



All Party Parliamentary Group on Students

Minutes of inaugural meeting Monday 7th July 2014- Committee Room 8

Attendees

Paul Blomfield MP
Ian Murray MP
Caroline Lucas MP
Julian Huppert MP
Lilian Greenwood MP
Alison Seabeck MP

Toni Pearce, NUS President

Formal business

Paul Blomfield opened the meeting with elections for the Officers of the Group. Paul Blomfield was confirmed as Chair. Eric Ollerenshaw, Baroness Margaret Sharp, Baroness Pauline Perry, were elected as Vice Chairs, as well as Julian Huppert as Secretary and Lilian Greenwood as Treasurer. Caroline Lucas was confirmed as an additional Vice Chair of the Group later in the meeting.

It was also agreed that NUS would provide the secretariat for the Group.

Speech from Toni Pearce, NUS President

Toni Pearce began by saying that it is really exciting that an All-Party Parliamentary Group is being set up to look at the range of issues effecting students in higher and further education. Student issues cross a number of sectors, and more joint working across sectors is really important.

The issues which students care about are incredibly varied— employment, housing, the cost of living, youth services, and the cost of transport getting to and from college and university, are just a few examples.

Students are also a diverse group of people. It is often assumed that an 'average' student is 18 years old, attending a red brick university, and living away from home. This APPG will be an important way of deepening understanding of what a student is, looking at issues affecting all students including mature students, part-time students, students who are parents and student carers.

NUS look forward to supporting the APPG to make sure that students are involved and engaged with the Group, and working with parliamentarians to ensure that student issues are high up on the political agenda.

Chair's opening (Paul Blomfield)

Paul Blomfield explained that, as the Member of Parliament with the highest number of students in his constituency, he wanted to establish an All-Party Parliamentary Group on Students to give students a stronger voice in Parliament.

The Group will act as a forum for members to talk about the issues which students care about, and will also be an important avenue for students from further and higher education to raise issues with their elected representatives and other parliamentarians.

Paul Blomfield then outlined a number of potential areas for the APPG to focus on in the coming year including: employment; housing; international students; post-graduate funding, and electoral registration. He then opened these topics out to the Group to discuss.

Discussion on the Group's work programme.

Attending parliamentarians agreed that student voice in parliament is incredibly important, and there was consensus that one of the key early priorities of the Group should be to look at student voter registration.

With the move to individual electoral registration, students have been particularly affected by the removal of block registration, and parliamentarians expressed an interest in hearing more about what universities, city councils and students' unions are doing to mitigate against this.

It was also suggested that a key area for the Group to focus on should be routes into further education, because information advice and guidance is often poor quality, and therefore young people often do not know about their options post-16, including apprenticeships.

The point was raised that the student voice is often missing or ignored in important issues. For example, in debates about housing, the anti-student rhetoric and concerns about the possible negative impact of students on communities, is often the loudest voice and the one most often represented to Parliament which can skew the reality.

It was also highlighted that this Group will be really important in making sure that students can contribute to the political agenda, as very often they do not have a voice. For example, international students do not have obvious or easy routes to representing their views in Parliament. The difficult truth is that policy is often driven by the loudest voice.

Closing remarks (Paul Blomfield)

Thanked Members for their contributions to the discussion about the Group's work programme and suggested that the topics for the next few meetings will be further discussed and confirmed with Members.

Also informed the Group that a reception for the APPG on Students will be held in the autumn with parliamentarians, NUS Officers, and student union officers.