

# Well accommodated: University vice-chancellors' residences

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## Introduction

University vice-chancellors are handsomely paid for their work, with an average salary of over £250,000.<sup>1</sup> In addition to these bumper salaries, they are sometimes also afforded additional perks, including residences with their own staff. In contrast, many students undertaking courses at their institutions are going on rent strikes because they cannot afford their student accommodation during the covid-19 pandemic.<sup>2</sup>

Tuition fees continue to rise, with the current maximum rate in England set at £9,250 per year. The government predicts that only 25 per cent of current undergraduates who take out loans will repay them in full, with the rest of the cost picked up by the taxpayer.<sup>3</sup> Outstanding loans alone are set to rise from £140 billion in March 2020 to £560 billion by 2050.<sup>4</sup> The millions of UK taxpayers who haven't attended university therefore also have a direct stake in university spending, as well as current and future students.

To reduce unnecessary costs, universities should remove official residences for vice-chancellors and make them responsible for their own accommodation. These properties can then be used for other university purposes, sold or leased out.

## Key findings

- In 2019-20, 26 universities spent a total of **£512,309** on rent, mortgages and other associated costs relating to residences for the vice-chancellor or their equivalent position. This includes utilities, insurance, maintenance, staff, TV licence and other associated costs. The average spend for each of these universities over this period was £19,704.
- At least four university residences were worth more than £1 million. These include Cambridge (£4.5 million), Oxford (£2 million), the University of East Anglia (£1.7 million) and the University of Strathclyde (£1.2 million).<sup>5</sup>
- Three universities (Glasgow, Cambridge and SOAS) spent **more than £50,000** on providing and maintaining a residence for their vice-chancellor or equivalent.
- The university that spent the most was the **University of Glasgow**, spending **£89,463** on remunerating residence staff.
- SOAS, University of London spent **£60,000 in rent** alone for their director's residence, costing £5,000 per month.
- The **University of Cambridge** spent **almost £40,000** on two members of staff for their vice-chancellor's lodge. This is alongside the **£463** the university spent on insuring works of art on loan from the Fitzwilliam Museum on display in the residence.
- In 2019-20, **Ulster University** spent the most on utilities, insurance and tax for the residence, **totalling £22,866**. This includes £10,000 on utilities, £9,480 on telephone and data charges, and £3,386 on rates.
- The Open University, principally known for off-campus studying, spent £21,004 on its residence – Wednesden House – including £1,886 on fabric.

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<sup>1</sup> Johnson, J., Average university vice chancellor now earns more than £250k for first time, as majority given pay rises in last year despite criticism, *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 February 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Packham, A., 'I can't afford my student housing during lockdown, so I'm striking', *The Guardian*, 11 June 2020.

<sup>3</sup> Bolton, P., *Student Loan Statistics*, 9 December 2020, House of Commons Library, p. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Petre, J., *No wonder university fees are soaring! The fat-cat vice chancellors who live rent-free in lavish homes worth £60m*, Mail Online, [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4805684/University-bosses-live-rent-free-homes-worth-60m.html](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4805684/University-bosses-live-rent-free-homes-worth-60m.html), (accessed 7 January 2021).

- Three universities (Royal Academy of Music, Ulster and Strathclyde) **paid for the TV licence** in their vice-chancellor's residence.
- The **University of East Anglia** spent £31,761 in total residence maintenance costs, including **£10,982 on cutting grass** and **£5,242 on trimming shrubs**.
- The majority of universities, or 100 of the 143 institutions which responded, did not provide residences for their vice-chancellors or equivalent.

[Click here to see how much each university spent on vice-chancellors' residences](#)

**Table 1: spending by universities on vice-chancellor residences, 2019-20**

University	Total spent (£)
The University of Glasgow	89,463
The University of Cambridge	68,067
SOAS, University of London	60,000
The University of East Anglia	42,102
Ulster University	37,021
The University of Exeter	24,909
City, University of London	22,573
The Open University	21,004
The University of Aberdeen	18,448
The University of Oxford	17,894
Royal Academy of Music	16,120
Imperial College London	12,258
London Business School	11,000
Royal Holloway and Bedford New College	10,654
London School of Economics and Political Science	10,012
The University of Bristol	9,806
Bishop Grosseteste University	8,054
University of Wales Trinity Saint David	7,164
The University of Strathclyde	6,991
Queen Mary University of London	6,599
University College London	6,304
Cranfield University	2,397
King's College London	1,405
The University of Stirling	1,000
Heriot-Watt University	564
Harper Adams University	500

**Table 2: five highest spending universities on maintenance, 2019-20**

University	Total spent (£)	Notes
The University of East Anglia	31,762	This total is inclusive of remuneration for 1.5 FTE members of staff. It includes: £10,982 on grass cutting, edging and lawn maintenance; £5,242 on shrubs, borders and beds; £8,112 on trees and hedges; and £7,426 on other ground maintenance
The University of Cambridge	22,756	For buildings and grounds maintenance
The University of Exeter	18,731	£14,231 on maintenance works and £4,500 on cleaning
Ulster University	14,000	Annual costs are approximate
Imperial College London	12,258	£7,152 on cleaning and £5,106 on maintenance

**Table 3: five highest spending universities on utilities, insurance and tax, 2019-20**

University	Total spent (£)	Notes
Ulster University	22,866	£10,000 on utility bills, £9,480 on telephone and data charges and £3,386 on rates (council tax equivalent) in 2020-21
The University of Aberdeen	11,430	£3,819 on gas, £3,032 on electricity, £4,179 on council tax, and £400 on insurance
The Open University	11,163	£3,845 on business rates/council tax, £2,674 on gas, £1,490 on electricity, £328 on water, £1,960 on internet/telephone and £866 on insurance
The University of East Anglia	10,340	£8,010 on utility bills, £791 on internet, £1,215 on telephone contract and £325 on building insurance
London School of Economics and Political Science	10,012	£3,546 on service charges including building insurance, £3,133 on utilities, £2,881 on council tax and £452 on internet

## Methodology

This research was undertaken by issuing freedom of information (FOI) requests to all higher education institutions in the United Kingdom. The request asked the following:

*This is an information request relating to the Vice-Chancellor's residence.*

*Please include the following information for the university's 2019-20 financial year:*

- *The number and total remuneration of staff either permanent or part-time employed to maintain the residence.*
- *A breakdown of the costs for the internet, telephone contract, utility bills, council tax, building insurance etc.*
- *A breakdown of maintenance costs such as window cleaning, house cleaning, hedge cutting, fence repairing etc.*
- *The cost of claiming a TV licence.*
- *The value of any allowances, such as a meal allowance for the residence to be used to host events.*
- *The total cost of rental or mortgage payments for the residence.*

*This request relates to residences for the Vice-Chancellor or the equivalent position such as Principal.*

Of the 165 institutions contacted, 143 fulfilled the request by providing a partial or full response. For the remaining 22, no response was received. Of those who sent a response, 100 did not provide a residence for their vice-chancellor or their equivalent. This equates to 70 per cent of the higher education institutions which responded. Any responses received after the 17 December 2020 were not included in this data set.