

# The LEARN Network and #ForThe100 hand in petition to protect university students at 10 Downing Street and meet with MPs and law makers in Houses of Parliament

After receiving 128,293 signatures calling for universities to be made legally accountable for how students are treated The LEARN Network and the #ForThe100 movement will today hand in its Petition at 10 Downing Street.

Every year around 100 students are lost to suicide at university. The LEARN Network is a community of bereaved families connecting to prevent suicide, their main focus is to encourage learning from the past and strive towards more compassionate and safer institutions. They have been joined by partners #ForThe100 to combat the lack of a legal duty to care about students in Higher Education.

This legal duty of care campaign is aimed at making universities more proactive in considering a student's mental health. Student Minds stated in one of their research reports that *"behind every academic problem is almost always a non-academic cause"*. The LEARN Network want all university leaders to recognise this, that progression and mental wellbeing are 2 sides of the same coin and resource accordingly.

LEARN estimate that 500 students have died by suicide over the last 5 years since Universities UK and Papyrus wrote the Suicide Safer Universities guidance. Adoption of this guidance has been reported as 'patchy' by one sector leader and LEARN now believes the only way to get fast change and improve lives is to have a legal duty of care.

The petition will be handed over by family members who have been affected by student suicide, including:

- Hilary Grime, the mother of Phoebe
- Maxine Carrick, the mother of Oskar
- Lee Fryatt, author of the petition and father to Daniel
- Jo Ndisang, the mother of Jared
- Jacquie Shanahan, the mother of Rory
- Isabella De George, the sister of Harrison

Later in the day, the campaigners will participate in a Parliamentary meeting at the House of Commons around student mental health, suicide and duty of care. The meeting is hosted by Conservative MP for Maidstone and The Weald, Helen Grant, for her constituent Hilary Grime who lost her daughter, Phoebe, to suicide at Newcastle University aged 20.

Bob Abrahamart, father of Natasha, says: "As parents, we have lived with this every day since we lost our daughter. Handing our petition to Number 10 is an important milestone. But what's

going to make the difference is bringing in changes to the law that will help to protect our students so that no other families, friends and communities have to experience the pain that we have.”

Hilary Grime, Phoebe's mother, says: “It’s too late to change what has happened to our children, but we can make the necessary changes to save other students and stop the pain that this causes. We have shown that the public understands the need for a legal duty of care in universities, so now we need to get the Government to see it too.”

Maxine Carrick, mother of Oskar, says: “We want to send a strong signal to the Government that we’re no longer willing to put our university students' lives at risk. We won’t be silenced on this issue until our students get the legal protection they deserve.”

Libby Kitson, mother of Romy, says: “This bill will both improve and save lives affording students everywhere the opportunity to realise their expectations and fulfil their potential; Romy's father and I will forever think 'what if' and that is something I wouldn't wish on anyone.”

Esther Brennan, Theo’s mother, says: “Thank you to the 100,000 + who have signed and shared our petition. You have done so much more as an individual than the university did for Theo, Phoebe, Oskar, Natasha, Romy and the hundred plus others who suffer and die alone at university each year; many, no doubt, for no other reason than the lack of a legal duty of care.”

Lee Fryatt, a LEARN Network spokesperson and author of the petition, says: “responsibility for pastoral care and student mental health is unclear for staff, students and families. Glossy university prospectuses are misleading and attitudes and approaches to mental health are inconsistent across the sector”. Referring to the current voluntary system of mental health guidance in higher education, Fryatt commented “Mental health would seem to be everyone's business but no one's responsibility”. Fryatt believes it is too easy for universities to ignore guidance and the concerns of families and friends until it is too late. He concludes “That has to change. We must be more proactive. A statutory duty of care will force university leaders to face the challenge and invest in helping staff to confidently spot the early warning signs.” The LEARN Network view the legal duty of care for students as a stepping-stone towards a more compassionate higher education system one that will enable ALL students to thrive.

To learn more about the campaign visit:

<https://www.thelearnnetwork.org.uk/>

<https://www.forthe100.org.uk/>

**[ENDS]**

Notes to editors:

The petition will be handed in at 2 pm on the 25th of April 2023, followed by the parliamentary meeting at 4pm - 6pm in the Jubilee Room, House of Commons.

Parents, family members and campaigners are available for interview.

- For media enquiries please email Sophie Flint in the communications team at [sophie.flint@2bd.me](mailto:sophie.flint@2bd.me) / [media@forthe100.org.uk](mailto:media@forthe100.org.uk)
- For further information about the campaign, please visit <https://www.forthe100.org.uk/>  
<https://www.thelearnnetwork.org.uk/>