



The Scottish Parliament
Pàrlamaid na h-Alba

PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01769

Name of petitioner

Marie Oldfield

Petition title

Higher Education in Scotland

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review the way higher education in Scotland is set up and delivered in Scotland including:

- How students' rights are enforced; and
- Whether there is scope to allocate more power to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

Emailed MSP.

Petition background information

I believe that, for too long, Universities have been able to:

- remain opaque in their processes and practises
- provide student contracts that are unbalanced and favour the University
- provide inappropriate responses to students' complaints or just not reply at all
- be a business, or a charity, when it suits
- not provide value for money
- deny students a fair education
- bill students with no rationale behind the bill
- demand payment from students despite non-delivery of education

Students need clarity regarding their rights at university or college, and to be confident that they will be enforced.

I believe that there is no one to hold Universities to account. The Ombudsman has limited powers but 'academic judgement' is being used as the 'get out clause' for any decision the University makes, even if that decision is commercial and not educational.

In one example, when lecturers went out on strike, the University withheld their pay for not teaching; but still took fees from students for classes that were not being delivered

not teaching, but still took fees from students for classes that were not being delivered. Students who had saved for years were denied a fair education and still billed for fees. The student contract did not protect them and, I believe, is unfit for purpose.

In another example, I was also told, two months into a course, that I could not study the course which had been advertised because the University could not staff it. I could only study an altered course. If I didn't agree I would still have to pay that years' fees but have nothing to show for it.

I submitted a complaint to the University and received a canned response after a long drawn out inefficient and incompetent complaints process. I then had debt collections threats from their Finance Department and attempted coercion when I refused to pay for lessons I never received. Although I referred the complaint to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman they said that they do not have the power to take any real action against the university and are tied by the 'academic judgement clause' even on commercial issues.

Taxpayers are funding this system in Scotland and the UK as a whole and are not receiving value for money if the students they are paying for are not even receiving a full education or a fair education.

Should a student miss even part of a degree then the whole degree is in jeopardy. We know this from studies on school attendance. However, students are being treated unjustly in being billed for lessons which have not taken place, being denied refunds and coerced and harassed to pay fees that the University is simply not entitled to demand due to non-provision of education.

It is not fair that the only outcome for students is to have to pay hard saved money for a sub-par experience, an incomplete education and then, should there be an issue, to have little recourse other than a court of law, which is often financially prohibitive.

Unique web address

<https://www.parliament.scot/GettingInvolved/Petitions/HigherEducationinScotland>

Related information for petition

Do you wish your petition to be hosted on the Parliament's website to collect signatures online?

YES

How many signatures have you collected so far?

0

Closing date for collecting signatures online

03 / 01 / 2020

Comments to stimulate online discussion

Should students have to sign student contracts without an effective appeal process?