

## Open statement to the University regarding the needs of our campus community

We are a body of University of Sussex students, Acorn members, and concerned members of the community. Our demands are entirely reasonable considering the current situation of the global pandemic that is displacing and isolating people on unprecedented levels. It is critical that Sussex acknowledges that financial insecurities already affecting certain students will be dramatically exacerbated over this time and that they act to mitigate the effects of this.

### **We demand the the University of Sussex acts on the following with immediate effect:**

- To cancel foreseeable rents for all students left in Sussex rented accommodation
  - To reimburse the full third term rent for those who have already paid.
  - To ensure that Students will be allowed to stay in their accommodation for the duration of the lock down period.
  - To offer pastoral care to those on campus or in isolation via a help line
  - To ensure that those remaining on campus have access to subsidised groceries or food during this period.
  - To make empty bedrooms in Sussex rented accommodation available for any students who need it.
  - To ensure that engagement with these demands isn't used to further unnecessary cost-cutting measures during this crisis. In particular the termination of staff contracts.
- We are aware of the financially sound position that the University is in and know that waiver of rents is not dependent on job cuts.

As we hope you are aware, the Covid-19 situation has left many students unable to leave their accommodation due to the government-enforced national lock-down. Many simply do not have the funds to continue to pay huge sums of rent, already much higher than their Student Loans cover, due to reduced hours in casual employment, total redundancy or other unforeseen monetary complications. As a student-based network, we have been reaching out and compiling the accounts and experiences of students remaining on campus or in Sussex rented accommodation. Students on campus are struggling and lack support. In addition to the insecurity we are all facing, and fear for ourselves and our loved ones, students are being let down by the institution that is supposed to be supporting them and listening to their needs.

Many international students cannot return home due to travel restrictions. For these students their future options and movements are incredibly uncertain, so it is imperative that the University offers them some certainty and stability in these unsettling times. We urge you to ensure that all students adhering to government restrictions will be able to extend their contracts seamlessly, ensuring that no one is evicted for any reason. This is an impossible situation for these students and whilst the University may not have adequately prepared for such circumstances, it should be doing all it can to adequately support and aid remaining students on campus. It has become clear that students on campus are massively struggling due to a lack of support from the University. As a consequence of the urgency of this matter and the inadequate response from authoritative bodies, a campaign is being led to draw attention to Sussex's failure

to support its students and apply pressure to help achieve these crucial demands for those in need.

Across the globe, individuals in positions of authority are implementing radical and compassionate measures in response to this crisis. In France, Emmanuel Macron has frozen rent payments for all renters. After 309 students pledged to join a rent strike, the University of Surrey released a statement\* on the 25th of March reassuring students “You will not be required to pay new instalments due from April. Postgraduates will not be required to pay for the third or fourth term and If you have paid up front for the full year, you will be refunded payments covering the third period of your contract – and the fourth in the case of postgraduates”.

As an institution with millions of pounds in reserves, the University of Sussex continues to make a profit from these circumstances, in which students are self-isolating on an expensive and inaccessible campus, many of them thousands of miles away from their family and friends. Financial decisions must be made in the interests of students, and alternative funds made available. For example, management can work with other unions on campus to institute a pay ratio of 1:6, therefore freeing up much needed funds for student and staff welfare provision.

We are asking that the university acts with conviction and through sustained interaction with wider members of the community. We must do better to locate the sites of vulnerability and use our combined resources to support the university community in its entirety.

\*<https://www.sussex.ac.uk/webteam/gateway/file.php?name=4551-financial-statements-2019-si-gned-web.pdf&site=262> p. 27