

7<sup>th</sup> April 2020

**Professor Julia Buckingham**

President, Universities UK  
Woburn House  
20 – 24 Tavistock Square  
London  
WC1 9HQ

**cc. Alistair Jarvis, CEO, Universities UK**

Dear Professor Buckingham,

We are writing to you as representatives of students from across the UK to request that Universities UK takes a position of supporting a 'no detriment' policy for exams and assessments. Many of our universities have already announced this policy, but some of our institutions are yet to settle on a 'safety net' policy for our students, and we believe this shows the need for national leadership on the issue.

Since the COVID-19 crisis escalated, we have been working around the clock to support students. We have tried to work with our institutions at every stage to ensure that student and staff welfare is at the heart of every decision that is made.

Our students are now uncertain of their futures. They face precarious living and working situations, new and increased caring responsibilities and the loss of existing support structures. Many students lack the required technology, working space and time to succeed, and those with existing childcare responsibilities will find this compounded with the closure of schools. Disabled students are particularly impacted. Those who already find examinations inaccessible face significant disadvantage in online examinations, where some reasonable adjustments cannot be accommodated.

One of the most pertinent issues for current students, particularly disabled students, is the question of exams.

We believe that the best solution for both student and staff welfare is to cancel all non-essential exams, especially all those for students who would progress within the university for a further year of study. We know that this is already the policy in many universities and applaud the bold leadership of those who were first to initiate this.

Final year students, whether on a Masters course or finishing an undergraduate degree, should be given greater flexibility over their assessment process. It should not be compulsory for any student to have to sit an exam in the Summer to be able to graduate. We urge university leaders to give final year and taught postgraduate students choice over deferring their examination, taking an open book examination or submitting a dissertation, or using their accumulated credit to graduate with the classification they are currently working at. Where this is regulated by a professional body, we would like Universities UK to work with students and PSRBs to find compassionate solutions, including extensions and deferrals.

The students who are most disadvantaged by the impact of COVID-19 are also those who are already disadvantaged by attainment gaps in higher education. As a sector, we have

invested significant work in closing these gaps, spurred on by ambitious targets from the Office for Students in England. We are concerned that pushing ahead with summer examinations online will threaten this work. Advocating a 'no detriment' policy nationwide would offer these students reassurance and the confidence to work to improve their achievements, rather than the fear that the current unstable environment will leave them completing their degrees with unfairly low marks.

We believe that this approach will allow for student success and welfare through this difficult time, ensuring that no student whose circumstances have suddenly changed will be unduly disadvantaged in those institutions where examinations are proceeding. There is significant strength of feeling among the student body that this is the correct approach for the situation that we find ourselves in and thousands of students have signed petitions to their own Vice Chancellors and senior leaders to ask for a 'no detriment' policy to be implemented. We have included these below, where available, to illustrate this.

The academic community needs compassionate and ambitious leadership to navigate the impacts of the pandemic. We urge that you take this step for the reassurance and welfare of hundreds of thousands of students. We would be happy to meet virtually to discuss this further if required.

Yours sincerely,



**Zamzam Ibrahim**  
**President**  
**National Union of Students**



**Claire Sosienski Smith**  
**Vice President (Higher Education)**  
**National Union of Students**



**Robert Murtagh**  
**President, NUS-USI**

**Hilary Gyebi-Ababio, Undergraduate Education Officer**  
**Vice President (Higher Education), Elect**  
University of Bristol Students' Union  
National Union of Students

**Callum Perry, Undergraduate Education Officer**

University of East Anglia Students' Union  
[University of East Anglia Student petition](#)

**Saqlain Riaz**

Vice President Education  
City, University of London Students' Union  
[City, University of London Student Petition](#)  
[Cass Business School Student Petition](#)

**Melanie Hooper, Vice President Education**

University of Chester Students' Union  
[University of Chester Student Petition](#)

**Jake Verity, President**

University of Sheffield Students' Union  
[University of Sheffield Student Petition](#)

**Stella Swain, Welfare & Rights Officer**

Cambridge University Students' Union  
[University of Cambridge Student Petition](#)

**Rida Shafqat, President**

University of Hertfordshire Students' Union  
[University of Hertfordshire Student Petition](#)

**Abiha Khan, Education Officer**

Leeds University Union  
[University of Leeds Student Petition](#)

**Giang Nguyen, Academic Officer**

York University Students' Union  
[University of York Student Petition](#)

**Rama Hilouneh, Vice President (Education and Democracy)**

University of Portsmouth Students' Union  
[University of Portsmouth Student Petition](#)

**Nicole Parkinson, Vice President Education**

Ulster University Students' Union  
[Ulster University Student Petition](#)

**Chloe Batten, Education Officer**

University of Warwick Students' Union  
[Warwick University Student Petition](#)

**Bee Morgan**

**Vice President Education**

Lancaster University Students' Union  
[Lancaster University Student Petition](#)

**Sheriff Muhammed, President**

Sheffield Hallam Students' Union  
[Sheffield Hallam Student Petition](#)

**Matthew Johnston, Vice President Postgraduate**

University of Northumbria Students' Union  
[Northumbria University Student Petition](#)

**Ayla Huseyinoglu, Women's Officer**

University of Manchester Students' Union  
[University of Manchester Student Petition](#)

**Alan Lofthouse, President Education**

Teesside University Students' Union  
[Teesside University Student Petition](#)

**Laura Flowers, Academic Executive**

De Montfort University Students' Union  
[De Montfort University Student Petition](#)

**Joshua Williams, President**

University of Birmingham Guild of Students  
[University of Birmingham Student Petition](#)

**Precious Onyenekwu Tatah, President**

The Students' Union at UWE  
[UWE Student Petition](#)

**Valeria Racu, Co-President Welfare and Campaigns**

SOAS Students' Union  
[SOAS Student Petition](#)

**Stephanie Lomas, Education Officer**

UCLan Students' Union  
[UCLan Student Petition](#)

**Lila Tamea, Vice President (Academic Quality)**

Liverpool John Moores Students' Union  
[Liverpool John Moores Student petition](#)

**Clara Garcia, Vice President  
Wellbeing**  
York Graduate Union

**Jenny Marchant, President of  
Education**  
York St John Students' Union

**Matt Hayes, President**  
Anglia Ruskin Students' Union

**Lauren Corelli, Education Officer**  
Goldsmiths Students' Union

**Sherry Iqbal, Education Officer**  
Leeds Beckett Students' Union

**Alice Flannery, President**  
Royal Northern College of Music  
Students' Union

**Ray Williams, Education Officer**  
Oxford University Students' Union

**Penny Dinh, Vice President  
Education**  
University of Exeter Guild of Students

**Hannah Nguyen, Vice President**  
University of Liverpool Guild of Students

**Alessandro Ceccarelli, President**  
University of Cambridge Graduate Union

**Hamsa Rajeswaren, Equality &  
Diversity Officer**  
Queens' University Belfast Students'  
Union

**Stephanie Vallancey, Education  
Officer**  
Edinburgh University Students'  
Association

**Nelly Kirbirige, President**  
London South Bank Students' Union

**Ross Loveitt, President**  
University College Birmingham Guild of  
Students

**Caitríona Cairn, Vice President  
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Liverpool Hope Students' Union