

DEPUTATION THREE – LEEDS UNIVERSITY UNION, LEEDS TRINITY STUDENTS
UNION AND LEEDS METROPOLITAN STUDENTS UNION

THE LORD MAYOR: Good afternoon 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.

MR D ALCORN: My Lord Mayor, fellow Councillors, the Members of my deputation are Anthony Haddley, Union Affairs officer for Leeds University Union, and myself, David Alcorn, President of Leeds Met Students Union. We are here representing the 100,000 students of Leeds from our four Students Unions and today we want to talk about the situation students in this city are in, in the face of the national policies implemented by the Coalition Government

Our education is under threat. Whether it is the cuts to the Educational Maintenance Allowance that have left college students with a greater financial burden when they enter further education, or the havoc the Government has wreaked with the Higher Education system, we, the students of Leeds, have grave concerns for the direction that we are being taken in.

This year, it is estimated that there are 2500 fewer undergraduate students in the city, according to Unipol Student Homes and Re'new Charity, with a large number of postgraduate students also missing this year. These are thousands of students who will not get to benefit from an education in Leeds; these are thousands of people who cannot contribute to our distinct culture and economy, and thousands who will not stay on to share their skills as graduates.

Just in case you are not convinced that this is a bad thing on these terms, we can boil it down to simple economics: 2500 fewer students in the city an estimated – and this is from a recent study from the University of Strathclyde Report – £2b less a year spent in this city and region. £2b. Students are far more than a money maker for Leeds, but the presence of students here really does have a wide impact.

In a deputation last March, our colleagues talked to you about the importance of access to higher education in the light of a new fees structure. We will not repeat that point; hopefully it is an obvious one by now. What we will say is that we need a better model for education, where you can access further and higher education regardless of age, financial background or any other barrier. We want to live in a city where mature students, part-time students and, yes, traditional undergraduates learn together with a benefit to the entire city.

This issue does not just end with a progressive vision for education. We are experiencing a time when youth unemployment is at some of the highest levels since the 1980s. Graduates are concerned about their job prospects in a highly competitive market, and are finding a shortage of graduate level jobs. School and college leavers are finding it equally difficult to get on to the career ladder. The skills and careers advice we get as students is all well and good, but when there are not jobs to apply to there is a much bigger problem than simply being prepared for the world of work.

So when we are frustrated and concerned about our future, do we as students feel empowered to change it? Some students have been put off by broken promises from the last

election; some never engaged in politics in the first place because they see it as irrelevant to their day to day life, but many are still involved - many students are reaching out to try and change the world around them for the better.

The question we have for you is this, are students a group you reach out to? Do you see students as voters, as constituents, or are they just there and in the way of the other residents in the area? Are students more than just an economic consideration to the city? Are students valued as residents of Leeds? Depending on who you ask, that answer will definitely vary.

I have so far been speaking about large scale issues, national politics and students as a political entity, but what we are really here for today is to ask for your help on a more local level. You have heard our concerns, and we would like you to work with us to address them. At a time when finances are a huge burden for those of us wanting to study, we need a city that offers affordable accommodation, that encourages students to move here and experience everything we have to offer as a city. We need housing policies that do not demonise the housing choices we make. Instead, we need an understanding that affordable housing is one of the greatest enablers of our access to education.

It costs £72.40 a week to live in a Unipol code accredited shared house, and £116 per week to live in Sky Plaza student accommodation. Restricting the amount of shared housing available to students in Leeds is massively adding to the costs of education.

We need more reliable public transport that gives us a safe way home when studying late on campus, with fares that allow students travelling from outside of Leeds to study without the added financial burden.

We need your help when we reach out to inspire the next generation of learners. We want to work with you to share the amazing things that happen on our campuses with the rest of the city, whether that is Leeds Met Students Union's volunteering in the local community, helping elderly people learn IT skills, or Leeds University Union raising £23,000 for 27 local charities through their student-led Raise and Give Society.

Next week we will be going down to London with the NUS to demonstrate outside Parliament. A lot of the issues we have highlighted today are due to Government policy and that is where our voice needs to be strongest and loudest. If you share our concerns and see a partnership between students and the city becoming even stronger, come with us. Help us show that it is not just the Students' Unions who are concerned, but a united Leeds, telling the Government that something needs to change.

THE LORD MAYOR: Please can you make your final point, Mr Alcorn?

MR D ALCORN: You can come with us and hold a placard, you can tweet a message of support, but essentially what we are really after is that most of all the Council will publicly endorse the aims of the demo, that education is a good thing in and of itself for Leeds and for society as a whole, that students in this city should feel empowered to change the world around them and that students with degrees from outstanding institutions...

THE LORD MAYOR: I must ask you to finish now, Mr Alcorn, your five minutes is up.

MR D ALCORN: OK. (*Applause*)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Lewis.

COUNCILLOR J LEWIS: Lord Mayor. I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board for consideration.

COUNCILLOR LAMB: I second, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: All those in favour? (*A vote was taken*) CARRIED. Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. Good afternoon. (*Applause*)