



UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL POLITICS SOCIETY

Dear Vice-Chancellor Brady,

I am writing to you on behalf of the University's Politics Society. As the start of the new academic year approaches and with it the challenges that both staff and students face due to Covid-19, we feel that it is prudent to contact you and express our mounting concerns around the treatment of our university's international students during the Covid-19 crisis; in particular with regards to their fees and funding, facilitating online learning and assisting in logistical problems such as transport, accommodation and self-isolation for returning international students.

I write this letter to you in response to concerns that we have received from a number of international students within our community as well as a multitude of UK based students, who too have communicated their sentiments about the university's handling of the situation. We seek to clarify your position on the matters outlined below in the hope to quell the unease that many students are facing about their return to University.

The most pressing issue that we would like to highlight concerns fees and funding for the university's international cohort. As you are aware, international undergraduates pay a minimum of £20,100 in tuition fees per year as well as the costs of living and accommodation. The burden of this fee, while already significant to many international students, has been greatly exacerbated by the financial difficulties that people are facing due to Covid-19. Furthermore, international fees are at the discretion of the university and the 'Higher Education Policy Institute' think tank found that on average each international student pays £5000 more than it costs to educate them. Finally, due to the fact that Bristol, like many higher education institutions, is set to go through a period of financial strain, there is very little chance that the quality and quantity of teaching that the university aims toward can be achieved under the current government guidelines. Therefore, I feel there is little foundation on which to justify these fees as a fair and accurate cost of an international student's education, particularly in the cases of international students who are unable to return to the UK and must take their course remotely.

Considering this information, I believe it is imperative to ask why the University has not established an emergency Coronavirus fund for international students or extended its International Hardship Fund to support cases of hardship as a result of Covid-19. Several other universities have already made this step; the University of York launched an Emergency Student Support Fund which is being supported by donations and gives bursaries of up to £500 for students facing unanticipated challenges because of Covid-19, and the University of Surrey has also extended its student financial hardship fund and has also set up the Emergency Student Support Appeal which has raised £240,000 to date. As a leading UK university, Bristol has a responsibility to its community, both at home and abroad, and should strive to set a precedent of generosity and widening participation during this time of financial stress for many.

I now come to address my second concern; the communication between the university and international students about online learning. Bristol was one of the first universities to announce that they planned to take teaching online in the new academic year. However, several students in our community have expressed feelings of confusion and discontent surrounding communication about online learning from the university. It is felt that information about how online learning is to be carried out has been rather vague up until the very last week before the beginning of term and there have been instances where previous information about the balance between online and in-person teaching has been contradicted in more recent statements, which causes problems for international students making the difficult decision of whether to stay at home or travel to the UK. We have also heard from international students studying from their home countries who are still unsure as to how they will attend their in-person classes remotely. Additionally, timetables for TB1 were only available to view on 25th September which has added to the feeling of uncertainty going into the new academic year and has left students in the dark while trying to secure work and organise travel arrangements during term time.

I would like to conclude by praising some of the provisions made by the university to support international students, including the help that has been offered to students who must quarantine when returning to the UK. Arrangements such as free masks and visors, flexible airport transfers, food parcels and the coronavirus self-reporting system give us and our community confidence that the university considers the health, wellbeing and education of students to be as important as ever, if not more so in these times. I therefore would ask that you consider taking action to resolve the aforementioned matters with the same urgency and comprehensiveness. I am certain that you agree that our international students are an integral part of the student body both on campus and in the wider community, and it is more paramount than ever that the university reach out to them during this period of isolation.

Thank you very much for your attention, and I eagerly await your response in this matter.

Kind regards,



Georgia Taylor
(Vice President of University of Bristol Politics Society)

*Point of interest: both this letter and your subsequent reply shall be accessible to our student community

<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/covid19/supporting-national-effort/Documents/we-are-together-case-studies-covid-19.pdf>



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