

The Year Ahead in Policy

As unions prepare their work for the year ahead and induct new officers, we have prepared this analysis of key dates and policy events to look out for across the UK.

What does this briefing cover?

This briefing looks at key dates and policy areas for unions in from August 2019 – July 2020. It is designed to help unions across the UK scope their national policy work and understand how it will affect their students.

All of the information here is accurate as of August 2019, and NUS will brief unions on key developments as the year progresses.

This briefing begins with an overview of work we know will take place across 2019/20, but which does not yet have a specific release date, and then provides month-by-month information on scheduled work

Navigation

Across the Year:

[UK-Wide](#)

[England](#)

[Wales](#)

[Northern Ireland](#)

[Scotland](#)

Policy Calendar:

[August](#)

[September](#)

[October](#)

[November](#)

[December](#)

[January](#)

[February](#)

[March](#)

[May](#)

Coming up in 2019/20

There are several pieces of national policy changes which will take place over the coming year but have not yet had dates announced.

Exiting the European Union

UK-wide, we expect the primary challenges for the education sector will come from ongoing work to leave the European Union, and the lack of stability that this has created for the Westminster Government.

It is expected that, following the date the UK departs the EU, there will be a new Queen's Speech setting out the legislative agenda of the UK government. At a similar time, the Chancellor will set a new Budget with implications for immediate UK government expenditure and initiate a Comprehensive Spending Review which will set spending priorities for perhaps three years ahead, including overall budgets for the devolved administrations. However, the timing of all of this may be contingent on the outcome of a General Election if one is called, or even a second referendum on our membership of the EU.

Review of Post-18 Education and Funding

The Review into Post-18 Education and Funding, while primarily having a legislative effect on England, will also indirectly impact the whole of the UK. More information on this is contained throughout this briefing.

Student information

The Office for Students will be working on a new strategy for student information, including

broadening the reach of the NSS and potentially reviewing the survey content.

As well as this, they will be continuing to develop and test the appetite for a national survey of Postgraduate Taught students. We will brief students' unions when and if there is an opportunity to feed in to changes to the NSS and the student information landscape.

England

The Office for Students & Regulation

The Office for Students has come into its full powers as of the beginning of August. This means that it will have the power to fine higher education providers which do not fulfil their conditions of registration.

The Independent Review of the TEF

The [Independent Review of the TEF](#), which is an evaluation of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework, will likely report in the Autumn. You can find all of our resources and input into it on [NUSConnect's TEF Hub](#).

We have been lobbying for it to recommend significant changes to what the TEF measures and how students' unions can engage in the process. Once the recommendations have been made, changes will have to be adopted by the Minister for Universities, currently Jo Johnson, who will direct the work of the Office for Students (OfS) to deliver the TEF.

The Post-18 Review (Augar Review)

The [Post-18 Review](#) was released May 2019. It looks at changes to post-18 education funding and maintenance funding for students. Key recommendations for students' unions to develop positions on include a £1 billion cash injection for the further education sector, maintenance grant funding for all students studying a higher education qualification and a tuition fee cut to £7.500 for home students in England.

A suite of different legislative and policy changes will be required for each recommendation; however, it is likely that a focal point will be the Comprehensive Spending

Review. This where the government reviews the budget given to different departments, so the chance for, for example, the Department for Education to lobby the Treasury for more funding. As discussed above, we anticipate this in the late Autumn, however it will be heavily dependent on the progress of Brexit.

Disabled Students' Allowance Consultation

The Student Loans Company is consulting on its' provision of DSA, focusing on the logistics and quality assurance of Assistive Technology supply and training to disabled students.

During this process, there may be proposed changes to how DSA provision is quality assured, including on how disabled student representation is managed nationally

We would encourage students' unions during the 2019-20 academic year to continue to support disabled students' representation to ensure that any changes in local practice or provision do not disadvantage disabled students.

Office for Students Review of University Admissions

Following requests from ministers off of the back of the ongoing debate around conditional offers, the Office for Students plan on hosting a review of the current university admissions system. Details are yet to be announced, but the OfS are keen to hear students' voices in the debate, as the real impact of the current admissions system is little known.

This will be a good opportunity for SUs to have their say in the debate around not only unconditional offers, but the challenges and opportunities that lie in the current admissions system in England.

Wales

Commission for Tertiary Education and Research

Throughout 2019/20, Welsh Government will be taking the first steps in the creation of a new Commission for Tertiary Education and Research (CTER) – a complete post-compulsory

education, training and research funder, regulator and enhancer.

The legislation establishing CTER is being worked on at present and is likely to appear in September/October. The Commission will aim to launch in 2023. This will bring together oversight of all education, training and research, from 6th form colleges to research strategy.

Mental Health

In April 2019, HEFCW announced a wellbeing and mental health pot: a £2.3 million pot for HEI's to bid for, in partnership with other HEI's, FEI's and other relevant organisations to focus on projects relating to this area. Partnership working with students and student unions has been a clear requirement. Bids have now been submitted, and NUS Wales is part of the panel that will select the winning bids.

Additional Learning Needs Bill and Code

This legislation is changing how support works for young people with what are currently referred to as "special educational needs".

At present, there is significant disparity between what happens at FE level, school level and what is coming from local authorities. The aim, and it is broadly supported by Colleges Wales and colleges, is to create better links for students, so that there is a unified framework. This should significantly improve learner journey's through these processes, but there are some concerns regarding financing of the Bill's implications.

Northern Ireland

Talks are underway which commenced in May 2019 to try and find a resolution to deliver the return of devolved government, and this may have an impact upon all of these matters.

Many of the decisions on these elements are dependent upon devolved government returning at Stormont; however, decisions may alternatively be implemented through Westminster

Abortion & Equal Marriage

There is significant momentum in campaigning to deliver free safe and legal access to abortion in Northern Ireland, and campaigning for marriage equality. This work will be taking place throughout the year and is relevant to all students' unions

Postgraduate Loans

The Department for the Economy is planning to carry out a review of postgraduate student loans in the North. This review could see an increase in the loan available to postgraduate students here. This work will likely be taking place throughout the year and is relevant to all students' unions and postgraduates.

Review of Higher Education Funding

The Department for the Economy is planning to conduct a review into higher education funding. This review may examine a wide range of options from increased public funding for HE to increased tuition fees. This work will likely be taking place throughout the year and is relevant to all students' unions.

Scotland

Disability-related Student Support Review

One of the recommendations from the Student Support Review in 2017 was for a further piece of work specifically around the support on offer to disabled students. The Student Awards Agency for Scotland, acting on behalf of the Scottish Government, commenced this review in July with a view to reporting in Spring 2020.

Lobbying register

Lobbying is a vital part of our democratic process. It gives students' associations across Scotland, and membership organisations like NUS Scotland, the ability to influence decision-makers like MSPs and the Scottish Government and inform the policy-making process.

The Lobbying (Scotland) Act 2016, which came into force in 2018, places duties on individuals and organisations engaged in specific types of lobbying, known as 'regulated' lobbying. To find out more, including what action you might need

to take, read [NUS Scotland's briefing for students' association.](#)

Scottish Funding Council publications

Throughout the year the SFC publishes a whole host of reports and institution-level data on issues which may be of interest to your students' associations, like widening access, gender action plans, the impact of Brexit on the sector, funding for institutions, and much more. [Publications and reports are available here.](#)

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The Policy Calendar

August 2019

PREVENT

Wales, Scotland, England.

The Counter-terrorism and Securities Act 2019 mandated Government to instigate an independent review into the Prevent duty.

Details of this will likely be published by August 2019, and we will be supporting students' unions to respond during the consultation, which will conclude by August 2020.

This is an opportunity for students' unions to describe the impact that the Prevent duty has on their operation and the experience of their students, in particular activists and Muslim students, and to lobby their institutions to take part honestly in the Review.

Office for Students Student Engagement Strategy Consultation

England.

The Office for Students is in the process of developing its student engagement strategy, which will detail how it intends to engage students with its regulatory work.

They are consulting on what awareness students should have of their work and how they should be engaged. [The consultation](#) will open on August 12th for a month.

Level 4/5 Qualifications Review

England.

Following a recommendation in the Post-18 Review that Level 4 and 5 qualifications, (HNDs and HNCs) become eligible for student loan funding, Department for Education are reviewing their regulation and quality assurance.

This is relevant to universities and colleges with a high proportion of students in technical education, and we will be releasing a further briefing soon. The consultation closes on September 29th.

Tuition fees for College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise

Northern Ireland.

The Department for Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs' tuition fee consultation for the College of Agriculture, Food and Rural Enterprise (CAFRE) is ongoing, and NUS-USI has submitted a response created in consultation with CAFRE students emphasising the need for free education. This review could see tuition fees in CAFRE increase; however, NUS-USI has been conducting significant work to try and prevent this from happening.

The consultation has now closed - this review will likely be concluding by around August 2019 and is of high importance to CAFRE SU.

September 2019

Inquiry into sex work and inequality

UK-wide

Parliament's Women and Equalities Committee has launched an inquiry, "[Prostitution: how can we tackle inequalities and harm?](#)". It is due to examine sex work, but with a wider focus than the legal criminal framework, and instead examining inequalities and harm. The inquiry closes on Friday the 20th of September, and the Womens' and Trans' students' campaigns are supporting students and unions to contribute.

Additional Learning Needs Bill and Code

Wales.

The implementation of the Additional Learning Needs Bill is planned for September.

Scottish Government Programme for Government

Scotland.

The Scottish Government will set out its actions in the year 2019/20. Ahead of the Programme for Government and the Scottish Budget, NUS Scotland will seek to influence the Scottish Government and other decision-makers on our campaigning priorities.

Counselling provision

Scotland.

In the 2018/19 Programme for Government, the Scottish Government committed to recruiting 80 new counsellors in further and higher education. It is expected that the first tranche of counsellors will be employed at the beginning of academic year 2019/20.

Reforms to cost-of-living support implemented

Scotland.

In July 2018, the [Scottish Government announced a suite of improvements \(after much NUS Scotland lobbying!\) to cost-of-living support](#) available to college and university students. Improvements which are to be introduced for academic year 2019/20 include:

- Raising the higher education bursary income threshold from £19,000 to £21,000
- Increasing the amount of bursary support available to higher education students from £1,875 to £2,000
- Increasing bursary support to poorest independent students in higher education from £875 to £1,000
- Ensuring all eligible further education students aged 18 and over receive a guaranteed bursary award, while increasing bursary support for the poorest further education students to £4,500

London Voter Registration Week

England – London.

We are working with the Greater London Assembly on voter registration week which they are hosting in September. We will be supporting unions in London to host voter registration drives, so watch this space.

Subject Level TEF Pilot Report

England.

The OfS is likely to publish the finding of the second year of the Subject Level TEF Pilot. This is of interest to unions whose institutions were involved in the pilot process, and those who use the TEF in their campaigning work.

October 2019

Brexit

UK-wide.

When Brexit does arrive, students' unions may need to play a role in helping students - EU students in particular – to ensure that they have access to the information and support they need in light of any changes.

The government is currently in the process of designing the next stage of European programmes – including Erasmus+ and Horizon – post 2020. Long-term, we will want to do some lobbying work to ensure that the UK is part of that – but it all depends on what the terms of third party membership of the new scheme are and what our Brexit deal looks like

Work around mitigating any negative impacts of Brexit upon students, tertiary education and the entire region is ongoing within government departments in Northern Ireland, and NUS-USI has already delivered significant wins on cross-border student mobility. Access to Erasmus+, replacement funding for apprenticeships and training funding if European Social Fund and access to research funding may all be a major part of this. This work will likely be taking place until the end of October 2019 and possibly throughout the year and is relevant to all students' unions.

Let Us Be Heard March – October 12th

London.

There will be a demonstration calling for a final referendum on the Brexit deal on October 12th in central London. This is supported by the People's Vote campaign, and students' unions may want to encourage their members to join or provide transport for them to attend.

Outcome Agreement Guidance

Scotland.

In October the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), the body responsible for providing public funding to Scotland's colleges and universities, issues guidance for colleges and universities on the development of Outcome Agreements (OAs).

OAs are how colleges and universities demonstrate what is being delivered in return for public investment – specifically the policy priorities set out by the Scottish Government in the Ministerial Letter of Guidance (more information below), like widening access, providing support to certain categories of learners like care experienced students or veterans, improving mental health support available to students, and more. Crucially, OAs should be developed in consultation with students and students' associations. [Previous OA guidance is available here.](#)

November 2019

Transgender Day of Remembrance: 20th November

UK-wide.

This is a day observed annually to memorialise those who have been murdered as a result of transphobia. Students' unions may want to hold a vigil and events led by their trans communities.

Gender Recognition Act

England and Wales.

The Gender Recognition Act consultation was a significant piece of work last year which consulted on whether people should be allowed to self-define their gender. There is no date for the results as yet, but it is likely to be released at the end of 2019/early 2020. Whenever it does come NUS will work with SUs and trans activists to respond to the proposals and lobby around corresponding legislation as it travels through parliament.

Impact Report into Access and Participation Plans

England.

The Office for Students will release an impact report evaluating the success of Access and Participation Plans. Students' unions should be involved in the drafting and monitoring of their institutions Access & Participation Plan, and the report will be relevant to those unions most closely involved with the process to stay informed of any recommended changes.

Office for Students Value for Money Strategy

England.

The Office for Students will release its strategy for work on value for money by December 2019. While there are concerns that work on value for money falls into a reductive narrative which equates contact hours and value, or high-paid employment and value, the effectiveness of the strategy will have to be judged upon publication and there may be aspects of this useful for unions to use to apply pressure to their institutions.

December 2019

UCAS End of Cycle data

UK-wide.

Between December and January, UCAS will release its end of cycle data. There will be several releases of data on UG student numbers for the 2019 cohort, and it can provide a useful tool to inform your campaigning work, particularly on access and participation and retention. It will also likely generate a large amount of media coverage for some providers, which could also involve the students' union.

Scottish Budget

Scotland.

The Scottish Draft Budget is ordinarily published around December. Draft spending proposals are debated in the Scottish Parliament and scrutinised in three stages throughout January and February. Find out more about the Scottish Budget process [here](#).

Each year NUS Scotland will lobby decision-makers, in the Scottish Government and the Scottish Parliament, on behalf of students' associations, to ensure student priorities – like cost-of-living support, or mental health, for example – are properly resourced. Our 'asks' are informed by our membership, through the policies passed at NUS Scotland conference, and our democratically-elected leadership.

January 2020

Office for Students Student Engagement Strategy released

England.

Following [consultation](#) in August and September 2019, the Office for Students will release its strategy for engaging students with its regulatory work.

Presidents' Parliamentary Roundtable

Scotland

In January 2019, NUS Scotland worked with the Scottish Government to hold a Presidents' Roundtable at the Scottish Parliament, giving every students' association President in Scotland the opportunity to put their questions to Scottish Government ministers.

We are now working with the Scottish Government to make this an annual event. Dates for a future event are to be confirmed.

February 2020

Report on senior staff pay

England.

As part of its work on value for money, the Office for Students will release a report on senior staff pay in higher education providers.

As part of their registration, institutions which are regulated by OfS have to submit details of the number of staff paid over £100,000 and the ratio between the median pay and the pay of the Vice Chancellor (or equivalent). Students' unions can use this data in their campaigning work and compare pay across the sector using [previous years' data](#).

March 2020

Report on the financial sustainability of the higher education sector

England.

The Office for Students will be issuing a report on the financial health of the higher education sector. In a time where political uncertainty and uncertainty over funding is rife, the report will be interesting reading, and will be useful for unions whose institutions are financially pressured to give some sense of comparison across the sector.

May 2020

Local elections in England and Police and Crime Commissioner elections in England and Wales

England and Wales.

A number of local authorities in England will hold elections, including 33 metropolitan councils. There will also be mayoral elections in several city regions including London, Manchester, the West Midlands, Liverpool and Bristol. Finally, 40 Police and Crime Commissioners will be elected across England and Wales. All of these will give SUs in the relevant areas a chance to engage students in the electoral process and influence policy on key issues.

Get in touch

If you have any questions about the policy landscape or want to talk about our work, please contact the following people.

- **Scotland** – [David Livey](#), Communications & Public Affairs Manager
- **Northern Ireland** – [Ian Williamson](#), Senior Policy & Public Affairs Advisor
- **Wales** – [Jeremy Harvey](#) – Policy and Public Affairs Officer
- **England** – [Hannah Sketchley](#), Policy Officer (regarding higher & further education policy), [Richard Stewart](#), Policy Officer (regarding PREVENT and liberation policy)