

NUS-UK Local Government Manifesto

Did you know that the dropout rate of students in Northern Ireland higher and further education increased by a shocking 58%?¹ Given that the dropout rate for the entirety of the UK is 23%, this figure is significant.

These students are our future nurses, teachers, engineers, leaders. If we don't support students now, we will be facing even further economic disruption.

About us

NUS-UK is a national union representing all university and college students in Northern Ireland. We are unique in being one of the first organisations in Northern Ireland that was set up to work on both an all-Ireland and all-UK basis. We represent students' voices, interests, and concerns to decision-makers to make positive changes in the student experience.

There are Higher and Further Education campuses across all 11 council areas and students live and travel across all of Northern Ireland. They represent a diverse and wide range of backgrounds, age and experiences, and their skills and expertise are central to building a prosperous future for this region. But this won't happen if we don't support the wellbeing of our students.

Council	Student Numbers (Approximate)
Belfast City Council	46,000
Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council	7,000
Mid and East Antrim Borough Council	3,500
Lisburn and Castlereagh City Council	4,000
Newry, Mourne and Down District Council	6,500
Ards and North Down Borough Council	5,000
Fermanagh and Omagh District Council	6,000
Derry City and Strabane District Council	12,000
Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council	10,500
Mid Ulster District Council	5,000
Armagh City, Banbridge & Craigavon Borough Council	8,000

How are students coping?

Not well.

NUS-UK has recently launched our [Cost of Survival Report](#) and it's clear that students in Northern Ireland are facing daily challenges trying to keep up with the cost of survival. They are trying to balance the rising cost of bills, food, and transport to get to class.

The level of student finance means for many their income, even with a job, comes well below the poverty line, yet few are able to claim benefits or access additional support schemes.

The report also found:

- Students on highest maintenance loans are left with on average £29.30 per week after accommodation costs;
- Most students are not eligible for government support and unlike other low income-households, did not receive a Cost-of-Living payment;

¹ In the 2021/22 academic year

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- Student support, and the thresholds at which people are eligible for support, have not increased with inflation since 2010; had inflation been applied, this would represent an increase of 40%.

With limited incomes, if any, and the rising cost of accommodation, food, heat, energy, transport and additional education costs, 92% of students are worried about their ability to manage financially.²

What has this got to do with local government?

Local government can support the wellbeing of students and drive economic development setting the path for future local employment pipelines, and creating the right environment that will enable them to thrive through key powers, including:

- Community Planning
- Economic Development
- Local Funding and Grants

In our Cost of Survival report, we made three recommendations to help support the wellbeing and sustainability of the student population which are:

1. A Cost-of-Living payment for all students in further and higher education.
2. A Rent Freeze in the private sector and purpose-built student accommodation.
3. Free public transport for students, as well as fuel payments and increased mileage rate.

We recognise that our recommendations are beyond the remit of local council powers, but we would like to identify the ways in which local government can improve the student experience and enable people to stay in higher and further education.

How can local government help support students?

In the run up to local government elections, we are calling on your party to commit to these asks to support our students and innovate economic outcomes across all council areas:

Housing and Community Planning

- Council enforcement of landlord offenses and regulations under the [Private Tenancies Act \(Northern Ireland\) 2022](#).
- Ensuring all private landlords are registered with the Landlord Registration Scheme.

Infrastructure

- Work with the Department for Infrastructure and Translink to provide free or reduced transport fare to students of all ages and improve interconnectivity between rural and urban travel.

Skills and Economic Development

- Partner with FE colleges to increase apprenticeship training courses across a range of sectors at every council area;
- Create a financial grant fund for students of all ages who are required to purchase additional equipment for trades, pay additional fees, or incur additional unavoidable further costs to FE/HE education;
- Promote, support, and provide training for emerging Net-Zero employment fields to ensure a steady pipeline to employment from education and boosting local economies.

² October 2022 NUS UK survey of over 6500 students and apprentices