

The Return of Students: The Unfair Blame Game

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Policy for Discussion and Approval

This paper is *public*

Recommendations

That the Committee approve the following:

1. To stand with young people and students, and denounce the Government's unfair 'blame' shift.
2. Be part of a national campaign to call for better support from the government for Universities, including managing testing and outbreaks on campus.
3. Join the call for an extension to the furlough scheme to protect young people who are forced to work.

1. Background

As the coronavirus cases across continental Europe are seeing a significant second spike, a worrying increase in cases in the UK has begun to emerge. As of 14.09.2020 there were 2621 new cases, with a 7 day average of 3004, a rise on the previous week. The UK has implemented multiple 'local lockdowns' to attempt to quell this rise, including the areas surrounding Lancashire. That said, the Government has continued to ease lockdown overall, including physically reopening schools and allowing holidays abroad.

2. Targeted Promotion of Easing of Lockdown Restrictions

In August, the Government introduced the 'Eat Out to Help Out' scheme, offering significant discounts on food and drink Monday-Wednesday each week. This was primarily targeted at the younger generation, who are the predominant users of such venues. We also note how, as bars and restaurants have reopened, young people make up the majority of staff in these circumstances. However, some smaller venues are physically unable to socially distance staff at 2 meters. As a whole, the scheme has given a successful boost to these industries.

3. Leaving Universities Behind

Despite multiple calls from the higher education sector and the Scientific Advisory Group for Emergencies (SAGE), little to no guidance has been given to Universities as to how to proceed during the annual 'student migration' of 2 million young people. Universities are effectively running blind, and with the imminent arrival of students into shared accommodation across the country, there is a growing unease that this will trigger outbreaks like that seen in the United States. This lack of guidance from government has

been deeply frustrating, with no help finding solutions on how to teach to working out how to run student society activity safely.

4. Narrative Shift

We have recently seen the Government narrative shift to pin the rise on young people, which we believe to be an urgent issue. For example, Matt Hancock, the Health Secretary stated on 7th September to BBC Newsbeat that “younger people spread the disease, even if they don't have symptoms.” He followed this with “Don't kill your gran by catching coronavirus and then passing it on.”

5. Conclusion and Resolutions

As a Union we believe this to be an unfair scape-goating of a generation, who not only have been key targets for Government re-opening initiatives but are also more likely to get a test for coronavirus. We believe young people have been the victims of mixed messaging (the ‘Eat out To Help Out’ and ‘Go to Work’ contrasting with the ‘Stay Home’) and are about to be blamed for a second spike as they return to University. A recent survey by the NUS found that 67% of students in England do not think the Government is currently acting in their interests.

The Union therefore resolves to:

- Stand with young people and students, and denounce the Government's unfair ‘blame’ shift.
- Be part of a national campaign to call for better support from the government for Universities, including managing testing and outbreaks on campus.
- Join the call for an extension to the furlough scheme to protect young people who are forced to work.

Sources:

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