# NUS Policy 2020

This document contains all policy passed at NUS democratic conferences in 2020. The policy is made up of policy passed by:

- National Conference
- Liberation Conference
- NUS Scotland Conference
- NUS Wales Conference
- NUS-USI Conference

# Contents

# Policy passed at National Conference 2020

## Emergency Policy: NUS' response to the Covid-19 pandemic

### Summary

This emergency policy addresses the COVID-19 (Coronavirus) pandemic, setting out the key issues our members face and how we can unite as a movement and work to support everyone affected by this crisis in a very fluid situation.

### What's the problem?

The COVID-19 pandemic is the single biggest public health crisis in generations and has already had a profound impact on the UK and around the globe.

NUS must ensure the health, safety and wellbeing of the seven million students and apprentices we represent as an absolute priority as government, sector agencies and wider society respond to the crisis.

From international students who cannot travel home and need visa extensions, to FE students uncertain how they will be assessed as examinations are cancelled, to student renters unable to pay their rent because they have been made redundant to their part-time job and many more, our members have been affected in a myriad of ways.

While many government departments (in Westminster and the devolved nations governments) and agencies are responding to the crisis, with such a fluid situation and with so many challenges the needs of students and apprentices could be overlooked or unintended or unrecognised consequences arise from those decisions which are made.

As well as the impacts on individual students and apprentices, there is a major risk the disruption will undermine the financial sustainability of providers across further and higher education, with enormous consequences for our members long after the pandemic itself recedes.

### What's the solution?

Our guiding principles are:

- The immediate safety, health and wellbeing of students

- Preventing students falling into poverty or homelessness due to coronavirus

- Prioritising the most vulnerable communities and those hardest hit by coronavirus including disabled students, students with underlying health conditions, international students, estranged students, students in precarious work, students on low incomes or in poverty

- Supporting, championing and protecting students who are working in frontline services in healthcare, social work, supermarkets, food production and other essential services

- Ensuring that the delivery of education, research and related functions (admissions, regulation etc) are as effective and fair as they can be under the circumstances and only to proceed with delivery where it is accessible and appropriate to do so

Key solutions include:

Institutions, sector bodies and governments should work in close partnership with students' unions and NUS on their changing responses to coronavirus. And they should communicate clearly and directly with students on what's happening.

Governments, institutions and others should work with SUs and NUS to address various detailed issues and challenges across education in the following areas to ensure students are safe, healthy, and aren't falling into poverty or other danger:

- The health & mental health of students and apprentices
- Pay, conditions and support for healthcare students and others pulled into frontline service work
- Student housing
- Student finance
- International student visa extensions
- The cancellation of examination in schools and FE
- The HE admissions cycle
- The regulation and quality of education including apprentices who may not be able to continue in their programmes

Governments should urgently address the following wider issues that disproportionately impact on students:
- Rent and utility bill holidays for those who cannot pay
- Pay replacement for people who are self-employed and in precarious work

As specific solutions are identified, governments in the different nations of the UK must step in to support providers or individual students, especially where this is beyond the means of providers or local government and where private interests are unwilling to help.

Governments must also look to support providers who experience financial difficulties and limit as far as possible the risk not only of provider failure but of cuts to staffing and services which undermine the student experience and the ability of providers to support society at large.

# Priority Policy 2020: Building a Movement to Transform Education

The National Education Service is NUS's ten year campaign for a better education which is funded, lifelong and accessible.

Our work for the next two years will focus on building a positive vision of education with students' unions and winning the public argument for that vision. The ideas submitted to this proposal will be key to informing that vision.

## The problems

*Education Funding*
Governments prioritise setting lower tax rates for high earners and deprioritise education funding. Some politicians want students to fill the funding gap with higher fees.

Funding for adult education in England had declined by 45% between 2010/11 and 2018.[1] Spending per student for those in 16-18 colleges fell by 12% in the same period. These cuts result in difficulties providing services and recruiting and retaining staff who, with limited budgets, often struggle to provide the life-changing and inspiring learning experience they want to.

Funding for education has declined across the UK. In Northern Ireland, universities receive 27% less public funding than they did in 2004. In Scotland, core funding for universities is £127million below the level it was at in 2014.

*Lifelong education*
We face a future where many jobs have not yet been invented. Our education system is not set up to support retraining and personal development.

Education is currently geared towards finding a linear path through school, college and university and funding and expectations are based on this. Assumptions are made related to a students' age, stage in life and level of previous education.

Returning to education is often impossible as funding is not available to support students with previous qualifications, and education is not flexible enough to suit modern students and their lives.

*Accessible education*
Accessing education is about overcoming the barriers to taking up education and ensuring that students and learners can thrive once they're there.

One of the biggest barriers to entering tertiary education is the lack of maintenance funding for students. In Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, a mix of grant and loan funding is available for students on a means-tested basis, alongside additional funding based on their needs, while in England grant funding for students has been abolished. This has led to the poorest students, who are eligible for the largest student loans, graduating with the greatest amount of debt. This debt has a negative impact on student mental health, exacerbating a situation which is already in crisis.[2]

In further education, there is a mix of support available, depending on where you are in the UK. However, in England, those who get the Learning Support Fund can usually only spend it within their college. This system is replicated with some bursaries in higher education as well.

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[1] https://www.ifs.org.uk/publications/13307
[2] https://www.independent.co.uk/news/education/education-news/student-loan-debt-harms-mental-health-careers-home-ownership-years-a8392326.html

International students see the worst impacts of the free market. Higher education providers can charge them as much as they like, and they are not able to get maintenance funding. They are often exploited by cash-hungry institutions for their fees, while having to negotiate a hostile immigration environment.

Working class students access education at a lower rate than their more well off peers and have a drop out rate of almost double.[3] There is such stratification in education that widening participation and access initiatives often focus on getting those who would anyway go to university into a more elite institution, not breaking down the barriers to education as a whole. Institutions carry out widening participation activity to benefit themselves and their recruitment targets; not to better the life chances of working class students.

Problems with retention exist across education. This is often rooted in students and learners lacking community in education, feeling alienated on hostile campuses with monitored prayer spaces, restrictive clothing rules in colleges and high course costs. When students arrive in education, they can find the current inequalities in society reproduced, shown in attainment and wage gaps, unfair treatment of postgraduates, sexual harassment and power imbalances between staff and students, and poor records on reasonable adjustments.

There are many other barriers faced by students in accessing education, not least the costs and conditions of housing and transport; however these issues require their own strands of work.

**The solutions**

When we launched the National Education Service, we said that the first three years of the campaign would be dedicated to setting out our vision and winning the public argument. With this motion, we have published a discussion paper which is designed to help us build this vision.

To win the argument, we need to change the way that we talk about education. We need to stop having a hard divide in our movement and in our education system between further and higher education. Let's talk about the qualifications that you're studying for, not the buildings that you study in.

Education needs a redesign to allow new routes into it regardless of age, stage of life and previous study. Our NES will be clear about welcoming students from across the world to live and study without restrictions.

Power needs to be spread throughout institutions so that students have a meaningful say in their education: through strong students' unions. From curriculum design and decolonisation to clothing rules in colleges: education should belong to and be shaped by the community who use it. And education should be out in the community: we will make sure that divides between towns and education institutions are broken down, so that everyone feels pride and ownership, not alienation.

We need to be real about the value in all forms of education and make sure it's high quality. We need high quality technical education, and apprenticeships that come with proper off the job training. At the moment apprentices can be exploited by private training providers, where they are offered poor quality training and left without protection when these go bankrupt. This cannot be allowed to go on.

We know the issue that underpins our problems is student funding. We'll work out a sustainable and fair funding formula and shout about it from the rooftops, ensuring that

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[3] https://fullfact.org/education/are-more-working-class-students-dropping-out-university/

students receive a living income all year round – in line with the real living wage - with funding which creates equity of opportunity no matter their circumstances.

While we share common goals, the way that we reach them and the barriers we overcome will be different depending on our devolved national contexts. We'll spend the next two years winning the public argument for our vision of education, we'll widen our reach and build organising capacity to support students' unions winning changes on their own campuses. We'll amplify students' unions' victories, so that a win for one of us can become a win for all of us, and together we can build a movement to transform education.

## Sub-proposal 1: Further Education

### What are the problems?

The budget cuts within the Further Education sector have had a massive impact on students, teachers and colleges as a whole with the Head of Ofsted recently speaking out about the negative impact. Colleges, due to the lack of funding, are unable to hire the number of professionals needed to teach and support students causing strain on current members of staff and in some cases are forced to ask teachers to teach subject areas that are foreign to them. We now find that teachers are learning alongside the students and are being faced with double the workload which effects their overall well-being. If students are being taught by professionals who aren't qualified within the field students may be taught incorrectly and/or not to basic standard and it can force students to teach themselves; which has a negative effect on their well-being and their overall college experience. The academic prospectuses across the FE sector have also taken a hit by the budget cuts. Due to lack of funding for new staff and colleges being unable to pay existing staff to teach other subjects, subject areas such as languages have been cut with half of sixth forms and college nationally being forced to drop subjects. This has a huge impact on students, as they may be unable to reach their own personal aspirations. Finally we know that there is a rising number of FE students across the country so it fair funding has never been so important.

### What could be the solutions?
FE students should not be deprived from the education they deserve which why is more funding needs to be available across the sector. Furthermore, language courses should be protected to ensure that students are able to develop skills in their chosen field and ensure that we continue to embrace different languages and cultures and celebrate our diverse communities.

### Suggestions for implementation
We resolve that NUS should work with key partners including AoC to lobby government for increased funding in the Further Education sector.

## Sub-proposal two: Student Numbers

**What is the problem?**
• Since the admissions cap was lifted in 2015, University numbers have continued to increase and the Office for Students predicts another 10% increase in the next four years.
• Nevertheless, capacity for these students at Universities across the country has failed to keep up.
• Lectures are that overcrowded, some students are forced to watch from home.
• Universities are becoming increasingly exclusive for many students. Commuting students struggle to travel to and from campus at acceptable hours, often travelling late into the evening because of post-6pm teaching. Student parents and carers are having to fork out for additional care in the evenings, with no additional support. Students with disabilities are being forced to miss out on lectures due to them being held in inaccessible venues or difficulties attending lectures late into the evening.
• Staff are overburdened with their workloads and insufficient numbers and consequently, are having to strike for better pay and conditions. Therefore, the quality and quantity of our education is diminishing, despite tuition fees continuing to increase.
• Our Postgraduate student teachers are struggling to dedicate the time they need to their own work as they are forced to pick up additional work, with unacceptable pay conditions.
• Higher student numbers has made affordable student accommodation scarce, students are being increasingly forced into expensive housing, of poor quality and further away from their support networks and communities.
• Our University experiences are more than just lectures and seminars, it is a time for students to get involved with part-time jobs and extra-curriculars. However, student number growth and late lectures has meant students are increasingly struggling to maintain a work-life balance, with detrimental impacts on their mental health.

**What could be the solution?**
• We want Universities to recognise that unsustainable student number growth is no longer acceptable.
• We want Universities to commit to proactive rather than reactive infrastructure developments and remove teaching from non-academic spaces to enable our student groups to continue.
• There should be percentage increase limits for student intake to ensure that students are not used as cash cows to fund University vanity projects and ensure sustainable student growth.
• There should be restrictions on EU and International Student Fees, who are being increasingly used by Universities to fund income shortfalls.
• We want the Universities to stop using online lecture recordings to replace actual teaching spaces and for the OfS to identify those universities that are over-capacity and restrict their intake until capacity and accessibility issues are resolved.

## Sub-proposal Three: Awards Gap

**Issues and context**

Inequality and inaccessibility are rife in our education systems. This can be seen to manifest in awarding gaps between Black and white students, and disabled and non-disabled students; it can be seen in the physical inaccessibility of university buildings and accommodation; in the justification of transphobia in academia as "freedom of speech"; in the gender and ethnicity pay gap across the sector; to name only a few examples.

We are beginning to hold our institutions to account - Ofs has now mandated UK universities to devise Access and Participation Plans (APPs) in order to address access of minority students to education, awarding gaps, and retention rates. However APPs are extremely limited, and do not use a holistic approach. Even universities with large populations of BAME, disabled, mature students and students with caring responsibilities still have awarding gaps, showing that simple representation does not erase the issues of structural inequality at the root of our education system. Universities are looking for a one-size easy fix for awarding gaps, and some cite looking for 'best practice' and standardized 'evidence' as a reason why they haven't done any work. Only a varied approach that covers all forms of education inequality at their root will work.

The Black and Minority Ethnic (BAME) Award Gap is the difference in a First Class (1st) or Upper Second Class (2.1) degree classifications between BAME students and their white counterparts. There continues to be a significant difference between the proportion of white British students receiving a 1st or 2.1 compared to minority ethnic groups who are UK – domiciled. The difference between white and black students gaining a First or Upper Second Class degree is 21.8 percentage points, and the difference between white and Asian students is 10.5 percentage points.

We are using the term 'awarding gap' instead of 'attainment gap', because the language of 'attainment gaps' reinforces the deficit-model, in which the onus of any disparities is placed on the individual students and groups affected, as opposed to recognising them as a failure of the system.

Many graduate/post-graduate level jobs have a minimum of a 2.1 degree classification entry requirement which means that BAME graduates are less likely to benefit from these opportunities. Students should be aware of the BAME Award Gap of the institution they are applying to help them make the best choice for them to pursue their degree as where they study – depending on the size of the award gap – will most likely have a significant impact on their degree result and potential job prospects.

In order to make real change we must understand that racism, sexism, queerphobia and ableism are woven into the way our education is structured. Inequality not only exists in the structural forms alluded to for students, but for staff also, who face gender and ethnicity pay gaps, hostile environment, increasingly casualised contracts and more. The way institutions are governed, for businesses and for profit turns education into a commodity only affordable to a privileged few, rather than a right that should be accessible to all. It is present in the investments of institutions in environmental and human devastation, in fossil fuels and arms companies.

Multiple factors include:
Lack of institutional accessibility - no introduction to the current British education system for international and mature students who have not experienced academia in this way before.
Piling student debts
Are Mental Health services on campuses incorporating racial trauma into their practices? Racism is and racist micro-aggressions are traumatic with scientific studies showing that racism contributes to a rise in Cortisol, the stress hormone (https://www.intechopen.com/books/mental-disorders-theoretical-and-empirical-perspectives/racism-and-mental-illness-in-the-uk).

Inadequate and lack of support for students and academics who experience racist and xenophobic violence on campus.
Students not being able to access childcare during teaching time
Lack of accessible technology required for learning in current practices
Fitness to practice / Fitness to Study procedures looming over disabled students and students with caring responsibilities
Classes starting at 8.30 and ending at 7 stop access to learning for student parents and carers

**What could be the solution?**

Universities and colleges should move away from this and associated 'quick fix' approaches to these deeply entrenched structural inequalities. Institutions should end intrinsically racist, sexist, queerphobic and ableist structures and practices.

Universities and colleges should retrofit their curricula to contextualise and critique the coloniality and the structures of inequality inherent in the history and the practice of every discipline.

Make APP transparent so that students can collaborate and work together

Universities should be forced to publish their Award gap so that prospective students are aware of the implications of studying at that institution. Furthermore, and public Award Gap will push universities to take tackling the problem more seriously as it may affect the income they gain from students.

Students should support UCU and other relevant unions to fight gender and ethnicity pay gaps and other manifestations of structural inequality that affect staff working in education.

Students should be encouraged to make divestment calls that make the link between sustainability and investment in the arms trade.

**Suggestions for implementation**
NUS should condemn links between education and fossil fuels, and links between education and war.

The NUS should support Students' Unions to lobby for physical spaces and digital learning to be accessible for students and staff with a range of access needs.

# Let's End this Mental Health Crisis together, once and for all

**What is the problem?**

There is a mental health crisis gripping the entire education system across the UK.  The issue is complex, multi-faceted and is caused by a range of different factors affecting our members differently.

Many Universities are seeing a tragic spike in the amount of student suicides including the University of Stirling, with 3 student suicides in the 2018/19 academic year alone.

The 2019 Save The Student accommodation survey found that 50% of respondents had struggled to pay rent and 63% said this had an effect on their mental health.

Many of the current support structures in our current education system are outdated and based around a 9-5, Monday to Friday campus culture, which is no longer suitable for a wide range of our members.

Many students face further challenges in life which may stem from being part of a minority group and accessing mental health support can be a huge factor in this. These could include: LGBT+ students, black students and people of colour, disabled students, care leavers, carers, mature students, students from widening participation backgrounds, first-generation students, international students, students for whom English is a second language, commuter students, placement students and so many more.

The marketised education system has eroded collaboration across the education sector and meant that student health and wellbeing has been shifted down the priority list - often underneath the accounts.

Multiple different sector bodies, organisations, universities and colleges are working in silos without leadership and a coherent national strategy. In addition to this, the NHS across all nations is overstretched, under-resourced, with unnaceptable waiting times and often refers our members back to their institutions for support.

Many front-line staff are not adequately trained and equipped to be able to support their students.  Especially in Further Education. Having staff trained to support their members at a base level, a whole system approach and greater awareness will also help to tackle the stigma around mental health within the education sector.

**What could the solutions be?**

Better NHS funding within mental health is essential and we can't put the responsibility only on educational institutions to fund mental health services. We believe that everyone has the right to free and accessible mental health care, including international students.

There should be the choice of how to get your support – inside or outside education, out of learning hours or safeguarded peer to peer support schemes.

That mental health support must be at the core of any universities policy, as the university cannot claim to be looking after students' wellbeing if students are left unfit to study through lack of well-funded mental health support.

That the response from many universities has been too slow, putting profits over the wellbeing of

students, and we should condemn this behaviour.

There should be holistic guidance on what students should demand from institutions, both in terms of funding and practical tips on activities and programmes to help improve wellbeing.

There should be guidance for the sector on the following:

• Culturally competent, sensitive, and professionally trained staff, policies and procedures.
• Free disability screening for all students and apprentices.
• Confidential counselling services.
• A 24-hour, accessible, NHS-led support service dedicated for students.
• Specific services for minority demographics and estranged students
• Kinder culture on social media, the impact it has on mental health and cyberbullying in particular

Students should have access to dual-registration at GP surgeries.

We want to be at the forefront of a partnership approach with other sector stakeholders, such as, but not limited to the Association of Colleges, Universities UK and the Office for Students. Such an approach has led to incredible work within Think Positive in Scotland and significant funding won in Wales.

That more students, University, college and students' union staff should be given the opportunity to access training from mental health training providers in order to help support both students' mental wellbeing and those of their colleagues.

**Ideas for Implementation**

NUS needs to identify and partner with MH training providers to offer SU's a range of training opportunities,

Some local areas give out information for young people, not just about mental health services but also about other youth services that are available – we should look at how this approach can be taken up elsewhere.

As well as engaging with sector work such as the postgrad wellbeing thesis and the student mental health charter and the Association of Colleges Mental health charter, we must work more collaboratively and follow the lead of incredible work within think positive in Scotland and significant funding won with NUS Wales.

NUS should drive a partnership approach with other sector stakeholders, such as, but not limited to the Association of Colleges, Universities UK and the Office for Students. This partnership should seek to produce a State of the Nation report every year, assessing the scale of the mental health crises in our institutions. The report should help to share good practice, identify areas for improvement and inform a nationwide strategy into combatting the mental health crisis.

Finally, NUS should work with stakeholders to look into the impact that social media has on mental health and in particular, cyber-bullying. This should inform an NUS-led campaign focusing on developing a kinder culture on social media.

We want NUS to work collaboratively with the sector to develop training for councillors and support staff to help our students. We want NUS to create resources to help SUs lobby for culturally

competent mental health services on their campus.

NUS should work to show the change in student demographic and need and how support structures can be better to deliver for your members.  In particular, NUS should help to produce

NUS should recommission the Pound in Your Pocket report, looking into students' experiences of the cost of study.  The study should cover the entire UK post-16 education sector. The findings of the report should form a basis for exploring the differences in UK education systems, sharing good practice and exploring areas of weakness within each of the systems.  The evidence can then form a basis for lobbying within each nation.

US must create a guide on what you should demand from your institutions both in terms of funding and practical tips on activities and programmes to help improve wellbeing.

NUS can lobby for greater funding for the NHS to ensure we get better mental health support, but we can also support students' unions in the immediate future.

That the influence of the individual Students Unions as well as NUS Scotland should be used to lobby universities to implement more adequate mental health facilities, with equally adequate funding.

We mandate NUS to campaign to keep our NHS in public hands and free at the point of use for all, including international students who NUS should campaign to scrap the NHS surcharge.

## Sub-proposal 1: Students with caring responsibilities

As well as diversity and cultural competence in mental health services NUS should look into how accessible student mental health services are for mature students / part time students / students with caring responsibilities. These are all students with specific needs around mental health who may feel student mental health services are not really designed for them or with their needs in mind.

# Declaring a Climate Emergency. Green New Deal for FE and HE

**Summary**

The climate crisis is the greatest issue of our time. Extreme weather events are on the increase and those who have done the least to cause climate change are bearing the brunt of the impact. The past year has seen mounting public concern and action on climate, ranging from the school strikes to widespread protest.

We call on the UK further and higher education system to undertake rapid reforms to reduce carbon emissions and to ensure students are prepared for a future which will be drastically impacted by the climate crisis. Rather than simply declaring 'climate emergencies' and carrying on business as usual, we want to see wide-reaching reforms across FE and HE in response to the crisis.

**What's the problem?**

The Climate Crisis poses an existential threat to the human race [4]

The Climate Crisis is a class issue which will affect the poorest and most vulnerable across the globe the most, despite the biggest contributions to the globe's CO2 emissions being produced by western countries.[5]

Since 2019, India has seen the wettest monsoon season killing 1750 people, Australia experienced apocalyptic fires that killed over a billion animals, the UK had its hottest day on record at 38.7 degrees celsius, and these freak weather events are increasing in frequency[6]

The 2018 IPCC report evidenced that our climate is currently already 1 degree hotter than pre-industrial levels, and we only have 12 years to put in sufficient work to ensure that the increase stays below 1.5 degrees.[7]

The Earth's climate has changed throughout history and the effects of this are everywhere. From extreme weather, shrinking ice caps to sea levels rising to name a few of the effects.

More and more young people are trying to actively change the products they use to lower their carbon footprint and become more sustainable.

Organisations, businesses and charities can do much more to change the way they work into being more sustainable.

Many FE institutions don't have the resources or scrutiny to support their procedures, building, departments and students to become sustainable and often large campaigns about divestment cut of FE student unions and associations from getting involved

Sustainability is an ideal state where human activity does not degrade the environment, but maintains natural systems and resources for future generations.

Students who are more actively involved with sustainability and community projects are more likely to take their skills out into their community and workplace and continue to make positive change.

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[4] https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/environment-and-conservation/2019/11/climate-change-driving-entire-planet-to-dangerous-tipping
[5] https://medium.com/radical-urbanist/climate-change-is-a-class-issue-cd6c143d38f6
[6] https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/eye-of-the-storm/the-top-10-weather-and-climate-stories-of-2019/ https://www.wwf.org.au/get-involved/bushfire-emergency
[7] https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2018/oct/08/global-warming-must-not-exceed-15c-warns-landmark-un-report

Campaigns that work for HE institutions are often difficult to rollout in to FE with FE needing bespoke campaigns.

There are a number of different organisations that NUS can working with to help student unions tackle climate change and in particular support FE institutions to become greener and more sustainable.

Institutions may use 'eco-anxiety' as a veiled attempt to avoid teaching and learning about the climate crisis. We know that the best response, instead, is to enable students to take action and develop their political agency.

SOS-UK is currently working with UCU to design a 'model' FE and HE Green New Deal which can be used by students' unions and local UCU branches to pressure institutions to make wide-reaching reforms to make strides toward the sector being carbon neutral by 2030.

This is inspired by the enormous success of the Green New Deal brought forward by joint campaigning by staff and students at Goldsmiths University. As with the Goldsmiths example, the Green New Deal 'model claim' will encompass teaching, learning, and research; operations, including catering, travel, energy, and investments; and broader commitments to carbon neutrality by 2030.

As students' unions take greater action on sustainability, the role of Environment and Ethics, or Sustainability, or similar, Part-Time Officers becomes ever more important. As PTOs these roles often receive little training and support.

Young people have always been at the forefront of large scale social change and climate change is no different as evidenced by the profile of Greta Thunberg and prevalence of school climate strikes all over the world.

NUS therefore is in a perfect position to be able to mobilise young people to lead the conversation on the Climate Crisis and coordinate activity that gives ourselves the best chance to conserve and save our planet.

When students lead, society follows and our communities benefit.  It's time for NUS to put the climate emergency at its core and to demonstrate the leadership we need.

**What could be the solution?**

- NUS to declare a climate emergency and urge members and other sector organisations to do the same

- Demonstrate commitment and leadership we wish to see across the education and union sectors.

- Recognise the negative impact of the climate crisis on students' mental health and wellbeing, termed eco-anxiety.

- Campaign for a Green New Deal in universities and colleges – the Green New Deal, a concept originated in the USA inspired by Roosevelt's New Deal, outlines a package of policy reforms designed to tackle the climate crisis and income inequality

- The HE and FE sectors should become carbon neutral and divert from fossil fuels

- Environment and Ethics Officers should receive more training and support in their roles – in the lead-up to COP26, having a network of skilled student organisers will be key in leading student action on campus and across the UK.

- Lobby the government for greater funding for colleges to use to develop greener practices.

- Support for FE unions and associations to develop and plan effective sustainability campaigns and policies.

- Highlight and celebrate sustainability campaigns that occur across the UK that students and their unions are doing around the climate emergency

- The Government should launch a carbon neutrality fund that Universities, SUs and other organisations can access to facilitate their ambitions to become carbon neutral

- OfS should incorporate regulatory expectations around sustainable practice and operations in universities

**Ideas for implementation**

At the same time as the declaration, NUS will publish a detailed plan outlining how it plans to be carbon neutral by 2030.

There has been increased concern across the sector about this issue (the impact on mental health) and so, through SOS-UK, NUS will commission research into the underlying cause of such anxiety and propose solutions.

Work with partners like SOS-UK and UCU to campaign for universities and colleges to adopt their own Green New Deal.

Net-Zero Carbon Campaign

NUS will convene a group of students and elected officers, through SOS-UK, to lead a climate emergency campaign. This group will research and publish every university and college's carbon reduction plans and compare them like for like. SOS-UK will support student campaigners and officers and laggard institutions to call for their institutions to commit to being net-zero by 2030.

This group will push institutions to implement plans that will take meaningful action in the face of the climate crisis. Institutions will be challenged to include campus operations, curriculum and research, investments, and landholdings. Traditionally carbon management plans include only campus operations, so this will extend the scope to fully cover institutions' impact.

This will include a continuation of the campaign for divestment from fossil fuels. In January, SOS-UK, in partnership with People and Planet, celebrated half of all UK universities having divested. This has shifted the narrative – universities that have yet to divest are now laggards in the face of the climate crisis. Through the net-zero carbon campaign, SOS-UK will support students and officers to campaign for more ethical re-investment and local off-setting solutions through land-use.

Through this work, we will hold institutions accountable to their 'climate emergency' declarations, ensuring that institutions cannot continue business as usual.

We call on SOS-UK to deliver an intensive summer training programme for such roles. This training will focus on the key campaigns for the year ahead and help to upskill these individuals to be effective campaigners. It will also establish a network for such officers and ensure they have access to the necessary peer-to-peer support.

Work with BUCS to improve the sustainability of travel to sport tournaments both in terms of mode of transport and geographic location relative to competitors

Work with SOS UK to develop a Carbon Rating system for the products SUs purchase through its consortium so students and students' unions can visibly see the carbon impact of products

Ensure that sustainability is embedded within each of the NUS UK training events for students and students' unions, such as Lead & Change and FEstival.

Work with colleagues in SOS UK to ensure that our members in further education are placed central to thinking and strategy and that they can easily access training opportunities and support

## Sub-proposal 1: Sustainable waste disposal within student accommodation

**What's the problem?**

Approximately 70% of full-time first year students live in student accommodation of some sort across the UK[1]. Many of these student accommodation providers do not make recycling accessible for students. With thousands of students living in student accommodation, it is important that we encourage accommodation providers to recycle student waste in an efficient manner.

With student Groups across the country campaigning for the future of our planet and with many Students' Unions declaring a climate emergency, it is important for the NUS to support the movement.

According to the National Geographic, 91% of plastic is not recycled. The NUS should be encouraging students' to recycle as a first step to saving the planet by ensuring that the waste infrastructure of student accommodations enables the residents to practise these behaviours[2].

For many living in student accommodation, this is the first time students will be responsible for their own waste and it is important to provide both the students and the accommodation providers with the tools to reduce their waste and promote sustainability

Moving out to university is a key transition period in many young people's lives, so it is important that their new environment supports them in becoming conscientious and responsible citizens.

Private student accommodation companies are driven by profit, but form a critical part of many new & returning students' experience; accommodation companies should be more aware of the social impact of their practices.

**What could be the solution?**

Student accommodation providers should not only meet standard waste practices but actively encourage and enable students to recycle effectively.

Using the expertise of organisations such as People & Planet to develop tool kits for students' unions to educate students.

## Sub-proposal 2: Combatting Food Waste

**What's the Problem?**

Around 10 million tonnes of food and drink were wasted in the UK in 2019[1].

A significant portion of this waste (around 15%) is generated in the hospitality industry1, including Students' Union facilities.

Around 70% of food waste is generated in households, including by students.

Globally, the 1.3 billion tons of food loss and waste creates 8% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Decaying food waste releases methane, which has much higher impact as a greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide[2]. The build-up of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere is currently a major contributor to the ongoing climate disaster.

That around 10% of people over 15 years old in the UK report experiencing a struggle to get enough food to eat3 – one of the worst rates in Europe.

Student food sharing initiatives such as the Strathclyde Foodsharing Society have proved to be an effective way to provide access to food for disadvantaged students, as well as working to create links with local communities.

Foodbanks, composting initiatives, and food-sharing also have the added benefit of reducing amounts of food sent to landfill.

**What's could be the solution?**

Students' Unions to develop ways to minimise food waste at their facilities.

Student' Unions should raise awareness among students of the issue of food waste, and to educate students on techniques for minimising personal food waste and proper food waste disposal.

Support for Students' Union food waste schemes such as food banks, food-sharing societies, and composting initiative, and help raise awareness among students of these provisions.

There should be foodbank provisions with easy access from university student accommodation.

Developing and a set of achievable waste targets for Students' Unions to work towards.

Ensuring the student movement reviews its commercial supply chain to ensure food waste is minimised.

# International Student Support and Experience

**What's the issue?**

When International students arrive at University, they are already behind their British/Home peers. As if the transition to a new environment wasn't hard enough, they have to do so in the face of a completely new culture, often alone, with very little support. And yet, despite their diminished student experience, the significantly higher tuition fees they pay mean that Universities themselves only seek to benefit from further income - something that's only going to increase in light of Brexit. This is not reflected in International students' experience on the ground, however, but it should be, for the following reasons:

- Dropout rates: Some International students have to leave University because of financial pressures.

- Working hours: International students can't work for more than 20 hours a week. Awarding gap: Little spoken about, but this awarding gap also exists. Let's take note of it.

- Student finance: International students have to self-fund their entire academic journey, with no support from student finance. As a result of Brexit, this may also be true for EU students in the near future.

- Wellbeing: The points covered here mean that International students are fighting loneliness, struggling with their Mental Health, and are under extreme pressure to survive University. This can sometimes be all too much, and needs to be recognised. Negative wellbeing = a negative student experience.

The average undergraduate annual tuition fees for International Students is between £12,000-£19,000, although fees for courses except medicine can be as high as £26,000 per year. This means that international students are paying, on average, between £9,000 and £30,000 additionally over the course of their degree, although this can be much higher for those on higher priced courses and for course longer than three years.

Estimates by the Institute for Fiscal Study show that the average Government spending on teaching grants for home students is less than £2,500 over the course of a three-year degree.

Prices for postgraduate courses, in particular PhD level courses, can be higher than double for international students than for home students for exactly identical provision.

International students face additional problems to home student's external from their degree, such as private healthcare services (dentistry, dermatology etc.), being taken advantage of by utility companies charging significantly higher amounts and threatening court action to scare international students into paying.

As we witness a national scramble amongst HE institutions to cash in on the growth of the international student market, many Union officers are realising the dangers associated with this. Across the country, unprepared Universities will increase their international student numbers, without considering how to give them the best student experience possible. International students may be brought into institutions with issues of intolerance, or with insufficient employability, well-being and welfare support. International students deserve an equitable experience to home students, but instead there is great disparity in the international student experience across institutions. What is required is some form of standardisation across institutions and unions to ensure consistent experience and expectations.

**What could be the solution?**

First off, each University needs to have a structure for International student support.

Pre-arrival induction: Substantive information packs created for all International students going to University, for the purpose of preventing the spread of false information through Agents.

Accommodation - regular check-ins with International students in the lead up to them arriving at University, to ensure they've been able to secure accommodation, or offer support in finding some if not.

Induction to, and transition through University. The induction process for International students needs to be tailored to their needs and circumstances, so that they're able to better adapt to their new environment.

Financial support. There should be a pot of money ring-fenced for International student support that's used in critical situations (e.g. paying for food when a student can't afford to feed themselves). This will not be a normal bursary/scholarship, but an increased provision of funding support. It should also be proportional to the number of International students each University has.

Help should also be provided with regards to tuition fees, where the University step in to help in cases such as a student considering dropping out for that very reason. When students are skipping meals and struggling to pay for their rent, there's a clear problem, and it needs to be addressed.

Using a percentage of the excess fee to fund either a national body or work within universities to provide financial support (e.g. bursaries) to help international students with the additional costs that they face during their studies and after graduation.

Using a percentage of the excess fee to fund either a national body or work within universities to provide additional career advice tailored to international students, enabling them to get the most of the post-study work visa.

Using a percentage of the excess fee to fund either a national body or work within universities to provide international students with additional information to help promote awareness and protect international students from external exploitation.

After consultation with our international student community, institutions should adopt several policies focusing on the International student experience. There are six main focuses:

- The first focus is on employability. We propose that all institutions be obligated to host employability fairs where employers are prepared to hire international students. The employers must understand visa requirements and be willing to employ students and sponsor their necessary Tier 2 visa or visa alternative. Additionally, we propose there should be equitable access to out-of-term-time internships and work experience through better promotion.

- The second focus is on international student fees. Whilst the annual fee cap for undergraduate home students is set at £9,250, international students pay a maximum of £26,000. This leaves many international students feeling like merely income generators for the institution, rather than valued members of an academic community. There should be a meaningful and significant reduction of international student fees.

- The third focus is on housing and accommodation. Host institutions should offer and promote a housing guarantor support service in which the Universities can act as guarantors – what is widely used is a complex and costly online service. We also propose

that institutions present accommodation expectations upfront i.e. moving out into the city after first year; support engagement with local letting agents; and finally, offer better information on the expectations of living in the UK, i.e. Council Tax exemption for all students.

- The fourth focus is financial support. The pervading stereotype is that international students are wealthy, but in reality many rely on scholarships and other funding sources to support their studies and living costs. The current lack of standardisation across the sector creates an inconsistent experience which can dramatically impact the study of international students. We propose that all Unions request their host institutions contribute 5% of their annual international student fee income to a hardship fund accessible only for international students.

- The fifth focus is on liberation, equality, diversity and inclusivity for international students. There should be a set of policies that support, safeguard and inform international students who engage with their Union, whether as academic representatives, society members, full/part-time officers, or when meeting students in their independent Advice services. Host institutions should  adopt effective, user-friendly and well-promoted reporting platforms for instances of racial harassment and discrimination, as a method of safeguarding international students. Additionally, institutions should have a more accessible and representative wellbeing service, which understand the complexities of international student experience. Finally, all Union and University staff, should undergo LEDI training focused on the international student experience.

- The final focus is on effective promotion of what the university expects from international students when studying. Universities must offer accessible, unintimidating and free visa support and information to international students before and during their studies. They must also provide a free, accessible and comprehensive induction that covers the educational expectations of the institution (i.e. referencing, essay writing, exam procedures, mitigation, re-sit policies, personal tutor engagement) to ensure international students study with the same opportunities and expectations as home students, and are not disproportionately implicated in instances of academic misconduct.

To conclude, this is a vital step forward in ensuring equity and equality of opportunity and outcome in the experience of international students in UK universities.

## Sub-proposal 1: Employability fairs

This proposal is because regulation and enforcement of an obligation would be near impossible in practice and give an interesting, and unlikely, role on campus to (presumably) the Office for Students.

The NUS should work with other campaigning organisations, such as People & Planet, to resist the Home Office's encroachment onto our campuses and get senior management of educational institutions to commit to defending students and staff who are threatened with deportation.

We propose that when institutions host employability fairs, there must be employers present who are prepared to hire international students.

## Sub-proposal 2: Financial Support

Financial support. In addition to the pot of money. There should be food banks on campus for all students. I know many starving students and myself as an International Student I got pushed away from the finance team, everything I expressed I was starving. Making it difficult for me to study. If there were food banks, which more fortunate students can donate food, and the resources that need to survive. These are basic human rights which seem that Universities seem to completely ignore for International students. FEED US! - it can sometimes be isolating and feel like

International students are exploited, we definitely need to bridge the gap! I personally have had to starve until the Student Union gave me food vouchers lasting 5 days, just so I can eat.

2: The final focus on effective promotion of what the expectation from international students when studying- University can also do a better job at protecting the right n regulation for international students to study in the UK. Many flee society barriers from their families who might not be accepting of their degree, a few have been in a radical position in which their parents want them out of the UK. Regardless of geographical barriers or location. Universities can do a better job to help protect the right of international students. After all, they are students.

3. Housing- what happens if a student has no family in the UK- where are they meant to find a guarantor: Paying for a guarantor and then £825 for rent without bills- is daylight robbery. Guarantor prices in the UK can go up to £2000. Unfortunately, life is extremely hard for International Students on top of that, the current systems put in place. Definitely weren't made for us- or at least it can feel that way.

## Sub-proposal Three: Brexit

Interim measures to be decide upon as a matter of urgency based on Brexit and the amount of universities which will be seeking to increase their international student populations whilst not drastically improving services and resources for them. An item should also be included surrounding better support in relation to the post-study work visa.

# Fire safety, late buildings, accessibility and affordability - the need for a national student housing campaign

**What's the problem?**

Student accommodation is one of the biggest issues for students across the UK. Issues of accessibility, affordability and safety are of major concern. We urgently need to develop a holistic vision for what reforms we want to see to the sector and mobilise to win them whilst these opportunities are here.

In recent years NUS and student led campaigns such as RENT STRIKE have had some big wins for student accommodation, but it is vital in the absence of a VP Welfare this work continues as no other organisation is going to do this work and continue to call out private providers who profit from our students.

This academic year started with hundreds of students left without student halls due to late developments or made to live far away from educational establishments because of lack of suitable accommodation.

In Bolton we saw a block of student halls go up in flames, more needs to be done to ensure this never happens again and that flammable cladding is removed from all student accommodation.

Students deserve accessible, affordable and safe accommodation regardless of where they study or their financial situation.

During the past year it has become apparent that student accommodation is finally on the political agenda with events organised by UUK and the Universities Minister. NUS has played a key role in these discussions and it should continue to do so in the absence of a VP Welfare.

Issues around student accommodation are being raised in all parliaments and Scottish Labour included it within their election manifesto. We want to see all political parties focusing on making student accommodation better.

The welfare campaign and disabled students' campaign have successfully lobbied for reforms to the codes of standards to ensure student accommodation is more accessible, but this work should not be forgotten within the new structures of NUS. It is vital NUS continues to do this work.

Late buildings have disrupted too many students this year we want NUS to build on the work of the past year and ensure compensation is mandatory.

**What could be the solution?**

In light of Grenfell, and the fire in Bolton student accommodation it is imperative the work on fire safety does not stop.

All flammable cladding should be removed from educational buildings and accommodation including social housing.

The NUS Affordability in Education paper began the process of articulating a new vision for affordable accommodation. We need a holistic vision for the future of student accommodation and what reforms we want to see.

Cut the Rent groups and student housing campaigns should be supported and there should also be a national campaign around a vision to secure more affordable and safer housing for all.

The affordability structures being implemented within the Mayor of London's Plan should be explored further as the basis for reforms around the country.

**Ideas for Implementation**

NUS must fulfil the recommendation from the Poverty Commission to write a full vision for the future of student accommodation and what reforms we want to see

# Parity in Healthcare for all students and apprentices

**What's the problem?**

Everyone has the right to access equitable healthcare. The current healthcare system is not designed to support a transient student and apprentice population that has continued to grow over recent years. The 2019 general election result suggests government policy over the next five years is likely to exacerbate students' and apprentices' inability to access healthcare, rather than improve it.

Students and apprentices form a large portion of the population in a lot of major cities across the UK. Students spend around two thirds of their year living in their university city, yet are only able to register permanently at one GP surgery at a time. On top of this, the infrastructure and processes of the National Health Service (NHS) make it inherently difficult for students and apprentices to access healthcare, such as having to undergo multiple referrals to different locations for one health issue, conform to rigid times for GP appointments, and pay charges for prescriptions and medical notes.

The NHS describe students as an atypical population, and thus GPs are encouraged to give special consideration to the types of issues likely to be common within student populations. We know that students experience lower wellbeing than young adults as a whole, and a 2019 survey of 38,000 students from 140 Universities, found that 21.5% of respondents had a mental health diagnosis studies, and can have a detrimental impact on their academic progression, retention and learning outcomes. Health issues that are then left unchecked become harder to tackle, and students find themselves in a perpetuating cycle of worsening health issues and an inaccessible healthcare system to improve them.  can have a detrimental impact on their academic progression, retention and learning outcomes. Health issues that are then left unchecked become harder to tackle, and students find themselves in a perpetuating cycle of worsening health issues and an inaccessible healthcare system to improve them.

This difficulty in accessing healthcare is then coupled with sector-wide institutional policy demanding supporting medical evidence. This leaves students with no option but to battle through complex NHS infrastructure in order to access diagnoses and obtain the evidence they need to allow them fair academic assessment.

**What could be the solution?**

We want to live in a community that cares for and supports all members of that community equally. Students and apprentices form a large portion of the community in a lot of major cities across the UK, and should be able to access all benefits of being part of those communities as equal members. We believe access to healthcare is a crucial and fundamental one of those benefits.

We want students to have access to a flexible and efficient healthcare system that supports the transient nature of being a student, instead of impeding it. The NHS should be reviewed holistically, so that it better reflects the population in the UK now, rather than that of 70 years ago. Students should be able to register fully at both their home GP and their university city GP, in order to have equitable access to healthcare in both their places of residence throughout the year. Referrals between healthcare agencies should be more collaborative and appointments in local services more flexible to cater to a student and apprentice population.

We believe that no student or apprentice should be at an academic disadvantage due to the inaccessible nature of the healthcare system. Medical notes and prescriptions should be free to all students in higher education. Institutional policies and procedures requiring medical notes should be reviewed and altered to be more streamlined, focussing on genuine necessity for medical evidence.

We know that health issues are prevalent within student and apprentice populations across the UK. We want to see a strengthened approach to healthcare that supports students to succeed.

## Sub proposal 1: Prescriptions

At the very least, students should have access to a cheaper offer on government prepayment plans for prescriptions. At the minute this is £29.30 for 3 months and £104 for a year (which is helpful for someone taking several medications, but still difficult for students)

# Ending exploitation while studying

**What's the Problem?**

Many students work while they are in education, often in precarious and casualised employment. This includes postgraduate students, whose work is often part of their course of study. The influence of an education system which functions on market logics where the cost of learning is taken by the individual student has created an environment where it is necessary to work to get through your course of study, as well as a system where postgraduate research and teaching staff are working without contracts, without fair payment and without agency. Student volunteers, such as those who take on roles within their student unions or on committees, are often unsupported by their student union and unsure of where to go when they have negative experience in their unpaid roles.

The ongoing industrial disputes within higher and further education demonstrate the crisis of fair employment and workers' rights for staff members in our university and colleges. Postgraduate teaching and research staff have highlighted their mistreatment as part of UCU's ongoing dispute on pay and inequality. Members of the Independent Workers of Great Britain union (IWGB) and United Voices of the World (UVW) have taken action to end the outsourcing of their contracts to external companies which do not provide them with equitable rights and treatment to that of staff members who are directly employed by universities themselves. This two-tiered system of employment discriminates against outsourced workers, who are more likely to be migrants to the UK and from communities of colour.

The marketisation of education combined with the influence of private investors and landlords wishing to profit from students' need for housing has left many students suffering as private renters, with no choice but to live in unsafe accommodation. The efforts of local tenants unions are a vital intervention to a housing market that is designed to benefit landlords.

**What could be the Solution?**

Create a strong unionised workforce across the UK. Encourage students to join trade and tenant unions to build collective power in their workplaces, which are often their places of study, and their communities.

Students should stand in solidarity with unions as part of a collective struggle against the concentration of wealth and power between a small amount of people who profit from working people's need for food, shelter and funds.

Build power and agency for students who take on voluntary roles in their universities and colleges, informing them of their rights and offering training and spaces of organising and community to fight isolation and exploitation, as well as creating collective power. We should see this work as part of a wider resistance to the marketisation of education, exploitation of workers and discrimination of those from liberation background

## Sub-proposal 1: International Student Volunteering

Currently any volunteering done by an International Student has to fall within their 20 hours work limit. This means students miss out on key employability skills gained through volunteering as they have to prioritise higher paid but less specialised roles. As an International Student who is a Sabbatical Officer of their SU, I've seen we also miss out by not getting as many international students volunteering in our key roles, which means we lose out on hearing a key demographics voices.

We want the following to change:

- Remove volunteering hours from the 20 hour work limit for international students

- Government to change from allowing 20 hours a week to allowing students to work more flexibly (for example 1,040 hours a year or 86 hours a month)

- Ensure there are measures in place to protect International Students from free labour

## Sub-proposal 2: Working hours

***Submitted by Huddersfield Students' Union***

International students struggle a lot with the restricted hours of working. It is currently only permitted for International students to work 20 hours per week in term time and more hours per week in non-term time.

Nearly all students work whilst they're studying to pay their rent, look after their daily expenses, travelling and food. We try to save for extra expenditure or holiday trips or for going back home, but it is impossible with the amount we're able to earn.

It is interesting to note, that we are permitted to work extra hours in the holidays where most of the students think of going back home because that is the only period we can see our family. Those who stay back should not be given any restricted working limits.

This creates massive stress even for those who wants to legally work hard, earn and study, and the only reason we cannot do this is limited working hours.

It is important to balance studies and paid work, but this is a choice a student should be able to make freely, without restrictions in place. However, if this could be implemented emphasising the importance of the attendance in the University and complications if not followed the rules, I believe students who are really willing to do both and can organise their time very well, will be benefited from this.

Most of the students take educational or other types of loans for studying abroad, working more hours can help them save at least an amount that they can be satisfied while returning home.

International students spend huge amounts getting to and living in the UK, and do not even get permission to work without any restrictions. This restrains a lot of talented students to miss the opportunities they deserve. With the introduction of the post-study work visa it is vital that International students can gain the skills and experience that will allow them to flourish in their future careers.

Finally, restriction on working hours is not helpful for students who are desirable and want to shape their future by working hard whilst studying, it is a barrier for those who wishes to an extra mile.

**What should happen?**

The hours an international student can work during term time should be increased to be unlimited.

## Sub-proposal 3: Apprentice Living wage

Apprentices should be paid the Real Living Wage. The Apprentice minimum wage is too low, is frequently ignored and should be abolished. Apprentices bring economic value to their employers and society and this must be recognised in their wage. If apprentices are not paid the living wage they are, by definition, not being paid enough to live. Apprentices are both learners and both workers. The idea that apprentices should have a lower minimum wage than other workers to signify the contribution to the cost of their education is both regressive and unfair and disproportionately impacts women and disabled people

# Ending Securitisation, surveillance and Prevent

**What's the Problem?**

Policies such as Prevent, Fitness to Study and UK Visa & Immigration monitoring has served to expand and normalise surveillance on our campuses. This 'securitisation' limits; internal democracy, academic freedom, access to support services, freedom of expression & belief. Students directly targeted go through a traumatising process, thus deterring grassroots organising. This has led to racial and religious profiling (esp. Black and/or Muslim students) of students at institutions like KCL, UCL and Leicester, where students are either locked out of their institutions, stopped and searched or their personal information is passed onto the police.

Prevent is part of the Counterterrorism & Security Act 2015 that mandates all public sector workers to identify those who could potentially engage in extremist activities.

In particular, Muslim students are disproportionately targeted by prevent since those implementing the policy are required to trust their "gut feeling" on who they believe will engage in such activities, which reinforces harmful sterotypes and otherisation. In a time of rampant islamophobia this has manifested as Muslim students' beliefs and practices being further demonised. Because of this we have seen; surveillance cameras installed in prayer rooms, prayer rooms removed, students disallowed the right to pray, islamic societies disbanded, emails and sermons monitored.

External speaker processes have been altered at many HE institutions as part of Prevent. Events have been burdened with increased security and restrictions, including external chairs being imposed on events, particularly in the case of Palestine societies. 33% of all Prevent referrals are from the education sector. FE Students are particularly vulnerable to targeting as 66% of all referrals are of those under 20. Prevent has repeatedly proven to be ineffective, with 90%-95% of referrals being 'false positives'. However, these individuals still face the stress of invasive interviews, police interrogations and a police file.

Government guidance on engagement monitoring for Tier 4 Visa compliance for international students is influenced by the 'hostile environment'. Institutions are enacting this through intensifying their tracking and surveillance technologies.

These changes are disguised by adding them to automated 'welfare' tracking systems. And the expansion of "fitness to study" policies for students viewed as problematic. Surveillance technologies comprise of; compulsory attendance monitoring applications, monitoring of online activity and emails, Room and seat tracking technology. Students who are seen as non-compliant may face deportation if they don't allow personal privacy invasion and academics can face personal fines if they don't report students.

Safeguarding, community protection and wellbeing provision (eg sexual violence prevention and mental healthcare) are all being merged with securitisation leading to further embedding of racist and islamophobic ideologies within welfare support structures in FE and HE. This causes violations in trust and confidentiality, stigmatisation, and additional barriers to accessing essential support.

**What could be the Solution?**

To protect the rights of students, Student Unions' policies and Government legislation that upholds the Prevent Duty and surveillance technology usage to monitor students should be scrapped.

Police presence on campus should be opposed, particularly given the use of body camera footage of disabled people being sent to the government for punitive investigations, sanctions, and imprisonment.

Students need transparency on the specific ways data on their attendance is being used. The surveillance of international and disabled students must stop and ultimately the government, SUs and institutions should be lobbied to scrap technologies and policies.

Policies on non-engagement with Prevent within students' unions and other surveillance apparatus should be created e.g. through producing template motions. Many SUs nationally have non-engagement motions with Prevent to delegitimise it, but others actively engage, and SU officers actively receive Prevent training. Motions should aim to cease regular contact with institutional prevent leads and SUs should cease internal Prevent training.

SUs need to clearly understand the legal boundaries because they don't have a legal duty to comply, but are unaware of this. Union Development resources and training should be disseminated on the legal aspects of Prevent. There should be bespoke support for students who face Prevent referrals and other rights abuses. Organisations like FOSIS, Netpol, UCU and NEU should be collaborated with.
Attempts to further rebrand and situate counter-extremism, discriminatory profiling and surveillance as welfare-oriented should be opposed: securitisation is not safeguarding

There should be an end the use of the Prevent duty, especially as a safeguarding tool. Prevent is an inappropriate framework for safeguarding, as fear of inclusion on a Prevent database discourages marginalised students from disclosing incidents. Colleges and universities to implement anti-racism training to counter the racist stereotypes that Prevent perpetrates.

# Policy Passed at Liberation Conference 2020

## Decolonisation

Content warnings: discussion of eugenics, sexual assault, intentional physical disablement, violence.

**Summary**
This proposal calls for NUS to provide political education to students on decolonisation, as well as providing the tools, resources, and support to run decolonisation campaigns on their own campuses.

**What's the issue?**
Decolonisation is essential to all of our liberation campaigns because historical and present day colonialism has shaped the structures of oppression that we live in. It is not only racism which is implicated in colonialism, but misogyny, queerphobia, and ableism as well. This is evident in the role of physical disablement and sexual assault as weapons of war, in the suppression of non-Western queer and trans cultures under colonial rule, in the development of eugenics to target disabled and queer people as well as indigenous people, and much more.

The question of 'decolonising our campuses' is becoming an increasingly mainstream discussion. This tends to misconstrue decolonisation as diversification, and to centre around curricula and universities. It is vital not only that we think beyond reading lists, and re-centre discussions around decolonisation to focus on institutional structures, but that we look beyond HE to FE, and indeed our entire education system.

We know that many of our institutions have historical links with slavery and other colonial exploits. In 2018 the University of Glasgow published research into the university's historic and present connections to slavery and to other colonial exploits. This research showed that through alumni, financial and familial connections, the university had profited more than £20 million from transatlantic slavery, with this being only the tip of the iceberg. Subsequently Glasgow became the first and only UK University to set up a restorative justice scheme.

We also know that our institutions still have coloniality built into their structures. In our institutions, we need to be critical of and dismantle colonial structures of governance, financial investment, research practices, teaching and learning.

**What could be the solution?**
We need to build accessible political education on decolonisation, though creating resources and creating spaces to share knowledge and be critical of our institutions. This should include education on intersectionality, on the implication of colonisation on various liberation groups, and how and why decolonisation work is our collective responsibility.

We must move beyond 'diversifying reading our lists' and confront the racist, sexist, ableist and queerphobic power dynamics which exist in our classrooms.
Our institutions are complicit in modern day colonial violence through investments and institutional links with war and the arms trade.

The current environmental crisis is inherently linked to historical and present day colonialism. Settler colonialism and industrial capitalism have resulted in the destruction of indigenous land and life which made the expansion of empire possible. Today, indigenous land and life are still under attack, with rising sea levels and extreme weather conditions destroying entire communities in the global south.

In the context of a marketised education system, our institutions are governed like businesses, by people who are detached from the realities and the lives of staff and students.

**Ideas for Implementation**
The NUS should not only deliver events and visit campuses, but create tools, resources and spaces which are accessible online.
The NUS should provide students with political education on how we can identify, confront, and resist the structural oppression they face in the classroom.
The NUS should support students to build campaigns to demilitarise their campuses, and to lobby institutions to divest from war.

The NUS should provide political education to students on this issue, moving to decolonise the movement for climate justice. The NUS should also support students on their campuses to build campaigns for divestment from fossil fuels.

The NUS should give students on their campuses the tools, resources and support to understand how their institutions are governed, and to build campaigns to democratise their campuses.

The NUS already has a proud history of working with UCU and other trade unions to support strikes, to fight for free education, to hold institutions accountable on the gender and ethnicity pay gap, to fight for pay equity and fair working conditions. We must also support FE strikes, to fight for fair pay and working conditions in FE, and work with other trade unions such as the National Society of Apprentices.

# Gender Recognition Act

## Summary

Liz Truss' comments about young transgender people's right to access healthcare have caused considerable concern amongst transgender people and their allies. As NUS' membership includes FE colleges that educate 16-18 year olds, we believe it's important that NUS takes a strong stance in campaigning on behalf of their rights and access to essential healthcare. This motion mandates working for the protection of the rights of trans students and campaigning for the provision and promotion of resources for their welfare.

## What are the issues?

On 22 April 2020, the Minister for Women and Equalities Liz Truss gave a speech to the Women and Equalities Select Committee outlining her priorities for the Government Equalities Office[8]. This speech contained worrying rhetoric including reference to "protection of single-sex spaces"; "maintaining the proper checks and balances" in the systems which allow legal recognition for trans adults; and "making sure that under 18s are protected from decisions that they could make"; all of which represent classic anti-trans talking points.

These comments come in the context of the scheduled Gender Recognition Act (GRA) reform[9], which will be a pivotal moment for the advancement or regression of trans rights in the UK[10]. The NUS membership includes 16-18 year old trans people who could be particularly affected both by these comments and by any future decisions regarding their access to healthcare.

Young trans and non-binary people's access to trans-affirming healthcare and welfare support is absolutely vital to their wellbeing.

Coinciding with the GRA reform consultation, we have seen a worrying trend for groups seeking to create divisions within the LGBT+ community; and TERF groups seeking to co-opt GRA reform to regress trans rights; as well as widespread transphobia within the British press.

Government ministers should not be using rhetoric liable to inflame an already transphobic media and embolden anti-trans lobby groups.

During the covid-19 lockdown, when direct action is more difficult, it is doubly vital that we are vocal and active in our support of trans people and do not allow the government to use this as an opportunity to regress trans rights.

Most obviously, these issues affect students within the Trans campaign and, therefore, the LGBT+ campaign. It's important for this to be considered as a cross-conference issue because of the way that these comments contribute to the fiction that those campaigning for women's rights and those campaigning for trans rights are campaigning against each other for mutually exclusive aims. It is therefore vital that campaigning done on this issue involves the LGBT+, Women's, and Trans campaigns. The Trans campaign also intersects with all of the other liberation campaigns, and students who fall into multiple categories face often specific and intensified bigotry around their trans identity, as well as often already having greater material barriers to transition and access to trans-specific healthcare. For example, the rhetoric of "single-sex spaces" is used to exclude

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[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-for-women-and-equalities-liz-truss-sets-out-priorities-to-women-and-equalities-select-committee

[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/reform-of-the-gender-recognition-act-2004

[10] https://www.stonewall.org.uk/about-us/news/why-were-worried-about-government's-statement-trans-rights-legislation

transfeminine people from women's spaces where they should be represented, which falls under the purview of the Women's campaign as well.

**What could be the solutions?**

Fundamentally, national legislation requires national solutions, and campaigning must take place to ensure that MPs work for and not against the rights of their constituents. On a smaller scale, trans students (who are threatened and can be marginalised by such institutionalised bigotry) must be provided with resources, support, and spaces to allow them to stay safe and healthy. This can take the form of campaigning for awareness and respect of trans issues, provision of gender-neutral services and facilities, and (where possible) material support for transitioning students, who face disproportionate financial and temporal burdens. This campaigning must be done in a coalition between women, LGBT+, and trans students due to the tactic of playing protected groups off against each other.

# Liberating Education

## Summary

This policy proposal aims to radically change our education system to put liberation issues at its core. It would seek to carry forward improvements to accessibility post Covid-19.

Inequality and inaccessibility are rife in our education systems. This can be seen to manifest in awarding gaps between Black and white students, and disabled and non-disabled students; it can be seen in the physical inaccessibility of university buildings and accommodation; in the justification of transphobia in academia as "freedom of speech" in the gender and ethnicity pay gap across the sector; to name only a few examples.

This policy addresses issues such as unfair hardship fund criteria, the expensive and time consuming admin work we have to do to access support, and to challenge the government and our institutions on ensuring work is produced with us, for us.

## What are the issues?

We are beginning to hold our institutions to account – the Office for Students has now mandated UK universities to devise Access and Participation Plans (APPs) in order to address access of minority students to education, awarding gaps, and retention rates. However APPs are extremely limited, and do not use a holistic approach. Even universities with large populations of black, disabled, mature students and students with caring responsibilities still have awarding gaps, showing that simple representation does not erase the issues of structural inequality at the root of our education system.

Universities are looking for a one-size easy fix for awarding gaps, and some cite looking for "best practice" and standardized "evidence" as a reason why they haven't done any work. Only a varied approach that covers all forms of education inequality at their root will work.

In order to make real change we must understand that racism, sexism, queerphobia and ableism are woven into the way our education is structured. Inequality not only exists in the structural forms alluded to for students, but for staff also, who face gender and ethnicity pay gaps, hostile environment, increasingly casualised contracts and more. The way institutions are governed, for businesses and for profit turns education into a commodity only affordable to a privileged few, rather than a right that should be accessible to all. It is present in the investments of institutions in environmental and human devastation, in fossil fuels and arms companies.

It is in this context that we see awarding gaps on the basis of race, disability etc. It is in this context that sexual harassment on campuses is rife, both between students and between students and staff. Disabled students are refused adjustments to teaching and assessments on the basis of "rigour" and given insufficient support to deal with the impact of a disablist society on the capacity to learn. Some institutions have become hubs of transphobic ideology, where those who do not work with trans people or on trans issues cry "academic freedom" when their credibility, record or ideas are challenged.

The main barriers that we face are inbuilt into our institutions systemic structures, in particular how we access support, adjustments, and complaints procedures.

The bureaucratic and financial hardships we face are rooted in the services that are supposedly there to support us. We're faced with inaccessible and expensive services that rely on hours of administrative and exhausting work - when we're in crisis. When we eventually access these services, they're not fit for purpose and reinforce the oppressions we face.

The criteria for hardship funds, grants, and bursaries were designed by the very people who benefit from the system and unfairly penalise us when we seek support. Adding the rampant marketisation of education, the support systems we students have spent decades campaigning for still exclude the groups who did most of the campaigning. With the addition of a pandemic, it has become very clear that our education system is there to only benefit those that designed the system in the first place.

Therefore we are asking to overhaul the design of our education system to integrate liberation issues into its core design, and ensure any changes are done through co-production with those the changes are meant to support.

All students should receive an education which is fully and truly accessible and offers an equal opportunity to succeed, regardless of identity. For many years, liberation activists have campaigned for Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to make changes in order to achieve this and for many years, they have been told that such changes are not possible. However, the Covid-19 outbreak has clearly shown that not only are such changes possible, but HEIs are capable of implementing inclusive methods including online recorded teaching and take-home exams both quickly and widely.

These teaching and assessment methods, if carried forwards beyond the pandemic, would make a substantial difference to the education of many students whose needs have traditionally not been prioritised by the education system. Specifically, this includes students with disabilities and students from other liberation groups, who experience disproportionally high rates of disability and mental ill-health in particular[11]

In addition to teaching and assessment methods, processes and policies regarding concessions and deferrals have also been adapted in response to the Covid-19 outbreak; another change which liberation activists have consistently campaigned for. Previously, to receive extensions, deferrals or special consideration, students have been expected to jump through hoops to demonstrate their needs, often by providing costly medical evidence and following invasive bureaucratic processes. At NUS National Conference 2020, student representatives from across the country passed policy on Parity in Healthcare, confirming the need for HEIs to review and alter their policies and procedures to become more streamlined, "focusing on genuine necessity for medical evidence"[12]. Now, HEIs have proven that this is possible, and we must ensure that this progress is not lost when HEIs eventually begin to review the changes made during Covid-19.

**What Could the Solutions be?**

We condemn the deficit model and encourage universities and colleges to move away from this and associated "quick fix" approaches to these deeply entrenched structural inequalities. In the months during the global Covid-19 outbreak, HEIs have shown that the changes so many activists have campaigned for in the past are possible, contrary to what they've so frequently been told. We cannot allow this progress to be lost. We believe that education must be fully and truly accessible to all, regardless of disability, mental illness or background, to ensure that everyone is given equal opportunity to succeed in our education system.

We want the Office for Students, Department for Education, and/or other external bodies to:
- Conduct annual research into liberation students' lived experiences of education, and the barriers we face.
- Fund and support students going through complaints procedures, and to produce guidance to institutions on how to mitigate the barriers that we face as liberation students.

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[11] Williams, Buck and Babalola (2020). What are Health Inequalities?. The Kings Fund. Available at: https://www.kingsfund.org.uk/publications/what-are-health-inequalities#long

[12] https://conference.nusconnect.org.uk/results/policy-and-report-voting-results

- Produce a public strategy how institutions and the OfS expect to meet the 2024 gap elimination targets. Particularly when the barriers that impact us haven't realistically been  taken into account - such as access to NHS services, social security, and housing other than PBSAs.

Universities and colleges should retrofit their curricula to contextualise and critique the coloniality and the structures of inequality inherent in the history and the practice of every discipline. Universities and Colleges should  work on how they can improve inclusion without requiring our unpaid labour - for example, when institutions try to decolonise the curriculum, they place an excessive burden on students of colour to their courses.

Funding aimed at "widening participation" to not be spent on marketing. There shoule be a national review of criteria/rules for accessing hardship funds, bursaries, and scholarships.

Programmes of learning, teaching and assessment should pull down barriers to disabled students, including making physical spaces more accessible, making it easier for disabled students to get adjustments in learning, teaching and assessments as well as fundamentally rethinking the ways in which normative education excludes disabled students.

Improvements are needed to support given to survivors of campus-based sexual violence and harassment. This should include an end to non-disclosure agreements which protect institution reputations rather than survivors. Recognition and mitigation the role that unequal inequal power relationships play in abuse

We condemn links between education and fossil fuels, and links between education and war. Students should be encouraged to make divestment calls that make the link between sustainability and investment in the arms trade.

Students organising against transphobia on campus should be supported, especially against that organised under the banner of free speech. The right of trans students to be gendered correctly is not an issue of academic freedom, but one of the right to study free from harassment. We must resist the proposed changes to trans people's rights, and call for the expansion of trans inclusive services and provisions on and off campuses.

We believe accessible equipment for sports/societies/opportunities should be funded, to enable the participation at no additional costs for liberation students, in particular disabled students.

There should be a professionalisation of support service staff and standardisation of titles.

The Covid pandemic highlighted that most people don't know what the issues we face actually are. We can't achieve inclusive education without challenging perceptions that we have it easy. We need to change the public perception of what a typical student is, given the current difficulties we have when trying to galvanise support for our rights from education to housing when the public believe we're all affluent, middle class, lazy, and white.

Higher Education Institutions must adopt accessible and inclusive teaching practices as standard beyond the immediate circumstances of Covid-19 and for these to be protected in policy. This means that all students will have access to recorded lectures and other online resources, allowing them to fully engage with their education.

HEIs must take responsibility for ensuring that all students have the necessary resources, space and time to effectively engage with their education. This means that all

students who need it will have access to appropriate assistive technology, as well as suitable space to complete assessed work and additional time if required.

Students should be given the option to complete alternative assessments, including take-home and online exams, whilst recognising that all students will have unique, individual needs. This means that HEIs must listen to the experiences of students with disabilities or other individual needs and ensure that they are fully supported during assessment periods, in order for them to demonstrate their academic abilities as best as possible.

Concessions such as extensions and deferrals must be made more accessible to students without the need for costly medical evidence and bureaucratic processes. This means that students will be trusted by HEIs to request concessions when they need them, without having to share extensive personal details or "proving" their need. Institutions should cover associated costs in the interim - for example, SPLD assessments, doctors notes, or deadline extensions

We now know that all of the above are possible across the sector. Though it's disappointing that HEIs have only made these changes now that they have had to, rather than to support students from liberation groups, we must now ensure that they are carried forwards, post Covid-19, in a step to make our higher education system more accessible to all.

## Sub Proposal 1: Hate Crime Reporting

**Summary**

Hate crime and harassment are challenges faced disproportionately by black, LGBT+, Trans and Women students. Nationally, data suggests that the number of hate crime incidents have increased drastically over the last few years, especially in offenses linked to sexual orientation and transgender identity. In the Higher Education sector, the number of racial harassments reported to universities are also rising. A number of high-profile cases of racial harassment and gender-based violence have been reported at a number of universities such as Exeter, Warwick, and Cambridge. We also know that inadequate support is in place to ensure victims of hate crimes and harassment get justice and ensure these vulnerable students are safeguarded. This needs to change.

**What are the issues?**

Online hate speech has been made easier thanks to social media. We have seen in recent years that anonymous confession platforms on Facebook at several universities have enabled hate speech that targeting marginalised student groups as well as individual student activists from marginalised backgrounds. Little has been done across the sector to tackle this type of hate speech. Worryingly, a recent study by Cardiff University found that the increase in online hate speech that targets race and religion would give rise to the number of racially and religiously motivated hate crime. This highlights the importance of the Higher Education sector in responding to the rise of online anonymous platforms to protect its most vulnerable students.

Report from the UUK task force showed that there has been improvement in reporting system at a number of universities, yet there is still room for more improvement. At some universities, students would be bounced back and forth between their university and their local police force, with either party being helpful, claiming that the case is not within their remits. Particularly, student sex workers often don't report hate crime, violence, and harassment they experience in fear they might lose their place at university even when this might not be in their university's jurisdiction. Students have also been telling us that support for those who reported hate crime and harassment during the investigation process is also inadequate.

**What could be the solutions?**

Potential solutions to this include:

The creation of national standard of reporting hate crime and harassment at universities. Universities should review support for victims of discrimination and harassment and reform internal complaints policy to ensure the right outcome is always reached quickly and effectively with minimal distress to the victim.

We must be critical of the police force in its complicity in hate crime and harassment and work with the police force to ensure they reform policies in investigating hate crimes and harassment at universities.

An approach with impartial mediation and conflict resolution allow all parties to acknowledge what happened, who it make them feel and add a possibility of reconciling by engaging with each other to come to an agreement on how to move forward.

Greater advertisement of how to report discrimination, hate crime, abuse and sexual assault both anonymously and otherwise.

Clear and measurable rules for how universities should support liberation students based on EHRC guidance, e.g. having an accessible complaint procedure, providing reasonable adjustments within 2 weeks of starting, yearly surveys of liberation students.

**Ideas for Implementation**

The NUS must work with the UUK, the Office for Students, and social media platforms in an enquiry into online anonymous platforms at universities and how to tackle hate speech enabled by these platforms.

NUS to call for OfS to do a yearly "lived experience" survey into liberation students' equal access to education.

Ask OfS how they're going to reach their 2024 goals and hold them to account to keep these promises.

Audits on equality gaps, external audits.

NUS to call for OfS to Investigate barriers to accessing complaints procedures across all liberation groups; Fund, publicise and supply policy & procedure explainers and reasonable adjustments like typing for students going through their university's complaints procedure.

# Policy Passed at NUS Scotland Conference 2020

## Special Support Payments

**Context**

The Student Support Review Group, which comprised representatives from across Scotland's education sector and wider civic society. The final report, published in 2017, stated that "no student should lose their benefit entitlements because they are in receipt of student funding", and proposed a "special support payment" for those students in receipt of benefits, similar to the approach already taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Scottish Government has progressed work on this issue but has not yet announced a policy solution.

At present students are having their benefits cut because they are eligible for student support. The Student Support Review final report noted that "many United Kingdom-wide benefits that are income assessed treat student support (including loans) as income, reducing benefit entitlement – sometimes pound for pound. This applies even if the loan is not taken. This would mean that for some students who can claim income assessed benefits, every pound of student support entitlement would result in an equivalent pound reduction in benefits." For example, Under Universal Credit 63p is deducted from someone's monthly payments for every £1 earned through work. While £110 in student loans and/or grants is disregarded per month for those in receipt of universal credit, beyond this for every £1 a student receives, the same amount is deducted from monthly payments. The Department for Work and Pensions has justified this policy on the grounds that it keeps the financial advantage of working, while simultaneously financially penalising universal credit recipients for studying.

**Believes**

At present students in Scotland are facing cuts to their benefits because they are in receipt of, or even eligible for, student support. The Student Support Review group published its final report in November 2017, with a recommendation that said "no student should lose their benefit entitlements because they are in receipt of student funding", and proposed a "special support payment" for those students in receipt of benefits, similar to the approach already taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. NUS Scotland believes that work to introduce a "special support payment" should be expedited by the Scottish and UK Governments, with a policy solution announced as soon as possible, to ensure that those in receipt of student support do not continue to lose out on benefit payments that they are entitled to.

# For a Stronger Student Support System

**Context**

Conference notes the continued and unsustainable rise in student debt students incur from the Student Support system.

Conferences notes that students continue to be unable to afford the cost of living while in studies.

Conference notes that the assumption of parental support no longer reflects reality for the vast majority of students, making the system of student support antiquated.

Conferences continues to note the poor provision for part-time learners.

Conference notes the huge disparities in student support between FE and HE students, including the disproportionate impact of Universal Credit on FE students.

**Believes**

In order to ensure student support covers the full cost of living it must be tied to, and rise in line with, the real living wage. When being calculated student support should not assume employment or other funding and should instead provide a sum based on expected hours of study

Student support should be provided through the form of bursaries, not loans, through a system of universal living grants.

That student support should be available throughout the year, including summer, to assist retention and prevent financial stress.

That student support provision should be the same between FE and HE students, to eliminate all disparities.

That student support provision should not impact the amount students receive from Universal Credit.

That student support should provide an equitable level of provision for part-time and post-graduate learners, both groups the current system fails. This should be based on the same principles as stated in this motion in order to expand access to education across all levels.

That NUS Scotland should campaign to achieve all the above.

# Affordable and Accessible Public Transport for All Students

**Context**

Across Scotland, thousands of students rely on public transport to access education

Research shows that transport costs are one of the primary areas of expenditure for students, and these costs are significantly higher for commuter students, and those studying in rural areas

While some concessionary schemes do exist for students in Scotland, these can often be challenging to access

The National Entitlement Card scheme allows disabled people to travel on public transport for free, but many disabled students are ineligible under the current criteria

**Believes**

NUS Scotland should work with Students' Associations and local campaigns, such as the Get Glasgow Moving campaign, to lobby for public transport provision which is affordable, accessible, and meets the needs of local transport users

NUS Scotland should support Students' Associations in lobbying their institutions to work with local public transport providers to protect and expand transport routes between campuses and student accommodation

NUS Scotland should lobby Transport Scotland to expand the eligibility criteria for the National Entitlement Card scheme to include students with chronic and degenerative health conditions, and allow students to utilise evidence from their institution as proof of eligibility for the scheme

# Haud the Bus - Stop Taking Students for a Ride!

**Context**

The combination of increasing rents, living costs and the growing diversity of routes into Further and Higher Education has resulted in growing numbers of part-time and commuting students dependent on a robust and cost-effective public transport system.

The current state of affairs in municipal and city bus service delivery has consistently struggled to meet the needs of students and the public alike, in terms of affordability, availability and sustainability.

Inadequate stakeholder engagement, and the lack of a coherent national framework for cooperation across key-decision makers, has led to a deficiency between service delivery, and the service user.

**Believes**

Consultation done right produces gains; gains for bus companies, passengers and students alike. At present, communication with colleges, universities, student unions and the National Union of Students over service changes and fare increases is inadequate.

Stakeholder engagement, particularly in communities where students have a large presence, is crucial is fostering trust and cooperation between service providers and service users.

NUS Scotland, as a major policy interface which students depend on, has a role to play in national coordination of such consultation strategy.

For NUS Scotland to develop general guidelines for student unions and associations to utilise in talks with bus companies on improving service and provision – whilst respecting tailored circumstances.

That NUS Scotland Officers lobby the Scottish Government over the specific issue of bus provision for students, and the inconsistency of service quality and provision across the nation.

To work with student unions, universities, colleges and bus companies to improve service quality and provision for students, and to ensure student representation and feedback is cultivated and acted upon.

# Let's talk about mental health. No, not that sort of mental health!

**Context**

Mental health is a priority for the student movement, government, and society as a whole. We are living in an age of mental health crisis and public conversation around this complex area is welcomed. However, some mental health sufferers have been alienated from the conversation.

The term 'mental health' has become synonymous with a range of terms which we take to mean:

Mental wellbeing → includes the things we can all do to make sure our mental health is as good as it can be in our day to day lives.

Ill/poor mental health → periods of severe ill mental health from which recovery can be possible.

Mental health disorders (such as, but not limited to bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, post-traumatic stress disorder, or personality disorders) → lifelong conditions where recovery is unlikely and management is often the best possible outcome.

Awareness-raising initiatives are great, but people still go quiet when someone mentions they are schizophrenic. Support workers still suggest inappropriate care strategies. And people still call the police when someone is in psychosis, when what they really need is a doctor.

People with mental health disorders continue to face discrimination in education, the workplace, and wider society. They are more likely to be victims of police violence, due to the misconception that they are a danger to others. With overstretched NHS mental health services of the NHS, many people can be living with symptoms for many years without receiving a diagnosis or appropriate treatment.

This needs to change.

**Believes**

That students with mental health disorders should have their voices centred in conversations around NUS Scotland mental health policies and campaigns.

That education is required across the sector in the differences between mental wellbeing, ill/poor mental health, and mental health disorders.

That a commitment should be made to reduce the stigma regarding mental health disorders across the sector.

That discrimination, bullying, or oppression of students due to their mental health disorder should not be tolerated.

That education is required across the sector on the appropriate responses to students who present with mental health disorders.

That police intervention when a student is suffering an episode as part of their mental health disorder is damaging and potentially dangerous to their life; and that this practice should be condemned unequivocally.

# Mental Health Matters

**Context**

Mental health problems on our campus have reached unprecedented levels.

That in many areas, waiting times for both University and NHS support are unacceptable, which is further contributing to this crisis. Students are not receiving support in a prompt manner and therefore being pushed to breaking point before they receive help.

That this crisis is affecting students' abilities to fully engage with and benefit from the university experience.

That for too long, Universities across the UK have failed to prioritise this crisis at the expense of students.

Many Universities are seeing a tragic spike in the amount of student suicides including the University of Stirling, with 3 student suicides in the 2018/19 academic year alone.

That a concerning number of staff are unequipped to deal with these issues through lack of well-funded and relevant training. Despite a number of staff voluntarily participating in Scottish Mental Health First Aid training, places on this course have been limited due to funding constraints.

**Believes**

That Universities must prioritise the mental wellbeing of their students to ensure all students receive the full benefit from their university experience, and are able to excel to their full potential academically.

That the influence of the individual Students Unions as well as NUS Scotland should be used to lobby universities to implement more adequate mental health facilities, with equally adequate funding.

That more University staff should be given the opportunity to train in order to help support both student's mental wellbeing and those of their colleagues. More funding towards Mental Health First Aid training would enable university staff - especially teaching staff - to better signpost students before they reach breaking point.

Through teaching staff being equipped with the training to refer students to the relevant support services, who have in turn received more funding, students will be able to receive support in a timelier manner.

That mental health support must be at the core of any universities policy, as the university cannot claim to be looking after students' wellbeing if students are left unfit to study through lack of well-funded mental health support.

That the NUS Scotland must push for further spending and prioritisation of mental health support at all universities, including training for both academic and non-academic staff, to ensure that this crisis is met head-on.

That the response from many universities has been too slow, putting profits over the wellbeing of students, and we should condemn this behaviour.

# Mental health and wellbeing support at colleges and universities remain patchy!!

**Context**

Mental health and wellbeing support at colleges and universities remain patchy. While some institutions have well-developed services, others have little provision. For example, freedom of information requests carried out by NUS Scotland in February 2018 found 11 colleges (out of 24 who responded), and 16 universities (out of 17), had dedicated counselling services

NUS Scotland has long called for new Scottish Government funding to establish a universal level of counselling provision at our colleges and universities. Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2019/20 commits the government to investment of £20 million over a four year period to provide 80 counsellors for colleges and universities.

The first instalment (£3.6 million) of this funding was announced in November 2019. A Scottish Funding Council publication on the funding for counsellors in 2019-20 showed that each institution was allocated to hire at least one counsellor; for those college regions with multiple colleges, further funds are allocated based on their student numbers; and beyond this funding was split 52/48 between colleges and universities. NUS Scotland has expressed concerns that this initial allocation does not redress the imbalance that exists between institutions. While this first instalment of funding will not redress imbalances that exist between institutions, the same SFC publication it is stated that "our aim is to support equity of access to counselling support across colleges and universities, informed by equality principles and shaped by robust monitoring and evaluation data for the first year, such that the student experience of accessing counselling services is comparable across both sectors, recognising that needs and approaches are diverse."

The Scottish Government has an expectation that all colleges and universities develop a mental health strategy, and a Student Mental Health Agreement (SMHA) through Think Positive, which is hosted by NUS Scotland. The SMHA is student-led and collates everything an institution and their students' association is doing to improve mental health in one easy-to-read document. The SMHA also encourages staff and students to consider a range of improvements that could have a positive impact on the staff and student experience.

NUS Scotland is currently conducting research into student mental health, and will publish a report later this year with a series of recommendations for improvement.

**Believes**

While there are examples of good practice across the country, the level of mental health and wellbeing support and service at colleges and universities remains uneven. All students, irrespective of where they study, should have access to the same level of mental health and wellbeing services and support.

# PBSA

**Context**

The PBSA sector has drastically changed in the last 20 years. Rising student numbers has caused the sector to grow substantially. More and more, however, it is becoming the domain of private companies. Research conducted by NUS UK and Unipol found that, as of 2018, PBSA is now split 50:50 between educational institutions and private operators.

Legal changes that have strengthened the rights of, and recourse available to, tenants in the private rented sector in recent years include specialist landlord and tenant dispute resolution, a new code of practice for letting agents and security of tenure. Additionally, limited rent control powers were introduced for local authorities but have yet to be used anywhere in Scotland. Student renters have been left behind, with both institution-owned and private purpose-built student accommodation (PBSA) being exempt from these recent legislative changes.

PBSA rents consistently outstrip inflation and are more likely to be set against competitors. In Scotland in 2018, average rents for institution-owned PBSA was £123 per week, for private providers it was £145. The average annual rent in PBSA's in Scotland in 2018 was approximately two-thirds of the maximum amount of cost-of-living support that a higher education student in Scotland can claim in bursary and loans and is more than £600 more than the maximum bursary a further education student can claim.

NUS UK and Unipol UK-wide research found private providers perform comparatively poorly in meeting the requirements of students with particular needs. A survey of providers found that 26 per cent report that they do not offer any specialist or alternative accommodation types, including adapted or adaptable rooms, single-sex halls, accommodation for families, alcohol-free halls, quiet blocks and safeguarding accommodation. This contrasts with a zero return for institutions on this question. The same research found that institutions scored significantly better than private providers on the question about rooms that could be adapted for ambulatory disability. As against 30 per cent for private providers, 68 per cent of universities reported that they had stock which could be adapted for these purposes. Institutions also outperform private providers on having some rooms that are actually adapted for ambulatory disability: 86 per cent, compared to 38 per cent. Privately owned PBSA are also often not linked up with student support services, meaning that students resident within them may not have access to the same mental health support as students within institution-owned accommodation.

**Believes**

The PBSA sector has drastically changed in the last 20 years, due to the absence of meaningful regulation. This has led to the rapid expansion of privately-owned developments, rents that outstrip inflation and student support payments, little consideration being given to improving the rights of PBSA tenants and few accommodations being made for students with particular needs. There must be a review of the PBSA sector in Scotland, conducted by the Scottish Government in cooperation with NUS Scotland and other stakeholders, to identify issues faced by students in PBSA, how these can best be tackled and informs any future regulation.

# For Justice in Student Housing

**Context**

Conference notes that the student housing sector is in dire need of proper regulation.

Conference notes the reduced rights students living in purpose-built student accommodation have compared to students living in the private rented sector.

Conference notes the global rises in purpose-built student accommodation rents, which impact students' ability to keep up with the cost of living.

Conference notes that members Students' Associations have been fighting to have rents frozen or capped for student halls in their institutions.

**Believes**

That housing is an essential human right, not to be abused for the sake of profit or fixing deficits.

That students living in purpose-built student halls should have the same rights and protections as those living in the private rented sector, and that NUS Scotland should work for this outcome.

That Students' Associations' efforts to freeze, cut or cap rents of student accommodation in their institution should be supported by NUS Scotland.

That a national conversation should be started around student-owned housing cooperatives and organisations, and that NUS Scotland should be one of the drivers of those conversations.

# Policy Passed at NUS Wales Conference 2020

## Mental Health

**Statement:**

Student mental health and wellbeing has become a growing problem for a variety of reasons. This issue spans both the further education and higher education sector indiscriminately.

Students' Unions and NUS Wales have successfully lobbied for additional funding from the Welsh Government over the past two years, seeing an initial £2m investment in universities and now a £4m investment to be split between higher and further education.

Whilst we are hugely appreciative of the investment from the Welsh Government, the way in which this money has been spent has varied. In some cases, students in some institutions have had more influence than their peers in others. This cannot be allowed to continue. Students should be partners and co-creators in their own education experience and should be involved at every level of decision making, especially around health and wellbeing.

If it's about us, then don't do it without us.

**Outcomes**

This conference calls upon the Welsh Government and relevant sector organisations to ensure that students are truly partners in the decision-making behind and the delivery of this funding and any other funding relevant to their health and wellbeing.

In addition, this conference calls upon the Welsh Government to guarantee long-term, ring-fenced funding to tackle the issues of mental health and wellbeing across the whole education sector. This is an issue which will not be solved in-year, we need a joined-up short- and long-term strategy.

# A Voice for Apprentices

With NSoA now being a full member of NUS, we are keen to see the voice of apprentices getting the attention it deserves through the access that NUS Wales has. We have submitted two policy proposals that are the main areas we believe need to be looked at by NUS Wales – Welsh language and how we are trained.

**Statement**

1)  Failing to provide education in a learner's language of choice is discriminatory. Funding and expanding apprenticeship provision in our language will enable better participation rates and encourage jobs in rural communities. Apprentices work in Welsh and English all the time. It should be easy to choose to work, learn how to do our job and do our maths and IT in whichever language we want, or even mix it up.  It would be great if we could learn our trade in English but do our maths in Welsh.
    Particular care should be paid to ensure that funding is available to secure sufficient staff able to deliver numeracy, IT and literacy in Welsh.

2)  Apprenticeships are meant to be both a real job and a real education. Sadly, too many apprentices in Wales don't receive the enough proper formal training. Less than half of apprentices in Wales receive a day's training a week and, shockingly, only 23% of women receive any training at all. This is the lowest rate in the UK – and half the rate in England. NSoA Wales doesn't think it's fair that Welsh women received less training than apprentices anywhere else in the UK.

Assessor visit apprenticeships can work but at the moment they aren't working for welsh apprentice.

We propose that apprenticeships for anyone under 25 should be delivered through day or block release. It would also help guarantee that apprentices have access to the mental health, advice and support services they need.

## NUS Wales Trans Policy

In 2017, the Welsh Government announced the opening of a transition-related healthcare service in Wales. Previous to this point, all Welsh trans people accessing transition-related healthcare through the NHS had to attend the Tavistock clinic. After many delays, the service was finally opened in 2019. Currently, the service only offers non-surgical interventions, the main services being diagnosis and hormone replacement therapy (HRT). The Welsh Gender Team also only accepts referrals from trans people aged 17 and over, despite the large number of referrals to the under-17s clinic in London. The service still acts on the basis of medical gatekeeping, where a clinician must "diagnose" a patient with the mental illness of "transsexualism". This is against international best practice as recognised by WPATH and WHO. Services for transition-related healthcare should instead be run on the basis of informed consent. The long waiting lines, underfunding and excessive bureaucracy has created a trans healthcare crisis across the UK, with a high number of trans people accessing transition-related healthcare privately or self-medicating through buying hormones from online pharmacies.

NUS Wales should campaign for the Welsh Government to improve services around transition-related healthcare. This campaigning should aim to do the following. Rather than the pathologising system of diagnosing trans people as mentally ill, trans people should be able to access prescriptions and referrals on a local basis on the basis on informed consent. The Welsh Gender Team should aim to recruit and train specialists in transition-related surgery and provide suitable resources and training on effective methods of gender transition. A service for under-17s should be available for trans people in Wales. NHS Wales should offer services on the NHS which are currently difficult to attain including microdosing of hormones, facial feminisation surgery, hair removal etc

## PCETing the Agenda

The Welsh Government has announced the Tertiary Education and Research Bill (TERB), which is expected to see the merger of the HE & FE sectors into one, post-16 sector called the Post Compulsory Education and Training sector, or PCET.

NUS Wales broadly agrees with the direction of travel, but wants to use this opportunity to level-up student representation and partnership across the new landscape.  We want to see students' unions implemented in every post-16 institution which are:

- Fully funded
- Politically autonomous
- Structurally independent

For too long, not all students have had similar opportunities and access to support across the post-16 sector.  This disparity is especially seen in colleges, where it is still uncommon to see full-time, paid sabbatical officers and dedicated students' union staff.

In addition to this, it is not always the case that students are truly partners and co-creators in their own educational experience.  There are still too many barriers to students being involved in decision making at every level within their institution, from course reps to executives.

We call upon the Welsh Government to ensure that fully-funded, politically autonomous and structurally independent students' unions across the post-16 sector are enshrined in law within the TERB.

## Higher Education Accommodation Fees

Once the stressful process of applying to university is over, the next step is to look for accommodation and this can be a hard decision to make based on the funds available. The 19/20 academic year's maintenance loan from the Government was, for most students studying outside of London and away from Home, £8,944 and this is to be increased in the 20/21 year to £9,203 in line with inflation but accommodation fees set by universities are also likely to increase.

The majority of university accommodation fees in Wales sit around the £5,000-6,000 figure and while this can be seen as low compared to some universities it is still around half of the academic year's maintenance grant.

There is a case for a review of accommodation finances and if it would be possible for the Welsh Government to introduce or enshrine in law a fixed low rate at which accommodation fees increase in line with the maintenance loan and by a lesser number than say £5,000 across the board; OR alternatively if the Welsh Government could themselves waive and scrap accommodation fees of which they would pay the full accommodation fee instead of offering multiple grants and loans. One other educationally selective route would be that of decreasing accommodation costs or paying them in entirety for students studying STEM courses as these subjects and sectors are the most beneficial to the Welsh and UK wide economy.

## Food Poverty

Many students regularly skip breakfast/lunch due to not having the finance to afford breakfast. Studies have shown breakfast consumption has various positive outcomes as it has a big increase on positively effecting the learning performance for students. Students not only in our college but within the whole United Kingdom are facing this problem and it is still being discussed as a topic to tackle.

Throughout a student's college life, they can be seen trying to keep up their studies as best as they can with also managing and multitasking their everyday tasks. This affects the students highly as they may be unable to carry on with their day to day tasks, revision, exams and their relationships/friendships. However, this topic still needs to be discussed as this is something is affecting the students in our college and having a larger effect on the economy.

## Transportation

At Gower College we provide transport to students from Rhosilli to Llandeilo to Brecon to Port Talbot.
All leaners need to pay up for the cost of bus passes or many learners are eligible for support with these costs. We also provide an option for students to get digital bus passes and in many locations, theses can be used throughout the day whenever needed or on another site we have our own bus service. Transportation is expensive for our students. And we are aware of students who walks nearly an hour to college every day due to cost. However, transport costs, and quality vary from location to location with many students commenting on crowding on the buses, not being granted access even though they have the required bus passes.

# Policy Passed at NUS-USI Conference 2020

## Oppose Marketisation and support free and liberated education

**The Problem**

Our tertiary education system has become increasingly marketized, with financial burdens being shifted away from the public and on to the individual. This has meant our Universities have begun to exist for profit, which has led to course closures, unmanageable workloads and casual contracts for staff, hidden course costs, rising accommodation costs and potential fee increases for students. It has also led to the outsourcing of services, including counselling provision.

Student's already struggle to make ends meet, with 78% of students struggling with mental health in their time at University, in large part due to financial pressures. It has also led to Higher Education staff striking on 3 occasions since 2018. Tertiary education in N.I. is broken, and both staff and students are at the cold face.

**Our position**

It is our strongly held belief that tuition fees must be abolished as they act as a barrier to access, particularly for students from lowest income backgrounds. We believe that maintenance grants should be restored and that accommodation is made affordable. We also believe that EMA must be continued to ensure FE students are able to study without financial pressures and that FE student unions are given proper protection in their institutions. We also believe it is vital to stand with our staff in their disputes because when staff feel they're being underpaid, overworked and under-valued, it affects students. We must decolonize our institutions, which means to democratize decision making giving students and staff a voice and ensure our institutions divest from fossil fuels and the arms trade.

Our relationship with UCU is one that should be nurtured and cherished in recognition of our common opposition to the marketization of education and our united goal for a national education service that is properly funded, accessible and lifelong that has students, workers and social justice at its' core.

# Reproductive Justice

**The Problem**

Abortion was decriminalised in Northern Ireland as of midnight on 22nd October 2019 under The Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc) Act 2019 (NI EF Act), and a new framework to provide lawful access to abortion services in Northern Ireland must be created by 31 March 2020.

The NI EF Act states that this new framework must be informed by paragraphs 85 and 86 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) Report: Inquiry concerning the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland under article 8 of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Abortion access is restricted by factors other than criminalisation such as stigma, conscious objection, lack of rural access, and barriers relating to gender identity, migrant status, disability, or socio-economic class.

Protesters outside clinics and healthcare facilities are a source of stress and hurt to those accessing healthcare in, as well as staff of, these facilities.

**Our position**

NUS-USI is a pro-choice organisation that believes and campaigns for abortion access that is free, safe, legal and local.

All barriers to seeking reproductive and sexual health services should be eliminated.

No person should be harassed, intimidated, or shamed when seeking healthcare.

Abortion access should be completely in line with the CEDAW recommendations, and is free, safe, and local. This will take into consideration the barriers that groups such as transgender people, migrants, international students, disabled people, and those from lower socio-economic backgrounds face when seeking abortion access.

A strong relationship with pro-choice organisations is essential (such as but not limited to Alliance for Choice and Doctors for Choice NI in campaigning for free, safe, and local abortion)

NUS-USI believes in the need for the creation of safe access zones which would protect and safeguard the rights of those entering healthcare facilities without fear of harassment or intimidation.

Standing in solidarity with the campaign for the decriminalisation of abortion, and wider reproductive justice across the world.

# National Mental Health Emergency Declaration

**The Problem**

NUS-USI released a Mental Health Survey in 2017.  The results of this survey were telling – 78% of students had experienced mental health worries of some variety.  In addition, 14% of students have suicidal thoughts.

The hiatus of the Northern Ireland Executive over the past three years, as has resulted in a negative impact on many different aspects of life in Northern Ireland, especially given the insufficient funding granted to our Mental Health services. The neglect has impacted heavily on the student population.

NUS-USI and individual member organisations have done great work in championing mental health, yet the rates of poor mental health continue to rise.  Mental health disclosures have been worryingly prevalent on UU Love and QUB Love since the inception of those pages – these disclosures are indicative of a student mental health emergency.

**Our Position**

Now, with a Mental Health Action Plan promised in the New Decade, New Approach deal, with the promise of a subsequent and more comprehensive Mental Health Strategy, there is the opportunity to right these wrongs and hold the Northern Ireland Executive to account.

**Proposed tactics**

NUS-USI  declares a National Student Mental Health Emergency.

# Building Blocks of Resilience to Become the Powerhouse of Tomorrow

### The problem

The levels of mental health issues affecting the population of Northern Ireland is a worrying problem. Research shows that mental health is a concern for young people with a significant amount having had concerns or worries about illnesses including anxiety, depression, self-harm and eating disorders.
Resilience to the problems of everyday life amongst students within the FE sector has often been mentioned as a factor in poor mental health. Individual resilience, built through self-discovery and personal development activity, can be so beneficial. Colleges can play a leading role in embedding resilience skills to help deal with such issues.

### Our position

International mobility offers a pathway to finding new partners, techniques and methodologies to make progress in such areas. Links with European partners, keen to play a leading role in discovering new techniques, can be discovered.

### Proposed tactics

The development of Self-discovery activity based workshops, building upon the theory that failure can be a positive experience, would be an ideal outcome. Other techniques and methodologies could also be found during research stage of potential projects.

# Parity of esteem for FE Learner Voice

### The Problem

There is not enough support for FE Student Voice.

### Our Position

More support for the FE student voice is needed. Giving it the same opportunities as HE learner voices and support investment in FE SU's. Also, encouragement should be given to the department of economy to put in place a learner engagement framework similar to those found in Scotland, Wales and England.

# Climate Emergency

### The Problem

The impacts of climate breakdown are already causing serious damage around the world. The 'Special Report on Global Warming of 1.5°C', published by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change in October 2018, (a) describes the enormous harm that a 2°C average rise in global temperatures is likely to cause compared with a 1.5°C rise, and (b) confirms that limiting Global Warming to 1.5°C may still be possible with ambitious action from national and sub-national authorities, civil society and the private sector Students across the world have played a leading role in pushing climate breakdown to the forefront of government agendas, and that it's important that this work continues and that our HE and FE institutions are also held accountable for their climate policies as well as local and national governments

### Our Position

Strong, radical policies and actions to cut emissions are essential to our future, and also have associated health, wellbeing and economic benefits. In recognising this, a growing

number of local authorities, unions and institutions have already passed 'Climate Emergency' motions.  A move towards a Climate Emergency declaration, formation of a national student 'Climate Action Group' and call for legislation on fossil fuel divestment is essential.

**Proposed Tactics**

NUS-USI should declare a 'Climate Emergency' that requires urgent action, recognising that all public bodies need to recognise and develop a strategy on fighting the climate emergency.
NUS-USI should establish a national NUS-USI Climate Action Group to organise and coordinate against climate breakdown at a grassroots level.
NUS-USI should lobby the NI Assembly and Executive to agree to conduct research into and commit to becoming carbon neutral by 2030, and to introduce legislation stating that corporations should implement actions to become carbon neutral by 2030.
NUS-USI should lobby the NI Assembly and Executive to commit to introducing legislation on fossil fuel divestment relevant to corporations and institutions across NI.
NUS-USI should work with Unions across the north to set up local climate action groups within their own institutions, helping with development and campaign training.
NUS-USI should develop a national strategy, based on the UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals, to campaign for curriculum change across institutions, focusing on the urgency of reflecting the need for a post-growth, green economy and society in our education.
NUS-USI should work with trade unions to conduct research into and develop a strategy on a just transition for workers specific to NI.
NUS-USI should work with NUS and USI on developing a campaign on a just transition for students and apprentices specifically.

# Defending Student Renters

**The Problem**

Currently in Northern Ireland the homeless population stands at an estimation of over 20,000 people categorised as needing immediate new housing under Housing Executive standard. This is alongside those individuals and families living in 'housing stress' that entails substandard conditions, overcrowding and sofa-surfing who are lost among the homeless figures. Housing Associations responsible for building social housing have for over a decade failed to meet their housing build quota whilst the private sector in Belfast and beyond has become the second most profitable area to 'buy-to-let' under UK jurisdiction.

Meanwhile there are over 19,000 known homes vacant across Northern Ireland. Student accommodation, whether under university management or within the private sector, is grossly unaffordable and consumes almost entirely the sum of the average student maintenance loan. The failure to build social housing has produced an increasing dependence upon the private sector to house the homeless which in-turn has seen millions of public funds annually squandered into the bank accounts of private landlords.

The increasing opportunities for short-term lets such as AirBnBs has further caused an unaffordable rise in rents as landlords pursue further profits. The profitably of the private sector has meant students, priced out of university halls, are left with no option but to rent within the private sector whereby they are positioned as cash-cows with little available rights.

**Our Position**

That the fight for social housing is inalienable from the fight for suitable and affordable student accommodation.
The current housing system is built upon the incentive of profit, not provision, wherein landlords have been permitted to profit from an economically manufactured housing

crisis. The monopolisation of housing within the ownership and management of a small collective of landlords and letting agents have facilitated a culture of neglect and corruption which has increased student poverty and ill-mental health.

This must be reversed! Housing should not be wielded as a commodity. There should be support and organise for increased social housing by demanding that councils start vesting vacant land and properties in order to bring them under public ownership and house homeless families.

Whilst students are forced to rent within a highly volatile, corrupt and unaffordable private sector, students' unions must do their best to protect and advance the rights of student renters.

## Proposed tactics

All student unions across Northern Ireland should support the promotion of tenants unions either through the establishment of their own Student Renters Group or physically and digitally support their local tenants union (eg; Belfast Housing Action). Tenants unions in the pursuit of countering illegal letting fees, deposit corruption, harassment, neglect, and unfair evictions are justified in commencing pickets, occupations, sit-ins, and rent strikes in-order to advance their goals.[13]

# End Period Poverty

## The Problem

"Period poverty' refers to having a lack of access to sanitary products due to financial constraints". [1] As of November 2019 UUSU are Currently running a one year test and providing free sanitary products available in the non-urinal bathroom on all four campus at Ulster University. 6 FE colleges in NI have free period poverty dispensers in their institutions.

The Students' Movement, with the support of our institutions, should be a leading voice in the challenge of eliminating student period poverty. Menstruation is an involuntary occurrence which makes sanitary products vital. Many women make do with unsuitable materials when they can't afford menstrual products. Alternative materials include leaves, toilet paper, socks and rags. Some women take their contraceptive pill back-to-back to skip bleeding, or resort to changing their tampons or sanitary pads less frequently. Not changing products when needed may cause urogenital infections or, in more serious cases, toxic shock syndrome. Period Poverty isn't just an inequality but can result in those who cannot access products to become seriously ill.

## Our Position

It is important that Period Poverty does not go unnoticed and we are determined to tackle the unseen issue of period poverty. The work already carried out by UUSU has been a great first step to ending period poverty.

Following the lead of one devolved government it is now Stormont's turn to introduce measures that will eradicate period poverty, Northern Ireland is already lagging behind the rest of the UK in combating the issue.  Providing sanitary products to address period

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[13] https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/over-20000-homeless-in-northern-ireland-while-19000-houses-lie-empty-38935401.html?fbclid=IwAR1atBGmUKWsRQ1nkdzAOsNk2aIEQOvUyPq-xKwIm1dlurVq1YytDTjUF4I
https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/1m-to-put-up-homeless-in-northern-ireland-hotels-and-b-and-bs-shows-we-need-more-social-housing-38858953.html

poverty is essential healthcare, not a luxury, and the provision combats both stigma and inequality surrounding the issue.

We believe that the Northern Ireland Executive should take immediate action to make sanitary products available in bathrooms across higher and further education institutions.

## Universities of Sanctuary

### The Problem

According to Article 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights "everyone has the right to education...and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit". The term refugee applies to any person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, or membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country. An asylum seeker is someone who has lodged an application for protection on the basis of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention. In the UK, Discretionary Leave to Remain (DLR) is a 3-year renewable status that may be granted to individuals on the basis of an asylum claim, including many separated children from countries such as Syria, Afghanistan, Iran, Yemen and Iraq.
The ongoing refugee crisis has displaced many thousands of students worldwide and these same students have been deprived of the chance to pursue higher and further education courses in their native countries and they should not be presented from accessing these courses in the UK.
Several other UK universities including Queen's University Belfast, have committed to funding scholarship places for refugees and Belfast Metropolitan College have gained their Colleges of Sanctuary award in the past year. At present, asylum seeker students are routinely charged overseas fees, yet their situation and needs are different to those of international students. A number of UK universities and colleges have amended their admissions policies to allow asylum seekers and/or students granted DLR as the result of an asylum application to pay 'home' tuition fees, or have waived fees entirely.

### Our Position

We believe there should be a continued fight for financial support for these affected students through lobbying the NI Executive to continue funding migrant scholarships in HE and FE institutions and allocate additional financial support for these students' living costs including student accommodation.

### Proposed tactics

NUS-USI members should be lobbying their institutions to make their institutions more accessible and supportive of asylum seeking and refugee students.
NUS-USI should encourage its members to achieve the University/Colleges of Sanctuary award, not as a tick box exercise but by creating long-term change.

## Apprentices should be paid the Real Living Wage

### The Problem

The Apprentice minimum wage is too low, is frequently ignored and should be abolished. Apprentices bring economic value to their employers and this is recognised in their wage.

If apprentices are not paid the living wage they are, by definition, not being paid enough to live.

Apprentices are both learners and both workers. The idea that apprentices should have a lower minimum wage than other workers to signify the contribution to the cost of their education is regressive and unfair.

**Our Position**

We call for more severe consequences for those who mismanage training providers or apprenticeships.

Recent times have seen a number of training providers fail leaving apprentices in the lurch. Directors involved in failed providers have rapidly resurfaced and are back working in the sector whilst the apprentices they were meant to be training are still waiting to complete their apprenticeships.

The most recent UK apprenticeship pay survey revealed some 20% of level 2 and 3 apprentices had been illegally paid less than the pittance of the apprentice minimum wage. Half of apprentices also reported receiving no off the job training. The last 2 pay surveys have not included Northern Ireland. We're campaigning on information that's almost 6 years old. The next survey should include us too.

## Irish Language

**The problem**

There have been important advances made in the New Decade New Approach agreement reached by the Stormont executive regarding the Irish language; including the creation of an Irish language commissioner and the repeal of the final penal laws. This was in no small part due to the radical and brilliant activism carried out by An Dream Dearg and student activists.

However, while these achievements are positive, they fall far behind what activists have been calling for in a standalone Irish Language Act, largely by not including any provisions for bilingual signage.

**Our position**

Close relationships are essential with Irish language organizations such as An Dream Dhearg and Conradh na Gaeilge to create recommendations for the new Irish language Commissioner on best practice for Universities and Colleges on Irish language visibility, promotion and protection.

 Further to this, support should be available for student-led campaigns for bilingual signage on their campuses and support officer teams who seek to ensure that their campaigns are carried out bilingually. We should also work with these organizations to prevent cuts to Irish language courses and for the expansion of courses to be taught jointly in Irish. It's vital that our Irish language schools and faculties receive the vital funding needed to thrive.