

Dear Luke Pollard,

My name is Harriet Moore and I am the Student Union President at Plymouth College of Art.

Firstly, I want to thank you for recognising the profound effect that this pandemic is having on students, especially in terms of their academic performance, financial hardships and the impact on their mental health. Thank you for providing forums where students can speak directly to you to raise their concerns, and thank you for listening to what we have to say.

I am writing to express my concern about the financial impact the pandemic is currently putting on students, particularly now that many are paying for accommodation in the city that they legally cannot return to. Students and non-student renters alike in your constituency are either paying for accommodation they cannot access or accommodation they can barely afford due to losing their jobs, extra caring responsibilities or raised utilities due to working from home.

As you know, the Government's advice for students is that they stay in their current residence and do not move residence during the lockdown. Many students have done this voluntarily, staying away from student accommodation in Plymouth in order to protect the safety of our local community. However, this means that many students will not be in their accommodation for this part (or potentially the remainder) of the academic year, and as such it is unfair to require these students to pay rent for that term.

During a normal year, landlords in Plymouth profit significantly from the thousands of students renting accommodation in the city. As such, I do not think it is unreasonable for students to ask landlords to do everything they can to absorb the financial impact of the lockdown, wherever possible.

I am asking for you to support our lobbying efforts in any way you can, including asking the UK Government to ensure that the needs of students are met universally. Although all of the measures that we're asking for can be enacted right now voluntarily by individual landlords and accommodation providers, this is on an individual, discretionary basis, which means that a lot of students are going to miss out. Your support in seeking action from the UK Government would be greatly appreciated from myself and the entire student body at Plymouth College of Art.

The motion from Plymouth City Council is a step in the right direction and a glimmer of hope for many students in the city, but it is my hope that you will continue to support students by lobbying for policy change that ensures students are not unfairly treated, are able to access further financial assistance and either a reduction in their rent or a reimbursement for those who have not been able to occupy their accommodation, and finally, are able to leave their accommodation contracts without penalty.

I understand that this is a particularly difficult time for many of your constituents and I would greatly appreciate any support or advice you are able to offer to the students at Plymouth College of Art.

If there is any more information that would be helpful at this time, please do let me know.

Yours sincerely,  
Harriet Moore  
Student Union President  
Plymouth College of Art