



**YORK ST JOHN
STUDENTS' UNION**

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL **Thursday 18 March 2021 at 16:00 via Zoom**

Present: Siya Varma (CSC) (Chair of Student Council) (Chair); Heather Graham (YBS) (Chair of York Business School); Kalen Reid (BAME) (BAME Students' Officer); Christian Smith (PGM) (Postgraduate & Mature Students' Officer); Marissa St Ange (International Students' Officer); Aimee Yeoman (ART) (Chair of School of Arts)

In Attendance: Jamie Andrews (PSU) (President of the Students' Union); (Jenny Marchant (PED) (President of Education); Paul Murtough (SOM) (Student Opportunities Manager); Emma Palmer (PWD) (President of Wellbeing & Diversity); Zaki Kaf Al-Ghazal (ARC) (Advice & Representation Coordinator) (Clerk)

1. Welcome and Introduction

CSC welcomed everyone to the meeting.

To receive apologies for absence

Donna Smith (Chief Executive Officer)
Dan Grayson (GIA) (Governance & Information Assistant)
Charlie Mills (C&F) (Societies, Culture & Faith)
Jessica Thompson (WOM) (Women's Officer)
Emily Balmer (LGBTQ+) (LGBTQ+ Students' Officer)
Dominic Bramley (HUM) (Chair of School of Humanities)
Callum Campbell (H&I) (Societies, Hobbies & Interests)
Jane Nesworthy (Chair of Science, Technology & Health)

Absent without Apologies

Kai Aspinall (DIS) (Disabled Students' Officer)
Sau Wu (London Campus Officer)
Millie Whiteford (ELP) (Chair of School of Education, Language & Psychology)

NUS Motions

1. Atypical Students Deserve Better - Proposed by: Swansea University Students' Union

Issue:

Atypical students have regularly been forgotten in higher education. This includes mature, parents, carers, part-time, commuters, care-leavers and estranged. There are common misconceptions about atypical students learning 'at the wrong time' or having children or different needs – not everyone is ready or able to study at 18.

Atypical students cite lack of confidence at being different, access to SU activities, making friends and being alone in the community as major issues. They found SU’s targeting younger students and intimidating.

Why it’s important to us as a movement:

All students deserve the same levels of support and representation. Education is for everyone - no-one in the UK should feel unable to get an education because of their age or status. Widening participation goes beyond 18/19/20-year olds – it crosses into all groups so important for everyone to consider.

What the solution might look like:

All students would get support, backing and representation. The most vulnerable students would have the support they deserve, leading to increased student retention.

Better public image for atypical students and more acknowledgment and praise. More inclusive university communities.

Nothing was noted here. 7 voted yes, 0 abstained, 0 voted no.

1. Nothing was noted here. 7 yes 0 abstained 0 no
2. Nothing was noted here. 7 yes 0 abstained 0 no
3. Nothing was noted here. 5 yes 0 abstained 0 no
4. Nothing was noted here. 6 yes 0 abstained 0 no
5. Nothing was noted here. 6 yes 0 abstained 0 no
6. A question was asked about the new Turing scheme (Marissa). 6 yes 0 abstained 0 no
7. Nothing was noted here. 6 yes 0 abstained 0 no
8. Nothing was noted here. 6 yes 0 abstained 0 no
- 9.

2. Atypical Students Deserve Better: Amendment (Parents & Carers) - Proposed by: Staffs SU

Amendment: Emphasising parents & carers in Atypical Students Deserve Better policy

Issue:

Thanks to the pandemic, parent students have been severely impacted in their learning due to the closure of schools. For Parent & Carer Students in HE & FE having to help their children with home schooling, whilst trying to engage in their own studies.

Why it’s important to us as a movement:

Parent/Carer Students are as much a part of this movement as anyone else and should have access to equitable & personalised support during their studies, global pandemic or not. Parent/Carers should not be alienated or pushed away from their studies due to them not being a “traditional 18-21 student”.

What the solution might look like:

Parent/Carers should be able to defer or extend their studies due to their responsibilities, without any financial or academic repercussions. There should be national regulations which allow extra time for completion on degrees if necessary, without fear of institutional repercussions.

National guidance and best practice collated and promoted would protect Parent/Carers, and better support to address digital poverty for children, to ensure that parent students can continue to study.

Nothing was noted here. 7 voted yes, 0 abstained, 0 voted no.

3. Bullying - Proposed by: East Kent Colleges Group Students' Union

Issue:

It is important to realize that every student is at risk from online abuse and online bullying. Bullying can encompass a wide range of things from repetitive name calling to full on mental and physical abuse.

We need more action to be done of personal safety. Online bullying is a clear and present threat to the mental wellbeing of students.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

More education about these issues is incredibly important and could cover many students in further education. Bullying has the potential to be both emotionally distressing as well as risking real-world consequences.

What the solution might look like:

Education is the way that is going to help minimise the risks. Therefore, it is important that we can educate more people about the risks of the internet, at an older age. This could look like a dedicated online safety awareness at a 16+ age group. It is important that we understand that we all have a part to play in raising cyber awareness to young adults, especially in this time.

Nothing was noted here. 5 voted yes, 0 abstained, 0 voted no.

4. Cost of Living - Proposed by: Durham Students' Union and Middlesex University Students' Union

Issue:

The Covid 19 pandemic has thrown into sharp relief the huge gaps which exist between students in terms of their access to technology, but also in access to Higher Education (HE) more broadly, and these gaps are largest and most impactful to students from the lowest socio-economic groups.

In the short term, current students face significant barriers accessing the appropriate technology with which they can fully engage with their studies while they are taking place in either through blended learning, or fully online.

In the longer term, students from all backgrounds face the prospect of severe economic impacts, which are likely to limit funding and/or employment opportunities with which to support themselves during their studies, however the impact is likely to fall far more heavily on the lowest socio-economic groups, which may limit their ability to access, or remain in, HE.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

NUS has made clear their commitment to fighting for a “free, liberated, and truly accessible education for all.”

We, as a movement, need to recognise and give our support to those students who are currently limited from even having the most basic level of access to HE, which can be a life-changing force for many.

What the solution might look like:

Students would receive a Real Living Student Wage that takes into account things that the Real Living Wage does not, and a Real Living Rent outlining what affordable accommodation looks like for our students. Universities should be lobbied to make clear the real costs of being a student.

A Further and Higher Education that doesn't saddle students with extortionate course and living costs is an Education sector which is able to support, engage and further the lives of potential students from across the UK.

Nothing was noted here. 6 voted yes, 0 abstained, 0 voted no.

5. Course Materials Licensing - Proposed by: University of West London Students' Union

Issue:

Last year universities across the country had to promptly adapt in providing core texts and essential readings in an online format, so that students could continue progressing in their academic journey. With libraries shutting down or operating on reduced hours and with students not able to commute as usual, e-books have become an important purchasing option for universities. E-book prices have increased substantially, more than 200%.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

Reviewing the e-book licensing models is important to the student movement because will be opening and supporting equal access to knowledge for all students. There are only few publishers that control the market; these are raising the price of e-book and licensing at their discretion without any regulatory process, so they are taking advantage of a global health crisis to profit whilst the quality of students' education suffers.

What the solution might look like:

The goal for this proposal is contributing to a fair and equitable access to education, for all. In striving for this, there will be a much higher dissemination of knowledge across the student sector, resulting in improved student attainment across all disciplines and subject areas. By improving the attainment across the sector, this will support an advanced pipeline of successful and industry-ready graduates moving into the employment world.

Nothing was noted here. 6 voted yes, 0 abstained, 0 voted no.

6. Disabled Students' Allowance - Proposed by: Bath Spa University Students' Union

Issue:

The current system to claim support through the Disabled Student Allowance (DSA) is inefficient and in need of review. Students with disabilities at postgraduate level and students with a Specific Learning Difficulty (SpLD) are being particularly disadvantaged due to the inefficient application process, which is impacting their degree outcomes.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

This is an issue affecting members of the student community across the UK. More work is required to ensure governmental systems are effective and that education is accessible to all students with disabilities. No student should be disadvantaged because of a flawed system. We as a movement have the ability to influence the government to address these issues in an impactful way.

What the solution might look like:

Experts and student support services should work together across HEI's to identify systemic flaws, a reduction in the 14 week wait for support, with provisions in place for PG students at the start of their course, and all students should receive appropriate and effective support, through individualised packages which understands every disabled students' needs.

Nothing was noted here. 6 voted yes, 0 abstained, 0 voted no.

7. Erasmus+ - Proposed by: Edinburgh University Students' Association and University of Bath Students' Union

Issue:

The Erasmus+ programme provides opportunities for students to study, train, and work in 34 European Union and associated countries, which are full participants in the programme, and up to 156 countries elsewhere in the world.

Following the UK's withdrawal agreement with the EU, the UK will no longer be able to participate in Erasmus+, meaning opportunities for both inbound and outbound study exchange in Europe are at risk.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

NUS UK believes in a transformational educational experience that provides opportunities for all, regardless of background or identity.

Over its lifetime of 30 years, Erasmus – which in 2014 evolved into Erasmus+ – has made learning mobility easy, invented patterns of educational cooperation and extended its approach into sport and the youth area. It delivers economies of scale for Erasmus mobility grants, joint master degrees, cooperation projects.

What the solution might look like:

Students and young people overwhelmingly voted Remain in the 2016 EU Referendum and have consistently voted for pro-EU and pro-second referendum parties in the two successive elections following the referendum.

A progressive future is built on cooperation with our closest neighbours and allies.

The events of recent years have represented a profound detachment from what we collectively regard as the United Kingdom's righteous future within a free and prosperous European Union.

Maintaining our membership of the Erasmus+ programme is key to a cooperative and accessible educational experience.

A question was asked about the new Turning scheme by the International Students' Officer and the Advice and Representation Coordinator provided an answer. Otherwise, nothing else was noted here. 6 voted yes, 0 abstained, 0 voted no.

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8. Fees and Finance - Proposed by: King's College London Students' Union, London School of Economics and Political Science Students' Union, University of Bristol Students' Union, Coventry University Students' Union

Issue:

The Government's handling of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant Universities were and continue to be underprepared for the 2020/2021 academic year. Students from across the world descended on UK universities on the promise of an in person, on campus experience and immediately faced tightening restrictions and a fleeting experience.

Students at all levels of education have been ignored, forgotten, neglected, bullied, scapegoated, misled, lied to, robbed, and treated with utter contempt by government, universities, and the media.

Tuition fees are one of the many ways in which students have been forgotten and the conversation on fees regularly gets ignored or pushed aside.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

The most crucial issue at this time faced by the students is that despite the inability to return to campus, students continue to pay the full amount of fee whilst not being able to utilize the fee in complete form. Hence, reduction of tuition fee/ some rebate or refund is what the students would like to request and advocate for.

This issue is crucial to the movement to do justice to the finances of the students.

What the solution might look like:

A multi-option solution - This is in the hope that the financial stress is relieved on all parties involved, international students, home students, and academic bodies.

We would like to see a refund of students' tuition fees this year: in order to match the quality of the education received, students will be granted partial refunds on tuition fees.

Nothing was noted here 6 voted yes, 0 abstained, 0 voted no.

9. Healthcare Students - Proposed by: Bournemouth University Students' Union

Issue:

According to HESA and UCAS data, there are more mature students studying healthcare subjects than any other subject, accounting for 39% of students studying on these courses, in addition to extremely high proportions of female and BAME students. This means that healthcare students are often our most marginalised, and least represented, students.

The most pressing issue currently facing our healthcare students is their ineligibility for life assurance whilst working on the frontline, as pre-registration healthcare students who are on unpaid contracts with the NHS do not currently qualify.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

Students are often signing contracts where they do not necessarily understand all of the conditions of their employment and study. Many students do not have the time, or appropriate legal knowledge, to understand the conditions that they are agreeing to. It is unfair that students are bound by legal contracts where small print dictates that they have to pay for many expenses out of their own pocket, including life insurance.

What the solution might look like:

We do not want any student to feel that their lives do not matter, both during this pandemic and beyond, and therefore we feel obliged to bring this issue to the wider attention of all students.

Life Skills in Education - Proposed by: Wiltshire College Students' Union

Issue:

We believe life skills should be added to curriculum courses and be more embedded into the education system. Life skills such as, handling finances, living away from home (rent or even getting a mortgage), to car insurance and even the best phone bills. We believe these are super valuable skills that all students should have and be taught as they can help build a person's personality and strengthen their knowledge of next steps after education or moving away from home.

What the solution might look like:

Educating students about these things will be hugely beneficial, for example if someone knows how to understand a pay slip then they will spot when something isn't right, or by understanding the terms of a tenancy agreement they will be better equipped to sustain it and avoid eviction.

As the pattern of the previous motions implied that the councillors were satisfied with the motions, and there were yet to be any votes against, it was decided by the Chair that the rest of the motions would pass unanimously which was agreed upon by all attendees.

10. Mental Health - Proposed by: Cambridge University Students' Union

Issue:

Over recent years, a mental health crisis amongst UK students has emerged. According to a 2019 government report, the number of students in higher education experiencing mental health problems has doubled since 2014/2015 [1]. The coronavirus pandemic has exacerbated this issue, with over half of students saying that their mental health has deteriorated as a result [2]. The repercussions of COVID-19, however, are a symptom of a deeper problem rooted in the current conditions within higher education institutions.

There is undoubtedly a lack of proper mental health provision, with services such as counselling chronically underfunded across the country, but there are also few attempts from universities to tackle the root causes of, and factors which inflame, students' mental health issues.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

UK HE institutions broadly seem to be failing at addressing the issues relating to students' mental health: crises are not isolated to specific institutions, they are prevalent in universities across the UK.

What the solution might look like:

The aim is to transform the structures which currently produce the conditions in which mental health problems are sparked and exacerbated within HE institutions, with the ultimate vision being a higher education system which places students and their wellbeing at the heart of university policies and structures. Universities will have properly funded mental health support for all those who need it, but this will be combined with a proactive preventative approach to addressing problems that can impact students' mental health.

11. Practical Courses Making Up Learning - Proposed by: University College Birmingham Guild of Students and Coventry University Students' Union

Issue:

For nearly a year, students have been missing practical learning due to the restrictions of Coronavirus.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

Practical learning is vital as it prepares our students to enter the workplace.

What the solution might look like:

The government should provide more funding for practical courses so institutions can put on additional learning lessons in the following years and over the summer for students who have graduated during Coronavirus.

There should also be extensions on baseline projects and professional placements to mitigate the circumstances that occurred during the pandemic, which led to a decrease in the quality of baseline projects and professional placements.

12. Pronouns on Microsoft Teams - Proposed by: University of Huddersfield Students' Union

Issue:

Trans and non-binary students are being misgendered in digital teaching and learning spaces in front of their peers by both academics and their peers. Although this is mainly an accidental mistake, many don't feel comfortable interrupting to correct people.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

This important to us as a movement as we strive for equitable and inclusive teaching and learning environments for all students.

What the solution might look like:

Microsoft to add a functionality to Teams that allows all users to add and change their pronouns and are shown visibly next to student's names.

13. Renationalising Apprenticeship Provision - Proposed by: National Society of Apprentices (NSoA)

Issue:

Over 70% of apprenticeships are delivered by private training providers. These providers are not covered by the Education Act 1994, there is no requirement for learner representation, they do not fall under the scope of college insolvency protection and are not required to have learner or staff representation on their boards.

What the solution might look like:

Day release or block release to be the norm, especially for under 25s

2. Every apprentice to be paid at least the Living Wage
3. Accessible funded mental, financial, sexual and relationship advice and health support for all apprentices
4. Apprenticeship funding to cover the cost of tools and equipment essential to an apprenticeship

14. Sexual Violence, NDAs and Relationship Abuse - A merged proposal taken from submissions from: Sheffield Hallam Students' Union, University of Strathclyde Students' Association, University of York Students' Union

Issue:

There is a sexual violence crisis prevalent amongst UK universities, colleges and student accommodation which is not being addressed.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

It is crucial to us as a movement because it goes further than 'students deserve better'. No person should experience the trauma of sexual harassment. Student accommodation providers and universities and colleges need to be held accountable for their management of these cases. More needs to be done to ensure these students are adequately safeguarded.

What the solution might look like:

As a movement, we aim to provide students a space to build communities to socialise and learn, and work to protect and defend the rights of students. A fundamental part of these aims is ensuring that our students are safe to study at our institutions. We have a responsibility to ensure our students are not being silenced, and our universities aren't working to actively protect perpetrators of sexual violence or harassment.

15. Student Housing - Proposed by: Leeds University Union, University of Sunderland Students' Union, Winchester Students' Union, Worcester Students' Union

Issue:

The global pandemic and national lockdowns have highlighted key issues within the student private and university accommodation sector. Students have no additional accommodation rights, are unable to leave complex and unhelpful contracts, ask for refunds or discounts to help them during financial difficulty or always expect their accommodation be of good-quality and safe.

Housing is a basic right yet students are often unaware of their rights and the standards that they should expect.

Why it's important to us as a movement:

As a movement, we have the power to change the housing culture and protect students from being taken advantage of in their first interactions with the housing market. "Students needs as tenants may differ but all tenants deserve the same level of patience, respect and understanding."

What the solution might look like:

Students should be compensated for accommodation that they have not been able to access and should be given the right to leave tenancy contracts.

Contracts would be reformed to be student specific and meet the needs of those who require shorter term tenancy, and not based on ensuring maximum profit

16. Student Housing: Amendment 1 - Proposed by: Winchester Students' Union, Worcester Students' Union

Students shouldn't have to go on rent strike to achieve change. There should be a specific association to represent student tenants.

17. Student Housing: Amendment 2 - Proposed by: Leeds University Union

This is an imperative moment to unite students in the movement against the marketisation of higher education.

18. Student Housing: Amendment 3 - Proposed by: University of Sunderland Students' Union

There should be changes to student maintenance to allow students to borrow more money to reflect the area and cost of living in the area they plan to live, reforming the premium only for London and extending to other cities.

Delegate Elections

YSJSU Byelaws state that if one NUS Conference delegate must be a sabbatical officer so amongst the 2 eligible candidates, Jamie Andrews (President of the Students’ Union) was elected unanimously. Kalen Reid (BAME Students’ Officer) was unanimously elected as the other delegate.

Any Other Business

The Student Council was asked if there were any other items of business to discuss not already covered elsewhere on the agenda.

Equity in Education

PED asked for Councilors’ views on the establishment of an equity in education group or committee within the Students’ Union. This would be established for next year. It would aim to allow for broader student input for education, not solely relying on the President of Education. PED reported that this would be a formal committee, with set agenda and business, and would have students as core participants. This motion will be submitted at the next Student Council (TBC).

Kalen Reid the BAME Officer, mentioned the Race Equality Survey and how important it is for students to fill this in.

Meeting closed at 17:00
Date of next meeting: TBC

Signed _____ (Chair) Date _____

