

A large, stylized orange hand graphic is positioned on the right side of the page, spanning from the top to the bottom. The hand is open, with fingers slightly spread. It has a thick, blocky appearance with a blue outline. The background is a solid teal color.

Winning on welfare

A short history of welfare work in
NUS and the student movement

In the early 1980s the two preoccupations were student finance and housing. These are still big issues but on the bright side NUS has flourished and campaigns very effectively on both."

Sarah Veale CBE

Head, Equality and Employment Rights Department and former VP Welfare



King Henry III was an early champion of 'student welfare'.

Introduction

Examples of students working collectively on issues relating to what we now refer to as 'student welfare' are as old as the history of student representation itself, and certain concerns echo down the centuries. When the very first forms of student self-government appeared in the University of Bologna in the twelfth century, the students were fighting for a reduction in the cost of student accommodation¹ and to end unfair debt recovery practices². The scholars of Cambridge, meanwhile, petitioned for the protection of King Henry III in the early thirteenth century to prevent exploitation by local landlords³, whilst in university cities across Britain, including Oxford, Glasgow and St Andrews, the numerous and often fatal clashes between 'town and gown' in the middle ages⁴ demonstrate that community tensions arising from studentification are nothing new, if generally rather less violent today.

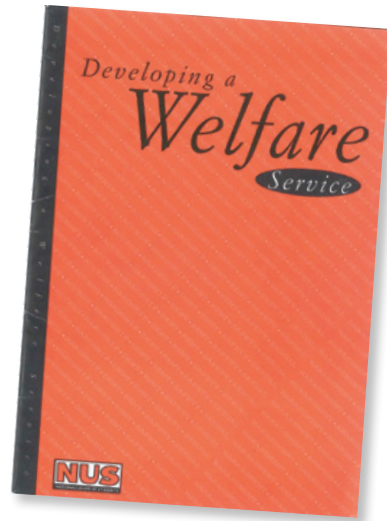
¹ Boren, M. (2001) *Student Resistance: A History of the Unruly Subject*, (London: Routledge) p10

² Koeppler, H. (1939) 'Frederick Barbarossa and the Schools of Bologna' in *English Historical Review* 54:216, 577-607

³ www.cam.ac.uk/about-the-university/history/early-records

⁴ Boren (op. cit.) pp11-18

The modern student movement has placed welfare at the centre of its work for decades. In 1937, the first ever research report for NUS was on student health (discussed below), and there has been extensive campaign, research and policy work on issues relating to other welfare topics such as housing, community relations, student finance, crime, alcohol and drugs, faith and belief and pastoral care throughout our history, as well as in individual students' unions across the UK. Of course, NUS has worked on numerous other issues throughout its history and in particular welfare and education are deeply intertwined and often difficult to completely separate, but welfare has nevertheless formed a distinct area with distinct challenges.



It is forty years since NUS created the position of Vice President Welfare to lead the political work in this area; we want to use this anniversary to highlight the work of the 28 occupants of that office as well as that of officers, staff and activists in NUS and in students' unions throughout our shared history. This publication sets out a brief account of that work, to commemorate and celebrate what has been achieved. ■

When NUS was founded in 1922 it was essentially an internationalist organisation, established to promote dialogue and cultural exchanges with its equivalents across Europe and elsewhere. However, by the 1930s, its focus has started to shift to domestic matters, and one of the most prominent was student health.

It was a topic of wider concern in contemporary higher education: officials believed that students (and British youth more generally) were unfit, with too few participating in regular physical exercise⁵. For example, the University of Aberdeen stopped timetabling classes on a Wednesday afternoon, to allow students the opportunity to play sport in the limited daylight of winter⁶, the first example of that policy. The student movement was especially anxious about the "complete inadequacy" of

health facilities in universities, and the impact of ill health on academic success⁷. There was also the issue of cost: the National Health Service would not be established until 1948, and so students in the 1930s had to pay for their own medical care. Such concerns led NUS to commission its first ever research report, examining the university health services in the USA, Canada, Germany and Sweden, as well as those services that already existed in the UK⁸. In particular, it included an examination of the student health insurance schemes at Aberystwyth, Oxford and Reading⁹.

The report recommended compulsory medical examinations on entry to university (to be used to identify medical needs rather than determine acceptance) and the establishment of further insurance schemes and facilities in universities¹⁰. Its findings were influential, and it has been credited with doing "much to stimulate the development of health services in universities"¹¹ – services which continue to be provided to this day.

⁵ Vernon, K. (2008) 'The Health and Welfare of University Students in Britain, 1920–1939' in *History of Education* 37:2, 227–252

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Savage, T. W. (1962) *National Union of Students: The First Forty Years, 1922–1962* (London: NUS)

⁸ Rhodes, F. (1968) *The National Union of Students, 1922–1967* (unpublished MEd. dissertation) p109

⁹ Vernon (op. cit.)

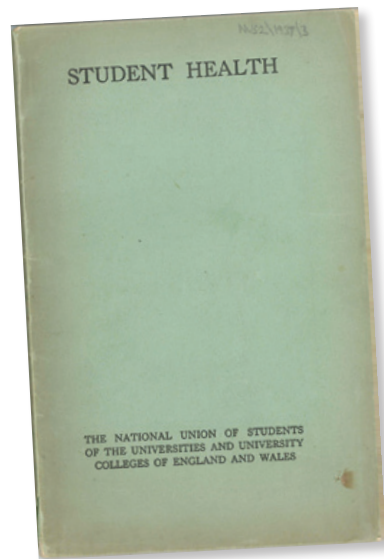
¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Ashby, E. and Anderson, M. (1970) *The Rise of the Student Estate in Britain* (Basingstoke: Macmillan) p73

During this period, NUS also contributed financial support to a tuberculosis sanatorium for European students in Switzerland. At the time, those diagnosed with TB would be placed in isolation, and the sanatorium was set up to allow students to continue their studies whilst recovering, with several British students sent there prior to the War¹². Finally, in an even more unlikely intervention on student health, NUS published its *Manual for Ski Babies*, which sought to encourage students to participate in winter sports. Sadly, it's not possible to establish what influence this had.

Campaign work continued throughout the Second World War. In 1943/44, NUS worked with the British Medical and Dental Students' Associations to devise a health scheme for students, which led to the first ever meeting between NUS and the University Grants Committee (the secretive predecessor to the various funding councils), as well as discussions with the Royal College of Physicians, on the topic of student health¹³. The creation of the NHS addressed much of the remaining concerns, though NUS maintained a Student Health

Committee in the immediate postwar years which continued to conduct surveys and campaigning for better health provision in universities and colleges¹⁴. However, in the context of rapidly increasing student numbers, the attention of NUS and the post-war student movement was shifting onto a different topic: student finance.



¹² Rhodes (op. cit.) p108

¹³ Ibid. p115

¹⁴ Ibid. p116

The 1944 Education Act had empowered local authorities to offer scholarships for further and higher education, but provision was highly variable and in some cases completely absent. Local authorities would often impose their own entrance examinations in addition to those set by universities, or would only provide funding for a student to attend a local institution rather than the university they preferred. Even where a student did secure support, it very often was insufficient: in 1948/49 NUS estimated that 75% of the awards that were made were inadequate and causing hardship, and NUS was dealing with increasing levels of casework related to finance¹⁵.

All this set the scene for a long but ultimately successful campaign by NUS and students' unions for a national system of student awards, which involved significant research, campaign and lobby work through the 1950s, including an annual Grants Handbook which highlighted the differences between different authorities. The campaign culminated in the publication of the Anderson

¹⁵ Ibid. p117

¹⁶ Ibid. p120

Report of 1960, which recommended the Ministry of Education establish a national system of means-tested student grants available to all those who gained a place at university. The report was heavily influenced by the evidence provided by NUS and SUs, and was accepted almost entirely by the Ministry, with the first 'mandatory' grants paid to student in 1962. This victory remains one of the student movement's greatest achievements.

Other success in student finance in the 1960s included the adoption of a similar scheme of student grants in Northern Ireland, reducing the time before graduates could access social security benefits from 12 months to six, and increased support for postgraduates¹⁶.

Despite these significant successes, securing adequate finance for students would be an ongoing struggle. Further education students and those in technical colleges did not have access to the same standardised system of support, and campaigns to improve their finances would continue down the years. Even in HE, grant rates failed to keep pace with the high inflation of the early 1970s – which



Another important legacy was the establishment of the Grants and Welfare Department in NUS in 1947. The increasing workload around student finance, as well as other welfare matters, meant dedicated staff were required if there was to be any chance of success. In 1954, the chances of success would be immeasurably enhanced when Stella Draycott (later Stella Greenall) took up the position of research officer. She would work in the Department for over 20 years, professionalising NUS' lobbying work and making it one of the most influential voices in higher education. Her obituary in *The Guardian* describes her as "the real creator" of the student grants system¹⁹, not least because her research into student finance was literally without parallel at the time – even the Ministry had to rely on NUS' figures on local authority grants²⁰.

Above, Stella Greenall, "the real creator" of the students grants system.

ran well over 20% at times – and the hardship this caused led to 400,000 students participating in the NUS campaign to increase grant rates in 1973, when Margaret Thatcher was the Secretary of State for Education¹⁷. This campaign bore fruit, however, with grants jumping by more than 60% over the three years to 1977, with annual rather than triennial reviews. Enhanced discretionary support for further education was also secured. NUS also won equal treatment for married women in the grants system – hitherto were given lower grants than married men, on the assumption their husbands should support them¹⁸.

¹⁷ Hoeffler, C. (2013) *British Student Activism in the Long Sixties* (London: Routledge), p186

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ www.theguardian.com/education/2008/jun/25/studentpolitics.politics

²⁰ Rhodes (op. cit.) p119

Student finance was not the only focus in the decades after the War. The increase in student numbers was putting pressure on student accommodation, though whilst standards and costs were a concern there was also a fundamental issue of student rights at stake.

In the 1930s and then in the immediate postwar period, the desirability of student 'residence' was orthodoxy in the higher education sector. This had a particular meaning: students could derive the greatest benefit from their studies when housed in university-owned, purpose-built and fully-catered accommodation, living alongside not only other undergraduates but postgraduates and academics too. They would dine and socialise together, and make erudite conversation in comfortable common rooms²¹. It was argued this principle should also extend to further education, though in practice there was limited provision²². NUS and the

student movement generally reflected these attitudes, at least through to the 1950s, though there was criticism of the standard and cost of some of the accommodation available. One wartime President of NUS, Brian Simon, stated: "university hostels... too often give an impression of bleakness, dreariness, and discomfort"²³ whilst as early as 1938 NUS was criticising universities for the fact rents were too high²⁴.

However, for many undergraduates, the concept of residence also represented control. Until 1971, the age of majority for most purposes was 21 – and students younger than this age who moved away from home were deemed to be in the university's care. The position of the university as *in loco parentis* (to use the terminology of the time) could mean the imposition of various rules and regulations that would be considered stifling now, including curfews, bans on overnight guests – especially those of the opposite gender – and in some cases students were not permitted to have a key to their own room²⁵. Colleges of education were even more restrictive than universities, and in many cases required women students

²¹ University Grants Committee (1957) *Report of the sub-committee on Halls of Residence*

²² Silberston, D. (1960) *Residence and Technical Education* (London: Max Parrish)

²³ Simon, B. (1943) *A Student's View of the Universities* (London: Longmans, Green & Co.) pp97-98

²⁴ NUS (1938) *The Challenge to the University* (London: NUS)

²⁵ Brothers, J. and Hatch, S. (1971) *Residence and Student Life* (London: Tavistock) p93

to undertake domestic chores²⁶. Indeed, women's halls in general could be "subject to regulations which savoured of the Convent rather than the University"²⁷.

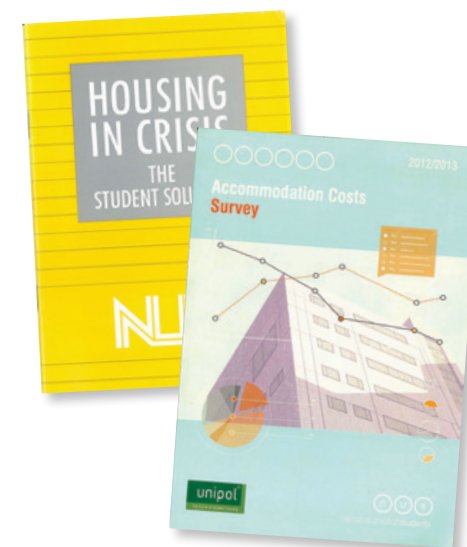
Unsurprisingly, students' unions and NUS demanded such rules be relaxed, producing a succession of briefings and reports on the matter, and condemning the treatment of students as "school children"²⁸. Even so, universities and colleges were attached to these rules, and challenges could provoke a harsh response: the SU President at the teacher training college in Bangor, Sheila Davies, was expelled for her campaign activities on this issue in 1953, although NUS and SU pressure led to her reinstatement²⁹. Another student in Weymouth was refused a reference when she married in secret³⁰.

When an official committee was set up to examine whether the age of majority should be reduced, NUS evidence would again prove highly influential³¹. Their report recommended the age of majority be lowered to 18, and the end of the status of universities and colleges as in loco parentis³², as NUS and SUs had demanded. To be sure, the report was not suggesting a total absence of rules ("colleges will continue to require that young people do not enjoy themselves with trumpets and strumpets to the point where it keeps other people awake"³³), and in some cases restrictions would linger; the students' association at Queen Margaret College in Edinburgh was still campaigning for students to be permitted overnight guests in halls as late as 1983³⁴. Nevertheless, the findings were a major victory and of huge importance to SUs who were demanding university authorities take a less paternalistic approach. This contributed to the end of 'residence' as it was once understood, and increasing provision of self-contained flats and bedsit-style accommodation in university halls³⁵.

By the 1970s, with its high inflation, the standard and cost of accommodation once again came to the fore. Rent strikes were a popular tactic in the early 1970s, with the SUs at various institutions including Keele, Lancaster, Surrey, Sheffield and perhaps most prominently Essex all organising such actions to protest against increased halls fees and substandard services, though not always with success³⁶. In 1970, NUS began to produce the *Survey of Student Accommodation and Lodgings Costs* to support this campaign work; as the *Accommodation Costs Survey*, it is still produced at regular intervals over 40 years later, now in conjunction with Unipol.

Amidst the protests, the nature of student accommodation was rapidly changing. Student numbers had significantly outpaced the construction of new halls of residence, the more so because ever greater proportions were keen to move away from the parental home to study. Pre-war, over 40% of full-time students lived at home; by 1974/75 just 15% would do so³⁷. The private rented sector was becoming increasingly important, and this would create

new challenges for NUS and SUs. For example, NUS successfully campaigned against proposals made by Margaret Thatcher as part of the Rent Bill of 1974, which sought to exempt student lets from much of the legislation, believing it would restrict the number of student tenancies and unfairly reduce students' security of tenure³⁸. Battles over the position of students within housing legislation have continued ever since.



²⁶ Day, M. (2012) *National Union of Students 1922-2012* (London: Regal Press)

²⁷ NUS (1938) *The Challenge to the University* (London: NUS)

²⁸ NUS (1968) *Report on Student Housing* p44

²⁹ Day, M. (op. cit.)

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Hoefflerle (op. cit.) p72

³² Committee on the Age of Majority (1967) *Report of the Committee on the Age of Majority* (London: HMSO) Cmnd. 3342

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Silver, H. and Silver, P. (1997) *Students: Changing Roles, Changing Lives* (Buckingham: OUP), p44

³⁵ Brothers and Hatch (op. cit.) p323

³⁶ Hoefflerle (op. cit.)

³⁷ Morgan, D. and McDowell, L. (1979) *Patterns of Residence: Costs and Options in Student Housing* (Guildford: SRHE), p3-4

³⁸ Hughes, D. and Davis, M. (2002) 'Student housing: a cautionary tale of one city' in *Journal of Social Welfare and Family Law*, 24:2, 135-155

The increasing diversity of issues facing NUS and the need for a clarity and focus around welfare work saw the creation of the position of Vice President Welfare on the NUS National Executive in the 1970s, both reflecting and fuelling the creation of welfare officer posts in students' unions around the UK as the need for advice and campaign work on welfare expanded along with student numbers.

NUS' first VP Welfare, Jez Lloyd, previously at the Liverpool Guild of Students was elected in 1975. He would be followed by, among others: Leighton Andrews from University College Bangor, who would go on to be Minister for Education in the Welsh Government; Sarah Veale from Goldsmith's College, now Head of the Equality and Employment Rights department at the TUC; and Vicky Phillips from UEA, so far the only VP Welfare so far to go on to become President of NUS, and now a leading employment rights lawyer.

Alison Downie, VP Welfare 1978–79



This new political leadership came at a time when the challenges for students intensified. Student finance, housing and health would remain key areas of focus, but the Thatcher government would be less receptive to student concerns and, as the 1980s wore on, successive reforms would be seen as a significant threat to student welfare.

NUS and SUs were not about to give up the fight. As well as significant campaign work, NUS continued its tradition of strong research, especially in relation to finance. Several substantial research surveys and reports were produced in this time, including extensive Student Income and Expenditure Surveys, and a study of the student loan systems in the US, Canada, Denmark and Sweden that sought to refute arguments that loans were a desirable alternative to the grant system³⁹. Other publications such as the *Accommodation Cost Survey* were produced at regular intervals. Even so, the government had a huge majority in Parliament and it proved

impossible to stop some policies being enacted. NUS ran a campaign called 'Claim It' to encourage students to take up their entitlement to social security benefits; the government reacted by ending any such entitlement for the vast majority of full-time students by 1990. Meanwhile, the Housing Act 1988 abolished rent controls, leading to increased costs for most students in the private rented sector⁴⁰. Most controversially, student loans for maintenance were introduced in 1990, despite all that NUS and SUs could do to oppose them.

Loans were not a new concept; some local authorities had made loans available to students as early as the 1920s. They had been rejected as a funding mechanism in the 1960s, as there was consensus they would act to deter women and poorer students from entering HE, but the argument never truly went away. By the 1980s the Conservatives were convinced of their necessity, partly for reasons of cost given their ambitious plans to expand still further the numbers of students, but also as a means of encouraging 'personal responsibility' among students who they felt took student support for granted⁴¹.

³⁹ Gaines, A. and Turner, N. (1985) *Student Loans: the Costs and the Consequences* (London: NUS)

⁴⁰ Stephens, M. (1990) 'Students and Social Security Benefits' in *Journal of Education Policy* 5:1, 77–85

⁴¹ Farrell, S. and Tapper, E. (1992) 'Student Loans: The Failure to Consolidate an Emerging Political Consensus' in *Higher Education Quarterly*, 46:3, 269–285

Conversely, NUS and SUs felt loans would impede access by deterring poorer students, and instead wanted the grant system enhanced. Despite many protests, the battle would be lost – but NUS and SUs still secured some important concessions. The government had wanted private banks to run the scheme, but in the end a state-owned entity, the Student Loans Company was established; the student movement also saw off a later attempt to privatise it in 1995⁴². NUS also succeeded in persuading the Department for Education and Science to provide discretionary ‘access funds’ for students in hardship, to compensate for the loss of benefits and reduced grants, as well as enhanced support for disabled students.

These were not the only successes in this era. Student campaigners had been intimately involved in the protests against the Poll Tax, the controversial local government tax where the same amount was paid by individuals regardless of income or property size. Although full-time students received partial remission, a student household might have many residents, and in the context of cuts

to student support any amount could easily push students into hardship. When the Poll Tax was replaced by Council Tax in 1992, NUS secured full exemption for full-time students and halls of residence, which continues to this day.

Other campaigns on welfare in this period covered a broad range of issues. Health had returned to prominence in the 1980s; the shocking impact of the AIDS outbreak in that period meant sexual health was a strong feature of many students’ unions’ work, both to encourage safer sex and to combat prejudice about the disease, and NUS launching its own ‘AIDS awareness’ campaign in 1986, calling the government’s response “criminally inadequate”⁴³.

Childcare was another key concern at this time. Students’ unions had been campaigning for better provision for students in universities and colleges since at least the 1960s, especially the polytechnic institutions given their high number of mature students.

⁴² Day (op. cit.)

⁴³ Vulliamy, E. (1986) ‘Students to launch own Aids campaign’ in *The Guardian* 9 December, p3

In some cases, such as Strathclyde, the students’ association set up a crèche themselves, in others, such as Teesside and Durham, there were campaigns to get the parent institution to do so⁴⁴. In 1995 NUS launched a joint campaign with the education trade unions AUT and NATFHE to push for better facilities across the UK, tying this to widening participation goals that were assuming ever greater importance⁴⁵.

Right, Former VPs Leighton Andrews (1980–81) and Ama Uzowuru (2007–09)



⁴⁴ Silver and Silver (op. cit.) p73

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Widening participation would be a key goal for the Blair government which took office in 1997, though there would be almost immediate controversy when the introduction of fees were proposed after the publication of the Dearing Review into higher education later that same year. The reforms scrapped the maintenance grant altogether, replacing it with higher student loans, though this was neither a recommendation of the report nor a manifesto commitment. NUS and SUs opposed the reforms but were unable to prevent them, although the error of the decision was recognised in relatively short order. Grants would be restored in England and Wales in 2004, and even earlier in Scotland and Northern Ireland. Devolution would lead to increasingly diverse student support systems after 1999, and indeed different approaches to other welfare issues.

One of the longest-running campaigns of the student movement, to secure statutory funding for FE learners, would finally be won when the Education Maintenance Allowance was introduced in 2004 across the UK following a pilot in England, replacing the haphazard discretionary funds

available previously. In England, an Adult Learning Grant and a childcare grant for younger FE learners called Care to Learn was also secured. Improved childcare funding for HE students in England, Wales and Northern Ireland was introduced in 2001, alongside enhanced funding for hardship. However, the diversity of funding sources, and the increasing complexity of rules designed to ensure 'fairness' was also creating a highly complex system. NUS would try to ensure that students and advisers could better navigate the rules and the interaction with social security benefits by publishing a detailed handbook with the Child Poverty Action Group every year from 2003 – but as an illustration of the challenges facing students, the most recent edition runs to 326 pages.

One of the biggest areas of student expenditure remained housing costs, and here too issues were ever more diverse. Welfare officers across the UK have long been involved in local politics and planning issues, but the 2000s brought a renewed emphasis on such matters. This was driven in large part by community concerns about 'studentification' – where the

number of students living in HMOs in specific neighbourhoods was felt to be too high, creating issues around noise and rubbish, for example. Although the phenomenon could be overstated – student households exceed 10% of households in only 59 wards of 8,000 in England in 2001⁴⁶ – there were clearly tensions in some areas and plenty of negative media attention. NUS and local SUs worked hard to promote a stronger community ethos, often in partnership with parent institutions and sector bodies, and several publications would be produced to help share best practice⁴⁷. Many SUs started to create more distinct 'community' portfolios on elected officer teams. Despite this, politicians responded by giving greater powers to councils to restrict student households, in turn generating a number of campaigns by SUs to stop these being enacted.

More traditional housing concerns were still a key feature of work. The 1990s had seen the rise of

private providers of halls-style accommodation, who sought to build or run institution-owned accommodation under PFI agreements, or operate as competitors. These companies proved highly controversial, in part because they were seen as fuelling the spiralling cost of student accommodation, and in part because of several high-profile failures by companies such as Unite and Jarvis to complete buildings for the start of term, the quality of the accommodation that was built, and the lack of redress for students when problems arose⁴⁸. NUS and SU pressure was a significant factor in the creation of two national Codes of Standards for purpose-built student accommodation in 2004, which has improved accountability and standards in the sector in the years since.

Standards in the private sector were improved too. A long-running campaign to protect the deposits of student renters from unscrupulous landlords would end with the huge victory of the Housing Act 2004, which introduced tenancy deposit schemes in England and Wales. Scotland would

⁴⁶ Rugg, J. and Rhodes, D. (2008) *The private rented sector: its contribution and potential* (York: Centre for Housing Policy)

⁴⁷ See, for example, NUS/UUK/GuildHE (2010) *Living Together, Working Together* (London: NUS/UUK/GuildHE)

⁴⁸ Anonymous (2003) 'Hundreds Left Homeless' in *Times Higher Education*, 3 October; McNulty, B. (2004) 'Student housing company in trouble again' in *The Guardian*, 4 March

follow in 2011, with one of the principal schemes there set up by a consortium involving NUS Scotland, and Northern Ireland in 2013. NUS Scotland was also part of the successful campaign to enforce laws preventing letting agency fees north of the border.

Mental health is another area of welfare work where NUS Scotland, along with NUS-USI, took a lead in the 2000s. The Think Positive and Open Your Mind projects in these nations sought to improve student mental health, and bring the issue to the fore in students' unions and institutions, though training, campaigns and resources. Mental health had been a focus for SU work across the UK since at least the 1980s, with SUs seeking to create or expand counselling provision to cope with ever increasing demand, and promoting good mental health practices in order to deal with problems such as exam stress⁴⁹. The improved understanding of the link between welfare and academic issues like retention and success also fuelled the demand for investment in student support services. Both projects were funded by the devolved administrations in Scotland and Northern Ireland, which also

highlighted NUS' increased ability to secure such funding for the benefit of students and students' unions.

Such external funding also included a two-year project on crime. Again this was an issue that had featured in students' union work for some years, and students were recognised as being at greater risk of certain crimes, especially burglary and street crime since the 1990s⁵⁰. Perhaps one of the most memorable early initiatives involved NUS helping to design and promote the 'Kebabathon' viral game in 2003 – where a student tries to break into his own house without dropping his fast food, to illustrate how insecure homes could be⁵¹. The most extensive efforts so far came when the Home Office funded an NUS project for two years from 2009, which conducted research into students and crime, including incidences of hate crime, and created a range of resources and videos to support local campaign work.

⁴⁹ Silver and Silver (op. cit.) pp35-36

⁵⁰ Ibid. p113

⁵¹ Anonymous (2003) 'Kebabathon game fights crime' in BBC News, 24 January – <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/2691425.stm>

A further area to benefit from external funding was faith and belief. A combination of the wider diversity of students and the difficult geopolitics of the last decade and more had led to a situation where there was a lack of common understanding across FE and HE as to how best to support students of different faiths and beliefs, how to address tensions between different groups, and how to manage certain risks in the context of different pieces of legislation. The NUS Campus Cohesion, Faith and Belief project has been funded by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills since 2009, working to develop students' union understanding of the needs of such students, facilitate positive dialogue on campus, and help students' unions understand the increasingly complex duties relating to hate speech and external speakers. The outputs of the project have included extensive guidance documents, frequent training opportunities, toolkits to help students unions to, for example, promote dialogue on faith and

⁵² NUS (2009)

⁵³ For example, Hinton-Smith, T. (2012) *Lone Parents' Experiences as Higher Education Students* (Leicester: NIACE) or Brooks, R. (2013) 'Negotiating Time and Space for Study: Student Parents and Familial Relationships' in *Sociology*, 47:3, 443-459



sexuality, and research on isolation and vulnerability. The response from students' unions has shown how much demand there was to improve their capacity in this area, and it remains of critical importance.

Welfare research work in this period sought to bring the experiences of other student groups to fresh prominence. One of the most notable was student parents, with the publication of *Meet the Parents*, one of the first major pieces of research into their experiences across further and higher education on a range of issues including data collection, childcare, finance, academic concerns and attitudes towards their studies⁵². The report would be highly influential, sparking a range of campaigns in students' unions, and its findings would be cited in numerous academic works in subsequent years⁵³.

The diversity of students, of campaign areas and of the further and higher education sectors present enormous opportunities for welfare work in the present and future – as well as a few challenges in meeting expectations. Undoubtedly, the perennial issues of housing, finance and health will continue to feature, but students look to NUS and students' unions to act on issues like transport, faith and belief, alcohol, drugs, crime and pastoral care. The impact of austerity under the coalition government has put many services under enormous strain and the fight to halt or mitigate cuts will likely continue for some time to come.

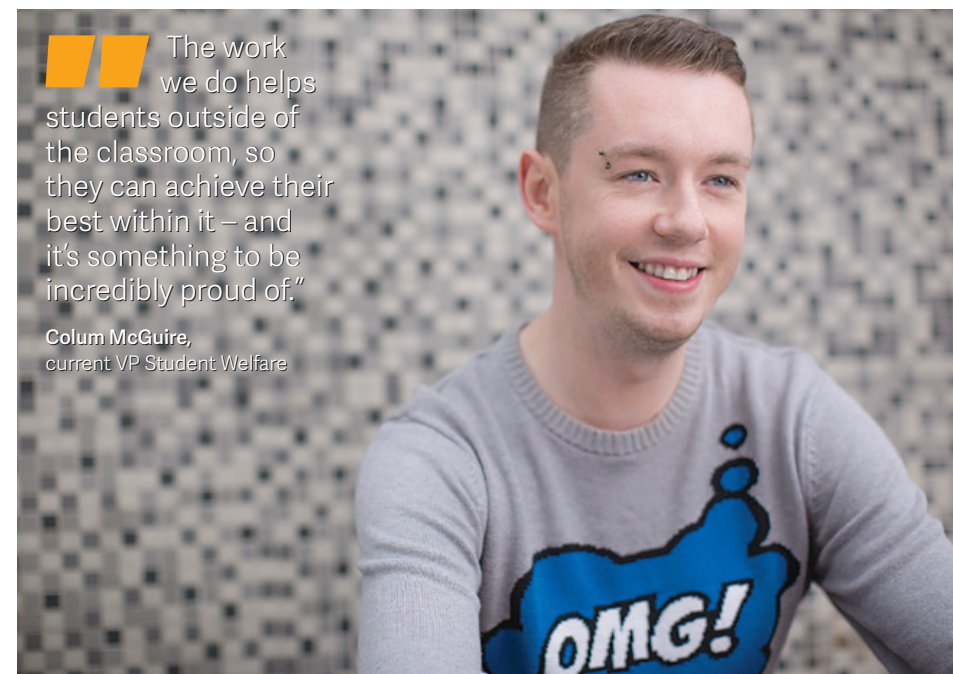
Major research continues to underpin NUS' work on housing. The *Accommodation Costs Survey* continues to be produced on a regular basis, the most recent⁵⁴ showing that the cost of student accommodation doubled in 10 years. This has been complemented recently by the publication of *Homes Fit For Study*, the first major study into the standards of student housing in over 10 years⁵⁵. Both have sparked campaign work in local students' unions as well as action at a national level. In addition, the innovative Ready to Rent project

seeks to provide student tenants with the skills to avoid common housing problems, by training students' union staff and officers to train their students in turn. Launched in 2014, over 60 students' unions are now participating, with the scheme still growing rapidly.

Community tensions also remain an ongoing concern for the student movement, and a key concern is the perceived culture of excess consumption of alcohol by students, and the associated parties and anti-social behaviour, as well as the impact on student health and academic performance. Two externally-funded projects have sought to tackle this in recent years. The lessons learnt from the first, funded by Drinkaware to look at social norms and communication, have been utilised in the second, Alcohol Impact. This is piloting a behaviour change model in seven institutions in England and Wales, and which, crucially, requires strong partnership working between the university and the students' union. The

⁵⁴ NUS/Unipol (2012) *Accommodation Costs Survey 2012/13* (London: NUS)

⁵⁵ NUS (2014) *Homes Fit For Study: the state of student housing in the UK* (London: NUS)



project has enormous potential and will be an area to watch in the coming years.

Similarly, the Campus Cohesion, Faith and Belief project continues to go from strength to strength, and will be critical in supporting students' unions in a changing legislative environment and with global events having their impact closer to home. However, despite the obvious challenges there are huge rewards possible with the right support, research and guidance. A key focus for the project will be expanding our efforts in further education, and the work so far has been well received.

More generally, campaigns that look at the specific needs of FE students are essential components of modern welfare work. Ensuring adequate and affordable transport, for example, has been a high-profile area in recent years, with the 'Get on the Bus' campaign highlighting the differing problems for learners in rural and urban areas. NUS and students' unions have won significant discounts for students, including the creation of the Young Person's Railcard in 1974 (then known as the Student Railcard), its extension to mature students in 1987, and the student travelcard in London

in 1999⁵⁶, but the fight for universal provision continues.

The cost of living more generally is a key concern in the movement's work on student finance. Major research here, *The Pound in Your Pocket*, has been undertaken in each of the four nations, highlighting the struggles students face to make ends meet in an era when student support rates have been frozen in some cases for years, or even cut in others – the £30 per week rate of Education Maintenance Allowance in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland hasn't increased in a decade, and the EMA has been abolished altogether in England, taking more than £300m per year away from learners. Student parents, disabled students, adult learners and those on healthcare courses face particular financial challenges.

Yet even in this era, it is possible to secure some victories. A ten-year campaign to prevent universities using academic sanctions to recover debts for accommodation and other non-academic services was won in 2014, a long focus on the student finance process for students who are estranged from their parents has

brought significant improvements, whilst NUS Scotland and NUS Wales have won significant increases in student support for their students.

Of course, whatever NUS does can only be a small part of the story. Welfare officers in students' unions have worked on an enormous range of such issues in recent years, including the pioneering community partnerships on student crime at Leeds, the successful lobbying for better transport provision at City College Norwich, Aberystwyth's securing an early day motion on housing in Westminster, the innovative training on faith and sexuality at Heythrop College, or the research on student mental health at Oxford.


If the challenges for student welfare have never been greater, the range and depth of work have increased to match. Today's welfare officers and staff build on a long and very proud tradition of work. It's clear that they will continue to make a significant contribution, to the benefit of students now and in the future. ■

⁵⁶ Day (op. cit.)

1975–77	Jez Lloyd	Liverpool University
1977–78	Sue Robertson	Bristol Polytechnic
1978–79	Alison Downie	Middlesex Polytechnic
1979–80	Mac McPherson	Leicester Polytechnic
1980–81	Leighton Andrews	University College North Wales, Bangor
1981–82	Hank Hastings	Sussex University
1982–84	Sarah Veale	Goldsmiths College
1984–85	Steve Morgan	University College Cardiff
1985–86	Vicky Phillips	University of East Anglia
1986–88	Simon Pottinger	Durham University
1988–90	Sarah Adams	North East London Polytechnic
1990–91	Rachel Taylor	Leeds University
1991–92	Lucy Jackson	Portsmouth Polytechnic
1992–93	Martin Lindsay	City of London Polytechnic
1993–94	Kevin Sexton	Liverpool Institute of Higher Education
1994–96	Ian Moss	Bristol University
1996–97	Gwilym Morris	University of Wales, Swansea
1997–98	Julie Eason	Kent University
1998–2000	James Asser	University of Central England
2000–01	Rachel Cashman	Jewel and Esk College
2001–02	Claire Kober	University of East Anglia
2002–04	Verity Coyle	Lincoln University
2004–05	Helen Symons	University College London
2005–07	Veronica King	Liverpool University
2007–09	Ama Uzowuru	Coventry University
2009–11	Ben Whittaker	Derby University
2011–13	Pete Mercer	Newcastle University
2013–15	Colum McGuire	Kent University



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