

Higher Education Zone report

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Section 1 | Priorities for 2015-16

In this section of the report you will need to write in the projects you are working on and the progress made since they started. You will have already written this in your first NEC report so just use that and add in the progress box where it has now progressed since you started office.

Projects	Progress
Write here a title or name which most closely describes your project	How has this area of work progressed since its commencement
Quality Doesn't Grow on Fees (HE Bill and White Paper)	<p>As the priority campaign, and with the timeliness of the HE Bill and introduction of the TEF, the Quality Doesn't Grow on Fees campaign has been the bulk of the work within the HE Zone this year. There have been 4 strands to the campaign strategy and will take progress made on each in turn:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• lobbying and parliamentary & sector engagement around both the HE Bill and White Paper• local support for our members to influence their institution's response to the TEF and raising fees, using a variety of tactics and the NSS boycott from Jan 2017• national demo, as part of the priority campaign, in conjunction with FE Zone and UCU and building public support for our demands• building an alternative student-driven vision for driving teaching excellence and getting sector buy in <p>Fighting the HE Bill</p> <p>Summary In order to take on the HE Bill most effectively, we distilled our arguments against it around 4 key areas and messages to get across in our parliamentary work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Student representation (the lack thereof, exposing the government's empty rhetoric on the reforms being in 'students' interest' or 'putting students at the heart of the system')- Risks of increased marketisation, competition and privatisation: harmful to students and the sector- Access and participation- Teaching excellence and tuition fees <p>There have been a number of significant amendments to the HE Bill as</p>

	<p>a result of NUS' work on this campaign, where no other sector organisations have managed to cut through. We have written or supported 17 amendments to the Bill which were all debated and several made it through. Our amendments have ranged from completely deleting Schedule 2 of the Bill (which would allow the operation of TEF & differential fees), to pushing back against easier entry for private providers, fixing terms and conditions for student loans, meaningful action on access & widening participation, access to student support for refugees, to automatic voter registration for students. As a result of our work, in particular, the government have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Amended the Bill to include at least a specific place for a student representative on the Office for Students (OfS) board. This amendment was developed in direct consultation with NUS, and whilst not our exact wording, the point has been made. - Amended the Bill to provide greater clarity on how postgraduate research students from all subjects will be supported by the OfS and UK Research & Innovation (UKRI, new merger of research councils) - Amended the Bill to require universities to provide more information about the gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background of students to monitor fair access & completion. - Publicly committed government to working directly with NUS about how to ensure stronger protections for students in the case of course or provider closure. This is notable as it is highly unusual for a Minister to commit to meeting anyone other than MPs in the Committee Stage <p>Alongside this, we have pushed the following concessions through our campaigning work:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reduced the proposed threat to students' union autonomy. The original proposals in the Green Paper have, for now, been completely dropped. - Kept universities subject to the Freedom of Information Act - Pushed for stronger student protections, which are of particular importance for students on Tier 4 visa who would otherwise risk deportation. We will now be working directly with the Department for Education (DfE) to influence what new student protection plans should look like. - Forced the most contentious debates throughout the Bill process to be about our issues: the link between fee rises and the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF); ensuring HE providers act in the public interest and that there is a high bar for entry in the sector, concerns about TEF metrics and also access to funding for refugees and asylum seekers. - worked with sector bodies on the issue of new providers with an untested track record gaining probationary degree awarding powers to voice the same concerns, gained support for amendments placating those areas of the reforms and spoke out in the sector together; have worked with Universities UK (UUK), GuildHE, Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) as well as civil servants, MPs and Lords to push back against probationary degree awarding powers. <p>Key elements of HE Bill stages The following breaks down my work on the HE Bill by bill stage</p>
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	<p><u>House of Commons stages (Committee, Report & Third Reading)</u> Our impact on the Committee stage of the Bill debate has been particularly significant, where I focused on working closely with the Shadow Cabinet in tabling amendments. NUS received 37 mentions from the widest range of MPs. We were second most mentioned organisation, after the Open University, which was mentioned mostly by Gordon Marsden MP, Labour Shadow Minister for Education, who had previously lectured there.</p> <p>When no students or student representatives were invited to give oral evidence to the committee, I've staged a stunt action outside Parliament setting up a mock Office for Students with actual students giving evidence on the HE reforms to highlight the empty rhetoric and the issue of a lack of any student voice in the plans. Hours later, NUS were asked to give oral evidence that week and I've done so on behalf of NUS UK.</p> <p>In addition, NUS also had 15 out of 17 of our proposed amendments debated by the committee. By focusing resource on building relationships across the Opposition, we have significantly shaped the narrative and debate around the Bill.</p> <p>In the Report & Third Reading stage, I prioritised encouraging SUs and students to contact their MPs in order to centre our amendments in the debate. 674 students sent an email to their MP asking them to vote on amendments relating to our four key aims and to oppose the Bill; using our online platform & template letter 337 MPs were contacted, including 180 Conservative MPs.</p> <p><u>House of Lords stages (Second Reading & Committee Stage)</u> I met with Lord Stevenson, Labour spokesperson for Higher Education, and have worked directly with 10 other Lords on our priorities. I worked with students' unions with direct links to Lords, asking them to write to peers asking for support with our main priorities. This had particular success at Oxford University Students' Union where they coordinated over 60 letters to be sent.</p> <p>By the end of the Committee Stage, we were successful in securing six amendments in relation to our priorities - all backed by Crossbenchers, Labour and Conservatives.</p> <p>In addition we confirmed additional amendments supporting better financial support for refugees and asylum seekers and voter registration.</p> <p>Additional activity As well as the Bill process, the Government have been progressing their reforms outside of Parliament. This has included rolling out the second phase of the TEF, consulting on its third iteration and recruiting the Chair and the CEO of the Office for Students.</p> <p>I have worked closely with the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) and DfE as they develop policies and ensured I was speaking at sector events and party conferences and writing publicly about our concerns regularly.</p> <p>A particular highlight was our student facing action, encouraging students to apply to be the Chair of the Office for Students. I used the opportunity to highlight students' concerns that their interests were not reflected in any way in the reforms. This action was highly popular,</p>
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with 861 downloads from our website, NUSconnect.org.uk, and the minister asking why our mock OfS logo in the application letter had snakes. I explained how we are getting snaked, I think he got it.

The TEF2 technical consultation took place over summer 2016 – we responded to it and mobilised and supported members to do so too, resulting in 1 in 10 responses coming from SUs. The greater contextualization of metrics shown in the government's response has been as a result of our arguments.

National Demo

#Nov19 United for Education demo took place in conjunction with UCU, bringing students and staff together in building public support for our demands and show resistance in the face of attacks on education at all levels.

I have undertaken a number of speaking engagements at events to promote the demonstration, promoted the demo through media engagements, wrote for Times Higher Education and liaised with membership in supporting them to build their delegations and sort out logistics.

Attended numerous freshers' fairs and student events in September and October 2016 to promote the demo and talk about the TEF and HE reforms (3-4 course rep conferences or panel events in unions a week).

Took part in the 'Road to National Demo' event in September.

Some SUs and officers reported engaging for the first time in political activity because of the demo and that the occasion helped them recruit students into local campaigns and keep them engaged.

The demonstration fell right before the Third Reading of the HE Bill therefore making our opposition clear, we received positive press coverage, and I used the opportunity to promote the NSS boycott action through flyering and placards, as well as my demo speech.

Supporting members in local anti-TEF campaigns

28 page campaign pack & guide with briefings on the HE White Paper and campaign tactics for SUs released in June and disseminated throughout summer 2016 to membership.

Campaign hub has been regularly updated with briefings, campaign ideas, a petition template, model letters for MPs and VCs, factsheet/flyer for students breaking down the HE reforms and what they mean, presentations that could be rolled out to student groups, videos and blogs.

Posted materials like stickers, badges, baubles to student groups and unions to aid with campaigning

	<p>Delivered workshops on the White Paper, Bill and NSS action campaign at NUS summer 2016 conferences and training events for SU officers and staff</p> <p>Have provided individual guidance to unions, full-time and part-time officers and activists who got in touch & have been liaising with them as campaigns progressed</p> <p>Delivered workshops on the TEF & #TEFOff campaigning (incl. preparing for an NSS boycott) at all NUS Regional Network events in the Autumn term</p> <p>Two workshop dates on TEF & boycott offered in November</p> <p>Unions have been invited to showcase their local campaigns on nusconnect.org.uk to inspire others and share ideas (and we've had articles from UAL, Reading, Sheffield, Oxford, Manchester SUs) – invite still open!</p> <p>Regular policy briefings available to members whenever a debate happened or announcement was made (available on campaign hub) by DfE</p> <p>Spoke at over 22 course rep conferences over a 2 month period about the TEF, need to mobilise against it and helping course reps see themselves as activists; accepted any invite I received to speak at a student meeting (in person or Skyped in if I couldn't travel) or to support an action, flyering or banner making session that I could fit into my free time</p> <p>Activist Training day being currently being organised for this spring (TBC at time of writing this report)</p> <p>Upcoming national course rep conference in March</p> <p>NSS Boycott</p> <p>Since National Conference 2016, I have been working on delivering action on the National Student Survey (NSS) as mandated by Motion 201. This called on NUS to determine the most effective strategy to either boycott or sabotage the NSS in Spring 2017 as the NSS would be a metric used in the TEF, in order to challenge its introduction in the sector.</p> <p>I commissioned a consultation that ran from July to September 2016 to determine the most effective strategy for national action against the NSS out of three proposed options – a boycott of the NSS, sabotaging the NSS or action short of boycott/sabotage. In total, 74 unions engaged in the consultation exercise. The consultation included online surveys with member HE students' unions and the NUS National Executive Council, face to face meetings with UCU, NUS Postgraduate Campaign reps, Fighting Against Casualisation in Education (FACE) and NCAFC reps, telephone interviews with member unions and two full consultation days for students' unions. 49 participating unions indicated a will towards undertaking action against the NSS, with 33 indicating interest in either boycotting or sabotaging the survey.</p> <p>After the NSS consultation, I released additional resources for the QDGOF campaign, concentrating on parliamentary engagement around the HE Bill and supporting students' unions to lobby their senior</p>
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management teams in opting out the TEF and/or fixing fees. As the next stage of this campaign, should other tactics fail, I announced that NUS would support a national NSS boycott.

Whilst lobbying action brought about some positive changes, as detailed in HE Bill work above, neither parliamentary action nor institutional lobbying made an impact on the implementation of the TEF in its proposed form. As a result, from November 2016, I supported unions to undertake NSS boycotts - launching our **NSS boycott online hub and pledge website** in the week of the National Demo and teaming up with UCU in order to get academic staff support locally. The hub includes practical resources for organising a boycott on campus such as flyers, posters and badge designs; a twibbon, step-by-step guides to campaign activities like lecture shout outs and winning the arguments briefings to make the case for boycott action.

Held a day workshop on the 5th of January for activists, officers and staff to plan campaigns and their boycott timelines and targets for the months ahead – it was fully booked.

As of February 2017, there are 25 unions with policy to undertake NSS boycotting action. Some boycotting unions who have access to their institution's NSS response rates are reporting notable reductions in participation relative to 2016, and other unions are hitting their overall pledge targets just a month into their campaign.

Secured national press coverage: The Guardian, The Times, Times Higher Education, BuzzFeed News

A glorious NSS boycott meme page has been created by campaigners and fans.

We have already seen a significant shift in the position of the government thanks to the NSS boycott. Following a year of staunch support for the role of the NSS within the TEF, the Chair of the TEF panel and Vice Chancellor of Sheffield Hallam, Professor Chris Husbands, has indicated a significant roll back on the role that the NSS will play in the TEF, calling the NSS "a poor proxy for teaching quality" and the metrics 'flawed'.

Engagement

Overall, the Quality Doesn't Grow on Fees campaign has been the most popular piece of work of 2016/17 so far according to NUS Connect website data.

The letter for students to apply to be Chair of the Office for Students had 4259 views, making it the most viewed resource on Connect, while the top three new articles for the year were for the HE Bill, the third reading of the HE Bill and the NSS boycott.

Building a Student-led Alternative Vision of Teaching Excellence

Despite the auspicious current political environment, the student movement cannot simply be a protest movement – if we want to win we have to pursue an alternative vision for our HE system. Which is why alongside arguing for the reinstatement of teaching grants as opposed to raising fees, we've had to talk about how teaching & learning can actually be improved while the government's TEF plans could result in the opposite.

	<p>The theme for this year's NUS HE Zone Conference was building a 'Manifesto for Teaching Excellence' to draw up a vision of what teaching excellence actually looks like and how an education system should work for all students and use that alongside our campaigning against the TEF ; it was the most attended Zone conference and it was a participatory event where delegates started generating ideas to build a manifesto.</p> <p>I used sector speeches to outline our vision for a free and liberated education system, argued for the value of co-creation and non-consumerist quality enhancement mechanisms; in particular, I spoke at UUK's Student Experience conference about non-marketised approaches to improving quality, and QAA's Quality Matters conference on non-reductive approaches to student engagement, as well as drawing on Liberate My Degree work on liberated & inclusive teaching and learning (see below).</p> <p>The HE zone committee has worked on synthesising the large volume of ideas generated at the Zone Conference into the HE zone priority motion to this National Conference in order to steer the work of the campaign going forward in further developing this vision and manifesto.</p>
Liberate My Degree	<p>I have worked closely with the Priority Campaign Liber8 to ensure the aims of both campaigns are complementary. I have continued to actively support students' unions working to decolonise and liberate curricula on their campuses with a range of resources, available online, especially in unions who have not engaged in the campaign in 2015-16. I have also worked directly with course reps, supporting them to develop local campaigns. So far this year I have delivered workshops at over 11 local course rep conferences.</p> <p>Delivered workshops at summer conferences (SU16) on liberating the curriculum and tackling the Black attainment gap and ensured the summer officer training programmes with had embedded liberation issues in their learning outcomes and that there was a focus on liberating the curriculum for education officers and supported liberation officers in delivering workshops at the NUS Regional Network events in the autumn.</p> <p>The NUS HE Zone Conference on a student-led vision for teaching excellence incorporated a main strand on liberating the curricula and the motion put forward by our committee to National Conference this year reflects that.</p> <p>In addition to this I have worked to ensure that a liberated curriculum is essential to any definition of teaching excellence. Whilst the Government refuse to drop their terrible Teaching Excellence Framework, it is now widely accepted by the sector that teaching excellence must mean excellence for everyone, and that academia is intrinsically exclusive and built on oppressive structures, rather than students having to adapt to a narrow notion of 'success'. The work so many activist groups and SUs are doing to make changes to curricula is amazing. However, there is still a long way to go and I hope the campaign will continue after my time as VPHE.</p> <p>Therefore, I've been working with the National President on embedding the campaign in the wider work of NUS and creating a sustainable</p>

	<p>framework and impact monitoring system for the campaign and as well as ensuring its further development and delivery through NUS's new strategic plan, Project NUS100.</p> <p>I have continued our engagement with HEFCE on guidance to institutions on tackling various attainment gaps and have been making the case of further collaboration between the Higher Education Academy and the Equality Challenge Unit in embedding equality & diversity into all aspects of teaching & learning.</p> <p>I have been part of UUK's Social Mobility Advisory Group (SMAG) Taskforce, which was established to provide advice to the government and support for universities to improve access and long-term success for underrepresented groups in higher education. The final report was published in October 2016 and presented to the minister, Jo Johnson and the secretary of state for education, Justine Greening. In the group I made the case for a holistic approach to access, attainment and equal access to employment and resisting policy interventions that drive a tension between issues of class and issues of race, gender, sexuality, disability – resulting in an intersectional approach to the group's analysis and recommendations. I promoted the use of language of liberation and resisting deficit models or wishy-washy notions of 'diversity' that still center the privileged when discussing what success means. The final report places a duty upon institutions to work with students and SUs, recognising their role explicitly in spearheading this agenda and ensuring liberation groups are at the forefront with students affected leading on the solutions in any initiatives carried out.</p> <p>I have subsequently Spoken at UUK conferences on access highlighting these areas of work and recommendations from the report.</p> <p>Working with the Office for Fair Access (OFFA), Equality Challenge Unit, Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation on new toolkits for institutions, taking forward recommendations from the 'What Works' cross-sector report and final research.</p> <p>As the issue of the under-representation of white working class boys in HE has come to dominate the narrative around access agreements, I have consistently spoken out in the sector on the need to understand this as requiring a class analysis and not race and gender, and the importance of not detracting from work on access and attainment initiatives for BME students and have written for WonkHE on the topic.</p>
Raising the bar on access	<p>As part of the HE Bill campaign, we have won significant concessions in relation to access and participation, including enhanced student protections and requiring universities to provide more information about the gender, ethnicity and socio-economic background of students to ensure fair access and completion.</p> <p>But the government has introduced concerning new measures for access. This month (Feb), OFFA have announced new guidance for access agreements that include provision for white boys and</p>

	<p>encouraging universities to sponsor schools and open free schools. We are providing guidance, support and advice for students' unions to articulate a better vision for access and widening participation in their institutions through their access agreements and student-led widening participation initiatives.</p> <p>We have tabled an amendment to the HE Bill and secured its debate on access to HE and financial support for refugees and asylum seekers and treating them as home students.</p> <p>We have secured a strengthening of student protections and requirements for universities to have protection plans through the Bill, but are continuing to campaign on introducing a statutory entitlement to continuing one's studies in any event, seeking legislation and not just guidance to providers, which is especially important for international students on Tier 4 visas but also for protecting widening participation, BME and mature students, whom are over-represented in alternative providers.</p> <p>We have also secured an amendment to the Bill on increasing support for postgraduate research students in all subjects.</p> <p>We are continuing to work on PG taught loans after regulations were laid in Parliament in 2016, after the success of the #CapsOff campaign last year, troubleshooting irregularities as well as making a stronger case for regulated fees for postgraduate taught degrees and the introduction of PG access agreements, working closely with OFFA.</p> <p>We responded to the government's postgraduate research loan consultation on the technical elements as well as making the case that loans are not a suitable way of funding research degrees and scholarships should be favoured and encouraged members to respond.</p> <p>We responded to the government's part-time undergraduate maintenance loans consultations making the case for universal access to them without restrictions of means-testing (disproportionately affecting older students or those already working who are more likely to study part-time or estranged students), and encouraged members to do so as well.</p> <p>Contributed to the UUK Social Mobility Advisory Group and its final report to the minister: emphasised SU involvement in the new Access & Participation plans, issues of postgraduate and part-time education fair access and degree outcomes, policy areas from Liberate My Degree and equal access to employment. NUS and UUK are now intending on working together on a number of recommendations from the report.</p> <p>Working with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) and the Paul Hamlyn Foundation on taking forward recommendations from the final research from the 'What Works' initiative and I'm speaking at their conference launching the final report.</p> <p>Together with individual students and the Carers Trust, and through HE Zone representation on the UCAS board, succeeded in getting a</p>
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	<p>tick box in UCAS application forms for student parent & carers so that their data is captured by institutions and can be used by them and SUs in order to improve provision and representation for those groups of students</p> <p>We are continuing to lobby the Department for Education to increase the Childcare and Adult Dependant's Grants and open them to part-time students.</p> <p>Submitted evidence to the government inquiry into support for carers, narrowing down our response on student carer issues and using findings and testimonials from our roundtable last year.</p>
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Section 2 | Zone Policy

Policy	Progress
Write here the title and unique policy ID	What work has been done in this area
Motion 201: Divorce our courses from market forces	<p>Please see "Quality Doesn't Grow on Fees" section in priority projects taking forward manifesto pledges, motion 201 & subsequent amendments.</p> <p>Launched the report from the second phase of the Debt in First Degree research – measuring and analysing attitudes towards debt of the first cohort of graduates on the £9k fees regime; findings have been widely reported in the national press and its findings were used in supporting the case for free education and analysing what 'value for money' really means in the context of huge labour market inequality.</p> <p>Was invited to review a book on debt, student funding and marketization called 'Student Lives in Crisis' by Lorenza Antonucci in the Times Higher Education</p>
Motion 203: Employability isn't working	<p>I have focused this work in two ways. Firstly, in making sure careers, advice and guidance is a key strand in NUS100, NUS' new long-term strategy. This will ensure that work can continue in an impactful way after this year. Secondly, I have focused on ensuring the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education survey is fundamentally changed to better reflect the much broader interpretation of graduate success. The survey is crucial in driving institutional behaviours around employability, and this year it</p>

	<p>was reviewed. As well as ensuring NUS was on the review steering group, I ensured we submitted a high impact consultation response and worked to support SUs to do so too. I provided a support webinar and also briefing resources for SUs. Sixteen SUs responded, making us the second highest group to input into the consultation. The consultation is now entering its next phase and I am hopeful that HESA, the body running the survey, will continue its intention to implement a much broader range of questions about graduates' views on their wellbeing and post-graduation decisions. This type of information will ensure the survey is not just about how much money you are earning 6 months after graduating.</p> <p>UUK's Social Mobility Advisory Group work has also been big focus as a timely and impactful avenue to implement this motion – worked with UUK on their report to Jo Johnson, spoke at their launch conference to highlight issues around liberation and equal access to employment and research that came about as result of motion.</p> <p>Continuing to work with the HEA on developing and improving their employability frameworks.</p>
Motion 205: Liberate My Degree	Please see "Liberate my Degree" section in priority campaigns.
National Ballot: NSS Risk Assessment and Equality Impact Assessment	This passed into policy in December 2016 following a national ballot. In January 2017, NUS published a risk assessment and an equality impact assessment of the action, templates for both assessments for unions to carry out their own, as well as offering bespoke one on one consultation support for students' unions to undertake their own risk assessments at a local level (offer of a webinar and a session with a policy staff member). To the date of this report, these documents have been downloaded 24 times for the risk assessment and 49 times for the equality impact assessment (16 and 55 respectively for the templates). No bespoke consultation has been requested.
Additional activity: Brexit	<p>Lobbying at Party conferences in the autumn</p> <p>Was invited to contribute to a Labour Party roundtable on Brexit and HE in December</p> <p>Received assurances from govt on UG & PGT access to student support up to 2018 entry, but pressing on further; as well as confirmation of PGR funding staying the same up to 2018 entry</p>

	<p>Submitted written evidence to the Education Select Committee's inquiry into the impact of Brexit on HE</p> <p>Gave oral evidence to Education Select Committee inquiry – raised our concerns around the limiting of freedom of movement for students and staff and urged for removing international student numbers from migration targets</p> <p>Attended British Council event in Berlin on Brexit with student representatives from across European countries</p>
<p>Additional activity: Student loan sell off</p>	<p>Previously tabled amendment to HE Bill on fixing loan terms & conditions and worked to secure more debates on the retrospective freezing on the threshold</p> <p>Wrote blog warning a month before it happened and explaining how the sale worked</p> <p>Spoke out against the intention of a sell-off in national press and receiving wide coverage when the news broke</p> <p>Launched email your MP platform & template the same morning</p> <p>Wrote to the chancellor Phillip Hammond to express our opposition, concern that the sell off is not in the taxpayer's interest and submitted an FOI to govt on their value for money case</p> <p>Tabling parliamentary questions by working with the Opposition</p> <p>Teamed up with WeOwnIt and Jubilee Debt Campaign for getting public profile for the campaign</p>