

Welcome to the NUS conference 2020 election Hustings for the Vice President higher education. I'm your host Keme Nzerem and joining me today are your election candidates Hillary Gyebi-Ababio from the University of Bristol Students' Union. Say hi, Hillary.

Hiya

Sajjad Hossain from London South Bank University Students' Union. Say hi, Sajjad.

Hi.

Ross Loveitt from University College Birmingham Guild of Students. Hi Ross, hi.

And Maisie Sanders from Birkbeck College Students Union. Hi Maisie, hi.

So lots of questions have come in from the electorate. But before we get on to that.

We just wanted to hear directly from the candidates themselves on why they would they make, in their view, the best vice president higher education. To kick us off with two minutes each, try and keep the time if you can, Maisie Sanders.

Hi, thank you. I'm Maisie. I'm a mature student at Birkbeck College in London, and I'm trained teacher as well. I'm a socialist and I've been active in the student movement since 2014 and fighting against fees and cuts and things like standing in solidarity with education workers. This year, I've been building support for the UCU strike on my campus and helping to spread that support nationally, as well, with other activists at universities, we're talking now about how we can help the strike win and will keep fighting with campus, trade unions against all of the inequalities and injustices that marketisation creates in our universities.

And I'm running for Vice President Higher Education because I think NUS and student unions should be leading these kinds of fights.

So there are about 5 million people in further education or higher education in the UK and overwhelmingly our concerns are the same as working class young people. Our concerns are about low pay and high rents that others don't go anywhere near covering and they're about public transport that works for everyone, about a decent health service about, provisions for mental health difficulties and reducing stress inequality, an overbearing surveillance that makes mental health problems such a big issue in our lives.

And our concerns are about campuses that aren't accessible to disabled students, about racism, sexism and transphobia and we're concerned about the future of the planet.

In colleges and universities students and workers fundamentally want the same thing, an education that we have some say over and education that's about improving lives in a society where it's agreed doesn't have to be a life raft, because everybody can find jobs that offers dignity and fair pay, whatever their educational backgrounds. And to make these voices

heard and to be winning these kinds of fights, we need a democratic NUS and democratic student unions.

That means student unions that are run by democratic organisations of students, that are run by mass general assemblies and elected student officers making decisions, not unaccountable and unelected trustee boards and senior managers. It means the right to hold meetings, to put up posters, to organize on our campuses. And it also means NUS where we have a conference that prioritises having the time and space for democratic political debate so that we can talk about what our demands should be and how we can go about winning them.

I'm involved in the student movement because I think that if these voices are heard, the voices of these millions of students, the working class millions of students who aren't engaged with NUS right now, but should be, that our society will start looking a lot better.

Maisie Saunders, thank you very much indeed. Hillary Gyebi-Ababio of the University of Bristol Students' Union over to you. Why would you make the best NUS VP higher education.

Hiya, thank you. And so my name is Hillary Gyebi-Ababio, you I am currently the undergraduate education officer at Bristol SU.

And I'm running for vice president of higher education or VP HE if you want to be politically because the next two years for NUS is crucial in rebuilding the organisation to really work for students.

I'm running for this role because I am passionate about empowering, engaging and enabling students

I strongly believe that by connecting with students and working with them and for them, we can make change that is really positive and meaningful for students.

What I will bring to the role of VP HE, is an extensive track record of bringing students at a table and making them partners and co-creators in all the work that I do.

I've done this with the decolonisation of the curriculum work at Bristol, engaging students with the NUS through to people's vote campaign and our recent referendum.

And through my work with previous NUS offices in feeding into and shaping the BAME attainment gap research.

Students have continuously told me that they want to see an NUS that represents them no matter where they sit on the political or factional spectrum. I want that for them too.

With me, you'll get someone who's prepared to listen, learn and engage with people from across the membership.

With a view to bring us together as a union that works with students at the heart of everything it does. Finally, you get me.

You get someone whose hearts is in the movement, who cares deeply about your lives and experiences and who will do everything possible to make sure that you can have a student experience that matches up to the prospectus. Please if you want that, vote me VP HE.

Hillary Gyebi-Ababio thank you very much indeed. Sajjad Hossain, what would you bring to the role as VP higher education?

I strongly believe that education is a people's right and it should be free for all.

I came to the UK in 2011 as an international student and I was isolated struggling with no support with seminars, social, deadlines and dates because mental health support wasn't there.

I could never identify myself as an average student, but I didn't stop. I stepped in. I started being a course rep, society president, international student officers, student ambassador and two consecutive years, Vice President education at my students Union because I care about the students that felt the same as what I felt in my personal experience.

So it is deeply unfair for our students when it comes to UCU strikes, international students pay so much tuition fees, including home students and they miss lessons for two/three weeks.

What are the solutions, what NUS can do for those students who suffer a lot, not attending the lectures but paying so much money.

My campaign will start to rebuild the relationship across the country with the unions, because NUS is trying to rebuild the relationship with the union, so that we can deliver the campaigns and we can achieve through our campaigns.

What government wants to do is work with NUS closely, the relationship is not there. And my priority would be to make that relationship with the government with external bodies, to build a stronger union, a strong NUS, which can help thousands of millions of students to achieve their goal, to become successful in their job sector.

So the current issues that students are facing continuing this this for

The subscriptions with the assessment and feedback and course organisations, when it comes to timetabling for those at the mercy of public transport if you didn't buy it says

High tuition fees for international and home students, in addition through no fault of our members find themselves studying in a university sector that is losing the trust of the UK and public at large.

Stories of accuracy Vice Chancellor pay grade inflation and unfair degree algorithms are embarrassing and distract from the achievements of our members.

Outside the university, the issues are landlord practices, raising poverty level among students and raising headcount and all manners of harassment against a wide range of students. I remember during my study Tesco £3 meal deal was my regular lunch, and I know how hard it is for students to

survive when it comes to funding, so removing student poverty is my number one priority too.

Thank you very much indeed Sajjad Hossain for that outline.

Lastly of the four candidates standing for VP higher education Ross Loveitt. What would you bring to the party?

Thank you. And if it wasn't for my students' union, I wouldn't be in education right now, let alone even being the president of the Guild of Students.

I don't like some people being pushed about it, something that really sets me off when did my training back in the summer, we did some work on our values and I realized just then, and much injustice and unfairness means something to me.

So representing students, to me, is about tackling the injustice, it's about giving a chance for those without a voice, not to be spoken for, but to be given the space and tools to push back on being kept quiet, so they can speak up.

It's about understanding that students' issues aren't just about what they say. But it's about what they need.

I want to be involved in NUS because I think I can bring a difference in perspective to the National Union.

I come from a vocational union of working class university with local students and international students and they mixed to create this amazing community.

For some of our students, it's the first time they found a place that listens to them and it's terrible that that's the case. But it shows what we can be for students, and I think that NUS could be for our students' unions.

And yes it's changing, and we have a chance to shape it. I'm passionate about it and I want to help it be the best possible NUS it can be, and that's why I'm running for the VP HE.

Thank you very much indeed, and all four of you have spoken so passionately about the importance of community when it comes to representing students as a body at large. And on that note, I wanted to move to our first question and Ross, you'll be first to respond to this first question. The question comes from the University of Bristol. Students Union and the students union of Royal Holloway at London so Ross first. What would your approach be to working with stakeholders, such as higher education institutions, regulators and other relevant organisations to achieve positive change for students and gain credibility for NUS to compromise and achieve rather than simply campaign. How are you going to work with those stakeholders to actually achieve?

Okay. I think it's clear from this question that there's a lack of faith NUS with some of its members.

But still you're engaging and looking to make it better. And that's something NUS really needs to embrace it's something that I'll put front and center of my work. Glad to hear what you want from us.

From a work at UCB we've turned around the Students Union, from something that really didn't create positive change for students as an organisation, it's starting to make real important impacts on campus.

We do that by listening to what students want, listening to what they're saying. But beyond that, those who really engaged so the not so traditionally engaged students

But not been losing those who have cared for us all along. I don't think it's impossible to stress, I said it in a manifesto. I want to lead a NUS that's able to hold the breadth of our movement, instead of just being distracted by infighting. We have to start by acknowledging the NUS has won things and doing good things, but it can do more.

Look, NUS will pass six key priorities this year at a conference and we'll win by not trying to cram in 100 of other things.

They've got to give these ideas and the resource and the attention they deserve, because this is what our membership is telling us that they want.

I'll be sure that we prioritise campaigning to achieve positive change for students. Campaigns are important, we're campaigning union.

But by campaigning it means much more, about bringing positive change and nothing else.

It's not one specific tactic, it's not one single approach whether that's working with the Office for Students, lobbying the government or going on demonstration.

I believe all these tactics have a place, we have to do what we'll do to bring positive change. Should the world want our members and ask for our society, what they need.

I'll lead an action focussed NUS that puts its resources into changing student lives. Thank you.

Ross, thank you very much indeed. Maisie, how would you deal with this issue of compromise and actually achieving stuff.

So, I think this question is posed a bit wrong, to be honest, I think we're a union we represent students who are low paid workers, and students who face all sorts of problems in their lives. I don't think that our stakeholders are HE institutions, I think our stakeholders are students.

They're workers in our universities and in education and they're trade unions that represent these education workers.

I think that, you know, they are the people who make our institutions function and the people who are facing the same issues that we are. And we've seen this in the UCU strike this term and last term where students and workers on campus are facing the same issues and particularly around

Covid-19 now are we going to be entitled to sick pay. Are we going to get full pay if we have to self-isolate and many, many of us are students who work in hospitality won't be entitled to that, and many of our teaching staff and cleaning staff and security staff and cafe workers in our universities also won't be entitled to the same thing. Because our universities are run like businesses by senior management on huge six figure salaries while huge numbers of the staff that teach us and work in our universities are not paid enough to live on, with no job security, with huge gender and BME pay gaps and unmanageable workloads.

And like I said, students who work whether it's in our student union cafe or bars in town face the same issues and these staff working conditions are our learning conditions too.

So I think that we need to work out who our friends are and who our friends aren't and our friends are education workers, trade unions students, people in our communities who are struggling with the same issues that we are, you know of poverty, rent, cuts, for medical students, nursing students, PGCE students. It's doctors, other teachers and the unions that fight for them.

So I think if we want to get anything changed in our education system and then society, then we need to be sitting around the table with the stakeholders that I've just listed and not the ones that I mentioned in the question. And on campaigning, I think you know we're the union. We're in the business of campaigning and we should campaign more and we should campaign better and we should make a business of reaching out all of those real stakeholders that I've just explains.

Maisie. Thank you.

Hillary Gyebi-Ababio, where do you stand? Interesting points made by Maisie about solidarity, but as to the question and working with higher education institutions and other relevant organisations in particular, how do you work with, how do you create that sense of camaraderie.

Yes, I think, this is a really interesting question, and I'm very happy because it's come from my union as well. So I'm happy my students are engaged.

And I think it cuts right to the heart of some of the issues that NUS has faced over the years. So I think it's really important that we look closely out what it means for us to work with these institutions and also represent the students that are members of NUS.

Let's not pretend our HE sector is complicated. We've got OFS, QAA, OIA, CMA, UUK, and all the rest, all of us in the same boat. Each of us has different agendas.

It's all a bit confusing, not least all of the acronyms, which if you want to find out what they mean, to Google it, it doesn't really matter.

And this is without the devolved nations too. I think, a new and reformed NUS call for a new and reformed approach.

This is a charge to wipe the slate clean and reinvent ourselves as an organisation, which is going to cut through the noise with clear and

concise asks, all of which are aimed at get students the best possible educational experience. This means switching up our approach.

We shouldn't take for granted the power of direct action like protests and occupations that has seen successes in institutions like Goldsmiths and Warwick.

However, it is important that NUS is strategic and tactical in its approach to driving change in the education sector.

We need to be prepared. We need to be as prepared to sit at the table as we are to make noise and push directly for our voices to be heard.

With an NUS that combines these two tactics well, we will be unstoppable.

We are never always going to agree. Students, universities, government and sector bodies, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't try and work together.

I'm a strong believer in education, the ability to learn. If we aren't prepared to educate and be educated will never achieve and actually win for students.

It's important that at NUS, we start to build relationships rebuild our own credibility and use that to try and generate some positive change.

But and it's a big but, we do this by sticking to our aims and objectives and our values.

While pulling out the stuff that's wrong with our set time such as marketisation, institutional sexism, racism, transphobia amongst other systemic issues, disgraceful levels of debt and the mental health crisis that shouldn't even exist.

We need to be fierce, clear and committed in getting what's best for our members, but we also need to try to show some kindness, openness and humility and model the behaviour that we expect our members to be treated with too.

Hillary. Thank you very much indeed a phrase you used 'cutting through the noise'. I'm sure it's a sentiment that all of your candidates agree with. You've got to be heard. You've got to land your messages so Sajjad to the question, how are you going to work with the stakeholders, the students at Bristol and Royal Holloway we're interested, in other higher education institutions, regulators and other educational organisations.

Building a strongest relationship with stakeholders charities and communities will be the answer for that question.

I personally neither agree or disagree with the traditional techniques being used by students union leaders to stakeholders as I consider this as a 50/50 approach. What does it mean? It means as the last intentions with the stakeholders, for example, most of the students' unions go to their stakeholders to bid for more money and in return of some egret obligation, but my approach would be what I feel would be at 80 to 20 upwards, which means first meeting with the stakeholders.

Well, it would be to build a relationship which will cover 40% and then in the next stage, the leader should negotiate the term which would constitute to 20 percent of that in total. And then the final stage, the leader should again focus on retention of the relationship with the stakeholders, which will constitute under 40% and this is how we need to build a relationship with the stakeholders and all the other communities and charities.

The issue that lies beneath all of this is one of pragmatism and we're going to stay with you Sajjad for the second question, you get first response.

How do you actually make the change you want to? And this is a question that comes from SOAS Students Union.

How should the NUS engage with the new Conservative government to best benefit its members. The question again. How should the NUS engage with the new Conservative government to best benefit members and that's to you Sajjad to start with?

Thank you so much. So if you look at in the history in the past what NUS has failed to deliver the campaigns and achieve the campaigns is because of the relationship with the government.

So the NUS' main priority should be work with the current government, which would be for NUS to work with the conservative governments and education minister to deliver the national campaigns that you want.

So I need to look at if I get elected. I need to look at what conversation we've had as a national union body with the government. And what did work what went well and what didn't work well with the government. So negotiation is the best tool to work with the government because we can't criticize government when it comes to establish our achievements to get our campaigns done. So we need to work with the conservative government towards a common goal which will be students betterment, making students experience better across the country. So my roadmap would be to build the relationship with the government and looking into all the issues and giving them all the issues that our students are having and going towards ministers and parliament not just to debate and stand against the government, is to help government. And is to work with government and to convince them to achieve our campaigns.

Thank you, Sajjad. Ross, do you agree, negotiate and work with or is the relationship too damaged for them.

I think we have to take a sensible approach to it. If elected we're gonna be serving a two year term and it's very unlikely that we're gonna have a change of government in the next few years.

Which means we're gonna have to take a positive approach to working with them if we want to make a serious change regardless what you think about whichever party's in power you have to recognise that the people working in government delivering the strategies do deeply care about education.

People working in the Office of Student, even civil servants, the ministers, advisors, they might not always share the same politics as us, but there's always going to be a way to find common ground.

And I think that if we address the issues that matter to us. It's about bringing positive change for students. And getting then on side with those issues. We saw this with the nursing bursaries that we achieved is phenomenal for NUS who have not been allowing them to take that point off the table. We're not going as far as we want all the time, but the reality is that the students put food on the table, it's their ability to study, it's their ability to choose nursing and it's a better outcome for us as a country to deliver that. So I'd say try and work positively as much as possible.

Thanks Ross. Maisie common ground, is that something that you think you can find

No, no, not at all. I think, NUS should be fighting the new Tory government every step of the way, and we should be doing what we can to scare them.

And I think, you know, we can do that through linking up with the trade union movement and getting out on the streets to resist the Tories.

To resist the government, be mobilizing students' unions and students for mass actions demonstrations and campaigns and you know on things like austerity for a fully funded and public NHS and against attacks on migrants rights and freedom of movement and, you know, and I think around Covid-19 and we've got now we've got a conservative government that bailing out big business, but is content to let workers and the make yourself is function in a situation where they're risking destitution and that represents a lot of students at the moment.

So, you know, we need to be making demands about full pay for people who are self-isolating and an end to zero contracts and outsourcing universities and everywhere.

No sackings and for things like rent to be free for private hospitals to be requisitioned, to campaign against any evictions and those are the kinds of like clear radical demands that we need to be making in a time right now. And I think going back to higher education in 2012

The higher education bill that the coalition government then tried to push through was dropped because the student movement was lively and there was a big movement that fought it and it was dropped because that big movements scared the government and if you elect me, I want to scare the government a whole lot more. And I want to do that in partnership with, like I said before, with our real stakeholders with students and workers on campus and with trade unions and with working class communities that are fighting for a better world.

Thank you, Maisie. A range of opinions, Hillary, you've heard talk of scaring the government, you've heard talk of collaboration and negotiation with I think you yourself mentioned direct action is something that students are of course no strangers to.

Where do you stand on working with the new Conservative government.

Thank you and I think my position is a lot closer to Ross in that I think we've got two years and of having these roles as VP HE whoever of us gets it.

And but in two years it's unlikely that we're going to get this Tory government out. And so we have to find ways of working with them.

And if we working with them it doesn't necessarily mean that we aren't working against them. It means that we're working to ensure that we get what is right for students.

And I really strongly believe that the NUS of the past is not going to be able to break through to a government that set on silencing, ignoring and disempowering us as a student movement.

That doesn't mean that we should lose sight of our values or stop talking about them. We stand for the voices of our collective, not just the loudest and certainly not the most powerful.

I think even across factions, the vast majority of us agree that education should be free from cradle to grave.

It should be fully accessible and inclusive and nobody should be left behind, because they can't afford to land.

The next two years are crucial in re-establishing ourselves as powerful and reenergised in a sector that is too often left underfunded and neglected.

It is important that we find ways of making it impossible for the government to ignore us.

For me, it's you, the membership that gives NUS the power, the voice and the fire to unpick this mantle and destroy the measures that continue to make the experience of education, less than what we deserve.

The same much going on right now where we actually have a chance to make some tangible positive change which will benefit our members, whether it's on fighting Brexit.

Looking at TEFF, Prevent, the attainment gap, mental health wellbeing, support for disabled students, parents, carers and healthcare students.

Now is the time to pick our battles, roll up our sleeves, get around the table with the people in Westminster, who have that hands on the levers of power. And to be clear, be fierce and to be making sure our members voices are heard and heard well.

This Tory government might have a stonking majority, but that doesn't mean we don't have a point to prove, especially with students and young people, we need to hold their feet to the fire and deliver on areas where we win for our members.

It isn't going to be sunshine and rainbows. We definitely won't agree on everything. But if we don't try and we aren't clever about it then, honestly, what's the point in NUS. We need to win for our students.

So it's interesting you began by saying you stood close to Ross's perspective, but the end of what you just said there about holding feet to the fire. I heard tones of Maisie in there.

But from the very, very big picture and that glimpse into what drives you and thank you for sharing with us your own social agenda, I want to ask a much more specific question that comes from City University in London.

It's an interesting where I went to do my post grads, their students' union, and this we're going to start with Hillary. There are a number of universities in the UK, where over half of the student body commute on a daily basis, yet the needs of the students are rarely understood from timetabling to online resources and a lack of tailored support for unions, which have large commuter student bodies.

What will you, as a full-time elected officer, do for commuter students in the UK. And we'll start with you, please, Hillary

Thank you. And this is a really great question. I think it's especially pertinent and given everything that's going on with Covid-19 and how it's affecting our institutions. And how it's really forced our institutions to put more accessible measures in to ensure that students can still get the educational experience, whether they're on campus or learning from home.

Commuter students often forgotten about, their needs aren't met by huge range of organisations and individuals, and honestly I think we can all put our hands up and say, we can and should be doing better for them and many other demographics within our membership like mature students, parents and carers.

I think the first thing we would need to do at NUS is to understand the situation better before we jump to action.

This requires hard work, engaging and some careful and considerate listening from everyone, if NUS is placed to help lead the way on this and bring everyone with them. We need to understand the reasons why students commutes, whether that parents with carers commitments work or voluntary commitment because they can't afford to live on their campus doorstep, or any other reason. From that we then need to understand how the students want us to better support them.

Whether it's by getting rid of the nine to five Monday to Friday campus culture, for example, or finding ways to better integrate them into our communities and foster a real and genuine sense of belonging.

The answer here isn't getting the students to change their habits and move into halls, and anyone that might be telling you the membership that all this thinking is living a decade in the past. We have to recognise that change is inevitable and positive that education delivery is adapting and that NUS has to be at the forefront of shaping that to be better for our commuter students

I will lead a nationwide learning exercise in partnership with students across all the nations and regions and we will bring the sector with us.

Because it's in your interest. It's in everybody's interest to learn too. Together we'll develop a vision to better support their students and make sure that this vision is acted upon by universities, colleges, and the government. Thank you.

Thank you, Hillary. Sajjad you're at South Bank. Are you a commuter

Yes, I'm a commuter student and most of our students are commuters.

And so, what would you do for commuter students if you were vice president higher education.

Well efforts are being made to us understanding and solving commuter students' problems in terms of their support and what commuter students need in consideration is travel and the flexibility of attending online lessons for example lecture captures. So at South Bank might one of the campaign I did which was recording lectures. If they missed the first one hour or the miss the whole session, they can watch back later when home. So yeah, these are the campaigns that university you can do to make sure the commuter students don't miss any lessons or anything, and another in terms of tailoring the solution could have possible cost implication as my understanding, it is empirical to negotiate with the government and university to lobby the potential solution for commuting students in terms of special bus services, for example, for the commuter students in London.

Just an example in London, most of the university are like, not that far nearby. So, if five, seven universities come together to do something for the commuter students, special bus services, those sort of plans. We can give to the government and some of the universities can establish some better services for our commuter students. And when you talk about outside London. Most of the students live near campus from my understanding. In London campuses, the city campuses, they have got more commuter students than outside the city campus so we can focus on the city big cities like Manchester Birmingham, London. They all have a shared by bus services which can have an agenda for government. I mean, the plan for the government to work and make our commuter students experience better here in the country.

Sajjad, thank you. Ross, you're in Birmingham, any practical ideas for commuter students

There. Yeah, we've touched on quite a lot. So I'm a commuter postgraduate student at UCB. It's probably important to highlight that my university we are 40/50% West Midlands of students and funny enough, one of our students winning an election coming from Plymouth. So that's about a four hour journey so I understand that the challenge that a lot of our unions are facing and there's definitely lots more we can do digitally.

At UCB we've been working hard on a digital first approach. And that's what connects to an engagement in terms of actual governance.

And how we can include students in decision making and where our resources go. It doesn't replace on campus activity, but if you find in multiple ways makes students feel more engaged with the Union was at home. I had the benefit.

When on campus with the limited time they do have, we want to make sure that they know the Union is there for them.

The more likely to get involved if they tell you what kind of activities and support that they want. And we found this out by asking the students

desperately what they needed and we found out that so many students need access to car parking in Birmingham.

We managed to actually negotiate a deal with NCP here. And that's actually saved hundreds of students thousands of pounds a year.

It's important to notice as well, I said it was a key issue and you can take a 15 minute drive or you can spend an hour and a half on a bus on the same journey.

So it's understanding if we can help the students have access to student parking that means they can drop the kids off at school, rather than drop out of university, which is a really important aspect, we consider the big aspect of their lives.

And so, focusing around this idea of sticky campus and whilst students on campus, how much they can benefit from that. Just knowing the fact that the Union has their back and is on their side means they're more likely to come back to us again for their educational issues.

I think central to this is a simple philosophy that when they are on campus we are doing as much as possible to support them as much and similarly when online they were give them a lot of the resources they need.

That can be student to a student, face to face, or zoom to zoom as we're using today. It's going to be over the next few months that we're going to test this out. I think with the whole coronavirus issues, I think this is really that the acid test to see how well it's going to go. And I encourage anyone to take that same approach.

Especially with the way people are being more isolated than they have done in the past. If they've been isolated to their homes.

As an officer in NUS, I'll be communicating with all unions, the same way I'm doing now, ringing you up, in asking you for the support and in collecting student feedback. And I don't think that should change me being a VP HE.

I'd probably advocate all offices and unions to do exactly the same, reach out to students during this time. And that's what's really going to make the difference and make them feel that they're valued.

Ross, thank you. And on commuters Maisie, at Birkbeck a very significant proportion, if not the vast majority will be commuting. What are your thoughts?

That's right, yeah. Yeah, lots and lots of students at Birkbeck commutes and we're an evening university. So our classes are exclusively after 5pm

And I mean, my response to this question really is, I think the public transport should be free.

And, you know, look at the big measures being taken with the coronavirus with Covid-19 we're in a time of emergencies and many big measures to save us. And I think making public transport free would be something that would help the climate, but it would also make so many people's lives better.

And Glasgow students have set up the Glasgow student Forum, which is made up of students from all the different universities in Glasgow.

And they found students on each of those campuses face huge problems with public transport and a third of students in Glasgow have skipped a class because they couldn't afford the cost of a bus or a train ticket.

So that's not necessarily evening students who commute it's students who have a short journey. And I think student poverty is a problem everywhere and NUS should be running mass campaigns around both demands about this.

Thank you, Maisie. Hillary you wanted to say something about commuting?

Yeah, I think, what's really important is that we recognise that these issues are very intersectional.

I don't think that by taking an approach that will singled out and not look at the full experience is the way forward, and it really is tackling the issues that commuter students face. I think this is a wider issue that spans across widening participation.

And when I was the widening and participation and part time oversight at Bristol, I did a lot of work in engaging students in the different identities they hold and really getting the university to really look into and dig deep into what these students actually need for the whole experience and not necessarily just chuck money at the problem or put in term quick fixes. I think we need to really deeply look at the widening participation agenda and see how we can shape that to make students feel like university can be fully inclusive for them.

And that participation challenge takes us very neatly on to the next question. Maisie will respond in the first instance to this. It is a question that comes from Harrow College Students Union.

And it's an interesting one. It's going to force you to think about the very definition of a student, if you like, and how you bring in as many people to the students representation body as possible. And the question is this, with the social and political climate rapidly changing in schools, how would you attempt to work with student councils and unions in primary and secondary schools to represent all students. That's from Harrow College Students Union and it goes to Maisie first.

Yeah, and so I used to be a secondary school teacher and I was also a primary school teacher so I agree I think that having student councils and student unions at school level even at primary school levels, really, really important. And I think the other thing there is that further education student unions often incredibly underfunded, are often not autonomous from management. And so I think that helping students working in further education to build up students' unions there is really important too.

And so what this question really made me think about actually is the youth climate strikes, which has been going on for a year now and you've had school and college students across the world, walking out of classes striking every month demanding radical action on climate change.

And these have happened in the UK and in kind of every tiny town and city that you can think of.

And they've been walking out of lessons, they've organised demonstrations and they built this huge movement from the bottom up with no resources.

And on a shoestring and they've been doing hours and hours of work and debating and discussing the political demands and educating each other and sharing skills and my sisters 14 and she's been really centrally involved in this as well.

And they've done all of this with working with unions, with campaigning around clear radical demands with collective direct action.

And I think we should be doing the same thing. And actually, I think it's what could we be doing to help students' unions be developed in schools, but it's also what we can learn from them. I think we should be modelling ourselves in the same thing, we should be joining them every month.

You know, working with them and education, trade unions to make climate march, it's huge and trying to shut down our universities by organising mass student and worker walkouts and like the one on the 20th of September that Sheffield's Student Union organised. So I think, there's lots there that we can be working with them on and local trade unions to the pressure schools and universities and councils in local areas to significantly reduce carbon emissions, talking about the kind of radical demands that we need to tackle climate change, like ending airport expansion, nationalising energy and free public transport and how we can win them. So I think what we've got to learn from them is the same model. It's about transforming our students' unions in universities and it's about helping students get organized and getting rid of all of the bureaucratic hoops that are in the way of setting up society being able to book a room and being able to put up posters that kind of eliminate the political activity and campaigning that ordinary students can get involved in you know. We should have like they spend all their time discussing what their demands are going to be and what their tactics are going to be. We need to have mass general Assemblies that are built for that having these kinds of conversations.

And we need elected officers that can be held to account by these mass general assemblies to call the shots, that the moment I think there's far too much power in the hands of managers and CEOs and other elected trustees.

Speaking of elected officials, which you all obviously hope to succeed in securing your spot and support from the student electorate. Sorry to move you on, but I'm keen to get around everybody and some very important reflections you made Maisie, on the role of young people in the role of leading climate activism and the climate debate. To you, Hillary, the question from Harrow as the VP HE, how would you encourage working with some of those younger student leaders in primary and secondary schools?

Yeah, I think this is such a personal question. I am a big believer in education being a holistic experience and one that feels very joined up and together from primary school right up into university and any other

bits of education, you'll do in between. I think young people especially students in primary and secondary schools and even in sixth form, have

really shown themselves to be so so powerful, especially in the past few years and we've seen that with Greta fighting climate change.

And we see that with Malala fighting for women's education rights and we also see that with students in our movement constantly changing the world for the better.

And I think we need to build on this energy harnessed by young people and really engage them in a way that is meaningful and impactful on their lives so they know that they can be the leaders of tomorrow, and that's a very generic thing to say but I genuinely feel like young people are the answer.

And I think young people and students are leading the way, yet again, in the fight of our lives from dialling up the lawyers for the climate crisis or fighting for liberation groups and everything in between.

It's inspiring and it's powerful, and we need to make the hay, while the sun is still shining on us.

Regarding how I will attempt to work with students in primary and secondary schools. I think we're missing a substantial part here. The bit in between.

And I think this speaks to the wider and more disjointed education system that we live in here in England.

I want to point you to some of the work that's been done in Wales and Scotland, for example. Whether efforts to make this all more joined up and embed student voice into the very fabric of education.

I'm going to be keeping a close eye on this and if elected will work closely with colleagues in those nations and in England to learn the key lessons and identify how we use that learning to help join up and bring together our own systems.

Thanks to some of the hard work and determination of our current VPs, we've seen the National Society of apprentices join the NUS family this year.

There's no reason why we can't iron out a way for primary and secondary school voices to be heard within our wider family and I really strongly believe that that's something that NUS should be moving to as we grow in this new and reformed organisation.

Hillary, thank you for that. Sajjad what ideas have you got, what have you seen that works well to widen the family and include younger student leaders in the work of the NUS.

I'm very recently at London South Bank Lambeth College has joined London South Bank and we are working with the current president, the students union president, how we can ensure that college student voices are getting heard. We are on the process to set up students' union as well. They are proper students which can tell you about all the campaigns. So, from my understanding all the schools and colleges students that need proper representation means they need to have a voice. For example, most of the FE colleges don't have voice, students don't have voice because their union is not representing their student voices. So, this conference

will elect one full time VP FE officer. My priority will be to work with FE vice presidents to support the FE vice presidents so they achieve higher in their campaign when it comes to a FE colleges. In schools I want to say that we need to promote university activities to schools and colleges, for example, most of the university, they do HE experienced days where the college students come to experience the HE sector to experience university, how University looks like for the same kind of open day, but it's not open like HE experience day, I believe we all know that most of the university do, so we can promote as a National Union of students, we can promote those events to our students to schools, colleges and number one priority would be to make sure that all the colleges have unions in them and students' voices are getting heard. That would be my answer to that question.

Sajjad, thank you. Ross have you seen anything that works. Have you got any fresh ideas on this?

I think it's sounds like a fantastic one in participation project that's students can run on the ground from their SU supporting school students to develop their student voice and using the amazing skills that we have in our union and sharing their skills be fantastic thing to do.

It's probably important to highlight that UCB we have the 60/40 split between HE and FE, so I've worked quite a lot with college students to promote their student voice. I think it's probably important to highlight the challenge that they face like lots of the students do come from WP backgrounds haven't had the opportunity to raise their voice and to really maximise and utilise the student feedback that they share. So, for a lot of them this is a new project. I think going into schools where that's not the culture is going to be a big, big change for that.

And to be honest with you, I'm not sure it's something that the NUS should be doing directly, but we should be doing more support the SUs who wants to get involved in a project.

And this can be done through regional networks something I'm quite passionate about and facilitating unions to meet together and develop on projects and make a change in those areas.

I think it's an opportunity to put some fantastic plans together to undertake this kind of work if it's something that's a priority for those unions.

We want to be working smartly, taking advantage of the knowledge of those institutions themselves have. We want to make sure it's targeted, I think it's important to look at the work that Manchester Students Union's doing with their access all areas project, and ensure that NUS should be promoting the great work they've done there and give platform and confidence to tell others about the successes they've had, and to how to get the ball rolling.

And next week, I was actually planning to be visiting Mild schools do a workshop about going to university, fingers crossed all goes ahead

And I think that these approaches are really super impactful and would encourage all unions to start doing this sort of activity because it does pay off in the long run, when you see these students that perhaps have

never thought about even attending college or university and when they do arrive here to see that the work that we've put in has paid off.

Thanks Ross. And that's, of course, that is something that every student can do is to maintain links with educational institutions that they have been through in the past to show younger, younger students, however, young that there is education available at every level and the sky's the limit. So look from young to old and I'm mindful that we only have a few minutes left, so I'm going to ask you all to answer one final question but briefly if you could, in a minute or less than we'll stay with Ross, from young to old this is a question, well older, from young to older, this is a question from the University of Wolverhampton Students Union more than 30% of students are over 35 years of age. Of them more than 50% are over 40 but the needs of mature students are often forgotten, how would you go about increasing the representation of older students and hold the government to account for them. Ross, your one minute starts now.

Thank you. I think statistically UCB with really great maturity and engagement and one of the ways we've done this is by not attempting to impose the traditional student union experience on them. I think it's something that is amiss if mature students aren't joining Wednesday nights prowl or they're not going on the cheer team is because it's not what they want to do so. We nailed it by asking and speaking to him regularly about what do they actually want. And what they're telling us is that that they don't want necessarily social activities like meeting halls or cheese and wine evenings or postgraduate pizza nights, they want solid academic representation and a chance to be part of the academic community and the huge successes that we've had in terms of sheer engagement is caused by societies and course based communities where they have integrated within representation structures which we've done it really well.

We've added 16 students running in our elections for five positions and I've actually seen a really boring engagement of mature students engaged in that as well.

Good to hear what you're doing on the ground. You've had your minute. Maisie in one minute or less if you can do it, how are you going to include mature students.

So I think mature students are that group who are most likely to be put off from entering higher education due to barriers like fees, rent, childcare, lack of grants and the prospects of 60,000 pounds debt.

So I think that people will get involved in students' unions and NUS if they can see that we're making headway on campaigning on these kinds of issues that there's a clear way, that's advertised as well as the talks about how they can get involved in those kinds of campaigns, it's about running campaigns that everyone can get involved in

Campaigns that are for the greater good, but obviously have a significant impact on the mature body themselves. Thank you, Maisie. Hillary one-minute, mature students.

So I think there's two sides to this. I think the first side is talking about how we are engaging mature students in regular students' union activity like Ross was talking about, I think, right now we're in a place

where NUS is at the forefront of being able to engage older students into the kind of work they do, that has a big impact on their lives.

So whether it's winning their nursing bursaries like we've seen recently, or making sure that students' union events aren't just focused on things that might not be as accessible to mature students. I think that's really important.

On the other side of that, I also think as part of that wider widening of participation, like I was talking about, about making sure that we really look into and work together to find what the intersectional issues are for mature students and really make sure that they're really they get really targeted support to have the best educational experience.

Hillary, thank you. Sajjad you have got the last word on the last question mature students. What are you going to do for them?

Well, from my personal experience at London Southbank it was quite challenging to engage mature students with sports and societies.

I think it's always challenging for a union. So from my understanding what helps to engage mature students with the union has to deliver something better for them is to organize some sort of improvement workshop because mature students, they are busy with other commitments. So when they see the improvement opportunity, like different workshop inviting people, we invited lot of companies to come and talk to our students and there was like a lot of mature students turn up on the day so from my personal experience, I would say doing something like employability skills, making them more employable and delivering some workshop for them to come to us or to engage with the movement with the students movement so they see there's something benefiting them. That would be my idea to give them some employability skills, what they need and equipped to get a job in your life.

Sajjad, thank you very much indeed. And I'm afraid that brings us more or less to a close, a whole host of your questions have been put to your candidates for Vice President Higher education from how do you work with the current government, what do you do about working with the Extinction rebellion and climate campaign, younger students, older students, your other questions will go to the candidates and they will be able to get back to you.

As a reminder of who standing for that role Maisie Sanders, Hillary Gyebi-Ababio, Sajjad Hossain, and Ross Loveitt.

You've got great candidates. They've all got wonderful and brilliant and well thought out things to offer. So please have a think about who you will vote for and make sure you vote. Thanks for joining us.