nus NATIONAL CONFERENCE

Priority Zone Live Policy 2017-20

If you need this document in another format contact NUS on 0845 5210 262 or email events@nus.org.uk

Key information

Purpose of this document

This document contains all the policy currently in effect for the Priority Zone. This is the policy that the National President is responsible for implementing and is sometime known as 'Live Policy'.

Policy Lapse

Policy Lapses in 2 circumstances:

1. If a subsequent policy over-rides it.
2. After 3 years unless National Conference votes to renew it.

Policy passed at National Conference 2017 will lapse at the end of National Conference 2020.

What You Need To Do

If you are considering submitting policy to National Conference you should first check whether any policy is currently 'live' for that issue and whether you need to change the National Union's current stance on that area of work.
If you require this document in an alternative format, please contact **democracy@nus.org.uk**.

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Motion 101 | Liberate Education

Conference believes

1. Post-16 education is facing a sustained, intense assault from the Government in terms of access, quality and scope.
2. The Government's area reviews in FE have caused some colleges to shut, while cuts have led to job losses
3. The Higher Education and Research Bill represents, even in amended form, a significant intensification of marketization.
4. Increasing fees is detrimental to the accessibility of education.
5. The new regime ushered in by the Higher Education Bill, linking TEF scores to recruitment numbers, is likely to disproportionately affect international students.
6. The government's refusal to remove international students from immigration quotas means we can expect more raids, detention, and deportations of students this year.
7. Brexit campaigns, run on anti-migration platforms, and the aftermath of the referendum have caused higher levels of insecurity and violence for migrant students and black students.
8. Securitization of education targets both international and Muslim students through the Prevent programme.
9. Accessibility to education is determine by the right to study free of intimidation and harassment, a right not afforded to women students and staff members who face endemic harassment and abuse.
10. These factors combine to result in record levels of student mental health problems, in the context of cuts to or inadequate mental health support.
11. Students are suffering the worst economic prospects for several generations
12. We have been hit by the greatest drop in income and employment in recent years compared with older age groups.
13. We face even greater barriers to achieving economic independence and success than they did five years ago.
14. Children born into poverty fare the worst in education, falling behind all other groups. Just 28.3 per cent on free school meals achieve at least five GCSEs at A* to C
15. During the recession and up to 2013, people under 34 experienced the steepest fall in incomes and employment, less access to decent housing and better-paid jobs, and deepening poverty.
16. Between 2008 and 2013, those aged 16-24 lost 60 pence an hour on average, dragging average pay down to £6.70. For the 25-34 age bracket, wages fell by an average of £1.40 to £10.60.
17. This is what living in such an extremely unequal country means. More and more people, most of them young, are being locked out of opportunities and privileges.

18. Between 2008 and 2013, black people's pay declined by an average of £1.20 an hour, almost double the overall average fall for the UK
19. Economic inequality is often reproduced and reinforced by education instead of being eradicated by it.

Conference further believes

1. We're facing a crisis in the education sector for students and staff alike.
2. This crisis has been many years in the making, emerging from the cumulative effects of repeated reforms, leaving education under-funded and marketised.
3. When discussing teaching quality and access, we must go beyond the limited framework proposed by Government – one which emphasizes a damaging role for private, profit-seeking companies.
4. NUS must propose a radically different vision for a free, liberated, and truly accessible education for all.
5. All students deserve access to education free from harassment, intimidation or violence, regardless of background.
6. Meeting the challenges outlined is a key priority for students across the UK and will require organisational unity regionally and across nations.

Conference resolves

1. To campaign with unions and grassroots groups for better and fairer funding
2. To produce materials putting forward a vision of publicly-funded and accessible education
3. To work with other organisations to nationally resist attacks on migrants and international students and forward a progressive case for migration.
4. Work with local unions on anti-hate crime work, including local reporting facilities and the creation of national guidelines, networks and resources.
5. To produce materials to support students' unions to campaign against sexual violence and support survivors.
6. To launch awareness campaigns about the student mental health crisis and support students campaigning on the issue.
7. To share information and ideas, and support efforts across campuses to liberate the curriculum including diverse approaches to teaching and assessment.
8. To encourage student unions to work with local campaign groups and union to join their work with those of the community around them.
9. To deepen the regional networks to achieve better unity of action.
10. Dedicate a section on the NUS website to share resources, ideas, and campaigns of the many initiatives around the UK including diverse approaches to teaching and assessment to liberate the curriculum.
11. To ensure that economic inequality is a central feature of our campaigns on liberating education.

Emergency Motion 1 | General Election

Conference believes

1. Prime Minister Theresa May announced a snap General Election on April 18th.
2. The General Election will take place on June 8th.
3. On April 18th Teresa May announced a snap election for June 8th
4. June is a time when campuses are quite, halls are empty and students are back home and working.
5. Millions of students are already missing from the electoral roll due to individual registration
6. We must not let students be sidelined.
7. NUS needs to show strategic leadership now about mobilising students.

Conference further believes

1. Many students across the UK will be concerned about the implications of this election, which will effectively be a referendum on the terms of Brexit.
2. Theresa May's government has already made clear that its approach to leaving the EU is harsher border controls and a deepening regime of cuts and privatisation of public services – from education to the NHS.
3. Now is a moment for our movement to come together, to hold politicians to account, and to put forward the demands of students across the UK.
4. The manifesto will focus on the key issues that our members have put forward in the last year: the rights of international students, the safeguarding of education and funding agreements, and a proper investment strategy into our public services.
5. The coming months will be crucial for our movement. As well as making sure students come out and register to vote, we will need to use our national networks to influence the outcome of the elections.
6. NUS' strategy must respect the diversity amongst our members not seeking to be divisive or partisan but focussing on the issues.
7. Conference policy should be turned into a manifesto for students and presented to the major parties
8. NUS must harness the power of digital to transform the landscape of this election.
9. We should help students to register to vote at both there term time and home addresses.
10. We should launch our largest ever virtual GOTV campaign
11. It is vital that we hold politicians to account for the decisions they have made and the votes they have cast.
12. We need a strategy for first 100 days of a new government to get our priorities to the top of their agenda.

Conference resolves

1. To communicate with all students in our NUS Extra Card database on polling day, reminding them to vote.
2. To collaborate with Students' Unions to hold hustings for candidates across the UK.

3. To organise national days of action, encouraging voter registration.
4. To work with student accommodation providers to facilitate registration drives.
5. To write to all political parties making clear our demands, and hold mass lobbies of prospective candidates.
6. To divert resource to running the biggest voter registration drive in NUS' history.
7. To support SUs to seek meetings with candidates across the political spectrum and to track results so that we can apply pressure to local candidates.
8. To mobilise every NUS committee member on election day, with people in every city supporting GOTV activities.
9. To publish a guide to each parties policies on the issues which affect students: Brexit, Education funding, Housing and Welfare.
10. To publish student guides on voting process.
11. To publish toolkits for students on how to see the voting record of MPs.

Emergency Motion 2 | General Election

CN: Sexual Harrassment, Sexual Assault and Rape

Conference believes

1. There is a systemic societal problem with preventing, tackling, and convicting, sexual assault and rape.
2. NUS has a moral and ethical responsibility to campaign on this issue, but in order to be taken credibly as a campaigning force it is essential that we have our own house in order
3. On March 24th 2017, two days before NUS Women's Conference, an anonymous social media account began trolling the event hashtag with wildly inaccurate and inflammatory victim-blaming and rape apologist statements.

Conference further believes

1. Approximately 85,000 women and 12,000 men are raped in England and Wales alone every year. These figures include assaults by penetration and attempts.
2. Nearly half a million adults are sexually assaulted in England and Wales each year
3. 1 in 5 women aged 16 - 59 has experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16
4. Only around 15% of those who experience sexual violence choose to report to the police
5. Approximately 90% of those who are raped know the perpetrator prior to the offence
6. The conviction rate in 2015-16 was 7.5% of recorded allegations
7. The above statistics clearly demonstrate the chasm which exists between survivors' experiences, and justice.
8. This now-deleted social media account referenced in CB3 used the event hashtag to push an anti-survivor narrative, targeted specifically at the women's campaign which has always been the part of NUS which carries out high profile work against sexual violence.
9. This action enforced a power dynamic which attempted to silence, or undermine, survivors.

10. It is unacceptable that perpetrators of sexual violence are able to infiltrate both our social media and physical spaces unchecked.
11. NUS states that we have a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment, but our current mechanisms to protect victims where an incident has occurred at an NUS event – physically or online - or where the perpetrator and victim are NUS members, are inadequate.

Conference resolves

1. To reaffirm our commitment to zero tolerance for sexual harassment.
2. To reaffirm our values; that we believe the victim.
3. To immediately convene a taskforce to critically assess and review the NUS processes for reporting code of conduct violations, with a specific focus on effectively supporting survivors of sexual assault and rape, ensuring the survivor's needs are prioritised, and removing perpetrators from NUS membership without relying on the criminal justice system.

Priority Zone Policy passed at National Conference 2018

Motion PC101 | Student Poverty

Conference believes

1. The NUS Student Poverty Commission has told us something clear and simple – it is time to get real about student finance.
2. Nearly half of Britain's students are worried about having enough money to buy essential groceries such as bread and milk from an average weekly food spend of £24.32, according to NUS research.
3. Research also found that almost half of all students are struggling to get together enough money to cover basic costs such as travel and textbooks.
4. Travel costs of £17.35 a week are also a cause for concern, with 43% of students worried about daily travel to university or college.
5. Almost three-quarters of students (71%) cite worries about money as a cause of mental health issues.
6. 23% have used non-government loans to extend their finances.
7. In 2015 student rents in London averaged £226 a week compared with £147 elsewhere, eating up their maintenance support before all other costs.
8. The current minimum wage rate for an apprentice is a shameful £3.50 per hour.
9. The Government is in denial about what is in reality a student poverty crisis. When challenged on the gap between maintenance and costs for university students in October 2017, the then Universities Minister Jo Johnson argued that students should "live more frugally".
10. The Department for Education has repeatedly refused to publish research into Student Income and Expenditure carried out in 2014/15.
11. Universities, Colleges and Training Providers are also in denial - often making decisions on the way they run programmes that make the problem worse for students.
12. A large proportion of students simply can't afford to participate in education- but are blamed for a "lack of aspiration".
13. The intense focus on the £9k paid to universities means that the amount FE, UG and PG students actually have to live on rarely gets discussed, underlying issues rarely debated, and the impacts ignored.
14. Universities promoting first year accommodation as the only way to make friends that then profit from that rent should be banned from doing so.
15. The main source of income for the majority of undergraduate students is a maintenance loan from Student Finance England (SFE).
16. Maintenance grant and loans are means tested for the majority of undergraduate students against their parents' income.
17. Maintenance support is not enough to cover a large proportion of students living costs[1]

[1] https://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jun/29/maintenance-loans-are-leaving-students-265-short-every-month

18. Many students now rely on additional income to be able to cover basic living costs[2]
19. A large number of students experience some level of mental health and stress whilst at University[3]
20. Young people aged 18 are treated as an adult by the law.[4]
21. Students are struggling to afford the cost of living whilst at university. The cost of living for students is an ever-increasing problem, and has increased at a higher rate than maintenance funding.
22. NUS research shows that many students find it difficult to budget and hardship funds see a spike in applications at the end of each term.
23. Student finance is often paid in excess of two weeks after the stated payment date
24. Students should not be subjected to unnecessary financial stress like this
25. Financial pressures, and their impact on student drop-out rates, are particularly high during the first few weeks of study.
26. The interest on the student loans presents an ethical dilemma for many Muslim students who want to attend higher education.
27. The rate of current tuition fees coupled with the absence of interest free student finance is preventing thousands of students from accessing higher education every year and resulting in disenfranchisement.

Conference further believes

1. An NUS that believes in a Living Wage in wider society should develop proper proposals on a Living Income for Students.
2. So that all students benefit, proposals should ensure that help goes to those that need it most- where costs are higher, work is more scarce or where parents can't help.
3. NUS should cause universities and colleges to make a commitment to working to reduce both direct and indirect costs that students face and expanding the number of opportunities to work within institutions.
4. As a movement, student discounts on core costs should be something we spend more time campaigning for and less time profiting from.
5. We should demand that detailed research on student income and expenditure for all our members is carried out, published and acted on by Government.
6. Needing to have a job to cover basic living costs whilst studying can be a cause of additional stress and mental health issues.
7. Maintenance grants and loans should be sufficient to cover basic living costs of all students
8. Students are being negatively affected by means testing when their parents are unable to financially 'top up' or support students financially.
9. University students are considered to be independent adults however are still expected to be reliant on their parents' income after moving out for University.

[2] https://www.endsleigh.co.uk/press-releases/10-august-2015/
[3] https://yougov.co.uk/news/2016/08/09/quarter-britains-students-are-afflicted-mental-hea/
[4] https://www.gov.uk/age-of-criminal-responsibility

10. Many households have an income above £30k however can still struggle to financially support students who are living away from home during their time at University but still have a reduction in maintenance and bursary support.
11. That the replacement of grants and bursaries with loans has caused additional pressure and financial difficulty for students.
12. That maintenance funding support should reflect the reality of students' needs and should cover basic living essentials.
13. That estranged students become particularly vulnerable during the summer, and their finance packages are often insufficient to meet their living costs.
14. That final-year students experience a steep decline in maintenance funding while many costs (such as rent) do not end early, and current employment rates mean a significant number of students are unlikely to guarantee a salary will be able to compensate for the reduction in support.
15. All students should receive their student loan at least one week before their course start date.
16. All forms of student finance should be paid in advance of course start date.
17. Some of the measures that have been taken by students to avoid the current model to finance their studies can have an adverse impact on their health and studies.
18. The government has developed an alternative model which will be available to ALL students who wish to access it. It has identical costs and repayment terms to the current student finance model, however is administered through an interest free finance mechanism. Although the government initially planned to introduce this model by September 2016, they are yet to do so and refuse to provide information to students affected.
19. That it needs to be acknowledged that this issue is negatively affecting the socioeconomic mobility of Muslim students for generations to come. It is vital that that our student guild lobby the department of education to work with priority for the launch of the alternative model.

Conference resolves

1. For NUS to actively campaign and lobby the government and Student Finance England to scrap means testing parents income for maintenance support.
2. To actively campaign and lobby the government for maintenance support over the summer period.
3. To reaffirm our commitment to lobby the government for a more realistic student maintenance funding system.
4. To lobby for Student Finance England and equivalent bodies to make the first student loan payment a minimum of a week before the course start date.
5. To lobby for Student Finance England and equivalent bodies to make termly payments in advance of each term's start date.
6. To set a deadline for Student Finance England and equivalent bodies to implement these changes.
7. That NUS lobby the Department of Education to provide ethical Alternative Student Finance.

Priority Zone Policy passed at National Conference 2019

Priority Motion - Education on the Edge

NUS Believes

1. The Augar Review of post-18 education and funding is due to report this Spring. Yet the ongoing negotiations around Brexit are continuing to delay its final report.
2. We live in politically uncertain times, and education reform has been pushed far down the priority list of the UK Parliament which is solely focussed on our withdrawal process and relationship with the European Union.
3. To date, there has been a conscious attempt by the UK government to not only undo our hard won gains in education, but to make it near impossible to win that ground back ever again.
4. We are seeing an almost unprecedented threat of universities being pushed to the point of collapse and closure across the UK – a threat which would have been almost unimaginable this time last year.
5. Institutions collapsing will lead to fewer places in HE, and measures such as student number controls and restrictions on funding all point towards attempts to limit the number of students able to access HE courses.
6. Alongside this, FE institutions face a range of immediate threats ranging from mass redundancies to the threatened closure of FE students' unions.
7. Upcoming reforms to tertiary education seem intent on pitting FE against HE, hiding a desire to restrict access to HE for the richest as providing benefit to the FE sector. We will not fall for these divide and conquer tactics.
8. Restricting access to HE might take more students into FE, but we will never build a thriving FE system in this way. While FE is a second chance for many, the government cannot treat it as a second choice.
9. Education policy is devolved in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Still, education reform in Westminster often has a knock on effect across the UK, all of which pales in comparison to the impact Brexit will have on education across all of the nations.
10. Brexit brings with it potentially catastrophic risks to education institutions that risk accelerating institutional collapse from massive drops in international student numbers to the loss of EU funding.
11. All of these challenges are not just affecting the classroom. We are seeing them impact all aspects of students' lives in cuts to mental health support services on campus, extortionate rents and an increasingly hostile environment for students from liberation groups.
12. The Poverty Commission showed that the poorest students end up paying a "Poverty Premium" when it comes to education, whether directly from having to get into debt and paying more interest on it, or indirectly from things like higher transport costs. This not only restricts access and choice – it increases the risk of dropping out.

13. NUS and students' unions face constant smears and attacks, largely because we stand for a different vision of education and society than those who seek to undermine us - our belief in a free and liberated education.
14. Be it tackling the black attainment gap or giving students a powerful voice in their classrooms; ending the silence around sexual harassment on campus or championing diverse, flexible and accessible education pathways; cutting the link between TEF and fees or bringing in affordable student housing for working class students. We have not only stopped these reforms time and again in their tracks; we have continued to advance our vision.
15. Whether selling off universities or exploiting postgraduate workers; or creating a false free speech crisis while simultaneously ramping up the racist PREVENT agenda - the political and social attacks that the student movement and education face come from the same place. They must be tackled together.
16. NUS is also facing challenges on multiple fronts. This makes it all the more essential that we unite behind a unifying campaign, rooted firmly in our values.
17. It is clear that our education is on the edge. But it does not have to be on the edge of collapse – by seizing this moment we could be on the edge of fundamental positive change.
18. Access to education is a right, not a privilege and NUS must reform its movement in striving to ensure that this right is protected for our membership.
19. It's essential that students from all backgrounds are enabled by universities to progress and succeed in post-18 educations. It is also vital that Universities explore and tackle how marginalised groups face barriers in accessing student finance and other financial support, and seek to break down these barriers.
20. Potential cuts to tuition fees will leave courses at risk of closure, and universities in crisis, with support staff, facilities and Students' Union block grants likely to be the first things to be cut at a time where mental health is a key issue in Higher and Further Education.
21. There could be a potential university tuition fees cut to £6,500, under proposals from the Augar Commission addressing Higher Education funding. This could leave some Universities with a third less income from fees, and a £3 billion funding shortfall.[1]

NUS Further Believes

1. NUS needs to articulate a shared political vision: not just for the work of our national union, but for the world we want to build.
2. The power to win this vision is in the hands of students' unions as a movement.
3. Across the UK, across institutions from 50 to 50,000 students: we know our work is at its best when it is rooted in making students' lives and chances better by improving their experiences in education.
4. Education changes lives. Everyone should have the opportunity to access further and higher education. But it's not just about getting in, we have to focus on getting on as well.
5. It is the poorest students who always suffer the quickest and suffer the hardest when negative changes are made. We will put front and centre measures that improve the life chances and educational opportunities of working class students.

6. Everyone should have the opportunity to take a full time residential undergraduate first degree, regardless of family income or class background.
7. We will continue to champion high quality flexible education pathways for all who want them: as an equitable education option, not a second tier option for the working class.
8. Education providers need to play a vital role in communities. Our institutions should be embedded within and engaging with the community that they are a part of, showing the public benefit that education brings.
9. Education funding touches on every aspect of students' lives and is a broader conversation than how undergraduate higher education tuition fees are funded. We have to prioritise the things that affect students every day: not only their ability to pay their rent, fuel, living and transport costs, but the extortionate cost of these in the first place. None of these concerns are unique to those in higher education.
10. We will fight for education funding models across the UK that ensure the poorest can succeed, where all students can afford the cost of living to enable them to survive and thrive on their courses, and which supports an education system which redresses inequalities in society.
11. We will always hold, first and foremost, the need to accept changes which will benefit the most disadvantaged in the first instance.
12. Institutions may be subject to closure, or reducing the range of courses they offer, which will impact upon the choice and opportunities for students. Higher cost subjects, like science, technology and engineering would be in danger of reducing opportunities for students from widening participation groups, including but not limited to, students from African and Asian descent. This also would likely lead to a reduction in the number of STEM graduates which are vital to the economy.
13. According to Prof Chris Day, the Vice chancellor of Newcastle University, should fees be slashed, the focus on social mobility would be among the first things to go. This will have an effect on widening participation groups, and local organisations that are dependent on this funding.

NUS Resolves

1. We will run a priority campaign that actively fights to build an education that is free and liberated, working across all zones and liberation campaigns.
2. 2019/20 will be the start of a renewed long-term, tactical and determined fight for the education system we need in this country - we will build a campaign that's fit for a fight that will run for years and possibly even decades.
3. We will build a coalition between the student movement and like-minded organisations who share our vision and values, and a public-facing influencing campaign designed to win public opinion. All this will be backed up by an ongoing General Election strategy focused on delivering a pro-education vote, strong enough to influence party manifestos and government's actions.
4. We will set out a clear, bold and proactive vision for post-16 education to the sector, to government and to the public calling for:
    a. full and free access to FE, HE and apprenticeships for everyone,
    b. maintenance funding so everyone can take part and succeed in education;

c. student voice at the heart of education
d. equity for all in terms of access and outcomes, with a particular focus on:
    i. equity for Black students in terms of access and attainment;
    ii. equity for working class students in terms of access and attainment;
    iii. equity for learners across HE, FE and apprenticeships in terms of esteem and outcomes
e. a government approach that views post-16 education as the engine room for a strong economy and an equitable society

5. NUS UK will work in partnership with NUS Scotland, NUS-USI and NUS Wales to ensure that our campaign is both UK-wide and also specific to the needs and particular devolved contexts of the nations.
6. We will support the Love Our Colleges campaign and work in partnership in pursuit of our goals and policies.
7. We will deliver on the recommendations of the Poverty Commission as part of this campaign.
8. We will work hand in hand with students' unions to be the unifying national force which brings together local activism and grassroots campaigning.
9. We will bring students into our vision of education through their unions and empower unions to make change locally and nationally. Most importantly the campaign will be successful in reminding students that their voice and their actions WILL change society.
10. Using NUS's national and sector influence, we will seize the opportunities that reforms to education provide and use them to build towards free and liberated education.
11. Through HE Zones, and NUS as a whole, highlight the potential risks associated w reducing tuition fees, and higher subject costs. This limits the access to education for our student membership.
12. NUS to set roundtables, and consultations with Students, activists and Unions to work in collaboration in the interest of our students.
13. NUS to work with the Department for Education in ensuring that the Student's voice is involved in all decisions which affect our membership.