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Ben Cooper
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18 November 2016

Dear Ben

**NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS), TEACHING EXCELLENCE
FRAMEWORK (TEF) AND TUITION FEES**

Given our recent discussions, I thought it would be useful to place on record the University's stance on the above subjects.

I have asked that this letter is published via the University's various communications channels from Monday. I would also ask you to make it available to RUSU members.

NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY (NSS)

I understand that RUSU is asking finalists not to fill in the 2017 National Student Survey (NSS). This follows 128 students voting in favour of RUSU adopting this policy in last month's Change It ballot, with 73 voting against and 53 abstentions.

The University has always taken the NSS extremely seriously because it represents the most comprehensive, detailed and independent survey of students' views. As well as analysing the data, staff across the University - myself included - read hundreds of individual comments every year.

In previous years, the information derived from the NSS has helped to focus our efforts as we seek to improve teaching standards and the student experience at Reading. At the same time, issues and concerns raised by

students have led us to make significant investments in student support and high quality facilities. RUSU is right to argue for the University to listen to students; the NSS is a crucial way of enabling us to do that.

A low completion rate in the NSS will mean we will not get a full picture of final year undergraduates' views, making it harder to intervene where we need to for the future. It may only take up to 15 minutes for each individual student to complete the NSS, but their opinions are vital in helping to make the University even better.

As you know, our overall satisfaction rates from the NSS are consistently high but we are not complacent. We know there is more to do, particularly on feedback and assessment and ensuring even greater consistency of approach across academic schools and departments.

Whilst the NSS is an important way in which we can listen to student feedback and act on it, we are keen to use a variety of approaches, including the UK Engagement Survey (UKES), to engage more widely with all our students and their representatives. We look forward to working with RUSU and the wider student body on this over the academic year.

In summary, the University strongly opposes RUSU asking students not to give feedback to the University. It will be detrimental to current and future students if we do not have access to their views.

TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (TEF)

As we have stated previously, we will be taking part in the national trial of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in 2017, like the vast majority of other universities and HE providers. We are doing so because it is one of a number of approaches to improving the quality of teaching in institutions, including Reading. In that respect, our engagement in TEF is intended to be in the best interests of students.

I have already said publicly that TEF is not perfect and we want to continue to work closely with government, other universities and the NUS to improve it in the years ahead. That is a sensible and constructive approach.

I understand that RUSU will be consulting students on how the TEF can be strengthened, as part of a wider NUS working group. I know that Professor Gavin Brooks, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Teaching and Learning, has already started conversations with you and Niall Hamilton, RUSU's Education Officer, on how we might take that work forward.

TUITION FEES FOR EXISTING STUDENTS

It is important to reiterate the point that we have fixed tuition fees at £9,000 a year for all existing UK and EU undergraduates, including those who started their studies in September 2016, and those who are deferring entry until September 2017. We have made a contractual obligation to students at the start of their course not to raise fees during their course – and we will not renege on that commitment.

TUITION FEES FOR NEW ENTRANTS IN 2017/18

Subject to the law being changed, tuition fees will be set at £9,250 a year for students starting in September 2017. If the government does not change the law in the coming months, tuition fees will remain at £9,000 a year.

A £9,250 tuition fee level means we can continue to invest in teaching and learning and other services and facilities which contribute towards the student experience at Reading. Retaining a £9,000 a year charge risks further real-terms reduction in income from tuition fees as they have not risen in line with inflation since being introduced in September 2012.

For comparison, the £9,000 fee introduced in 2012 is worth approximately £8,500 in real terms this year and would be worth around £8,000 by 2020, according to the government. This will be even more marked if inflation rises at the pace being projected by independent economic forecasters.

RUSU has written in its Reading Students Say TEF-Off petition that “we understand that an increase of fees in line with inflation is perhaps necessary for the sustainability of an institution“. That is why we have decided to raise tuition fees by £250 a year from each UK/EU student starting in 2017/18 - around £12 a week over that academic year.

RUSU has also written the “differentiation of fees beyond inflation is unacceptable“. To be clear, the government has proposed that the maximum increase from 2017/18 onwards will be in line with inflation, subject to Parliament passing the necessary legislation.

TUITION FEES FROM 2018/19 ONWARDS

We have made no decision on tuition fee levels for 2018/19 onwards. I can say though that the University Council - the ultimate decision-making body - will

not increase tuition fees without considerable thought and discussion.

The working relationships between RUSU and the University have always been positive and constructive, even when there is disagreement. That, I know, continues to be the case and so I look forward to continuing discussions between us on the matters raised here.

Kindest regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David Bell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

SIR DAVID BELL KCB