



Queries Regarding Reintroduction of Maintenance Grants from LUSU.

From Gillett, Liz <l.gillett1@lancaster.ac.uk>

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To cat.smith.mp@parliament.uk <cat.smith.mp@parliament.uk>

Cc Longdon, Frank <f.longdon@lancaster.ac.uk>

Dear Cat Smith,

I hope this email finds you well. My name is Liz Gillett and I am the Education Officer at Lancaster University Students Union (LUSU).

I am writing to you, off the fantastic news of the reintroduction of maintenance grants. However, the news has prompted a few concerns and queries on behalf of the students that we represent at LUSU. Our queries cover eligibility, delivery, and concerns regarding equality and the levy on international students that is being used to fund the grants. Firstly, the grant is reportedly covering "lower income students on high priority courses", of which there is little further information. What courses will be considered high priority? Who will be considered lower income? And will this include current students who are considered low income? How do the grants plan to be delivered? Would it be something that fits in with the current instalment system of maintainable loans?

Who will be considered lower income?

The maintenance loan amount for maximum loan has not risen with inflation, leaving many students who would have qualified years ago, to not qualify now. The threshold amount of household income qualifying for maximum loan was earnings under £25,000 in 2007, the equivalent of around £40,000 today. Those students can be considered low income, however do not have the same access to loans and grants that they would have had in 2007. We do not want to see this issue carried forward and would like to see this considered in the decision making process for qualifying 'low income'.

To further the conversation around student income, middle income students could potentially be missing out on funding that they need. The current system expects parents to support their children, however many students are left fending for themselves and worse off due to their parents financial position. I would like to highlight that maintenance grants would benefit all students, especially low income and under supported middle income students.

What courses will be considered high priority?

Additionally, what would be the criteria for a high priority degree? I understand that this will align with the Labour Governments wider mission, however this is vague in what this means for students. As this would outline grant eligibility, this would hence influence the decisions of future students. This would be a factor to consider uniquely for lower income students. My concern is that this will create a two-tier system, only making 'lower priority' degrees accessible to those who are not financially disadvantaged. This would create an unintentional side effect of making degree choice a privilege. We do not think of any programmes at Lancaster University as low priority due to the quality of education.

International student levy

Furthermore, I would like to note our concern surrounding a levy on international students. As a Union who represents a significant number of international students, we are concerned about the passing of additional financial burden on to those students. Although international students must be able to financially support their studies as a requirement, we find that this is not the reality due to changes in circumstances, or the financial pressure this requirement

brings. International students pay much higher fees than home students and often face financial pressures which can negatively impact their health and damage their experience in the UK as a student.

On a local level, Lancaster University is making significant staffing cuts, citing a lower intake of international students as a reason behind these cuts. These university cuts negatively impact student experience for all students. The levy could exacerbate the pressure on international recruitment and hence impact students further.

In summary, the reintroduction of maintenance grants is great news! However, we have many concerns regarding delivery, equality and the financial burden on international students.

I would be enthusiastic to meet you to discuss our concerns as a Union. I believe it would be beneficial for you to understand the student perspective and for us to gain clarity over the many questions we have.

Thank you for your time in reading this email, I look forward to your response and eventually the positive impact of the grants.

Yours sincerely,
Liz Gillett

Liz Gillett (She/They)

Education Officer

Lancaster University Students' Union

L.gillett1@lancaster.ac.uk | lusueducation@lancaster.ac.uk | [@lusueducation](#)

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