

Motion 201 | Divorce our courses from market forces

Conference believes

1. Successive governments have introduced policies designed to increase market competition in higher education and pass the cost of education from the taxpayer to the individual student.
 2. The marketisation of the Higher Education sector, not to be confused with privatisation, is defined as a way of changing people's relationships and values towards those of the market, while operating institutions as if they were businesses. This is not simply a state versus market values debate, as the marketisation of education has been paralleled not by a decrease but an increase in state intervention and the micro-management of university life.
 3. The previous Coalition government passed legislation which increased maximum tuition fee levels to £9,000 in England and pursued an agenda of opening up the sector to competition from private providers.
 4. The current government, through its policy proposals since the publication of the Green Paper *Fulfilling our Potential*, show an intent on implementing further market reforms that have potential to further increase the cost of education to students and force even greater competition between institutions.
 5. Higher education institutions are responding to higher education reforms and cuts to public funding by continuing to raise tuition fees where possible and by behaving as market actors, treating students as consumers, cutting corners and ruthlessly focusing on efficiency savings and competition in league tables.
 6. The UK government's marketisation agenda in England is having knock-on effects in the nations, by squeezing funding for devolved administrations, and by putting pressure on institutions in the nations to raise fees for other-UK and international students in order to compete.
 7. NUS has highlighted in publications such as *The Roadmap for Free Education*, *A Manifesto for Partnership* and *Democratic Universities*, how the marketisation agenda in higher education is having a negative impact on students.
 8. NUS does not currently have policy on state-enforced marketisation and how to support unions and students in challenging it systematically.
 9. The HE reforms currently being considered by the government represent a fundamental attack on the idea of education as a public service. It is a blueprint for the marketisation of the sector, introducing private providers and variable fees, and orientating the whole sector towards the needs of employers.
 10. The new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is a core part of the reforms and will damage the quality of education. In the years to come, the TEF will require and use data from the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Destination of Leavers in Higher Education (DLHE) survey.(1,2)
 11. The government's Green Paper represents the most significant restructure of higher education in recent times
 12. The Green Paper's reliance on metrics to assess the quality of our teaching stifles innovation in teaching
 13. The Teaching Excellence Framework's suggestion to allow institutions to increase tuition fees creates further marketization within our sector
 14. The idea to allow more private universities risks creating inferior institutions and taking valuable resources from our existing universities
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15. Making universities exempt from Freedom of Information enquiries will hurt transparency and limit students' ability to hold universities to account
16. The plans to reform Student Unions are yet another example of the government's opposition to the student movement
17. The proposed reforms presented in the government's Higher Education Green Paper included:
 - a Increasing tuition fees in line with inflation.
 - b The introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) that forces universities to compete in market-oriented metrics.
 - c Variable tuition fees across institutions that can rise if universities meet certain criteria in the TEF, including graduate employment statistics.
 - d Increased private sector involvement by making it easier for private providers to enter the 'market', award degrees, and compete with existing universities.
 - e Facilitating closure of existing universities.
 - f The exemption of universities from the Freedom of Information Act
 - g Students' unions mentioned in the context of the Government's reforms attacking trade unions' ability to campaign and take industrial action.
18. At the time of writing, after the consultation, we were waiting for a revised version of the reform package to be announced
19. The proposed reforms presented in the government's Higher Education Green Paper are a potentially devastating attack on education.
20. The HE paper threatens further fee rises, privatisation and marketisation on our campuses

Conference further believes

1. Marketisation is one of the greatest threats to our education system at all levels.
 2. The so-called "benefits" to students and students' unions from market mechanisms, such as better information and choice, higher quality provision, and greater power to change things, are often exaggerated and can be achieved via non-market mechanisms.
 3. The overreliance on quantitative data and metrics can deteriorate the relationship between students and academics, and it stifles the development of an inclusive learning environment.
 4. Students' Unions operate in a difficult environment where they need to balance how to fight for better support and services for their members whilst actively opposing marketisation and other threats to students and education more widely.
 5. To function in the medium term, the TEF will need us to participate in the NSS and DLHE.
 6. If students and graduates either boycotted the NSS and DLHE or sabotaged the surveys by giving artificially maximum or minimum scores, this could render the TEF unworkable, and seriously disrupt the government's HE reforms as a whole. The NSS and DLHE already form important parts of the government's management and marketization of education.(3)
 7. There is a strategic case for using them as a highly effective form of leverage against the government's destructive HE reforms.
 8. The Freedom of Information Act is an essential tool for holding universities to account by students and student media.
 9. There are no one-size-fits-all metrics with which the Government can quantify the quality of teaching at very different institutions.
 10. Some of the proposed metrics fail to recognise, and perpetuate, sexist, racist, socioeconomic and other disadvantages. Research has shown that the ethnicity of lecturers affects NSS scores. And
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given pay gaps and the biases in the job market, the use of graduate employment statistics will punish universities for accepting more women, black students, disabled students and those from poorer backgrounds.

11. Higher education should not be seen merely as job training. A narrow-minded focus on employability will damage the quality of education, and disadvantage institutions specialising in arts and humanities. The introduction of TEF will further disadvantage struggling institutions.
12. The TEF will increase stress and exploitation for teachers and academics, in particular casualised early career academics including postgraduates. Issues of casualisation disproportionately harm women and black academic staff. Improving teaching requires good working conditions for staff.
13. Universities and teaching can be improved by decent public funding and democratic structures, not marketisation.
14. The Government is proposing a structure which sets some public universities up to fail and close in order to make way for private businesses, to the detriment of students, staff, and wider society. The proposed reforms actively facilitate this process.
15. The autonomy and campaigning activity of Students' Unions must be defended.
16. We need to significantly up our work to stop the proposals which, combined with cuts to grants, bursaries and FE colleges, form a potentially devastating attack on public education.
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Conference resolves

1. To actively campaign against the marketisation of education, calling for a free, publicly funded education system for all, driven by democratic values and duties for the good of society.
 2. Focus attention on combating current and future government policy which attempts to further marketise our education system.
 3. To produce further evidence of the negative effects of the market on students in higher education.
 4. To produce guidance for students' unions which can help them better understand and counteract the negative forces of marketisation.
 5. Provide direct advice and support to students' unions in fighting for improvements to the student experience whilst avoiding the pitfalls of consumerism and short-term thinking.
 6. Help drive a new language of student empowerment outside of the frame of students as consumers, where ideas of "student choice" and "student rights" have strong meaning outside of marketisation.
 7. Find more effective means for surveys and quality assurance to be used solely for enhancement rather than market competition.
 8. Help enhance students' unions negotiation and campaign tactics to encourage their institution to break from market-orientated policy and strategy, and find an alternative sustainable path to institutional success with students at its core.
 9. To work at a sector level to lobby and campaign against political inertia of organisations like Universities UK (UUK) to marketisation, pushing for institutions to change collectively.
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10. To form greater collaboration and consultation with NUS Scotland, NUS Wales and NUS-USI on how UK government policies on higher education affect the devolved administrations and institutions in the nations.
 11. The VPHE, consulting with the NEC and education workers affected by the NSS (represented by UCU, NUS Postgrad Section, and the Fighting Against Casualisation in Education campaign), will determine the most effective boycott/sabotage strategy.
 12. This will be done before June, when NUS will write to the government and announce that the NUS will mobilise students to sabotage or boycott the NSS and DLHE if the HE reforms and the TEF are not withdrawn.
 13. If the government refuses to withdraw the HE reforms, to mobilise students to sabotage or boycott the Spring 2017 NSS, and the next year's DLHE. The campaign should begin at the start of Autumn Term 2016 collecting pledges from students that they will carry out the action if the HE reforms are not withdrawn.
 14. To oppose any rise in tuition fees linked to the Teaching Excellence Framework
 15. To fight any attempt to weaken Student Unions or the Student Movement
 16. To provide resources to help SU officers to:
 17. Engage productively with their universities to ensure the student view is heard as plans set out in the Green Paper are further developed.
 18. Lobby MPs to oppose the provisions in the Green Paper that are unsatisfactory to students
 19. Continue to lobby to secure policy proposals that would make it more friendly towards the partnership between students and universities that we seek to achieve
 20. Lobby Jo Johnson, Minister for Universities, with the concerns over the Green Paper to get a change in direction
 21. Actively campaign, in collaboration with education trade unions, to stop the proposed Higher Education reforms as a whole, countering with our own vision of democratic, accessible, well-resourced public education, with academic freedom and good pay and working conditions, well-funded by taxing the rich.
 22. To put this campaign in the context of a wider fight against marketisation, casualisation, and the institutional perpetuation of oppressive biases and disadvantages.
 23. To help SUs, with resources such as toolkits, etc, to spread awareness of the content and negative consequences of the reforms in order to mobilise people to join the campaign
 24. To organise a demonstration at Parliament in the week running up to, or on the day of, any Parliamentary discussion or vote on these reforms, and to invite the education trade unions and other supporters to join us.
 25. To place this action within a wider strategy of protest, direct action and lobbying, with action at both local and national levels.
 26. To reaffirm our commitment to campaign for free and democratic education at all levels, funded by taxing the rich and big businesses, not by cutting other services or further squeezing those who can't afford it.
 27. Actively campaign, in collaboration with education trade unions, to stop the proposed Higher Education reforms.
 28. To link fighting the HE reforms to stopping the major cuts threatening further education and to reversing abolitions of grants and bursaries.
 29. To organise further local and national action – including protest, direct action and lobbying, strikes and occupations
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