**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.

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

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 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.

## Amendment one: More Funding for Further Education

## Leeds City College

**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.

**Compositing note**
The solutions of this motion have been reframed to ensure it meets the new style of policy submission.

## Amendment two: Student Numbers
## Lancaster SU

**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.

## Amendment three: Delivering inclusive education & Publishing the BAME Award Gap

## Anglia Ruskin SU, Salford SU

**Issues and context**

Inequality and inaccessibility are rife in our education systems. This can be seen to manifest in awarding gaps between BAME and white students, 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.

**DPC notes**
The solutions of this motion have been reframed to ensure it matches the new policy proposal guidelines. This amendment has been merged with "The Publication of the BAME Award Gap" from Salford SU as they discuss the same issue, and propose similar solutions.

There was text in this motion which discussed divestment from Fossil Fuels and demilitarisation. As there will be separate debates on both of these areas, this has been removed from the main motion.

## Amendment Four: Care Leaver Support & National Care Leavers Week

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The problem

According to the 2017 NNECL 'Moving on Up' report, Care Leavers as a demographic are around 11% less likely to enter into higher education than other young people with similar demographic profiles and qualification levels and are 38% more likely to withdraw from their course and not return.

The most common issues faced by care leavers transitioning to higher education can be identified as poor local authority support, social/emotional issues and financial problems. At present, the nationally recognised definition of care leavers used within higher education under the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 restricts the care experience to, 'a young person over the age of 16 who has been in care of the local authority and/or Health & Social Care Trust for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14'. This definition of care leavers fails to encompass all adults who have experienced local authority care who may need support as they enter higher education within their lives.

Within the Scottish higher education system, the Care Leavers' Association model has been adopted. Simply put, this includes any adult who has spent time in the care of the local authority and/or Health & Social Care Trust as a child. Ranging from local authority care directly provided by the state to voluntary respite and the private sector, a few months to a whole childhood, the care experience model enables all care leavers to access the support they need to be able to thrive in a higher education format.

The restrictive legal definition of care leavers within higher education isolates any prospective student who has had experiences within the system up until that point. Experiences that surely had a substantial impact on their educational performance, social development, mental health and future educational and career desires.

It is incredibly disappointing to see that the failure of this definition has already been identified by the Scottish higher education system and altered appropriately in addition to UUK. However, as of yet, the UK government has yet to address this.

Significant work still needs to be done to ensure the social mobility of those that have experienced life within the care of the local authority. Adequately addressing this will revolutionise the futures of care leavers throughout the country and leave a lasting benefit for these prospective students.

**The solution**

The Care Leavers' Association model should be adopted across all United Kingdom higher education institutions, following the example of the Scottish higher education system.

Students' unions should have adequate resource to be able to better support their students from a care experience background.

**Suggestions for implementation**
For NUS to lead a campaign for care experienced students over National Care Leaver week.

**DPC notes**
This motion has been made an amendment to the priority motion, as it looks at what education should look like for a specific group of students. It has been stylistically edited to meet the current style of NUS policy proposals.