

MAIN MANIFESTO

VOTE ESTHER ADEYEMO AHIABA #1 for NUS VP HIGHER EDUCATION

#Centering Student Voice. Delivering Change

Pronouns: she/her

@estherussu

Hello, my name is Esther and I am running to be your NUS Vice President for Higher Education for 2026-2028. I am currently the International Students Officer at the University of Sussex Students Union and Chair of Trustees. Before this, I studied Governance, Development and Public Policy at Sussex!

In my two years as an officer in Sussex,

1. I led the campaign to establish an International Access and Participation Plan, building momentum through the creation of an Experience Working Group and a subsequent Task and Finish review process. This has led to institutional recognition that international students deserve real support.
2. In response to the cost-of-living crisis, I advocated for flexible tuition and accommodation payment plans while directly supporting students navigating financial hardship and wellbeing challenges.
3. I successfully lobbied the university to embed an international students' segment within the Student Experience Forum (SEF).
4. To address systemic gaps in intercultural learning, I worked with the Educational Enhancement team and academic advisors in the university to embed inclusive practice into teaching resources across campus, pushing for curriculum-level change.
5. I lobbied for the revamping of the University's Welcome, Induction and Transition programme to better serve international and marginalised students, challenging the previous one-size-fits-all approach to student integration.
6. I transformed the International Students Committee into an active and engaged representative body. With 16 elected regional and religious representatives, the committee now plays a meaningful role in union and university governance, strengthening accountability and collective voice.
7. I expanded access to opportunities for students by contributing to recruitment panels, organising targeted career events, promoting volunteering and paid roles, and taking students to a British Council employability symposium to ensure international voices were represented in national conversations.

Why the NUS?

I believe strongly that for an NUS that works for students, every VOICE must matter. I want an NUS that is visible to students and that students can trust to meet their needs

Why the VP Higher Education Role?

Besides loving the student movement, I genuinely enjoy policy work. My passion lies at the intersection of student voice and student governance. I have spent a large proportion of my time listening to students and then being buried in university policies and trying to make them work for students. This certainly led to push backs, but ultimately the university listened and made the effort to change things. Now, I want to do all these and more for education and for students at the national level! If elected, I will work to break down barriers to accessing education opportunities that translate into real value for students, whether through quality education or access to employment.

I will ensure that stakeholders and government bodies, especially the Office for Students engage meaningfully with students more before introducing tools and policies that directly

affect those they are meant to protect. To achieve all this, we need a strong student movement to push education back to the front burner of the nation's agenda.

If you elect me as your officer, I will prioritise the following:

1. Equal SU Representation within NUS

Student Voice is the fuel of any membership organisation that must work. NUS has worked for students over the years and while recent changes have decentralised how the NUS works, there is still work to do. Student voices need to be heard within the NUS. If members do not feel heard, disengagement grows and legitimacy is weakened.

As your VP HE, I will

- Bring back power to the student movement. I will work to ensure that NUS governance provides a structure that amplifies student voice, not restrict it.
- Strengthen the link between NUS and its members by taking the NUS to the unions, especially unions that have been historically disengaged. There are a few engaged unions every year, but there are 100s more unions that deserve an equal space for expression and a more structured engagement mechanism.
- I believe that division weakens the movement. I will introduce more democratic and transparent priority setting processes so that campaigns can reflect what students actually want. I will also tighten cross-portfolio work to rebuild collective organising capacity across HE and FE and across all relevant issues.

2. Fair Deal for Student Living and Employability

The Cybil annual mental health study for 2023 showed that cost of living is a major cause of declining mental health for 3 in 4 students with mental health difficulties. It also found that 3 in 5 students worry about money daily or weekly. The cost of education is affecting all students: with outrageous fees for international students, and rigid loan conditions for home students, students are getting poorer by the day, struggling to afford food and transport while facing unemployment and underemployment. 68% of students currently work part-time during term time and struggle with work and study balance. I want to work to fix this.

As your VP HE, I will

- Work to increase national and regional campaigns for maintenance reform and fairer loan terms for students.
- Organise students to fight more to protect university funding models as universities financial health are having an adverse impact on academic delivery and student experience
- Fight for access to education for vulnerable students
- Ensure Access and Participation Plans are meaningful and not simply compliance exercises for the Office for Students.
- Campaign with unions to make transport affordable for students
- Challenge universities to make hardship funds accessible and responsive to inflation, including the providing free food on campus.

3. Fight for Fair Deal for International Students:

International students consistently receive the worst deal in UK education. Government support is poor, institutional support is inconsistent, peer-to-peer support is almost non-existent. From exploitative fees, to hostile political environments and racial abuse at work, the list goes on. An average international student struggles to get a good job if any at all, has to deal with the uncertainty of immigration policies, has zero access to public funding, cannot bring their dependents and pays heavily to access the NHS. This is neither fair nor welcoming. All students deserve a clear return on their education investment!

As your VP HE, i will

- Increase structured international representation within NUS' democratic spaces and ensure that international students' issues are prioritised.
- Ensure that the NUS actively challenges racism and all forms of hate, while also ensuring faith inclusion within the NUS.
- Campaign nationally against international student levy and all hostile policies, including the removal of the 20-hr work restriction to provide international students with better financial independence and reduce reliance on unfavourable work conditions
- Campaign to extend the graduate route visa and abolish restrictive thresholds
- Push for fair recruitment policies that prioritise student experience, not revenue generation
- Advocate for an international education strategy is fair to students and not government interests.
- Work with sector bodies to challenge exploitative fee-setting practices.

4. Continue Pushing for Student Rental Rights:

Students continue to face exploitative and inaccessible housing.

As your VP HE, i will

- Campaign for sector-wide reform of guarantor requirements and/or ensure universities provide guarantor schemes that genuinely work for students, particularly international and vulnerable students.
- Push for reform of letting agents and landlords exploitative behaviours
- Fight for fairer prices in university owned accommodation
- Ensure students are aware of recent rental rights changes and how these affect them.
- Advocate for stronger regulation of the PBSA industry and improved transparency in pricing structures

Vote Esther #1 for Vice President Higher Education

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