

Government advises on student issues

Jim Bulley
NEWS EDITOR

A REPORT released by the National Students Forum (NSF) has sparked a response from the government on issues relating to student finance, employability and the experience of disabled, international and postgraduate students.

In a governmental report released last week the government responded to requests from the NSF, issuing instructions and recommendations to Universities and private companies.

In response to the NSF report the government considered some of the key issues relating to student finance. As a result, work with the Student Loan Company will be continued to try and introduce a more flexible loan installment arrangement. The response recognises that "some students are content with current termly arrangements, others would prefer a monthly instalment." Similarly it is recommended that universities consider introducing more flexible payment for tuition fees.

The NSF dedicated a chapter of the report to the issue of employability, and the government has responded by outlining a plan to improve the partnership between universities, colleges and employers at a national level. It is recommended that employers publish information that will help inform prospective students as to the long-term impact of their subject choice.

Employers should also provide universities with a "wishlist of broad-based skills" that they look for when hiring.



The student report was presented by David Lammy MP, Minister for Higher Education (second from left)

A large section of both the report and the response deal with the experience of disabled students. The government has started to explore the feasibility of creating an Association of Disabled Students. This association would be intended to "combat the isolation that can be felt by these students" as well as providing a better peer support system. It is also proposed that disability-awareness is incorporated into the orientation process at universities, to help improve awareness. A similar program is recommended for all staff.

The government proposes that to improve the experience of international students, basic compatibility problems need to be

addressed as a priority. Clearer guidance needs to be provided by UCAS to explain the international equivalents of qualifications.

It is also recommended that universities introduce a cultural transition programme to help international students adapt to a new country. The National Union of Students (NUS) will also take action to ensure that students' unions are "international-student-friendly." Finally, the government believes that it is best practice for universities to "allocate a percentage of international student fee income to support individual students in need."

Both reports are particularly concerned with funding for post-

graduate students, and suggest that Research Councils make funding available for international post-graduates, as well as home post-graduates. This is intended to better support international students who have undertaken all of their undergraduate study in the UK. It is also suggested that an accessible database is created to suggest alternative sources of funding.

At the launch of the response a statement from David Lammy MP, Minister of State for Higher Education and Intellectual Property, and Lord Young, Minister for Students, said, "This response should not be seen as an end but as the beginning of a continued dialogue."

'Free' bus a drain on YUSU welfare funds

The YUSU Magic Bus has been struggling to muster the student donations that help keep it afloat. YUSU has budgeted for £40 worth of donations per month, however, over the course of last term only £30.68 has been amassed from the pockets of 1,368 students. Charlie Leyland, YUSU Academic and Welfare Officer has commented that "the lack of donations is not unusual, and we budget to help towards the cost of running it." However, the Union website shows a disclaimer that donations "ensure that the service is able to continue." YUSU have been actively seeking to remedy this situation.

CO2 club night hit by bad advertising

Allegations that the below-par performance of the initial CO2 club night 'UV Party' was down to a lack of sufficient organised advertising by YUSU have been raised at a recent meeting. YUSU Policies and Campaign Officer Michael Batula called for a greater emphasis on making sure that a heavy poster campaign would be carried out, in order to attract people to the event. As well as this, criticisms were raised at the use of Facebook and other internet tools in order to publicise the event. Rory Shanks defended the advertising, saying he believes the nights should be run with the view to an "organic process".

Underage BoB band disqualified

Popular band 'Adam and the Weather Fronts' have been disqualified from Battle of the Bands. The group, who were competing in heat 4 last week, were disqualified after it was discovered that their drummer was only sixteen. The disqualification of 'Hurricane Adam and the Weather Fronts' meant that 'Magicians Ghetto', 'Hot Toddy' and 'The!Spoon?' (and the) finished in first, second and third place respectively. Battle of the Bands is organised by YSTV, URY and Bandsoc. The winner of the competition will win three days recording time at Melrose Yard Studios.

Reporting by Luke Simpson, Ben Gascoyne and Anna Bucks

Cap on home student increases to force selection bias

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The uncompromising line on recruitment quotas is being seen as an admission by the Government that it cannot provide for any increases in student loan and grant numbers following mistakes that left a £200m shortfall in the higher education budget.

Denham admitted that "the number of students receiving full or partial grants was exceeding

projections," and informed HEFCE that he was "reducing the funding to [universities] for the coming year by £19m compared with the indicative figure shown in last year's grant letter."

"Any over-recruitment in the coming year could result in a transfer of HEFCE grant back to this department in that or future years, in order to meet the consequent unanticipated student support costs," Denham's letter said.

Wes Streeting, President of the National Union of Students, stated that he was "concerned that the welcome expansion of higher education through additional student numbers (ASNs) has been curtailed this year and that decisions about additional places in future years have been put on hold".

Home students can claim £3,145 from the government for tuition fees, and up to £6,475 in

loans for living costs.

Figures provided by the university application service UCAS show that the number applicants accepted on to full-time undergraduate courses in the UK increased 7% between 2007 and 2008 to 442,443.

Between 2006 and 2007, the number rose 5.8%.

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NOUSE

Grimston House (V/X/010)
Vanbrugh College
University of York
YO10 5DD

contact@nouse.co.uk

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