

Contact details

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Student Impact

Have you consulted students about your proposal? Please explain how many students you have engaged with and how.	Numerous students have contacted the Sabbatical Officer team directly or through the union to express their dissatisfaction and to call for a fee reduction for the academic year 2020/21
How does your proposal impact the students at the University of Plymouth, what difference will it make to students?	The impact of COVID on the student experience of 2020/21 has been significant and students have not received what they have paid for. A reduction in fees will go some way towards compensating students who have not received the university experience they were anticipating and have paid for

Policy Proposal

The Union Notes (Facts) This section should include facts, not reflection or opinions. Please provide references where possible.

1. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, "Most teaching, learning and assessment for taught courses with the exception of some essential courses has and may continue to be conducted remotely for the duration of the term, including for those still in residence in Plymouth."
2. In addition, the work of graduate students pursuing teaching and study courses at the University of Plymouth has been influenced to a varying degree by the limited availability or lack of resources available and the inaccessibility of facilities. It is currently uncertain when, under normal circumstances, graduate students will be able to return to school.

The Union Believes (Opinions/Beliefs) This section requires reflection on the facts stated in 'The Union Notes'

1. Although the University of Plymouth has taken measures to alleviate these conditions, the continued challenge faced by many students to their education and experience is significant. For many students, this is reflected in a decrease in the number of contact hours and severe decline in mental health.
2. Some aspects of studying at universities in general and, in particular, at the University of Plymouth, including a wealth of cultural, literary, social and sporting activities, cannot be adequately replaced by alternatives that are socially distant.
3. As a consequence, charging full university fees to students for the 2020/2021 academic year is unfair and does not sufficiently account for the altered experience of many students.

The Union Resolves (Actions) Here you will describe the action you want to be taken, be specific.

1. Clearly express their view that university fees for all students impacted by the above circumstances should be reduced for the academic year 2020/2021.
2. Endorse the Sabbatical team to express this belief to the University of Plymouth in writing.
3. Endorse the Sabbatical team and the representatives of the University of Plymouth Students' Union to vote for any university policy aimed at lowering university fees for the 2020/2021 academic year.

Appendices/supporting information Please include any supporting information relevant to your motion, this could include; consideration of how you would achieve any points in 'The Union Resolves', links to news articles or online publications

Excerpt of minutes from meeting of 9th February 2021

Tuition Fee Policy Proposal
Fawziyyah Ahmed , VP Wellbeing and Diversity gave an overview of the policy proposal and explained that as result of student feedback the Sabbatical Officer team are asking for Union Council's agreement to join the national Students United Against Fees campaign launched by LSE .

The policy will also give UPSU a formal stance on the matter which will be binding of the next two years.

The campaign recognises that it is not possible for universities to give fee refunds or reductions without creating financial instability so is seeking to build a coalition between students, universities and unions to make sure that the Government takes responsibility for compensating students and supporting the sector.

Emi Dowse, VP Education added that she attended a meeting with the group and they are putting international students and both postgrad taught and research at the centre of the campaign. They want for everyone to get equitable refunds if they can so no students would be left out.

Viv Hocking, School of Engineering, Computing and Mathematics commented that tuition fees don't just pay for course materials and contact time, they also pay for the block grant that funds the SU and student services such as mental health and disability support services. The university has already reduced funding to the SU. Viv queried if the student body then asks for lower fees what is to say the university would not respond by cutting support to student services and the block grant.

Emi Dowse responded that the campaign acknowledges that and seeks to lobby the Government to get universities to lobby Government also. It is also aimed at educating students in the arguments they can use for lobbying, that's it not just the same old argument of paying more for what is seen to be an Open University (OU) course.

Takudzwa Mawera Part-time BAME Officer liked the idea but was concerned that Sussex University are in the middle of a vote of no confidence because of an indiscriminate immigration policy. This campaign supposedly recognises and helps international students but there is a concern that any shortfall to university finances may end up being detrimental to international students whose fees may increase.

Emi Dowse explained that the campaign would not put anyone in a position where that would happen. It would be hoped that if UPSU join the campaign it would be with the university on side. The university have said the Government have told them that they will not be giving out refunds and the campaign seeks to join universities and unions to collectively influence Government.

Alex Jobling, Accountability Board Chair agreed with Viv Hocking that the amount paid in fees is not just for academic teaching and that costs are still subsidised on top of that amount. Alex noted that there has been a sizable reduction in staff over recent years and he would also be concerned about cutbacks as a consequence of refunds. The money does not exist, it is the promise of debt to be repaid in the future.

Emi Dowse noted it is a new campaign and not all details have been finalised yet but if the campaign can't secure refunds, they would be asking for free repeats of courses if students fail or a percentage of next year's fees if that applies.

Will Styles, Part-time Postgrad Officer suggested that it sounded like it is not really expected at a refund would happen but that agreeing the policy would make a point and support broader action.

Emi Dowse noted that the Officer team do want a refund to happen but it is unclear if it would at this time. The university do not expect the Government to help so that is why a national campaign is needed to bring everyone together, universities and unions.

Viv Hocking pointed out that UPSU has disaffiliated from the NUS which exists to lobby at a high level of behalf of individual and collective affiliated unions, this then goes against to grain of that decision making and is a point of opposition.

Viv Hocking added that regarding the Open University (OU) as point of comparison is not realistic as the OU is not a traditional university with all the support mechanisms that a physical university has, for example, contact time is limited and extenuating circumstances etc are not the same, they are not comparable and not like for like services.

Emi Dowse clarified that it is not an NUS campaign.

Libby M School of Biomedical Sciences Rep noted that students studying practical courses need physical access to labs etc. because of COVID they have not have access so it is comparable. Viv Hocking responded that the OU does not pay significant block grant to an SU, it does not have the same level of support services, onsite library etc. Just because they are online it does not make them the same.

Gem Evelyn, Part-time International Students Officer noted that he would love a refund and supports the call for one but did not see how it was really viable. British students have loans that could be reduced but that would reduce the money invested in grants. Fees are subsidised by international students and he could not see how that would be viable without an either impact on international fees or on the grants they fund.

Owain Gullum, Part-time Welfare Officer noted that he does not want to see money back but he would like to have his debt reduced to compensate for the experience that he has not received but has been promised. Owain explained that he had been working for the university marketing department and the script for applicants is still the same, it has not been amended due to COVID and it was not changed last year for clearing.

Owain thought it was unfair to pay for the next 30 years for something that is out of student's control.

India Ellis, School of Law, Criminology and Government Rep supported the motion and agreed that debt should be reduced. India noted she understood the comparison with the OU and agreed that practical elements of courses should be refunded as students have not received the practical element they have paid for. India noted she would support refunds on a course by course basis. Many students would benefit from the reduction but India believed that the bigger issue was rents for accommodation that people cannot access.

Takudzwa Mawera noted that that the OU is a different culture but the consensus is that you get more bang for your buck and with the marketization of HE, students are being misled as to what they will receive. This is why people compare with the OU as students receive what they have been promised. Students are questioning what the rest of their money is being spent on. Takuzwa agreed with India that rent is the more important issue and that tuition fees are secondary.

Will Robinson, Part-time Students with Disabilities Officer explained that this is not the same experience for students with disabilities and many have worked extremely hard to overcome barriers to get to university in the first place and to not have that grow into fruition will impact on the rest of their life. Not being able to develop key skills learned at university like socialisation, not having the ability to network with other students, and not having peer assisted learning is really difficult. You do not really make friends for life in breakout rooms. Everyone is missing something and it does make logical sense to propose there is some level of compensation. It's a national issue with national responsibility, not that of the individual. If it is already subsidised by the government then they have recognise that they do have that obligation to support students to study at a tertiary level.

Viv Hocking noted that the proposal makes no mention of the Open University and acknowledged that despite of personal feeling they will be voting on behalf of the students they represent.

For: 23

Against: 0

Abstentions: 2

The policy proposal regarding a Tuition Fee Campaign was passed.