

Learning from the NUS Poverty Commission: What Works

Addressing Inequality in Post-16 Education



POVERTY
COMMISSION

nus
national union of **students**

Introduction

NUS established the Poverty Commission in 2017 to bring to light issues of class and poverty in post-16 education.

In a society where class still determines too many outcomes, and poverty is on the rise, it is more important than ever to understand the barriers to accessing - and excelling in - post-16 education for working class people, and the ways in which poverty affects students' ability to enter and succeed in tertiary education.

The Commission took a collaborative approach to identify both problems and potential solutions. There were two main strands to its initial fact-finding work. We asked students, students' unions, academics, further and higher education sector agencies, trades unions, and business, charity and campaign groups to submit evidence on income and post-16 education.

The call for evidence was launched in October 2017 and closed in December, and we received 66 responses in total.

We also asked 12 individuals from these same groups to act as commissioners and hear from experts from a range of organisations. Over three full days, the commissioners heard from 13 witnesses discussing issues relating to finance, education and the way institutions and education itself is structured. The evidence received was then synthesised into the main report.

The Poverty Commission took a collaborative approach to understand the current situation for working class students and students experiencing poverty in 2018,

in terms of accessing, progressing through and succeeding in FE and HE.

Equally, we wanted to generate solutions for the problems we identified and highlight positive examples of work already being undertaken. We sought to involve NUS' diverse membership and engage with partner organisations across the UK – including trades unions, campaigning bodies, charities, and FE and HE sector agencies – in order to identify the key issues, examples of good practice and potential solutions.

As part of our call for evidence we asked participants to tell us about any projects, schemes, partnerships or activities that they were part of that supported working class students to access and achieve in post-16 education.

This report aims to capture the full range of work carried out by educational institutions, charities and other bodies to address inequality and summarise the responses we received in our call for evidence.

In writing this report it became clear that there are some gaps in service provision and as such, we intend to keep this report as a live document to be updated and reissued as we encounter more examples of excellent practice within the education sector. This briefing is current as of July 2018.

If you know of examples you would like to see highlighted here, please contact fleur.priest-stephens@nus.org.uk

'We must work together to challenge and dismantle all the barriers to education, so that everyone has the chance to get in and get on.'

Shakira Martin, NUS President

What Works: Financial Support and Budgeting

Edinburgh University Students Association

Activities and Sports Participation Grant

In 2016 Edinburgh University Students' Association received £10,000 from the University to deliver a new small grants scheme to help reduce financial barriers to taking part in sports clubs and societies. This was in response to research in 2015 which found that students from low income backgrounds, or with WP markers, were often less likely to be involved in these types of activities. Taking part in societies, sports clubs, volunteering and other extra-curricular activities is a key part of the student experience and a good way to build skills, knowledge, confidence, experiences and connections to succeed in post-16 education and beyond.

Our Activities and Sports Participation Grant is based on the University of Sheffield scheme. It is open to students in receipt of a University bursary and provides up to £100 towards items such as membership fees, transport and kit costs, class and event fees. We have worked closely with the University and the Sports Union to deliver the Grant. The Students' Association received more applications that it could fund in both 2016 and 2017. As a result, the student officers successfully secured additional funding from the University this year.

Students who applied for a Grant explained how it would benefit them:

"I currently work a part-time job to ensure that I can fund most of the activities I want to partake in, but this puts a lot of pressure on my studies."

"It would make a huge difference to my personal development to go on this trip, since the opportunity to not only have organised the trip, but also to lead it, would help me a lot in terms of

management experience, especially since I am currently in fourth year and applying for jobs for after I leave uni."

Contact: president@eusa.ed.ac.uk

NUS

Student Switch Off+ project

The Student Switch Off+ project provides monthly advice to students on how to save energy and money in the private-rented sector in order to reduce the exposure of all students to fuel poverty.

More information can be found here:

<http://studentswitchoff.org/save-energy-rented-accommodation/>

The Union of Manchester Metropolitan University

Access to Learning Fund

Manchester Met have committed to providing a hardship fund for home students, called the Access to Learning Fund. This source of funding can be a crucial lifeline for students facing poverty. There are improvements being made to the fund this academic year, including a fast-track service for urgent cases such as eviction and extending the deadline for final year students to apply.

MMU have also heavily invested in the Advice Centre to ensure that support is available for students at Manchester Met. The vast majority of queries relate to financial issues, including debt, money management, correcting DWP and SFE mistakes and applying for additional funding. This service can help ensure that a student is in the strongest financial position possible whilst studying. From September 2015 to August 2017 they helped students gain an additional £1,324,832.

Finally, the Union have also worked with the University on the **LOTUS (Linking Opportunities to University Services)** project. This focuses on providing support for care leavers, young carers and estranged students. Many of these students come from a WP background and may need additional guidance and financial support. For example, these groups are classed as a priority for the Access to Learning Fund and the University offer a care leavers bursary

University of Bristol

Accommodation Bursary Scheme

First-year undergraduates who are living in University-allocated accommodation and who were living in an area of low participation in Higher Education are able to apply for a discount of up to £1,040 to reduce the cost of first year accommodation.

Bristol Students Union submitted evidence to the Poverty Commission based on research that was carried out with recipients of the bursary to understand their experiences of living in halls. The research found that where students had used the bursary to pay for rent in more expensive high-end accommodation, they did not tend to have a better experience than those that used the bursary for living costs in less expensive accommodation. Bristol University will use this information to support recipients of the bursary in their decision of where to live in their first year.

University of Surrey

Guarantor Scheme

For many students, especially international students, estranged students and care experienced students, the challenge of

finding a guarantor for their rent in a private rented property is prohibitive.

The Student Money Team in Student Services Centre operate a University Guarantor scheme which is open to students who are unable to find their own guarantor. Unlike other similar schemes, the Surrey University model is not limited to international students, or to home students.

More information can be found here:

www.surrey.ac.uk/currentstudents/accommodation/guarantor-scheme/

What Works: Peer Support

Edinburgh University Students' Association

Peer support

Edinburgh University Students' Association (EUSA) leads the Peer Support Project at the University of Edinburgh. This aims to support students with the transition into, through and out of the University. The Project aims to build a sense of community, belonging and partnership within the student body, improving and enhancing the overall student experience and in turn helping to improve retention rates. It is for all students though some peer support schemes elsewhere may target specific groups.

Universities and students' associations should work together to provide peer support and buddy schemes. What Works?¹ states that 'at the heart of successful retention and success is a strong sense of belonging in HE for all students' and that this is 'most effectively nurtured through mainstream activities that all students participate in'.

Contact: president@eusa.ed.ac.uk

improve student experience, attainment and other outcomes such as employability for BAME students, those from low socio-economic groups and students that experience mental ill health. The scope of this project is linked to the work mentioned above on the retention of students from low-income backgrounds, particularly those who identify as BAME and students who have come to the institution through the route of studying BTEC at an FE College rather than traditional school leaver A Level study.

The Union of Manchester Metropolitan University

Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassador Programme

Manchester Met is a partner on the University of Manchester led 'Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassador Programme' which will see the University work with The Union MMU to deliver the project. The Union is leading on identifying groups of student ambassadors who will develop and deliver sessions for their peers to foster a sense of belonging and enhance the student experience. The programme will work to

¹ Building Student Engagement and Belonging in Higher Education at a Time of Change,

What Works? Student Retention and Success Programme 2012

What Works: Information, Advice and Guidance

Union of Manchester Metropolitan University

The First Generation Scheme

This is a new programme focussing on supporting those from backgrounds who do not usually enter higher education to access University, and to succeed once they are here. The programme is available to college students studying and living in the Greater Manchester area, and provides continued financial, professional and personal support throughout the time students will be studying and into employment. The project will target year 12 pupils in breaking down barriers to access and participation in post-16 education. The outreach element of the scheme will be funded through the Access Agreement, with Alumni and Development raising funds to provide enhanced support once the students enrol at Manchester Met. The Union are actively engaged in the project as members of the project board and have fed in ideas for income generation and engagement in the scheme overall. The Union have worked with the Education Committee at Manchester Met on a Foundation Year Review and were encouraged to see emphasis being placed on the Foundation Year as a key device in widening participation rather than an attempt to recover the fees of students who have missed their offer. Focus is being placed on the need for a recruitment strategy and recruitment targets, giving merit to the Foundation Year as a standalone programme rather than a fall back option as can often be the case. With the Foundation Year being institutionally positioned and sufficiently resourced The Union are working with the university to ensure appropriate investment in course representation and sharing of best practice across the institution, particularly in widening access and welcome and

transition activities. The university have committed to exploring a part-time pathway for Foundation Year with the intention to expand recruitment to mature students embedded 'in practice'. Currently only 17 (1%) of Foundation Year students studying part-time and 1132 (89%) of our Foundation Year students are under the age of 22 therefore any activity to promote widening access to mature students and students who cannot commit to full time study is seen as a positive step by The Union.

We supported our institution's proposal to explore the possibility of a level 3 exit certificate for students who do not progress their studies past the Foundation Year. This option allows students to leave with a qualification, having paid a full year's tuition and the ability to reflect their learning and experience when applying for jobs or education courses in the future.

Contact: Christina Kennedy

c.kennedy@mmu.ac.uk

Oxford University Students' Union

Class Act

This campaign is sponsored by Oxford Student Union focussing on addressing class barriers facing students. They run events for students who identify as one of four streams; working class, first generation, state comprehensive school educated and those from low income households (or intersecting through more than one).

This year they have instituted a buddy system matching students from upper years

with incoming first years to provide support and guidance when settling in to university. They have produced an academic survival guide to give students advice on approaching work when they arrive at university and explaining unfamiliar concepts.

More information can be found here:

www.oxfordsu.org/campaigns/ClassAct/

Target Schools

Target Schools is Oxford SU's flagship access campaign. It was founded in 1982 and for 35 years have aimed to debunk the myths that many school students have about Oxford. Current undergraduates share their experiences with students from schools with limited history of Oxford applications.

It is run entirely by Oxford University students. This gives an honest insight into the admissions process, from UCAS to the personal statement to interviews.

They aim to demystify Oxford in two ways. Firstly, through Shadowing Days, where sixth-form and college students are given the opportunity to shadow a current undergraduate at Oxford University. The second is the Target Schools Roadshow, a series of presentations delivered by students to schools around the country.

More information can be found here:

www.oxfordsu.org/campaigns/targetschools

Contact: vpaccaff@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk

Access HE/ NEON

Access HE Online

Over the last two years, nine AccessHE members have contributed to the development of AccessHE Online: a portfolio of online short-courses aimed at learners in Years 9 to 13. The courses aim to bring innovative teaching and learning to learners from under-engaged schools and colleges, intending to develop the skills and knowledges which support learners to succeed in accessing post-16 education. Courses include 'Guiding University Choice' for Year 12+, 'Independent Learning Skills' for Year 10+, 'Social Problems and Issues' for Year 11+ and 'Molcraft – Molecules in Minecraft' for Year 10+ GCSE Chemistry students.

Contact:

graeme.atherton@londonhigher.ac.uk

What Works: Support for Underrepresented Groups

The University of Derby

Practical Recipes for Student Success

The University of Derby has successfully halved the gap in the proportion of BME and white graduates gaining first or 2.1 degree classifications, from 30 percentage points in 2011–12 to 15% in 2016–17, through Practical Recipes for Student Success, or PReSS. The project provides tutors with a 'recipe' book to use with students to help them raise their attainment. It is a "pick and mix" selection of activities, advice and guidance. Each of the 'recipes' has been proven to have a positive impact on student attainment, especially with those students who may be first in family into Higher Education or who come from a BME background. HEFCE have now provided funding to trial extending the project to other universities and to target other student groups, for example those with disabilities or from lower socio-economic backgrounds.

The University of Birmingham

BAME Equality & Diversity Student Ambassadors Programme

Running since 2013, this programme focuses on building capacity in the student population. This impact of this range of work can be seen in the reduction of the attainment gap from 22% in 2010 to the current level of 12%.

As part of the scheme over one hundred student ambassadors are in charge of initiating and producing student interventions. Last year's ambassadors organised BAME student placement opportunities, cultural evenings, and drop-in peer-support sessions. They also developed the 'Beyond My Ethnicity' e-magazine, now in its 5th edition. Birmingham is now working with HEFCE, the University of

Manchester and Manchester Metropolitan University to launch the Diversity and Inclusion Student Ambassador Project. This project adopts a co-production model that brings staff and students together to take action to promote wellbeing and improve outcomes for BAME students, and students from low socio-economic groups.

University of Sussex

First Generation Scholars

This award-winning scheme provides a wide range of support and initiatives to increase participation in higher education amongst under-represented groups. The scheme includes financial support (a means tested scholarship, £50 per week discount on housing in the first year and travel awards from year 2) alongside a range of activity that forms a life-cycle of engagement that begins with year 9 school children and runs right through to transitioning Sussex graduates into the workplace.

Once at university, students are supported with workshops and social programmes, as well as internships and supported study abroad opportunities. The internships include funded internships at home or overseas in China, as well as paid research internships to explore the possibility of postgraduate study and a research career. The scheme has been extremely successful, with 85% of FGS graduating in 2015 receiving a First or 2:1 degree and 90% moved into graduate level employment or further study; in both cases this was a greater level of success than the graduate cohort overall.

What Works: Employment, Experience and Social Capital

University of Newcastle

PARTNERS programme

The PARTNERS programme supports disadvantaged students to gain work experience and develop social capital by providing Careers Insights bursaries to support their work experience and career development.

School and college leavers can apply to the PARTNERS programme and receive a lower conditional offer to Newcastle University, attend transitional events run specifically for PARTNERS students, visit the university and meet other students and access support with the application process.

The programme also offers a range of bespoke events. This has led to over a 10 percentage-point increase in participating students progressing to highly skilled jobs.

More information can be found here:
www.ncl.ac.uk/schools/partners

Queen Mary University of London

QMUL is pioneering a model of undergraduate education in which opportunities to develop employability skills and social capital are embedded into all degree programmes.

Approximately 10 per cent of the curriculum in each year of study will be devoted to acquiring skills and developing experience that will enable our graduates to become leaders in their respective fields and to make a positive societal impact, regardless of their social or financial background. The new modules cover many themes, including entrepreneurship, creative

thinking, networking, communications, cross-disciplinary and cross-cultural critical thinking and global perspectives, and all are academically demanding and subject to rigorous assessment by QMUL, even when they involve placements elsewhere.

The new bespoke modules also include partnership with graduate employers. One of these is with the civil service, and aims to equip students with the skills that civil servants need to support the government. Students will experience the work first-hand and have opportunities to talk to senior civil servants in a range of roles about what their jobs entail. Accommodating the needs of each student will involve individual tailoring of their programme to specific circumstances through a personal tutorship scheme.

More information can be found here:
www.qmul.ac.uk/media/news/items/200043.html

What Works: Access for Marginalized Groups

Goldsmiths University

Open Book

Open Book at Goldsmiths aims to break down the barriers that discourage people from entering higher education. The project works closely with a network of agencies to support people from a wide range of non-traditional backgrounds including, offending, addiction and mental health, as well as those who have never truly considered further and higher education as any kind of route to enhancing their future career choices and personal development.

Open Book offers a wide range of taster classes (delivered by experienced staff and volunteers) including, Anthropology, Art, Creative Writing, Philosophy, and Music and Performance. The project also offers an Extended Project program, teaching the basics of academia, which will offer both a qualification and practical experience, allowing students to make genuine applications to foundation and bachelor degrees. The project also offers a dedicated Women's Drop-In session, offering a wide range of practical advice from both a personal perspective and an academic one.

Open Book values the importance of learning from experience. The project encourages students to value and reflect on their own life experiences to offer new dimensions to the academic and policy perspectives offered by their courses. Open Book staff work with individual students to find the right solution for them.

More information can be found here:

www.gold.ac.uk/open-book/

Prisoner Education Trust

PUPIL Network

Prisoners' Education Trust is proud to be working with the growing number of prison/university partnerships across the country and internationally. These innovative partnerships bring universities, and often university students, into prisons to learn alongside prisoners.

PUPIL partnerships have the potential to transform the learning experience of students both inside and outside prison, and to improve the educational opportunities we offer to those in custody and in the community.

The network brings together students, practitioners and academics.

It aims to:

- Provide a forum for students, practitioners and academics to come together and share their experiences
- Support existing and emerging prison/university partnerships by sharing and promoting good practice
- Identify opportunities for future projects and research
- Use shared evidence and experiences to influence future academic and prison education policy

More information can be found here:

www.prisonerseducation.org.uk/pupil

