



OU Students Association

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Gillian Keegan MP & Robert Halfon MP
Dept for Education

(CC: Bridget Phillipson MP & Matthew Western MP)

2 August 2023

Re: Open letter calling for changes to part-time student finance

Dear Ministers

Student representatives from across England have united to advocate in this open letter for equal opportunities in higher education. We would like to draw your attention to the lack of financial support for part-time higher education students in England. Specifically, we would ask that the government considers these three issues:

- 1) The current ineligibility of part-time students for the Childcare Grant
- 2) The current ineligibility of part-time students for Parents' Learning Allowance
- 3) The current ineligibility of part-time students who complete their studies via distance-learning for maintenance loans

When the Lifelong Loan Entitlement is implemented, a flexible approach to obtaining qualifications will be fundamental to its success in creating a society where the ability to retrain and upskill is within reach of people at all stages of life. However, the current lack of support for childcare expenses and parental learning costs, as well as maintenance loans for distance-learners, places a significant burden on those who need to study more flexibly, hindering their ability to access education or excel academically and fulfil their potential.

By excluding part-time students from accessing the Childcare Grant and Parents' Learning Allowance, we inadvertently perpetuate inequalities within our educational system. These grants serve as critical financial assistance for full-time students, enabling them to afford childcare services while they study. Denying this support to part-time students creates an unnecessary disadvantage and discourages them from pursuing higher education, despite their aspirations and commitment.

Furthermore, the lack of availability of maintenance loans for part-time distance-learners places a financial barrier in front of many potential students, who may be in

low-paid work and seeking to upskill for career purposes, or have parental or caring responsibilities that prevent them from travelling to and studying at a campus. The student finance system should recognise that being a student comes with additional costs, irrespective of the mode of study.

There is significant evidence that these elements of financial support for part-time learners would have a large impact, both in terms of removing barriers to lifelong learning, and facilitating the government's levelling-up agenda:

- The number of part-time students on first year undergraduate higher education courses has fallen by 65% between 2008/09 and 2020/21.*
- The most recent Student Income and Expenditure published by the Department for Education estimated that 36% of part-time students have dependent children compared to 9% of full-time students.**
- Those who study at part-time intensity are much more likely to remain in their local area after completing their qualification and use their skills to benefit the local economy.***

Promoting accessibility for part-time higher education students aligns with the government's vision of widening participation and creating a more inclusive education system. Therefore, we respectfully urge the Department for Education to consider extending the eligibility criteria for the Childcare Grant, Parents' Learning Allowance, and maintenance loans to part-time and distance-learning higher education students in England. This extension would signify a real commitment to lifelong learning, inclusivity and empower countless individuals to overcome the financial barriers that hinder their educational aspirations.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to the possibility of an improved future for part-time students in our country.

Yours sincerely.

Signatories:

Margaret Greenaway	Open University Students Association
Gareth Jones	Open University Students Association
Isabella Sparling	York St John University
Sol Gjoines	University for the Creative Arts Students' Union
Gemma Hopwood	University of Chichester Students' Union
Dan Bichener	Christ Church Students' Union
Beth Garrett	Northampton Students' Union
Zaid Mahmood	Kent Students' Union
Cazzandra Flowers	Open University Students Association
Nicholas Farmer	University of Leicester Students' Union
Erin Meharry	Liverpool Hope Student Union
Maria Papageorgiou	Leeds University Union
Huseyin Arslan	Hull University Students' Union
Nichola Connolly	Open University Students Association

Aroubah Mazhar	Aston Students' Union
Marianne Evans	Bath Spa University Students' Union
Olivia Vann	Liverpool Hope Students' Union
Laura Bold	Bath Spa University Students' Union
Laura Marulanda-Carter	Open University Students Association
AnneMarie Deeb	University of Leicester Students' Union
Saj	Hertfordshire Students' Union
Rania Regaieg	The Students' Union at UWE
Noah Thorley	Liverpool Hope Student Union
Nigel Patterson	Open University Students Association
Diana Dakik	Surrey Students' Union
Neetu Karwal	Bath Spa University Students' Union
Jack McDonald	University of Leicester Students' Union
Megan Simmons	Surrey Students' Union
Eleanor Hill	University of Gloucestershire Students' Union
Daniel Lay	Keele Student Union
Sharon Azams	Roehampton Students' Union
Lily Byrne	University of Sheffield Students' Union
Anna Taylor	University of Warwick Students' Union
Enaya Nihal	University of Warwick Students' Union
Holly Roffe	University of Warwick Students' Union
Sebastian James	Worcester Students Union
Maria Jose Lourido Moreno	University of Sheffield Students' Union
Neve Rosser	Liverpool Hope Students' Union
Ella Taylor	Liverpool Hope Students' Union
Tammika Chambers	London Metropolitan Student Union
Harry Hughes-Slattery	Loughborough Students' Union
James Relf	London School of Economics Students' Union
Neetu Karwal	Bath Spa University Students' Union
Laura Bold	Bath Spa University Students' Union
Lou Robinson	Open University Students Association
Noah Thorley	Liverpool Hope Students' Union
Elise Booth	Bath Spa University Students' Union
Holly Tyack	Student Union Bournemouth University
Norah Valerie Deka	Student Union Bournemouth University
Devonte James	London South Bank Students' Union
Chike Dike	Student Union Bournemouth University

* Data based on Open University analysis of HESA Student Record, 2008/09 to 2020/21. Copyright Higher Education Statistics Agency Limited 2021.

** Student Loans Company, [Student Support for Higher Education in England 2022: Table 4c](#), 2022 & Department for Education, [Student Income and Expenditure Survey 2014/15](#), 2018

*** Open University data