

Beds SU Policy Ideal: The University of Bedfordshire Should Create More Jobs for Students and Pay the Real Living Wage

Beds SU believes... *that the University of Bedfordshire should be accredited as a Living Wage Foundation employer and pay all their staff and contractors the Real Living Wage whilst committing to creating more in-house employment and skills-development opportunities for Beds students and recent graduates.*

What are the facts?

THE REAL LIVING WAGE?

- The *Living Wage Foundation* launched in 2001 with the purpose to persuade employers to pay a living wage, which is calculated based on a basket of household goods and services
- As off 21 March 2022, The *Living Wage Foundation* promotes an hourly rate of pay of £9.90 across the UK, and £11.05 in London, which constitutes an estimate of the minimum income required to pay for a basic cost of living in the UK, referred to as the *Real Living Wage*
- The “Living Wage” set by the UK Government is not the same as the Real Living Wage proposed by the Living Wage Foundation, as it is currently only £8.91 for those aged 23 and older, and includes no London weighting
- Organisations can become accredited by the Living Wage Foundation, under the condition that the organisation commits to paying all staff and contractors over the age of 18, at a minimum, the Real Living Wage
- Nearly 60 universities and colleges are accredited Living Wage employers. However, the University of Bedfordshire is not an accredited Living Wage Foundation employer.
- The University and Colleges Union (UCU) supports UK universities accrediting with the Living Wage Foundation
- Beds SU is currently accredited with the Living Wage Foundation, which means it publicly acknowledges that it pays its staff the Real Living Wage.
- The University of Bedfordshire states publicly that it strives to contribute to the globally defined UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), a number of which aim to eradicate poverty and economic inequality, as well as to promote decent working conditions for all. As such, accrediting with the Living Wage Foundation and paying all workers the Real Living Wage would enable the UoB to better align itself with the SDGs

STUDENTS PREPAREDNESS FOR GRADUATE EMPLOYMENT

- In a recent Prospects survey¹, **nearly half of students** said that they felt **unprepared for getting a job** or an apprenticeship, with not having work experience being cited as the biggest barrier to employment for students, followed by not having the right skills
 - Students also cited a lack of opportunities to apply for jobs as a barrier to employment
- National research has also drawn attention to the barriers to graduate employment faced by BAME students in particular, with lack of work experience being cited as a major barrier²
 - Fifteen months after graduating from university, UK-domiciled graduates from BAME backgrounds are 8% less likely to be in full-time graduate employment than their white counterparts (54% versus 62%) (HESA)³
- At present, the University of Bedfordshire does not publicly commit to hiring a certain proportion of its own students in the likes of in-house administrative or hospitality vacancies.
- Additionally, whilst the UoB does run a 'Graduate Advancement Programme' which offers recent graduates the opportunity to undertake part-time paid work experience at the university in a variety of fields, the UoB does not publicly state how many such positions will actually be available to UoB recent graduates.
- As the above figures illustrate, many UK graduates – particularly those from BAME backgrounds – struggle to find employment after graduating, and universities like Beds could undoubtedly do more to support graduates into work not least by offering internships and in-house employment opportunities.
- For example, most universities use external employment agencies for administration and hospitality work, many of which could arguably be filled by students and recent graduates.
 - What's more, universities face an added burden of a VAT leakage and a profit leakage to the external firm by doing so. However, if a university spent less on external temporary workers, more funds could be retained to fund the recruitment and selection of student workers, as well as the kind of "on job" support that would be required to hire students and recent graduates in the first place.
- Beds SU has also received feedback from students stating that university employment contracts are insufficient. For example, one student contended

¹ <https://luminare.prospects.ac.uk/do-graduates-feel-ready-for-work>

² <https://www.hepi.ac.uk/2020/10/28/what-are-university-careers-services-doing-to-bridge-the-outcomes-gap-between-white-and-bame-graduates/>

³ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/graduates/activities>

during a meeting with Beds SU on 23.03.2022 that they had taken up an employment contract with the university that had been advertised as 120 hours, yet in actuality there was only enough work available to claim for 12 hours. Indeed, some students have reported to wanting work that is flexible around studies – such as 0 hours contracts, however, others would prefer work that would guarantee them a certain income. As such, students would like the university to offer a range of different contract times (such as fixed-term and 0 hours) to cater to student's diverse needs.

THE UK COST OF LIVING CRISIS

- The UK is currently facing a cost-of-living crisis, with inflation set to rise above 9% this year⁴, which will especially affect students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds
 - Nearly half (46.3%) of Beds students are from a deprived socio-economic background, as determined by the IMD quintile scale and will likely be extremely affected by this.
 - The UK cost of living crisis is projected to hit BAME households particularly hard⁵, which is especially pressing in a UoB context given the high percentage of BAME students (approx. 58.5% as of 2022 student records data)

How does this impact students?

- Being paid below the Living Wage can make basic and fundamental life choices, such as supporting a family, very difficult. What's more, financial worries are especially pressing for students at the moment due to the current cost of living crisis in the UK, which is anticipated to hit poorer households – as well as BAME households – particularly hard.
- Data indicates that a high proportion of students nationally do not feel prepared for graduate employment, citing lack of work experience as a major barrier. What's more, BAME students on average struggle more than their white counterparts to secure graduate roles. However, if universities were to commit to hiring more students and recent graduates for the likes of in-house hospitality, administrative work and internships, as well as generate job specifications that stress transferrable skills gained in such roles, then more students would feel confident entering the graduate job market upon finishing their studies.
- Students expect their university to set an example to them – encouraging students to seek fair, rewarding pay that allows them to live comfortably and enjoy their

⁴ <https://www.ft.com/content/170eb32b-91f1-44f4-a776-601078ce3237>

⁵ <https://www.theguardian.com/society/2021/feb/23/bame-britons-more-likely-to-face-higher-living-costs-study-finds>

work. Indeed, graduates will carry their university's name throughout their career and so expect it to adopt a positive civic responsibility as a visibly good employer and live up to its strategy of being a values-driven university.

- Universities can benefit from attracting talented and committed staff, and good pay and benefits are a key part of attracting talented people to work somewhere. Students rely on and benefit from a committed, fairly paid workforce who are delivering their educational and student experience at the University of Bedfordshire.

What is the Beds SU ideal?

Due by large to the dual problem of the cost-of-living crisis and data showing that a high proportion of students feel ill prepared for graduate level employment, Beds SU believes that the University of Bedfordshire should commit to providing better employment support for students in the following ways:

- The University of Bedfordshire visibly demonstrates its commitment to paying any workers, including contractors, the Real Living Wage by accrediting with the Living Wage Foundation.
- The university should provide full transparency regarding in-house employment opportunities and payment conditions for students and recent graduates, by stating publicly on the UoB websites its commitment to the Living Wage Foundation, as well as publishing data annually on the number of UoB students and recent graduates it – and its contractors – employs
- The university should commit to employing more UoB students in general, particularly in the likes of hospitality and administrative roles which are often unnecessarily filled by external employment agencies
- The university commits to providing a variety of different contract types for student job vacancies – such as 0 hours contracts and fixed term contracts – to cater to the diverse needs of students
- The UoB commits to publishing job descriptions for 'casual' jobs which stress transferrable skills relevant to graduate level employment, so that students know how to utilise any work experience gained during university to enhance their graduate career prospects
- The university uses proper interviews and selection processes during recruitment, thereby giving students good experience of taking part in interviews in advance of entering the graduate labour market
- The university displays effective EDI practice during recruitment to ensure that non-traditional students are fairly represented within in-house job vacancies