



UNIVERSITY OF BRISTOL POLITICS SOCIETY

Dear Pro Vice-Chancellors, Tansy Jessop and Sarah Purdy,

I, Oscar Wollen, write to you on behalf of the committee of the University's Politics Society and our affiliated community with sincerity concerning the University's response to the third national lockdown. I am aware this letter will be one of many that you will receive and that your response may take some time. I appreciate your swift response in informing students about the University's approach to this new lockdown. I am sure, unlike the government, you are actively seeking to support students during these horrendously unstable and for many, mentally challenging times. The reason I write to you is because I would like to use my society's platform and networks to help promote the University's response to the lockdown. I feel it is important for a large engagement from students so they have clarity and understand how they are being properly supported by the university. In group chats, conversations and through complaint systems, I am seeing students fear, worry and stress over their degree, their finances, and their futures – all things that lead to further, and even more severe issues. You mentioned in your email how are supporting the Russell Group statement on no detriment and safety net proposals. The statement says

'In response to the pandemic, our universities have re-designed their learning, teaching and assessments for the 2020/21 academic year. They have put in place new teaching and learning plans and a range of support services so students can continue their academic study. They have also adapted assessment methods so students can demonstrate their knowledge and attainment of learning outcomes.'

I acknowledge that one must support their parent institution and that, correct me if I am wrong, you feel, much like the Russell Group, that you have implemented enough changes to how students are taught and how staff can function, that there is no need to implement any precautions to protect students grades like we saw in the first national lockdown. The sad reality is many students do not feel supported and the measures taken to mitigate coronavirus this year, fail to achieve the same benefits as during the first lockdown. As a university you have admitted that the impact of coronavirus has impacted the aspects of teaching, marking being one of them (an example being SPAIS's dissertation synopsis marking). We have experienced staff taking longer than average to publish assessment results, so if this is the case surely one understands the effect coronavirus would have on students studying for assessments. Life is not the same, students have been ignored by the government, blamed by the public, and now facing betrayal by their university.

These extraordinary times are being engraved into history and therefore I ask you how you would like to be remembered; did the University of Bristol stand by their students during a time of need, or did they conform to bureaucratic ignorance. Even the government, which has ignored advice after advice, reason after reason, have conceded to science in that schools and colleges must close and that the disparity and inequality in terms of online accessibility to learning mean that it would not be fair to hold exams (which are due in 6 months). Admittedly, the University has better online learning capabilities, but this doesn't mean that student's own personal situations are the same. I have highlighted a few of these concerns:



- Substandard technology and study environments
 - o This is a major concern as students are stuck in places that are not beneficial to their learning or personal development, with poor WIFI, troublesome technology, and environments that are a detriment to studying. Unfortunately, the majority cannot change this due to finance related issues or the inability to travel. What are the university putting in place to mitigate this?
- Tuition fees
 - o As we know, tuition fees are fixed and not going to change. Insulting enough as it is, we are now faced with the lockdowns, restricted teaching and so many more detrimental factors as a result. This is less of a question, but more of something I believe should be more strongly acknowledged when considering why students are so angry and upset.
- Housing and student living
 - o We students, have to pay for our student accommodation as a *legal*, contractual right, however, we cannot go and travel to these accommodations as it is *illegal*. Although very little can be done by the University, it is something that is extremely stressful for students and is something we would like to be supported on by the University.
- International students
 - o While not only paying an absurd amount of money international students often have to pay the entirety of their rent upfront as they do not have guarantors. They also face attending teaching at preposterous hours and the possibility of having to take exams at similar times. How are you supporting international students?
- Estranged students, caregivers and mature students
 - o These students do not have the luxuries of finances, or the safety of a home, and often have people relying on them. Therefore, they need the University as their main support network. Furthermore, what about mature students who are parents. I am aware that as parents one can furlough themselves in order to help homeschooling, what provisions are Bristol putting in place?

Pro Vice-Chancellors Jessop and Purdy, I hope this has exposed the sentiment within your student community. This letter is not an attack on the University, it is to highlight, the sheer worry and unhappiness that is growing. This petition shows just how unhappy students really are <http://chng.it/d5tfBRDFkr/>. I intend only to benefit everyone that calls the University of Bristol, their place of study, work or where they live. I do hope you understand my intentions and am more than happy to further discuss and work with you. In the meantime, I wish you both well and look forward to your reply.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Oscar Wollen'.

Oscar Wollen
University of Bristol Politics Society President

*This letter and its subsequent response will be made public and accessible for students and the wider community to read unless asked otherwise.



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<https://www.bristolsu.org.uk/groups/bristol-politics-society>