

## **uea(su) Management Committee Statement**

Over the past ten months, the COVID-19 pandemic has transformed the student experience, presenting many new and difficult challenges on top of existing pressures already faced by students. UEA students have remained vocal about these pressures, helping us challenge the University to provide the necessary support at this time.

These challenges include adapting to online learning, paying for accommodation they can't or don't need to use, and the stress of ever-changing national restrictions. The pace of change coupled with changes to assessment, grading, and module choices left many students at UEA and across the country confused and worried. Access to campus facilities has been limited and therefore so has access to clubs, societies, support groups, activities, and events. These and other factors have contributed to a diminished student experience alongside significant mental health and financial pressures, beyond those we would normally see. Whilst many students understand the task at hand, the overall impression is they are disappointed and underwhelmed by the provision offered so far.

Universities and their staff having been working hard to keep up with the rapidly changing national situation. The Government has been unclear and indecisive, leaving students and university staff with little guidance. The pandemic has exacerbated many existing inequalities and social issues, including those caused by the marketisation of education. This has forced universities to compete for students and brought some to the edge of financial collapse even before the pandemic.

UEA students have shown great initiative throughout the pandemic, with many working on the front lines through placement, supporting the local community, and fighting for student rights, for example by demanding quality education and financial support. We applaud your continuing efforts in guiding us and lobbying the University and the Government to meet your demands.

So far, we estimate the Government has spent approximately £210bn on the pandemic, including £112bn supporting UK businesses. To date, the Government has spent **NO MONEY** to support universities with learning and teaching costs or accommodation fees. UEA's eight-week rent rebate will cost the University £5m at a time when their finances are severely challenged by the pandemic. The lack of Government support for UK Higher Education institutions is disgusting; we feel this is a deliberate attempt by the Government to undermine universities in the UK.

We believe students, SUs, and universities should unite in their call for the Government to support Universities financially.

We demand the Government to:

- Reimburse universities for the loss of accommodation revenue so they can reimburse students for accommodation they can't use in academic year 20/21
- Increase funding for universities to meet the costs of increased and high-quality online learning and teaching costs, COVID secure face-to-face learning and teaching, and additional student mental health and wellbeing spending

- Pay the additional costs for universities to make their campuses, building and accommodations COVID secure
- Reduce tuition fees for academic year 20/21 as recommended by an independent enquiry which the Government should commission. The same process should be carried out to identify fee reductions for 21/22 based on the expectation that most but not all services will return for the next academic year

This situation is ever-changing and has already stretched two academic years, causing students much concern. Should the situation continue to deteriorate, we would expect the Government to make further commitments to support students and we will continue to fight for your rights.

Notwithstanding the Government's role, we recognise UEA's responsibility in supporting students and we demand that UEA:

- Publish a comprehensive no detriment policy for all students
- Increase the amount and scope of the student hardship fund and promote it effectively to students
- Actively monitor the quality of online teaching
- Support students/the SU in demanding the Government provide financial support for universities and students
- The Vice Chancellor participate in a live online Q&A with students

Some universities are at risk of financial collapse, and UEA is not immune to the financial pressures created by the pandemic. We believe the responsibility to finance rent rebates and tuition fee refunds sits with the Government. For this reason, we are not calling for a rent strike. However, we do believe students deserve rent rebate this year, and want those who believe a rent strike against UEA is the appropriate action to be supported. Therefore, we commit to supporting UEA rent strikers in safely facilitating their action. UEA Rent Strike and Rent Fightback UEA have played key roles in achieving the eight-week rent rebate this semester, and in unifying student voice.

We now call you to maintain this momentum and redirect your efforts by joining us in lobbying the Government. We will provide students and their parents with letter and email templates to write to their local MPs and Government ministers with our demands. We encourage students to sign [this national petition](#) calling the Government to reduce university tuition fees in academic year 20/21. We will be working with other SUs in our region and with NUS to build a campaign to force the Government to fund Higher Education in alignment with our demands and give you the support you deserve.

Yours in solidarity,

				
Em Anderson Welfare, Community, and Diversity Officer	Ayane Hida Postgraduate Education Officer	Lizzie Payne Activities and Opportunities Officer	Callum Perry Undergraduate Education Officer	Hamish Williams Campaigns and Democracy Officer