



NUS Scotland
2019 General Election
manifesto policy briefing

NUS Scotland General Election 2019 manifesto briefing

NUS Scotland has released its manifesto of key general election asks for the December 2019 election. This briefing provides you with more information about our central asks

An education system for the public good

1. Increased funding available to the Scottish Government for apprenticeships, further and higher education

What do we want and why?

While education is devolved, public funding available for education and skills in Scotland goes up or down due to decisions taken by the UK Parliament. For example, if funding in education in England increased by the equivalent of £100 per head, the Scottish Government's block grant should go up by £100 per person in Scotland. So, more spending in England should mean greater availability of resources in Scotland to spend on improved cost-of-living support, better mental health services at colleges and universities, ensuring our institutions can attract the best staff and offer a wide variety of courses, and much more.

With students' associations across the UK, we're campaigning for candidates to back greater investment in education to ensure that the education systems in Scotland, and other parts of the UK, are truly accessible to all, well-funded, with life-long learning opportunities.

2. Work with the Scottish Government to ensure that no student in Scotland in receipt of benefit entitlement loses out

because they are in receipt of student cost-of-living support

What do we want and why?

Under universal credit 63p is deducted from someone's monthly payments for every £1 earned through work. While £110 in student loans and/or grants is disregarded per month for those in receipt of universal credit, beyond this for every £1 a student receives, the same amount is deducted from monthly payments. The Department for Work and Pensions has justified this policy on the grounds that it keeps the financial advantage of working, while simultaneously financially penalising universal credit recipients for studying.

This approach is completely at odds with consensus of Student Support Review Group, which comprised representatives from across Scotland's education sector and wider civic society. The [final report](#), published in 2017, stated that "no student should lose their benefit entitlements because they are in receipt of student funding", and proposed a "special support payment" for those students in receipt of benefits, similar to the approach already taken in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. This requires joint working between the UK and Scottish governments. **We want to see this work expedited, and are calling for the next UK Government to work with the Scottish Government to ensure that those in receipt of student support and universal credit do not lose out.**

3. A commitment to a Real Living Wage for all workers, regardless of age, including apprentices

What do we want and why?

Right now, in accordance with [UK Government policy](#), the 'National Minimum Wage' is set at £8.21 for people who are 21 and over; £7.70 for people aged 21 to 24, £6.15 for those aged 18 to 20, £4.35 for those under 18. For apprentices aged under 19, or aged 19 or over in the first year of their apprenticeship, the rate is just £3.90. Apprentices aged 19 or over who have completed the first year of their apprenticeship are entitled to the 'National Minimum Wage' for their age.

Apprentices are both learners and workers. We believe that the idea that apprentices should have a lower minimum wage than other workers to signify the contribution to the cost of their education is regressive and unfair. NUS is proud to host the National Society of Apprentices, who work with apprentices across the UK to represent their interests. They have developed a [specific manifesto](#) for apprentices, which is supported by NUS Scotland.

With students struggling to get by across the country, combining work with study is a necessity for all but the wealthiest. The student support review for Scotland, published in November 2017, augmented the Minimum Student income with paid work during term time of no more than ten hours, in line with the Cubie Review. It's crucial for students, therefore, that work pays.

The National Minimum Wage is not calculated according to what employees and their families need to live. [The Real Living Wage](#), on the other hand, is independently calculated based on what people need to get, and employers can voluntarily sign up. We're calling for all workers, regardless of age, or whether they're an apprentice to be paid the Real Living Wage. The Real Living Wage is uprated on an annual basis and, in 2019/20, is £9.30 across the UK.

We are calling for candidates to back a Real Living Wage for all workers, regardless of age, including apprentices.

4. Abolition of the Prevent Duty in further and higher education

Prevent is a strand of the Government's counter-extremism strategy, and subject to intense criticism for its negative impact on several of our communities, most notably Black and Muslim people. Prevent has generated suspicion and prejudice against those communities and, in further (FE) and higher education (HE) across the UK, the requirements of the Prevent 'duty' have changed the relationship between lecturers and students from one of partners in learning to that of suspects and informants, as well as eroding students' right to freedom of political expression.

The effectiveness of Prevent at actually preventing violent political crime is unproven and unevaluated, and while there may be some referrals due to concerns around white supremacy or right-wing views, this still does not address the root cause of any violent political crime.

NUS does see the need for a strategy to stop people committing violent political crime. We believe the government should focus on the root causes of violent crime, which include its foreign policy, disenfranchisement, poverty, racism and deprivation. While Prevent is currently under review, we believe that it has so lost the trust of our communities it now cannot be reformed. That's **why we are calling on candidates to commit to abolishing the Prevent duty in FE and HE and indeed beyond.**

A healthy society for the public good

1. Ensure politics is accessible to all by introducing votes at 16 for all election and referenda,

and opposing the introduction of voter ID schemes

What do we want and why?

Votes at 16

At 16 UK citizens can join the armed forces, leave home, get married or enter a civil partnership, and much more. For the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence 16 and 17-year-olds were enfranchised and it's estimated that 75 per cent of them voted. Sixteen and 17-year-olds can also vote in the Scottish Parliament elections. Yet, over 1.5 million 16 and 17-year-olds are denied the vote in the United Kingdom general elections.

We're calling for candidates to commit to extending the franchise so that the minimum voting age for all UK elections is 16.

Voter ID schemes

There have recently been calls for voter ID to be introduced for all UK elections. This would require voters to show a form of photographic ID at polling stations to be able to vote. However, there is no evidence of widespread electoral fraud that would necessitate such extreme measures. Out of 44.4 million votes cast in 2017, there was one conviction resulting from the 28 allegations of in-person voter fraud.

Any move to introduce a voter ID requirement would bar thousands, possibly millions, of UK citizens from voting in elections and will hit students, those from ethnic minorities backgrounds and LGBT+ citizens hardest. 3.5 million citizens do not have access to photo ID and 11 million citizens do not have a passport or driving licence. Younger (aged 17-30) black and minority groups are 15 per cent less likely to own driving licences than their white counterparts.

When the government trialed this scheme in 2018 and 2019, 2,000 people were turned

away from polling stations in 2019 and roughly 750 of these did not return to vote. This shows the difficulty in making people aware of the changes so that they can prepare. Even if a free local electoral identity document is introduced, electors must apply for this prior to polling day and so must also be aware of the changes before then.

We're calling on all candidates to commit to voting against any legislation that would bring about the introduction of Voter ID for UK-wide elections.

2. Invest in the NHS with additional resources available for healthcare in Scotland

Like education health is devolved to the Scottish Parliament. If more is invested in health in England, more public funding is available to the Scottish Government to invest in Scotland's healthcare system.

We're calling for all candidates to back greater investment in health services, not just for the good for students, but for the good of society as a whole.

3. Abolish the health surcharge levied on international students across the UK

Access to healthcare has been limited to overseas visitors. There is an expectation that outside of core care such as emergency treatment, they will pay. The Immigration Act 2014 requires for non-EEA temporary migrants (including international students who do not have indefinite leave to remain) to pay an obligatory 'health surcharge' in addition to their visa application fee. As of 8 January 2019 the health surcharge is £300 per year for students and £400 per year for non-students. While health is devolved immigration is a reserved power, meaning it is the responsibility of the UK Government. As such, health provisions in the *Immigration Act 2014*, including health surcharge apply, across the UK.

We are calling for candidates to commit to abolishing the health surcharge wholesale, so that healthcare is accessible on the basis of need, not the ability to pay.

4. Take urgent action on the climate crisis

What do we want and why?

NUS Scotland is proud to have worked with, and campaigned alongside, activists and other campaigning organisations across Scotland MSPs to commit to meaningful action to tackle the climate emergency. Thanks to the hard work of climate activists across Scotland, the new Climate Change Bill, passed on 25 September 2019, includes a commitment to 75 per cent cut in emissions from 2030, compared with 1990 levels and net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045.

Just as we called for the Scottish Government to take radical action, we're calling for the next UK Government to take radical action too.

We're calling for candidates to back the asks of Students Organising for Sustainability United Kingdom (SOS-UK), the new charity launched by the National Union of Students. [The SOS-UK manifesto can be accessed here.](#)

An end to Brexit for the public good

1. Back a People's Vote on any Brexit deal agreed by the UK Parliament

What do we want and why?

Brexit, in any form, will significantly impact the opportunities of all students in the UK. Whether that be through reduced funding for maintenance support and research, a reduction in opportunities for outward mobility or the restriction of freedom of movement.

In the 2016 referendum nearly three quarters of under 25-year-olds voted to remain. On top of this since the 2016 referendum there have

been three academic years of students who were not eligible to vote at the time but would be now. Young people will be amongst the most affected by the UK leaving the EU yet many have not even been given the opportunity to express their will.

Before the UK leaves the EU, whether with or without a deal, this must be subject to a second referendum to reaffirm that it is truly the desire of the British public to leave.

We're calling for all candidates to commit to giving the public a final say on any Brexit deal through a People's Vote.

2. Guarantee the replacement of EU funding which currently supports access to vocational and further education, and research in higher education in the event of Brexit

What do we want and why?

The EU's European Social Fund (ESF) is a vital source of income for the further education sector in the UK. In July 2018 the government guaranteed it would underwrite all projects, including ESF projects, that would have been funded by the EU under the 2014-2020 programme period, if a no-deal Brexit occurs. This is a very positive step and provides some security for apprentices and other students that are reliant on this funding. However, the ESF is not open to third-country participation. This means the UK would not have access to the programme that will run from 2021-27. Without this funding it could lead to thousands of apprenticeship places being lost along with other funding support for students.

All parties must guarantee that equivalent levels of funding will be available to these projects post-2020, in line with European Social Funding. The new Shared Prosperity Fund should be used to help make up this gap in funding and should be targeted at those areas that are most in need to support students into education.

EU funding is essential for the UK's higher education sector too. The Horizon 2020 programme has boosted the university sector's ability to collaborate with EU partners for research projects by providing ready-made platforms for international collaboration and attracting global talent to the UK. The funding platforms that the EU provides allow for all institutions to access the funding that they need.

Since 2014, UK-based researchers coordinated one in six Horizon 2020 research projects. Universities secure more than £800 million per year through the programme to support vital developments in research activity and this funding will be crucial for expanding the UK research base if we are to reach the 2.4 per cent target.

The next government must confirm that it is their intention to seek continued association to Horizon 2020 and its successor programme. This assurance must be given so that researchers and post-graduates students can be given the confidence to continue to apply for funding.

Candidates should guarantee EU funding which supports access to vocational and further education and research in higher education will be replaced in the event of Brexit.

3. Protect inward and outward student mobility post-Brexit

What do we want and why?

By abandoning Erasmus+, through leaving the EU without a deal, the UK economy would forego £390 million per year in export earnings that incoming Erasmus+ students' living expenses generate alone. HE students who study abroad are 9 per cent more likely to gain a first-class or 2:1 degree and are 24% less likely to be in employment than those who don't.

Since the start of the current Erasmus+ funding cycle in 2014, UK colleges have received over €59 million for vocational projects, benefiting over 100 colleges. Part of the success of Erasmus+ has been that it allows college students to undertake short placements abroad, that fit better with the traditional college structure and work or family commitments that college students often have.

Candidates should protect inward and outward student mobility post-Brexit, including participation in Erasmus+ or any successor schemes and cross-border study on the island of Ireland.

4. Create a fair immigration system for all migrants including international students, with an expedited legal guarantee of a post-study work visa lasting at least two years for international students

What do we want and why?

Students from EU member states are currently eligible to travel freely around the EU to study and work, whether for the duration or part of their course. If free movement ends, post-Brexit, the UK would be shut out of this opportunity unless a new, frictionless immigration deal is reached. Therefore, the next government needs to create a fair and accessible immigration system that is welcoming for all international students.

International students are an essential part of our campuses. All parties should extend the post study work visa available to all students to two years and remove international students from any limit on the number of entry visas issued. All future immigration systems must recognise the investment made in the UK by international students, and create opportunities for graduates to stay following their studies.

The next government must ensure that the UK continues to be an attractive destination for EU

students and that any money saved from a change in fee status is ringfenced for colleges and universities. They should also seek to establish reciprocal arrangements with EU member states so that UK students can enjoy opportunities to study abroad at an accessible price.

The Tier 4 visa system is not fit for purpose and disadvantages students coming to Scotland and the rest of the UK. The next government must streamline the application process so that applicants understand what evidence they must produce in advance and only need to produce that evidence once. This system must be accessible and not penalise potential students financially for seeking additional information or support through the process. The government must also prevent delays which can result in students missing essential induction and transition periods.

Additionally, any future study immigration system must recognise the reality of study, including the different requirements of different courses and modes of study, such as courses lasting four years in Scotland (or longer in the case of some qualifications like medicine and architecture), and around interruption of studies. A future government should remove the initial application fees for returning students and any new children travelling with them.

Candidates should create a fair immigration system for all migrants including international students, with post-study work visas lasting at least two years.

5. Ensure no hard border on the island of Ireland and protect the Good Friday Agreement

What do we want and why?

Any hard border on the island of Ireland would be a major challenge to relations between communities in Northern Ireland and the rights guaranteed under the Good Friday Agreement.

Peace in Northern Ireland was hard won and it simply must be protected and maintained. A hard border would also create issues for student mobility cross-border on the island of Ireland.

All politicians must guarantee that there will be no hard border and that their actions will not make the likelihood of a hard border being established increase, nor threaten to jeopardise the Good Friday Agreement.

Candidates should ensure that there will never be a hard border on the island of Ireland and guarantee that they will protect the Good Friday agreement.

6. Secure medical supplies from the risk of a no deal Brexit

What do we want and why?

Of the 12,300 medicines currently licensed for use in the UK, around 7,000 come to Britain either from or through the European Union – with the vast majority being shipped across the Channel. In the event of a no deal Brexit it is very likely that this supply chain would be disrupted which would leave students at risk of not receiving essential medicine.

Whilst efforts have been made to stockpile and the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) has asked pharmaceutical suppliers to build up six weeks' supplies of medicines coming from the EU, concerns have been raised by the National Audit Office about the levels of stockpiling. Additional approaches to risk mitigation such as additional freight capacity or changing regulatory requirements may not fully mitigate against shortages and may create additional issues within the supply system. It is essential that Brexit does not disrupt the supply of medicine and all people are able to access the medicine that they require, including transition related prescriptions.

The next UK government must secure medical supplies from the risk of a no deal Brexit.