John Swinney MSP
Deputy First Minister & Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills
Scottish Government
St. Andrew's House
Regent Road
Edinburgh
EH1 3DG

26 November 2020

By e-mail only

Dear Deputy First Minister & Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills,

I have been asked to write to you on behalf of student leaders, representing over 200,000 students at Higher Education institutions across Scotland, to urge you to take immediate action to address the challenges faced by our members.

In September, hundreds of thousands of students returned to campus, and many more arrived for the first time, based on guidance and reassurance from both institutions and the Scottish Government. They were told that, not only would they be receiving a world-class blended learning experience, but that being on campus was necessary for them to engage fully with student life.

And so, they spent thousands of pounds on travel, leaving behind friends and family; signed leases; and paid their tuition fees, only to be greeted by the realities of student life during COVID-19: isolation, anxiety, and financial hardship. Many also discovered that they had no in-person teaching and limited access to campus facilities, meaning they could have remained at home, navigating the challenges of COVID-19 in familiar surroundings with the support of friends and family.

While these changes have impacted every one of our members, this situation has hit disadvantaged students hardest; those already experiencing financial hardship, those without the safety net of family support, and those who are the first in their family to access Higher Education.

While we are proud of the role we have played in ensuring students’ experience and wellbeing are prioritised by institutions, it has become clear that these issues go beyond institutions and so we are calling on the Scottish Government to provide urgent support for institutions, Students’ Associations, and most importantly, students.
Specifically, we are requesting:

1. **Immediate additional financial support for students**, to mitigate the financial impact of COVID-19, and in recognition of the fact that many students feel they were misled regarding the need to be geographically close to campus, costing them thousands of pounds.

2. **The Scottish Government lobby funding bodies for a freeze on student loan interest rates**, for a length of time equal to or longer than the length of a student’s studies which were impacted by COVID-19.

3. **A long-term financial plan to support students**, recognising that the economic impact of COVID-19 will be felt long after the pandemic is over.

4. **An end to COVID-19 restrictions targeting students**, which not only stigmatises the student population, but fundamentally misunderstand the complexity of students’ lives as workers and community members.

5. **A support package for Students’ Associations**, recognising that many have lost income due to COVID-19 and are struggling to provide vital support services to students.

6. **An additional support package for Universities**, recognising that funding has already been allocated to Universities via the Scottish Funding Council to support research, but there has not been equivalent funding to support teaching and learning.

Scotland’s students – many of whom have travelled hundreds and thousands of miles to be here – are an asset to this country, and we’re determined to show them the best of Scotland: a country that is welcoming, a country that believes in fairness and equality of opportunity for all.

Whether they’re here for one year or four, we want to ensure they receive the support they need to reach their full potential, at institutions which are empowered to deliver the world-class academic experience Scotland is known for. But in order to do that we need your help.

We hope you appreciate the urgency of this matter and look forward to sharing your response with our members.

Yours Sincerely,

Ellen MacRae
President, Edinburgh University Students’ Association

And the following undersigned elected student representatives:

*Edinburgh University Students’ Association*
Rachel Irwin, Vice President Activities and Services
Amanda Scully, Vice President Community
Fizzy Abou Jawad, Vice President Education
Niamh McCrossan, Vice President Welfare
NUS Scotland
Matt Crilly, President

Aberdeen University Students’ Association
Louise Henrard, Vice President Welfare

Dundee University Students’ Association
Scott Quinn, President
Martha Umeh Ude-Eze, Vice President Academia
Saffron-Louise Cook, Vice President Communications and Campaigns
Izuin Hanis, Vice President Engagement
Rebecca Johnston, Vice President Representation
Lauren Macgregor, Vice President Student Welfare

Edinburgh Napier Students’ Association
Ankit Duggal, President
Heloisa Fyfe, Vice President Reps and Volunteers
Nikhil Reddy, Vice President Sports and Societies

Heriot Watt Students’ Union
Emily Lucy King, President
Lara Stroudinsky, Vice President Wellbeing
Colin Aitken, Vice President Community
Alexander Hedlund, Vice President Education

Highlands and Islands Students’ Association
Florence Jansen, President
Ash Morgan, Vice President Further Education
Jack Shehata, Vice President Higher Education

Queen Margaret University Students’ Union
Chiara Menozzi, President
Andy White, Vice President

Scotland’s Rural College Students’ Association
Amy McLuckie, Central Co-President
Cara Sangster, North Co-President
Kevin Hamilton, South and West Co-President

University of St Andrews Students’ Association
Dan Marshall, President
Amy Gallacher, Director of Education
Tom Groves, Director of Events and Services
Gavin Sandford, Director of Student Development and Activities
Emma Walsh, Director of Wellbeing
Sophie Tyler, Athletic Union President
Stirling Students’ Union
Amy Smith, President
Josh Muirhead, Vice President Communities
Lexi Ehresmann, Vice President Education

University of Strathclyde Students’ Association
Kayla-Megan Burns, President
Ru Wallace, Vice President Community
Chelbi Hillan, Vice President Education
Rachel Cairns, Vice President Inclusion
Eilidh Sneddon, Vice President Sport
Benn Rapson, Vice President Welfare

Students’ Association of the University of the West of Scotland
Ismail Ali Nizami, President
Aishwarya Tiku, Vice President Education
Clare Hunter, Vice President Student Development
Luke Humberstone, Vice President Welfare and Wellbeing

Cc  Kate Forbes, Cabinet Secretary for Finance
Richard Lochhead, Minister for Further Education, Higher Education and Science