



11th January 2021

**Dear Vice-Chancellor Rama Thirunamachandran,**

We are writing to you as the elected Leadership Team of Christ Church Students' Union on behalf of the student body of CCCU to highlight the repeated failures by the Office for Students and the Department of Education to adequately support students during the pandemic.

We are writing to you, both as Vice-Chancellor and Principal of Canterbury Christ Church University and Chair of the Million Plus Group, to join us and support our students in addressing the inequalities they are currently facing in light of the ongoing global pandemic.

We have a number of internally focused recommendations, which are outlined below, and we would also like to ask that you use your position of national influence to lobby for government-funded tuition fee rebates in recognition of the extreme disruption students have experienced this academic year. We also ask that you publicly support calls for students in private accommodation to be given government-funded rent rebates or the ability to break their contracts without penalty, as they are currently prevented by law from occupying this accommodation. We recognise that these asks are outside your ability to implement solely at Canterbury Christ Church University, but we know that you are well-placed with strong national networks to advocate on behalf of our students at a national level.

### **Internal Recommendations**

We would like to thank the University for its strong support of the Students' Union, and we know that several of these recommendations are already being progressed. Our recommendations are based on feedback from students and aim to mitigate the effects of the global pandemic as much as the University is able to do. We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with you and your team to progress these, as we know an outstanding student experience is at the heart of the University's mission.

### **Academic Experience and Study Support**

- **A policy to protect students' academic outcomes should be implemented as soon as possible**, which includes the assurance that no student should be disadvantaged by marks obtained since the beginning of the 2020/21 Academic Year.

- **Move teaching online where required** and ensure consistent, timely and clear communications on changes to delivery. This includes **providing no less than 2 weeks' notice to when in-person teaching will begin.**
- Where possible, **replace traditional time constrained examinations and assessments with a range of carefully designed and approved alternative assessments.**
- Continue to **enable students to self-certify for COVID-19 related issues** and to remove the need for evidence in COVID-19 related cases.
- Students should be able **to apply for extenuating circumstances without evidence if they have any IT related issues.**
- Ensure there is a **mechanism for students to contact the University** about any issue that is **monitored for at least 12 hours a day**, and that students receive prompt replies.
- Improve the responsiveness of systems such as the i-Zone to student queries and ensure **open and honest communication with students is a primary principle at all times.**
- **Allow students to submit back-dated work during the Summer break** and still progress or graduate, by introducing additional award and progression boards.
- **Allow students at least one uncapped resit for all failed assignments.**
- Allow **students with children and additional caring responsibilities during COVID-19 to extend assignments** to a time when children can return to school.
- Any **students that are required to re-sit the year or semester because of COVID-19 should not be charged for the additional year of study** required.
- Remain committed to **involving the Students' Union Leadership Team** in all key discussions.

### Accommodation Rent Rebates

- All students that live in University accommodation, regardless of whether they are returning to campus or not, **should receive an eight week rent rebate.**
- Any student who wishes to **end their accommodation contract early should be able to do so** without the requirement to pay for time they will not be using their accommodation.
- The University should actively and openly support the Students' Union agenda in campaigning for **equitable rent rebates for all students in private accommodation.**

### Financial Hardship

- **All hardship fund processes should be considerably streamlined** in order to ensure that students who need funding can access it easily and quickly.
- **Hardship Funding should be significantly increased**, and the thresholds for successful application lowered, to support students who are finding themselves in additional financial hardship.

### Wellbeing Support

- Commit to **continuing Mental Health Drop-In services, both online and in-person**, during Lockdown 3 and ensure that information on the availability of these is widely spread.
- **Implement temporary measures to increase the availability of wellbeing provision** through Student Support, Health & Wellbeing, such as counselling, support networks,

mental health and wellbeing advisers, including offering services outside 9am-5pm to reflect the reality of students' lives in lockdown.

- **Co-run a joint University and Christ Church Students' Union communications campaign, informing students of the services available to them to support their mental health**, both on and off campus.

We would like to acknowledge again the considerable time and effort put in by staff across the University: academic, professional, and Senior Management colleagues have been working extremely hard to respond to continually changing HM Government guidance and we are grateful for this. We hope to continue our close partnership working to ensure that students' experiences at Christ Church are the best they can be in extremely challenging times.

**Yours Sincerely,**

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