

Nottingham Trent Students Union

Our Agenda





We have reached a critical juncture in the Higher Education policy debate.

A debate is raging not merely about at what level fees should be, but whether we should have fees at all. This is a major success for NTSU locally, and our friends at NUS nationally. We intend to play a full part in that debate that will be held on campus, in the media and ultimately in Parliament.

However, since the concerns of students are broader than funding policy, the agenda of the Students' Union must be also. This document seeks to outline some of the challenges and opportunities that our members have identified as barriers to a better student experience at NTU.

I look forward to leading the Students' Union during the coming year, and to working with colleagues within the local community and the university to deliver the changes and improvements that would benefit our members.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Phil Docherty". The signature is stylized and written over a light blue background.

Phil Docherty
NTSU President 2010-11

Fees

Higher Education needs a long-term settlement for student finance that provides certainty for institutions and fairness for students. The current system, with the potential for perpetual review, does not achieve either of those aims.

Where the current system succeeds is in the essentially flat fee structure. No prospective student has to make a choice about a specific university or subject based on affordability. If a student can afford Higher Education, they can go to the university with the right profile, geography and mission for them.

Prospective students, many aged 16-17, do not have enough information, advice and guidance about graduate outcomes to

We will campaign vigorously against any increase in fees that introduces a market into the selection of universities places by applicants.

make informed choices in a market with variable prices.

A system of graduate contributions would link successful outcomes to university finance, providing more incentive as if it were needed to ensure that graduates leave university well-rounded and able to enter appropriate levels of work or further study.

Student Loans Company

Delays in payment of student loans last year were widespread and caused severe hardship for many students. The SLC is already ominously warning that it may not be able to cope with the demand again this year, and a number of students could arrive at NTU this year with no finance in place.

A co-ordinated approach from colleagues across the university is required in order to ensure that any student found in this situation this year is enabled to sustain their selves and succeed on their course.

Part-Time Work

Average student debt now stands at £26,000. A lack of decently paid part-time employment contributes to this overall figure.

Most available work is concentrated in the lowest paying sectors of the economy, and much is only available at unsociable hours, which can have an impact on attendance and participation in time-tabled classes.

If, Nottingham Trent was to take a lead from many American universities and employ its students on part-time and job share basis, then it would not only be alleviating a debt problem but giving students the opportunities to develop on the job skills vital to the world of work.

Hidden Course Costs

Any additional course costs (on top of tuition fees) should be transparent, reasonable and audited.

We want to see a commitment to transparency with additional fees, like the University of the Arts, London has agreed to make.

Anecdotal evidence points to an ad hoc system of hidden costs and huge discrepancies between courses as to the additional costs that students are expected or required to meet.

It is also a concern that there would appear to be no allowance made as to whether a student has the means to pay these extra costs.

We want to jointly undertake work with the University and Schools to establish what hidden costs there are currently.

As part of that work we want to establish guidance as to what forms part of the core offer of a subject and therefore should be considered to be included when a student pays their tuition fees.

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Additional bursaries should be available for those students from the poorest economic backgrounds if they are on courses with higher than average additional costs.

Graduation

We know that some of our students are very unhappy about the costs of graduation ceremonies.

Our evidence suggests that NTU is one of the most expensive institutions to graduate from (on the basis of one graduate and two guests attending the ceremony).

We acknowledge the cost of external

'£25 for a Trent Uni Graduation Ticket is a rip off' Facebook Group has 1,608 members

venue hire for such ceremonies, but also note that other universities manage to conduct ceremonies without so large a contribution from guests in attendance.

We would be keen to share our research with the University, and jointly gather opinion from potential graduates well in advance of decisions being taken for next summer's ceremonies.

Welfare

Student Welfare will continue to be amongst our highest priorities. We will continue to provide information, advice, and guidance on how to combat exam stress.

Our campaign about safe use of taxis and minicabs will continue. We need to collaborate with the council, licensed premises, and taxi companies to reduce instances of illegal "flying" so that students can have confidence in the industry and enjoy the peace of mind that comes

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from insured bookings.

Crime Prevention is of increasing importance in some residential areas with a high number of student

lettings. We will do what we can to help minimise the potential for crimes of opportunity and promote good practice throughout the student community.

Housing

The Unipol managed accreditation scheme has not delivered for our students. The loopholes in the scheme did not encourage full participation from landlords, and therefore Unipol's income was too small to risk the loss of income that proper regulation may have resulted in.

We need to support initiatives that benefit our members.

We will support the Councils, Unipol, letting agents and landlords' associations with any effort to drive up standards in the rental markets in which our students live.

Transport

Rush hour transport links between the City Campus, West Bridgford and Clifton are inadequate. Students are often stood on the roadside, as bus after bus passes them because they are too full. Capacity on this line needs to be improved at peak times.

We are also concerned that there is an over-estimation being made by the University with regard to the extension of the tram. The tram extension, should it get the go ahead, will be more of a link with Clifton Village than Clifton Campus. Consequently, it should not be seen as an opportunity to completely remove the student motor car from Clifton Campus.

For many, an attraction of studying at Clifton was the ability to drive to and park at the site; for others, it is a necessity. We remain convinced of the need for student parking at Clifton, and such parking should be safe, secure and

not likely to damage vehicles.

We are mindful of the possible introduction of a city wide Workplace Parking Levy and the detrimental impact that this would have on university finances should the current plans to offer no educational exemption be realised in the final proposals. However, we feel there is scope for the university, students' union and local council to work together to ensure the continued accessibility of the Clifton Campus.

Libraries

The study habits of students are changing and diverse. However, access to libraries are still highly valued by a large proportion of students.

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TurnItIn

Students should have the right to use TurnItIn as a learning tool. TurnItIn's own website states that it "is the leading academic plagiarism detector, utilized by teachers and students to avoid plagiarism and ensure academic integrity."

We are concerned the focus of the University's current use of TurnItIn is too focused on plagiarism detection and not to support a better understanding of how to reference academic work.

*"Turnitin lets students check their own writing for improperly used content, inadvertent plagiarism, or quotation errors."
- Turninit.com*

Dyslexia Screening

Other UK universities use dyslexia screening software on university computers to prompt students exhibiting signs of dyslexia towards the testing, and consequently the support, that is available.

We are in favour of all cost effective measures that direct students towards the support they might require.

Voter Registration

It is important to us that students exercise their democratic right to vote. For too many, the annual house move and the feeling of non-permanence in the area dissuades them. Last year,

working with the City Council, we ran a highly successful voter registration drive, which aided turnout in Nottingham East (+7.5%) and Nottingham South (+9.1%).

We would like to move towards a more comprehensive system of voter registration at enrolment and re-enrolment as happens currently at Manchester Metropolitan University.

2011 is the quadrennial opportunity for students to influence the make up of the City Council.

We would like to move towards a more comprehensive system of voter registration at enrolment and re-enrolment, as happens currently at Manchester Metropolitan University.

This is especially important as the Deputy Prime Minister has announced measures to equalize constituencies on the basis of

electoral registrations, rather than the Census. This process is intended to be completed by December 2010, so it is vital we act soon.

Ethical & Environmental

We were pleased to have again been recognised as one of the most ethical and environmentally friendly universities by *People & Planet*.

However, carbon management is an area to improve upon. We are keen to play our part in reducing the environmental impact of both our buildings and activities.

International

We welcome the University's commitment to expanding its international recruitment. A diverse student body is good for all students.

It is acknowledged that there are additional pastoral and welfare considerations for international students. We are sure that any increase in recruitment will be mirrored by an increase in support provided by NTU.

However, some home students are already concerned about group work when it involves working with someone whose

We want NTU to sign up to the Green Impact Scheme, which builds on the successful work of 'Degrees Cooler'.

first language is not English. We need to be enabling all students to succeed, and it may be worthwhile revisiting IELTS entry scores or looking at data to see if there is a difference in attainment levels attributable to IELTS entry scores.

Widening Participation

It is a credit to the university that their efforts to widen participation amongst non-traditional students have been successful. However, with that success comes some additional welfare and support needs.

Some groups who we consider WP students do not get the additional support they require because there is no duty to record them.

The Students' Union's values are inclusive, accessible and democratic. Our collective strength comes from our diverse membership. We need to enhance understanding of the WP agenda and the benefits that gives to all students.

Sport

The success of NTU Sport helps create a positive campus atmosphere, and benefits are not only confined to those who compete at elite and representative level (especially when we win Varsity).

NTSU believes that there is scope for a programme of inter-mural sporting events, and that such a programme could provide benefits of sports team membership and the physical advantages of regular sport to a wider range of participants than can currently access.

Employability

Students have high expectations of graduate employment. However, HECSU (Higher Education Careers Service Unit) is warning of graduate unemployment rates of potentially 20-25%.

More of a focus has to be put on graduate

outcomes at earlier stages of the university cycle. Too often students get into their final years before they realize that they have missed golden opportunities that come from volunteering, running a club or society, work experience/ placements, or further training and development.

We would be keen to develop initiatives that properly record and accredit extra-curricular activities, many of which are found in the Students' Union, so that graduates have documented proof of their achievements, and thus their skills and competencies. We also support bolstering The Hive so more students and graduates can become self-employed in the toughening jobs market.

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Cover photo: Patrick Taylor

This publication can be made available in large print and alternative formats on request.

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