

Surrey Union's Stance on the Financial Resilience Plan

This Union Notes

1. In January 2024, a report into the financial sustainability of UK Higher Education from PWC commissioned by Universities UK found that 40% of English and Northern Irish universities are likely to operate at a deficit this year, due to constraints on income generation, rising operating costs, and limited access to funding¹.
2. Funding per student has fallen year-on-year to its lowest level in over 25 years, leading to UK universities relying more heavily on fee income from international and postgraduate students².
3. Recruitment of international students has also been impacted due to immigration restrictions introduced in January 2024 and uncertainty around post-study job opportunities in the UK. As a result, the number of issued study visas nationally is down by 33% this year and the number of enrolments to postgraduate taught courses is also down by over 40%³.
4. The impact of financial pressures is being felt across the sector, with over 45 UK universities facing cuts, redundancies or closures as of April 2024, and 9 in 10 post-1992 universities announcing cuts⁴.
5. In early March 2024, the Vice-Chancellor announced that the University of Surrey was facing financial difficulties caused by the pressures of inflation, increased energy costs, and a reduction in income generation from student fees and government funding.
6. The University also announced that it had developed a plan, known as the "Financial Resilience Plan", aiming to respond to these challenges and reduce the deficit in the University's funds, including opening an 'enhanced voluntary severance scheme' to academic and non-academic staff.
7. Responses received to the Students' Union's feedback form following the University's announcement indicate that students are most concerned about the quality of education, the loss of staff, rising financial burden for students, and uncertainty about the short and long term impact on students different departments and levels of study.

This Union Believes

1. The Students' Union occupies a powerful position as the sole representative body for Surrey students, and should utilise this position to lobby⁵ on behalf of students at both a local and national level.
2. The Union's Officer and staff team work closely in partnership with the University to improve the student experience at Surrey, with the Union representing student interests in a range of senior University committees (including University Education Committee, University Research and Innovation Committee, Senate, University Council, and the University Students' Union Committee).
3. The Union's approach to lobbying the University on issues relating to the financial resilience plan will be guided by elected officers and student feedback, focused on minimising the impact on areas of most importance to students and student satisfaction.
4. Any formal policy stance taken by the Union should be applicable to the fast-changing situation at the University through the duration of the financial resilience plan.
5. For the benefit of our members and to inform the Union's representative work, it is vital that the University is transparent about where the financial resilience plan will impact the student experience.

¹ [UK Higher Education Financial Sustainability Report](#), PWC, Jan 2024

² [UK Higher Education Financial Sustainability Report](#), PWC, Jan 2024

³ [The Guardian](#), Feb 2024

⁴ [Times Higher Education](#), April 2024

⁵ "Lobbying" is used in this policy to mean "to seek to influence an individual or body on an issue" (Oxford Languages Dictionary)

This Union Resolves

1. To formally **write to the Universities Minister**, Luke Hall MP, **the Shadow Universities Minister**, Seema Malhotra MP, and **the MP for Guildford**, Angela Richardson MP, to highlight the practical impact on students and universities due to the continued lack of higher education support.
2. To lobby the University to commit to **honour degree awarding** and to protect outcomes for students in any instances of the removal of teaching provision or course delivery, in accordance with the University's [Student Protection Plan](#), and in line with the Regulatory Framework for higher education in England, set by the Office for Students.
3. To lobby the University to **extend the programme of enhanced voluntary severance** for academic and professional services staff, providing more opportunities for the University to meet the aims of the financial resilience plan without the need to make large numbers of compulsory redundancies.
4. To lobby the University to improve communications with the University community and prioritise the distribution of **transparent and timely information** about the impact of the financial resilience plan.
5. To lobby the University to commit to safeguards that **staff-student ratios will not fall to 1:20**.
6. Throughout the duration of the financial resilience plan, for Union Officers to **prioritise the areas of greatest importance** to our members when representing student interests, including:
 - a. The quality of learning and teaching across all courses;
 - b. Access to high quality, timely, and tailored academic, wellbeing, and administrative support for all students;
 - c. The fair treatment of PGR students undertaking paid work for the University;
 - d. The recognition of the equal importance of all academic disciplines and appropriate levels of resourcing and support for students across all Faculties;
 - e. The protection of the academic experience and degree outcomes for any students undertaking courses where cuts to teaching provision or course delivery are announced;
 - f. The protection of an affordable and accessible full student experience including the delivery of inclusive education and the quality and cost of campus services;
 - g. The accuracy and quality of information, advice, and support provided to students across University support services.
7. To agree with the University to **collaboratively review relevant policies or regulations** where necessary in light of any impact to student support, University response times, or appeals and complaints resulting from the financial resilience plan.
8. To agree with the University on an approach to **monitoring the long-term impact** of the financial resilience plan on students, with feedback being sought from students directly, including reviewing NSS and MEQ feedback.
9. To share this policy with the University's Executive Board to ensure the stance of the Union and its members are understood and considered in the implementation of the financial resilience plan.
10. For elected Sabbatical Officers to utilise their positions in relevant University committees and both formal and informal conversations with the University's Executive Board and other management staff to promote the resolutions outlined in this policy.