

2196 Making good on the working-class promise

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Union Notes:

1. Over 14 million people live in poverty in the UK – over 1 in 5 of the population. This is made up of 8 million working-age adults, 4 million children and 1.9 million pensioners. 8 million live in families where at least one person is in work. ¹
2. 25% of university students in UEA are from a working-class background
3. The gap between rich and poor students being granted university places has reached a record high. There is clear evidence that the wealthier the background of the student, the more likely they are to end up at University. ²
4. There is no dedicated officer to represent people from deprived backgrounds
5. The difference in deprivation is at its starkest along Dereham Road in Norwich. The Larkman estate area, which includes Motum Road and Beecheno Road, is in the 10pc most deprived neighbourhoods in the country which is also an area that many students live in.
6. The words: pikey, inbred, chav is commonplace in university environments. Many students hold prejudiced views towards working class students and these views are often also gendered and racialized.
7. Poverty unjustly impacts hardest on women and people of colour. The biggest victims of the austerity programme are BME women and single mothers. Black women suffer the cumulative effect of [austerity] measures that disadvantage women and ethnic minorities and as a result these groups are suffering the worst socio-economic. The impact of poverty has clear impacts on the educational outcomes for children of these families. ³
8. There is a significant lag in achievement by white working class pupils and more support is needed to encourage these groups and help them access higher/further education. Figures released by UCAS show that a third more girls are going into higher education than boys. In the most disadvantaged communities, girls are 58% more likely to apply to university than boys.
9. The conception of this university was sold to the local population who supported it because it was to be 'the university of the city's working-class people' – G.F. Johnson. 'I look upon this college as providing the university of the working classes' - Alderman C.F. Jex
10. There are many societies and clubs within the Student Union who work to engage with the local community whether that is through political parties, charities or activist organisations.
11. The Union has existing policy which affirms its commitment to free education and full universal living grants as the only method of fully ensuring fair and equal access to education for students regardless of their economic background.

¹ <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2017>

² <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-30684462>

³ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2528798/>

12. UEA has dedicated Outreach and Widening Participation Teams whose aim is to work in partnership with external stakeholders, engaging with schools and colleges, HE providers, local authorities, NHS trusts and other educational stakeholders across the eastern region to enable under-represented groups particularly from East Anglia to gain advantages from Higher Education irrespective of their background.⁴

13. Despite this, many students from low income or working class backgrounds still feel alienated while they are at University and the experience of a working class, first-generation student is vastly different to their peers.

14. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds are still 35 per cent less likely to attend university, and are much more likely to drop out if they do.⁵

15. With maintenance grants cut, we are seeing the poorest students being penalised for the social class they were born into, leaving university with an average of £57,000 of debt.⁶

16. The NUS has recently launched a national campaign to research the experience of students from poorer backgrounds which will soon produce recommendations addressing the deprivation relating to education, skills and training in post-16 education and examine the barriers that working class people face with regards to accessing and succeeding in education.⁷

Union Believes:

1. There should be representation for those from a disadvantaged background at UEA.
2. There should be an effort to link the student body with local people particularly, the poorer ones, with fewer opportunities, that live just a stone's throw away.
3. Education is a public good. Everybody, and not just a section of society, should have the option to access it and succeed in education.
4. The Union should look into ways of ensuring and committing significant resources to ensuring that working class voices are built into and prioritised in its organisation without doing so in a way which is tokenistic or conflates the working class with a liberation campaign.
5. Widening participation teams in universities are not going far enough to ensure that working class student's attainment is as high as their middle-class counterparts. It is not enough to ensure that WC students enter University, there must be strategies in place to ensure their levels of attainment are as high as everyone else's.
6. Class is not an issue of self-identification; in a rigidly class-based system your economic position is objectively measured rather than self-determined. University often blurs lines between who counts as the 'working' and the 'middle' class as often it is a section of the lower middle classes who are frozen out of accessing funds and bursaries because of the means tested nature of student loans. For example:

a) Millennials are significantly worse off than their parents were in their first years of their employment⁸

⁴ <https://www.uea.ac.uk/about/corporate-social-responsibility/widening-participation>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/smcp-research-on-attainment-of-disadvantaged-children>

⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/smcp-research-on-attainment-of-disadvantaged-children>

⁷ <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/take-action/education/poverty-commission/>

⁸ <http://www.resolutionfoundation.org/app/uploads/2017/09/The-Millennial-Bug.pdf>

b) an apprentice earning just £7,000 a year isn't entitled to childcare grants ⁹

c) There are up to 10 million people in insecure work in the UK¹⁰

7. With over 50% of the population of school leaving aged children going to University and many of whom being unable to find graduate level work, even those from traditionally 'middle class' backgrounds are facing similar economic struggles as the working class.

8. There are therefore a lot of difficulties in trying to define what it means to be 'working class' at University and there is not one definition which adequately accounts for the socio-economic struggles of many students.

9. Universities are not businesses – they have a social responsibility to the communities they are in and play a role in creating prosperity through research and development. They also have a responsibility to invest in their communities and encourage better access for students from poor or rural backgrounds.

10. There is a blasé attitude to the discrimination and plight of individuals from poorer demographics of society. White children who are eligible for free school meals are consistently the lowest performing group in the country, and the difference between their educational performance and that of their less deprived white peers is larger than for any other ethnic group.¹¹

11. British children eligible for free school meals are now the lowest-performing children at age 16, with only 31% of this group achieving five or more GCSEs at A*-C including English and Mathematics¹²

12. Attainment is not only linked to issues of class and socio-economic privilege but strongly connected to and routed in wider societal issues of race. The most recent Higher Education Statistical Agency (HESA) data, compiled by the Equality Challenge Unit (2014) shows that 73% of UK domiciled White students achieved a first or a 2:1 in 2012-13, compared with 57% of Black students. ¹³

13. HEFCE's research noted that the experience of Black student's attainment was crucially linked to their financial situations which impacted on their learning and attainment ability.¹⁴

14. The student body and its representatives position themselves as a radical and progressive force but fail to apply themselves in a meaningful way to even their most immediate local environments. There are clubs and societies and student groups who do contribute meaningfully to the local community, but often it is small groups of the same people performing this labour. There needs to be more incentive to get the wider student body engaged in helping their local communities.

15. This university is failing to abide by the tasks that were set by some of the universities founding supporters: G. F. Johnson and Alderman

⁹ <https://www.nus.org.uk/en/take-action/education/poverty-commission/>

¹⁰ <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2017/jun/05/nearly-10-million-britons-are-in-insecure-work-says-union>

¹¹ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/142/142.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/data-and-analysis/publications/higher-education-2015-16>

¹⁴ Ibid.

Union Resolves:

1. To lobby the University to create more opportunities for working class and lower socio-economic students to access higher education, including a possible mentoring program such as the K+ program at Kings College, London.
2. To mandate the Welfare, Community & Diversity Officer and the Campaigns & Democracy Officer to include engagement events in the community strategy, as well as opportunities for students to get involved in local community volunteering.
3. To lobby the University to increase the amount of teaching hours and assessment opportunities which directly engage students in helping local community projects. This could take the form of modules which give credits for practical work that helps local community groups or more opportunities to take off course modules to engage in meaningful community volunteering.
4. To mandate SOC to investigate and implement ways of making offensive language towards working class populations and state disciplinary action for clubs and societies caught using that language
5. To lobby the University to increase their outreach efforts towards the local community through engagement and development programs
6. To mandate the Welfare, Community and Diversity Officer and the Campaigns & Democracy Officer to include engagement events in the community strategy
7. To mandate SOC to explore how to create more opportunities for students to get involved in local community volunteering and to ensure that: the SU publicise these when they are created and lobby the University to do so.
8. To mandate SOC to conduct research into the experiences of working class students at UEA and feed this information into the NUS Poverty Commission and for this research to include experiences of discriminatory language at UEA and opinions on the representation of working classes in the Student Union and suggestions of how to combat this.
9. To feed into the NUS Poverty Commission and use all Union communication channels to promote and encourage working class/poor students to feed into the research NUS is currently conducting on poverty within student populations
10. To wait for the outcomes of the NUS Poverty Commission to be released and to mandate SOC to use this information once available to bring recommendations to council of how the Union can better support students from low-income/working class backgrounds
11. To reaffirm the Unions commitment to fighting for a fully free and liberated education system funded by a progressive tax system which allows working class students the same opportunity to access education
12. To mandate SOC to research ways of promoting the University Hardship Fund to students struggling financially and to lobby for an increase in the funds available.