

PET(4)-02-12 p4a

P-03-296 Unfair Proposals on Student Loans

Petition wording

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to resist the Russell Group of Universities' unfair proposals to force graduates to repay student loans at a faster and steeper rate.

Petition raised by: Mr Cerith Rhys Jones

Number of signatures: 146

First considered by Committee: September 2010

Supporting information:

In a submission, dated May 2010, to the Independent Review of Higher Education Funding and Student Finance (otherwise known as 'the Browne Review', led by The Rt. Hon. The Lord Browne of Madingley), the Russell Group of Universities, a group of 20 universities throughout Great Britain which pride themselves upon excellence in research, proposed in its Executive Summary point XI, that "it [*student support system*] should be reformed through the introduction of a real rate of interest, and increased repayment rates."

Furthermore, at point 3.72.1 of its submission to the Review, the Group states that it supports "the introduction of a real rate of interest". Although CymruX realises that current interest rates can be, at best, fluctuant, our organisation is concerned at what the interest rate proposed would be. Knowing that the coalition government in London is keen to raise interest rates and taxes, CymruX is severely concerned that an interest rate would be set, that would out-price students and prospective students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

At point 3.73 of the Group's submission to the Review, it is suggested that "a revised student support system should also incorporate mechanisms to encourage up-front payments, thereby reducing the overall burden of debt on the public purse." CymruX recognises of course, that both public and private debt in Great Britain as they stand are unsustainable, but the organisation does not believe that the way to remedy the situation is through penalising students. Our organisation cannot understand why the Group may think it just to encourage students to pay for higher education up-front, when it is only a small minority of students who will be able to pay fees in this way.

Although not the main point of this petition, CymruX is also concerned that the Group proposes to remove the cap of student fees, and allow

Universities to charge their own set prices for higher education. Our organisation believes that this would allow fees to spiral, thus making higher education less accessible, and permitting Universities such as Oxford or Cambridge to charge astronomically for higher education, thus completely exempting anyone below the so-called 'middle' or 'higher' classes of society from attending them.

In recognising that times are hard, and in valuing the core socialist principles held by Plaid Cymru, CymruX does not believe that is fair or just to ask students to repay student loans at a higher rate. Our organisation reaffirms its commitment to students and to graduates, and reiterates its long-standing belief that education is a right of all people and should therefore be free.

We therefore call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to resist, to the full force of its ability and power, any plans that the Russell Group of Universities may wish to impose upon Cardiff University as stipulated in its submission to the Browne Review. CymruX believes that although education is devolved, were these plans to be put into practice even in Cardiff University, the door would be opened for other Universities in Wales to follow suit. Our organisation does not accept this as an appropriate or acceptable move in modern Wales.

We ask as well, that other parties and individuals be willing to join us in our endeavours; our organisation believes that the sheer importance of this issue supersedes party political divides, and thank all signatories for their support.