly for a possibility of a 30% reimbursement for International Students' tuition fees that would go some way to compensate for the various challenges they have faced due to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Below are some of the concerns and challenges that international students are currently facing. These have affected their experience, and significantly affected the expectations students had when enrolling.

- Lack of access to the learning facilities has resulted in international students having to incur additional costs to create learning environments in their home countries. International students, however, have paid for tuition fees for on-campus teaching which includes their ability to access support services including study spaces, the laptop loan services and internet access. They have had to spend extra money to access these remotely or find alternatives locally in their home countries. For example, the internet, which is the prime means of access to remote learning, has a global average monthly cost of \$78.14, with the highest internet cost being \$2,666.24 in Eritrea (cable.co.uk, 2020). Parents across the world have been unduly affected financially by Covid-19, and hence find it challenging to incur these extra costs.
- Most of our international students applied to study in the UK with the hope of a 'study-abroad' experience; meeting new people both within and outside lecture halls, experiencing the local culture, and attending personal development programmes were all aspects which students hoped to engage in. These expected experiences are factored into the value international students place on the fees they pay for an education in the UK. We understand that this is not possible with remote learning and there is little universities can do about it. However, we believe that a goodwill compensation for the lack of this experience, will be a great way to mitigate the value lost.
- Remote learning has affected all students but International students deal with the pressures of their home country along with the pressures of undertaking an international education. Many international students find it hard to adjust to the new environment of the university

and doing so remotely is harder, leading to feelings of isolation and detachment. This affects the performance of students and their overall wellbeing at university. Students who are studying in their home countries have limited access to the support systems available, as online wellbeing initiatives may not be able to help with the various situations a student may face. We understand that universities are trying their best, but being abroad naturally puts obstacles on the access to mental health support. Moreover, all these support being offered online meets the financial constraints with accessing the internet as explained above.

- We recognise that almost all universities have established a Hardship Fund. Though we acknowledge that all students are eligible, the purpose of these funds does not include international students' ability to apply for reimbursement of extra costs incurred and reduced value for money, for learning from home.
- International students have incurred lots of avoidable costs due to ambiguous Covid-19 guidelines and unplanned national lockdown. For example, most international students travelled to campus by relying on the DfE and Universities assurance of at least two hour face-to-face teaching which wasn't achieved. The government and universities' reactive covid guidelines have led to international students travelling back and forth as a response. This has meant that students have had to pay for accommodation fees which they were unable to cancel later on. Also, return flights which were booked and then cancelled haven't been refunded by many airlines till now. Even though we do not blame universities for these erratic changes in guidelines, we believe the financial burden shouldn't be borne by international students alone and the actions taken by the students were due to their reliance on the promises of the universities.
- Many international students rely on part-time jobs to enable them to study in the UK. However, due to the pandemic and effects on the employment sector, most international students have struggled to find part time jobs hence making it difficult for those already in the UK to sustain their stay without relying on food donations and staying in uninhabitable conditions. An example can be seen from the [Channel 4 news](#) article on international students and their reliance on food banks.

We believe that universities know the positive social and economic role international students play in the UK. Hence we would like to propose a 30% reimbursement of international students' tuition fees, which we believe would help compensate for the challenges we have enumerated and explained above, and would also reassure international students that universities recognise their peculiar challenges during these times of extreme difficulty.

We would like to kindly request a meeting with you and to work alongside you to see how we can make this happen.

**Yours sincerely,**

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Abdirahman Ahmed, Postgraduate Officer on behalf of the University of Nottingham Students' Union

Paschal Onyemaechi, International Students' Representative, Edinburgh University Students' Association.

Wei-Lun Chen, International Officer, University of Birmingham Guild of Students

Patrick Aasen, International Students' Officer, Glasgow University Students' Representative Council



## References:

Cable.co.uk. (2020, July). *The price of fixed-line broadband in 211 countries*. Retrieved from Cable.co.uk: <https://www.cable.co.uk/broadband/pricing/worldwide-comparison/>