

## DEPUTATION 4 – LEEDS STUDENT UNIONS

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen, and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council, which should not be longer than five minutes, and please begin by introducing the people in your Deputation.

MS R WENSTONE: Good afternoon my Lord Mayor and fellow councillors. This is Jo Johnson, Lorna Johnson, Paul Gold and Liam Challenger and my name is Rachel Wenstone and we are from Leeds City Art College, Leeds Met Student Union and Leeds University Union.

Firstly, thank you to Councillor Lewis for assisting us in speaking to you today and thank you all for giving your time to hear our concerns.

We are here and we represent over 100,000 students in Leeds. We are all united against cuts to higher education and the damage higher fees will have on Leeds.

In 2008, the Scrutiny Board for City and Regional Partners made recommendations about Higher Education that we believe were correct, remain valid and must be upheld. We oppose cuts to Higher education funding. We oppose the Government's failure to appreciate the value of higher education

Graduates are not the only beneficiaries of higher education; society benefits, business benefits, the economy benefits.

As a city, Leeds benefits enormously from public investment in higher education. One-third of Leeds students remain in the city to enter graduate employment in Leeds.

University education brings value to society. This principle is under attack from a Government whose ideology recognised education solely as a means to create earning potential. *(Applause)*

Education is a social leveller. We cannot go back to the days of university for the elite, where two per cent of people have access to education. Those two per cent are forcing their mistakes – their deficit – on to the laps of teenagers across the country, including Leeds. They are being forced to pay for the debt of a generation of risk takers. Student, future students are an easy target. Banks do not cure diseases or write literature that shapes and inspires generations, but graduates do.

We oppose the government abdicating from their responsibility to ensure an educated and developed future generation. Every other top 25 OECD country invests in their higher education. The UK spend is already the second lowest as a percentage of GDP.

A cut to education on this scale and a transfer of that cost to students will see the creation of a two tier system, where Universities are able to set fees based purely on reputation and prestige.

Institutions like Leeds University may be able to rest safe in the knowledge that their research focus will allow them to charge a healthy sum for their courses, but we will see the

destruction of newer, teaching-based universities – the same universities who attract the majority of students from low-income backgrounds.

This includes institutions like Leeds Met, where 92% of students are from state schools. These newer institutions will not be able to compete on charges with Russell Group institutions. Their facilities will decline, standards will drop, students will stop paying and we will see many of them close.

We oppose the negative impact the cuts will have on Leeds.

The Scrutiny Committee recognised that the least well-off will be the first group of potential students not to be able to go to university if fees increase.

Leeds University already spends £7m every year on widening access schemes and successfully talks to 30,000 students in Leeds about opportunities offered by HE – the same students who are likely to be alarmed about significant debt upon graduation, but it is worth noticing that only 200 local students from the four lowest socio-economic backgrounds actually study in Leeds University as a result of this widening access work.

The only solid target the government has given Universities is a higher fee; there is not target for widening access.

The combination of newer institutions struggling under a marketised system, poorer students being deterred and a trebling of fees means, that Leeds is likely to see a dramatic reduction both in the numbers applying to University and the numbers moving to Leeds.

The Scrutiny Committee found the local economic impact of Leeds' two universities to be substantial. They are responsible for over £1.3b of output, (9% of the city total), and 17,600 full-time equivalent jobs (5% of the city total).

It is clear that the 40% cut to higher education and the lifting of the cap on fees to nine grand will fundamentally change the sector for the worse and dramatically change the opportunities available for learning.

The evidence has not changed since the Scrutiny Board made it's recommendations over two years ago.

We ask that local MPs be asked to give their support to the view that there should be adequate funding of higher education without removing the cap on fees. We ask them to vote against the cut to HE and against any subsequent rise in fees.

We ask that MPs vote against a tuition fee loan with interest, because Muslim students will not be able to take that proposed loan.

The demonstration that took place last week shows how passionate we are...

THE LORD MAYOR: Could I ask you to finish up now, please?

MS R WENSTONE: Yes, I will just be half a second. The demonstration that took place last week shows how passionate we are to save HE. 50,000 students, lecturers and

parents marched against cuts – 50,000 acting not in their own interest, but in the interest of the young.

This is not about the students in your Wards. This is about the children and grandchildren of your constituents. It is about their access and right to higher education.  
*(Applause) (Standing ovation from Labour Group)*