[Your address]

[Date]

[MP’s address]

Dear [local MP’s name],

I hope you and your loved ones are well.

I am writing as a student constituent worried about the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on students across the country. The third national lockdown and ongoing effects of the pandemic have severely disrupted my education this past year.

Despite efforts being made to uphold our university experience, the pandemic has led to inconsistent education quality and prevented access to many of the services and resources promised. Furthermore, the latest national restrictions specify that students on most courses should not travel back to our term-time accommodation and that we should remain where we are until at least mid-February. We are now paying rent for accommodation that we are unable to access. The ongoing effects of the pandemic have caused significant financial vulnerabilities for students across the country, in particular those living in University or other student accommodation. We are all counting on your support and hope you will take immediate action to address the matters outlined in this letter.

The Government has spent £210bn pounds to support the country during this pandemic. Only a meagre sum has been allocated to universities. Due to the pandemic, universities have faced the additional costs of making campuses, buildings, accommodation, and learning spaces COVID-secure, and of transferring teaching to quality and accessible online provision. At the same time, they have lost revenue from commercial services, international student fees, and reduced accommodation income due to reduced student numbers and refunds.

I would be grateful if you could please raise this issue in Parliament and lobby for students on national level to urge the Government to:

* Reimburse students either directly or via universities, Purpose-Built Student Accommodations (PBSAs) or private landlords for accommodation they can’t occupy in academic year 20/21
* Require universities, PBSAs, and private landlords to offer contract release without penalty for term-time accommodation that students have either been unable or unwilling to use because of Government regulations and the COVID-19 virus
* Increase the funding for: mental health support, greater academic support offered to students in learning and assessment.
* Increase the size and scope of University hardship funds to aid digital poverty, students from widening participation backgrounds and international students, whose financial experience is largely inequitable in comparison to home students.
* To commission an independent enquiry to determine fair tuition fees for students while attending a British University in the period March 2019 until the end of COVID restrictions and to also freeze interest rates on student loans. This is to reflect the enormous disruption to students and their ability to take advantage of the opportunities normally available to them at university
* Provide funding for universities to directly provide partial refunds to self-funded students, including international students in accordance with the findings of the independent enquiry
* Reimburse Universities the additional costs for making campus COVID secure, increased online teaching provision, and loss of accommodation and catering revenues, ensuring where necessary this funding reaches students eligible for rent refunds
* Provide funding to international students either directly or via universities to ensure they receive equitable financial mitigations to home students during the pandemic
* Instruct the Office for Students (OfS) to cease grade inflation monitoring for at least two years after COVID restrictions are lifted so universities can fully and effectively mitigate the academic impact of the pandemic without having to factor in grade inflation regulatory oversight
* Instruct the Competition Markets Authority (CMA) to formally define what is meant by ‘a quality student experience’ and assess whether British universities have delivered a quality experience that meets the offer made

[To emphasize the urgency of Government taking action on the above measures, you may want to highlight:

* The nature of your situation, including details of your academic experience thus far and tenancy contract you are still paying for
* Any financial difficulties you are experiencing paying the rent, as well as other issues you have experienced with your landlord during the pandemic
* Any recent communications you have had with your landlord
* The support you have/have not received from your university/college
* If, for instance, you are a postgraduate research student, explain what effects the pandemic and UKRI’s recent decision have had on your degree and the ways in which this is unfairly disadvantaging doctoral researchers]

Maintenance loans are not enough for most students to cover their rent and other financial obligations. Many are now unemployed as a result of COVID-19 and are unable to apply for Universal Credit or other Government funding because of their student status. Students who are parents and carers face the difficulties of being in full-time study without childcare provision, whilst students who earn less than £118 a week are not entitled to Statutory Sick Pay if they need to self-isolate.

Student accommodation is not the same as private accommodation, and students require more support when it comes to housing. Many providers are yet to react to best practice by offering students flexibility with their accommodation. Furthermore, the offer of mortgage breaks or Government support must be extended further to the landlords of private student accommodation, as this sector is expanding and currently refusing to help students.

Universities are a public good and students are the future of this country. Students have been integral to the civic agenda and many of us have been working on the frontline in the NHS or in the service industry. It is critical that the Government supports students and Higher Education Institutions, particularly at this time when anxiety is at an all-time high and students’ collective future is threatened.

Thank you for taking the time to consider my concerns. I would be grateful for your prompt action on the issues I have raised, and look forward to hearing from you.

Kind regards,

[Name]