

1951 Market Reforms in Higher Education passed 20 October 16

Main Motion

Proposer: Finn Northrop (Non-portfolio Officer)

Seconder: Theo Antoniou-Phillips (Undergraduate Education Officer)

Union Notes

1. Successive governments over recent decades have introduced policies designed to increase market competition in higher education and pass the cost of education from the taxpayer to the individual student.
2. The National Student Survey is a large survey of existing undergraduate students carried across the UK.
3. The previous Coalition government passed legislation which increased maximum tuition fee levels to £9,000 in England and pursued an agenda of opening up the sector to competition from private providers.
4. The Government had proposed to link NSS metrics to the ability of Universities to raise fees.
5. UEA SU has repeatedly recognised the threat of marketisation and the importance of fighting for free education, most recently in motion 1818 "Response to the HE Green Paper." And motion 1605 "No to the Marketisation of Education (The Future of Undergraduate Funding)"¹
6. The current government, through its policy proposals since the publication of the Green Paper Fulfilling our Potential, show an intent on implementing further market reforms that have potential to further increase the cost of education for students and force even greater competition between institutions. Despite delays caused by Brexit and subsequent political changes, the current conservative government has signalled its intent to further pursue the objectives outlined in the green paper.²
7. Higher education institutions are responding to higher education reforms and cuts to public funding by continuing to raise tuition fees where possible and by behaving as market actors, treating students as consumers, cutting corners and ruthlessly focusing on efficiency savings and competition in league tables.
8. The HE reforms currently being considered by the government represent a fundamental attack on the idea of education as a public service. It is a blueprint for the marketisation of the sector, introducing private providers and variable fees, and orientating the whole sector towards the needs of employers.
9. This has been recognized by UEA SU motion 1818 "Response to the HE Green Paper."³

¹ http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/20439/22177bf7ad989c110f3b0bb20727f693/1818_HE_Green_Paper.pdf and <http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/12146/b63bdd52b4ae37210318ddac2dc7c45c/1605%20No%20to%20the%20Marketisation%20of%20Education%2030%20Oct%2014.pdf>

² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Lords/2015-11-06/HLWS291/>

³ http://s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/nusdigital/document/documents/20439/22177bf7ad989c110f3b0bb20727f693/1818_HE_Green_Paper.pdf

10. The new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is a core part of the reforms and will damage the quality of education. In the years to come, the TEF will require and use data from the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey.⁴
11. The Teaching Excellence Framework's suggestion to allow institutions to increase tuition fees creates further marketization within our sector.
12. Already multiple HE institutions have laid out plans to begin raising fees even for current students.⁵
13. Tuition fees as they stand already have an adverse effect on student mental health and force working class and poor students to alter their choices at university.⁶

Union Believes

1. Marketisation is one of the greatest threats to our education system at all levels.
2. The university and union have a huge variety of methods for data collection of which NSS data forms only a part.
3. To function in the medium term, the TEF will need us to participate in the NSS and DLHE.
4. NUS should reaffirm its opposition to the use of NSS to justify raising fees.
5. Some of the proposed metrics fail to recognise, and perpetuate, sexist, racist, socioeconomic and other disadvantages. Research has shown that the ethnicity of lecturers affects NSS scores. And given pay gaps and the biases in the job market, the use of graduate employment statistics will punish universities for accepting more women, black students, disabled students and those from poorer backgrounds.⁷
6. Higher education should not be seen merely as job training. A narrow-minded focus on employability will damage the quality of education, and disadvantage institutions specialising in arts and humanities. The introduction of TEF will further disadvantage struggling institutions.
7. The TEF will increase stress and exploitation for teachers and academics, in particular casualised early career academics including postgraduates. Issues of casualisation disproportionately harm women and black academic staff. Improving teaching requires good working conditions for staff. Instead increased marketisation damages academics morale and mental health.⁸

⁴ https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/24832/Education_Live_Policy_201417.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=AKIAJKEA56ZWKFU6MHNQ&Expires=1475679591&Signature=9mS%2F0yYqP%2BHRkdoPoA83gtZ6G90%3D

⁵ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-36856026>

⁶ <https://www.theguardian.com/education/2016/mar/13/tuition-fees-have-led-to-surge-in-students-seeking-counselling> and <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/may/01/higher-tuition-fees-are-distorting-the-choices-poorer-students-make-lower-tuition-fees-could-see-poorer-students-applying-for-different-courses>

⁷ <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/biased-students-give-bme-academics-lower-nss-scores-says-study>

⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2014/mar/06/mental-health-academics-growing-problem-pressure-university>

Union Resolves

1. To actively campaign against the marketisation of education, calling for a free, publicly funded education system for all, driven by democratic values and duties for the good of society.
2. Focus attention on combating current and future government policy which attempts to further marketise our education system.
3. To fight against the TEF through lobbying, demos and protesting.
4. To oppose any rise in tuition fees linked to the Teaching Excellence Framework.

To reaffirm our commitment to campaign for free and democratic education at all levels, funded by taxing the rich and big businesses, not by cutting other services or further squeezing those who can't afford it.