

PE1807/B

Petitioner submission of 17 August 2020

While the Scottish Government's submission:

(http://www.parliament.scot/S5_PublicPetitionsCommittee/Submissions%2020/PE1807_A.pdf)

tries to show ways that the issues have attempted to redressed, it misses the purpose of the petition and what it seeks to rectify through the cited mechanism. While the report says the first point of complaint is the universities, most have come out publicly and said they will not compensate students for lost time or education. The second point of contact they reference is the ombudsman, due to the nature of these complaints, the number of complaints, and the lack of knowledge of the complaints process the Scottish Government should make funds available so that universities may give the compensation to students regardless if they take advantage of these procedures. Additionally, the scale of these complaints warrants governmental redress. The hardship funds, while they assist some international students, do get to the point of actual compensation for the lost time. Many international students may not qualify, yet could still have been affected and suffered a material loss.

The attached guidance from the UK government:

(<https://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2018/briefing-compensation-refund-policies-april-2018.pdf#search=industrial%20action%20student%20compensation>)

sets out a pathway and measure if compensation is warranted. They set out that compensation is warranted if material information covered in the course at the point of acceptance (enrolment) is not met, if course aims are not achieved, one suffers potential loss of job offers, and if the situation is out of the student's control. While education is a devolved matter and Scottish institutions are aware of guidance, universities have been advised to adhere to the guidance according to the previously cited report. Seeing as students may have been adversely affected by all the previously mentioned scenarios, it makes sense for the universities to award a form of compensation. The guidance suggests that a "goodwill payment" may be in order.

The specific reason for the Scottish Government to get involved is that universities will not accept complaints or responsibility unless they have the means to do so. The Scottish Government should make funds available with the explicit purpose of refunding/compensating students for lost time and curriculum last year. The discretionary funding the Government has currently given has been used for Covid related efforts to prepare for the next year, and none has been used to redress the issues of last year. This is a matter that is far larger than any singular complaint and must be addressed as such.