

# **VOTE JEENA THOMAS #1 VP HE:**

## **Leadership that Listens, Systems that Deliver.**

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### **What Is Higher Education Supposed to Deliver?**

Opportunity? Stability? A pathway to a career?

For too many students, it currently delivers financial pressure, structural inequality, and uncertainty.

Higher education in the UK is under strain. Maintenance loans do not meet rent. Mandatory placements remain unpaid. Student levies increase financial pressure. International and postgraduate students face disproportionate financial burdens. Mental health demand continues to rise.

This is not an individual failure. It is a system structural failure. Behind every statistic is a student choosing between a textbook and a meal, or a student nurse working a 12-hour unpaid shift before heading to a part-time job just to cover rent.

The responsibility now is not to describe the crisis; but to organise a response.

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### **The Current Model Is Unsustainable**

The funding structure disproportionately burdens international students, healthcare students, and postgraduates while universities themselves remain financially fragile.

Healthcare students complete thousands of unpaid placement hours while covering tuition and living costs.

International fees subsidise domestic teaching.

Postgraduate maintenance support does not reflect real living costs.

Opaque levies shift financial strain onto students without sufficient transparency.

This model is unstable, inequitable, and politically short-sighted.

It requires national coordination, structured advocacy, and measurable accountability.

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### **What Have I Done Differently?**

At ARU, I did not just raise concerns.

I built systems.

I co-created and launched **One Voice – United for Students**; a university-wide accountability framework that tracks feedback from submission to closure, leading on Grade Pathways and co-leading Your Guide, Your Tutor to ensure students can clearly navigate academic and welfare support.

I'm collaborating for **Pay the Placement** campaign nationally pushing for fair treatment of healthcare students, while previously campaigning to raise awareness of NHS bursaries and advocating to extend placement travel bursaries to international students.

I **reformed democratic structures** to strengthen representation and portfolio-based governance.

I **tackled timetabling errors** to ensure students received timely, accurate schedules.

I led **Turn-It-Up** to improve understanding of academic integrity and proper use of Turnitin.

I worked with faculty of Health, Medicine and Social Care to establish a Student Simulation Group, creating **multidisciplinary clinical learning** opportunities.

I delivered **mental health awareness** initiatives and partnered with external organisations to improve student safety through the **Night Life Safety campaign**.

I strengthened student engagement through inclusive events such as multilingual Movie Week and campus talent showcases; because **representation is not just policy, it is belonging**.

**As your VP HE, I will scale this framework to the national level to ensure the NUS finally delivers measurable wins for every SU.**

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## **My Priorities as VP Higher Education**

### **1. Paid and Fair Placements**

Mandatory placements constitute labour.

I will:

- Coordinate national lobbying for paid healthcare and professional placements
- Engage with professional bodies and unions to align advocacy
- Push for reform of NHS bursary and travel support structures
- Centre widening participation and international equity in placement reform

**Delivery mechanism: Building a united front with trade unions (like the RCN and UCU) and healthcare charities to force the government's hand on placement poverty.**

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## **2. National Student Voice Accountability Framework**

Student voice must produce visible outcomes.

I will:

- Publish transparent progress reporting on NUS lobbying
- Introduce structured outcome briefings following government and regulator meetings
- Strengthen formal coordination between NUS and local SUs

**Delivery mechanism: measurable reporting standards and quarterly accountability updates.**

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## **3. International & Postgraduate Equity**

International and postgraduate students must not subsidise systemic instability.

I will:

- Lead the lobby for a sustainable, publicly funded model that ends the sector's reliance on spiralling international fees.
- Advocate equal access to hardship funding
- Push for maintenance reform for postgraduate students
- Strengthen national representation mechanisms for postgraduate voices

**Delivery mechanism: structured policy advocacy and cross-nation collaboration.**

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## **The Leadership NUS Requires**

NUS does not need louder rhetoric.

It needs:

- Structured accountability
- Transparent reporting
- Cross-union coordination

- Evidence-based negotiation
- Systems that convert pressure into policy

Leadership is not performance.

It is delivery.

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### **Final Commitment**

I will:

Listen.

Act.

Publish progress.

Strengthen collaboration.

Hold institutions and government accountable.

Students should not just be heard.

They should see outcomes.

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