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Student Group Claim – Students launch multi-million-pound group legal action against UK universities over Covid and strikes disruption

- Thousands of students have joined Student Group Claim via website StudentGroupClaim.co.uk to seek compensation from UK universities over disruption during strike action and Covid-19.
- To date, nearly **20,000 students** across England and Wales have already joined claims with further students joining every day.
- Leading solicitors have teamed together to help the Student Group Claim members claim fair financial compensation of thousands of pounds each from their universities through no win, no fee group court claims.
- Letters before claim have already been sent to **18 universities*** seeking damages on behalf of current and former students at those institutions. These include University College London, LSE, Kings College London and the Universities of Manchester, Leeds, Birmingham, Warwick and Cardiff.
- If successful, UK students at university during the pandemic are estimated to win compensation of around £5,000 each, with international students potentially winning several multiples of this figure.
- Millions of students and former students could potentially join the Student Group Claim.
- Depending upon how many of them do, the total value of compensation could see universities collectively having to pay out hundreds of millions of pounds.
- **On 2 February 2023, the High Court will decide whether to issue a Group Litigation Order** for the first group claim which is against University College London.** If this is successful, similar orders are likely to be made for the other student groups for litigation against their respective universities.

Overview

There is a contract between every student and their university under which the student pays tuition fees and the university agrees to provide in-person tuition and access to facilities and other services. However, from 2018 to 2022 there was a material difference between what students paid for and what they actually received.

During the Covid-19 pandemic and strike action by university staff (from 2018 onwards), universities across the UK breached their contracts with students, failing to provide them with in-person tuition by cancelling classes or moving them on-line and denying or severely restricting physical access to campus facilities like libraries, study spaces and labs.

The Student Group Claim, represented by leading solicitors [Asserson](#) and [Harcus Parker](#), is for all students whose time at university was affected by strikes or the pandemic.

Why are the students bringing this claim?

UK students pay £9,250 per year for undergraduate courses and more for graduate courses; international students pay up to £40,000 per year. Like any other consumers, they deserved compensation when they received substantially less valuable services than those for which they paid.

No other service provider would get away with cancelling a service or replacing it with a lower-value substitute without offering a price reduction. Access to state-of-the-art facilities and world-renowned in-person teaching are decisive factors when choosing a university. However, notwithstanding the significant cancellations and changes made during strikes and the pandemic, often for months on end, universities have largely failed to offer financial compensation to students.

Students understand that universities sometimes had to close campuses and could not necessarily stop lecturers going on strike. However, students' losses – the disruption to their courses and access to facilities – should fall on the shoulders of the universities, which can afford to bear that burden, rather than falling upon students who cannot afford to do so.

Universities have thrived financially during the Covid period; the 18 universities being challenged earned a surplus (i.e. profits) of more than £1 billion during the 2020-21 financial year and collectively hold more than £16.3 billion in net assets. They can afford to meet their legal obligations and make good their students' losses.

The Student Group Claim seeks damages for Claimants to reflect the difference between the market value of the services paid for and the market value of the services provided.

While students are rightly entitled to compensation, most students are not financially able individually to claim the compensation they deserve through the courts. Accordingly, the best way for them to achieve compensation is as a group, in a collective court claim.

Status of the claim

Nearly 20,000 students have signed up as Claimants on the Student Group Claim website StudentGroupClaim.co.uk with further students signing up every day.

The first university to receive a Letter of Claim was University College London, which was sent pre-action correspondence **in April 2022**. An application for a Group Litigation Order in relation to the UCL Group Litigation was made on 18 July 2022 and will be heard in the High Court on 2 February 2023. To date about 3,500 current or former UCL students have joined the claim.

On 19 October 2022 Letters of Claim were sent to a further 17 universities, pursuing similar claims. It is anticipated that further universities will be written to in due course and the number of claimants will grow substantially as Student Group Claim continues to build the claims.

Student Group Claim has obtained a substantial package of litigation funding and insurance worth c. £13.5m to bring these claims, and its solicitors have instructed three leading barristers at top-ranked commercial chambers One Essex Court to represent the claimants: Anna Boase KC, Patricia Burns and Matthew Hoyle.



Shimon Goldwater, solicitor to Student Group Claim (partner at Asserson) comments:

“When you pay for a service, if you did not receive what you paid for, you deserve compensation. Universities promised students in-person tuition and access to facilities and other services in return for substantial fees. During strike action and the pandemic they failed to provide this but still expected to be paid in full. Students have often taken out substantial loans to pay for a package of education and experiences which they did not receive. Working with Marcus Parker we want to ensure students get fair compensation for the disruption to their academic lives and their ruined university experience.”

Ryan Dunleavy, solicitor to Student Group Claim (partner at Marcus Parker) comments:

“These universities are often huge, wealthy institutions that pushed the financial impact and burden of Covid and of their own staff striking onto their customers, the students. Unlike the universities, a significant number of which increased their income over the pandemic period, those students largely survived on limited financial means and loans. Despite this, universities generally took few steps to compensate students for the subpar services they delivered in these periods. The Student Group Claim helps readdress the power and financial imbalance between the parties by giving the students the opportunity to bring a claim collectively, rather than as individuals.”

* So far 18 universities (see Appendix) have been sent letters before action and these are being treated as separate claims. However, the claims being pursued relate to the same underlying factual background and are very similar or identical in nature.

** At the hearing, the judge will decide whether to allow the 3,500 UCL claimants to bring their claims together against UCL as a group.

Appendix – Universities in receipt of Letters of Claim

1. Birmingham, University of
2. Bristol, University of
3. Cardiff University
4. City, University of London
5. Coventry University
6. Imperial College London
7. King’s College London
8. Leeds, University of
9. Liverpool, University of
10. London School of Economics and Political Science
11. Manchester, University of
12. Newcastle University
13. Nottingham, University of
14. Queen Mary University of London
15. Sheffield, University of
16. University College London

17. University of the Arts London
18. Warwick, University of

Notes to Editors

For more information on the Student Group claim and to find out if you are eligible to join, see the website:
www.StudentGroupClaim.co.uk

For media enquiries please contact:

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About Asserson

- Asserson is a prize-winning firm of solicitors specialising in complex commercial dispute resolution with a proven track record of getting excellent results for its clients.
- The firm acted for a group of solar energy companies in which the claimants won c. £60 million from the UK Government. At the time, this win was the largest ever Human Rights Act settlement against the UK government.
- The firm has a strong reputation in human rights claims and has challenged large institutions, the UK Government, and local authorities in all levels of courts, up to the UK Supreme Court.

About Harcus Parker

- Harcus Parker is a commercial litigation firm that specialises in bringing and defending complex claims, usually involving large groups of claimants.
- The team has a strong track record of delivering successful outcomes for groups of consumers, institutional investors and private individuals.
- The firm is a recognised market leader in group litigation, case management and litigation funding.
- Some of the firm's most famous cases include the Lloyds / HBOS acquisition case, The Tesco Equal Pay Claim and The VW Emissions Action.