

1818 Response to the HE Green Paper passed 3 December 2015

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Union Notes:

1. The government recently released its 'Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice' green paper, outlining its plans for the future of Higher Education in the UK.
2. The government's recent Comprehensive Spending Review also contains plans to retroactively change student loan conditions to "raid the paychecks" of graduates on low and middle incomes.
3. That National Campaign against Fees and Cuts (NCAFC) has claimed that combined reforms of the HE Green paper and the Comprehensive Spending Review amount to 'full marketisation', and completely devastate and undermine the principle of publicly funded education. ¹
4. The key proposals in the HE Green paper are as follows:
 - a) Teaching Excellence Framework: The paper outlines plans to introduce a TEF, which includes an inflationary rise in fees for those passing "TEF 1". In Year 2, higher levels be introduced and financial incentives differentiated according to the levels. Future tuition fee rises could be imposed by ministers without a vote in Parliament, opening the door to unlimited, unaccountable fee rises.
 - b) The Office for Students: HEFCE & OFFA are to be merged to create a new body that will be in the interest of students.
 - c) Widening Participation: There will be additional targets for widening participation and a new Social Mobility Advisory Group.
 - d) Private Providers: A private provider could get degree awarding powers in less than four years and university status in less than five.
 - e) Student protections: There will be increased protections for students if a course or institution fails.
 - f) Students' unions: A question is asked about how we can improved our transparency and accountability.
 - g) Sharia compliant loans: After years of joint work between NUS and FOSIS, the government are introducing Sharia compliant loans.
 - h) Research: HEFCE will no longer allocate research funding and the research councils are to be reformed.

¹ <http://www.independent.co.uk/student/news/national-campaign-against-fees-and-cuts-urges-students-to-save-education-by-demonstrating-following-a6749026.html>

5. That the government has already announced plans to convert the maintenance grant package into a means-tested loan scheme.
6. The government has already removed the cap on student numbers, generating competition amongst institutions for a limited number of students.
7. That the union has existing policy that resolves to campaign against any further marketisation of higher education. ²

Union Believes:

1. That these reforms represent the final piece in the jigsaw to implement of a fully, marketised system to Higher Education in the UK.
2. That students should be partners in education, not passive consumers.
3. Access to Higher Education should be based on ability, and not ability to pay.
4. The Teaching Excellence Framework is based upon the Research Excellence Framework, which was described by Peter Scott, Professor of Higher Education Studies at the Institute of Education, as “a Minotaur that must be appeased by bloody sacrifices”.
5. That the REF is an unmitigated disaster. It is expensive, ineffective gesture that discourages genuine innovation and restricts academic freedom subjecting research to set of arbitrary metrics aimed at generating competition between institutions. ³
6. The TEF will use employment destination data as a metric for student outcomes. This will, in effect, measure teaching and learning on the basis of what benefits our future employers rather than what is best for us as students.
7. That education should not be subjected to the demands of business. The Green paper mentions ‘what employers want’ 35 times and ‘value for money’ 27 times. Students should be able to explore a diverse and intellectually-stimulating curriculum in an environment of academic freedom – instead of one where teaching outcomes are externally imposed and subject to the interests of employers.
8. That quality teaching is often subjective and difficult to measure: and much innovative practice occurs at the grassroots level. Introducing a national framework threatens to strangle pedagogical innovation where it occurs.
9. The TEF will estrange students from academics, and further encourage students to engage with education as ‘value for money’ and to put

² 1605 No to the Marketisation of Education (The Future of Undergraduate Funding)

³ <http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2014/dec/15/research-excellence-framework-five-reasons-not-fit-for-purpose>

pressure on already over-worked academics through increased reliance on implementing consumer feedback via the National Student Survey (NSS).

10. That the recent changes to the student maintenance package to a means-tested loan system will already deter many poorer students from attending university. Combined with a tier system for fees as proposed in the TEF, this will make it drastically more difficult for students from widening participation backgrounds to reach those institutions and worsen the BME attainment gap.
11. That the proposed Social Mobility Advisory Group will be largely ineffective in tackling the access issues that will be exacerbated by recent policy changes.
12. That the proposed link to increase in fees will create a two-tier education system, whereby elite institutions are only accessible to those who can afford it.
13. Increased competition for limited student numbers will lead to most institutions focusing on those subjects immediately profitable, which in practice may lead to huge cuts to school and courses amongst middle-ranking institutions.
14. That plans to make it easier for institutions to 'exit' the sector and easier for private providers to enter. This is effectively indicating the planned collapse of our publicly-accountable institutions in favour of those from the private sector.
15. That questions on the transparency and accountability of students' unions is a direct threat to the autonomy and effectiveness of students' unions to represent their members.

Union Resolves:

1. To release a statement responding to the HE Green Paper based upon the beliefs as outlined above.
2. To lobby the Vice-Chancellor to publicly state their concerns as to the consequences of the HE Green paper.
3. To oppose and actively campaign against the implementation of the Teaching Excellence Framework.
4. To oppose any move to further embed graduate attributes, employability, or any other mechanism that attempts to subject learning and teaching outcomes to the needs of employers into course or module design.
5. To request that Norwich South MP, Clive Lewis, write an open letter to the Universities Minister Jo Johnson outlining concerns about the future of HE as outlined in the Green Paper.
6. To convene a working group with the staff unions – UCU, Unison, and Unite – to develop a joint policy document on the green paper and the

state of the sector, addressing key issues such as staff workload and assessment and feedback.