

Becky Thomson, Beth Elwood, Maddy Young, and Nathan Baker
Christ Church Students' Union's Sabbatical Leadership Team 2020/21

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14 January 2021

Dear Becky, Beth, Maddy and Nathan,

Thank you for your letter to me of 11 January 2021, in which you set out a range of requests and recommendations to support Canterbury Christ Church students during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. I have carefully noted your comments.

Firstly, I would like to state that I and the University Senior Management Team recognise the tremendous hard work and commitment of Christ Church Students' Union colleagues in representing the student body, and welcome and value the continued collaborative working partnership between the University and Students' Union. I also appreciate the substantial challenges and difficulties that students are facing at this anxious time of continued uncertainty for them during the pandemic. I am committed to ensuring that every student receives a high- quality education to achieve academic success, and an excellent student experience, while ensuring their health, safety and wellbeing as a priority. We continually review closely our services, procedures and regulations, in line with advice from the Government, Department for Education and Public Health England, and make adjustments where necessary, to fully support our students in every way.

Set against this context, I turn to the requests and recommendations set out in your letter.

I can confirm that in my role as Chair of Million Plus and as a Board member of Universities UK, I will raise the matters of tuition fees and student accommodation rebates and refunds, through the appropriate routes in Government. You may well have heard my comments on Meridian news yesterday evening. I will also write to local key private providers of student accommodation to highlight the difficult circumstances for students at this time. However, as you state in your letter, any decision taken on financial relief is solely a matter for the private provider.

You will be aware that, in recognition of the current government national lockdown, resulting imposed travel restrictions, and the impact this has on student's ability to access their University accommodation, students have been advised that we will provide an appropriate and fair rebate on accommodation fees charged for this lockdown period. I have authorised a four week rent rebate to all students residing in University accommodation, regardless of being in residence, and an additional two weeks for those students who are unable to use their accommodation at this time. I consider this approach to be both fair and in line with that taken by other higher education providers. In addition, I have committed to look again at the matter once the lockdown period has ended and further Government guidance has been provided.

A range of academic support measures are in place for Academic year 2020/21, to support both a blended learning experience, as well as during the lockdown periods. I am aware that students are naturally anxious about their studies at this difficult time. However, it is important that we ensure there is fair and robust



support for all of our students, studying on all years across our very broad and varied suite of programmes, and this work takes a little time to finalise. On 8 January, students received a communication from Professor Helen James, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, about the provision of academic support and other support during the lockdown. Further guidance about protecting academic outcomes will be published next week.

You raise a number of recommendations about various support procedures and processes related to student wellbeing and financial hardship, acknowledging that work related to some of these matters are already in progress. As your recommendations relate to operational activity, may I ask that you liaise and work directly with Dr Moira Helm, Director of Student Experience, who has leadership for these areas.

I would like to close by reiterating that I value the continued collaborative working partnership between the University and Students' Union, especially in these challenging times. I look forward to our next trilateral meeting with Ben on 22 January.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rama' followed by a stylized flourish.

Professor Rama Thirunamachandran
Vice Chancellor and Principal
Canterbury Christ Church University

cc

Ben MacPhee, Christ Church Students' Union Chief Executive Officer

Dr Moira Helm, Director of Student Experience, Canterbury Christ Church University