



All Party Parliamentary Group on Students

APPG on Students – Extraordinary General Meeting – 15 June 2015

Attendees

Paul Blomfield
Mike Gapes
Daniel Zeichner
Caroline Lucas
Rebecca Long-Bailey
Cat Smith
Liz McInnes
Ben Howlett
Jo Stevens

Formal business

Paul Blomfield, as current Chair of the Group, opened the meeting with the formal business to re-constitute the Group.

Paul Blomfield was re-elected as Chair

Ben Howlett, Baroness Sharp, Caroline Lucas and Jo Stevens were all nominated as Co-Chairs, and elected.

Alison Thewliss was also nominated as Co-Chair, and the Group agreed that she be elected if she agreed to the position.

NUS was also confirmed to continue the role of Secretariat

Discussion of the APPG on Students work programme

Paul Blomfield outlined the meeting topics which are outstanding from the previous 2014/2015 agreed work programme. These are:

- **Student housing and communities** - Many students live away from home to study, and a great number of these rent in the private rented sector in preference to purpose build student accommodation blocks. This session will examine some of the perceived tensions between students and other parts of the community.

The APPG will hear from students' unions and their community reps about good examples of increasing community cohesion between students and the communities they live in.

- **Work and Employment** - The state of the job market is a big worry for students, and employment is consistently the issue students in further and higher education are most concerned about.

A key question to be addressed is - how do we create quality opportunities for employment and pathways to work for young people? The session will also hear from students and study leavers about their experiences of accessing work.

Paul Blomfield also made some further suggestions for topics for the APPG on Students to address including:

- **Student volunteering** – looking at how students participate in social action and volunteering whilst in education, the value this has, and examining what opportunities for social action are available to 'non-traditional' students.
- **Fair Access** – looking at how under-represented groups are able to access further and higher education and achieve their potential. Examining funding barriers, but also the regulatory framework which oversees how institutions ensure fair access, and whether this is working sufficiently.
- **Students as global citizens** – looking at how students are mobilised to be 'global citizens'

The suggested work programme was opened out to the Group to discuss.

Voter registration

Jo Stevens made the point that voter registration should be a key area for the Group to focus on. Although the Group had already held a meeting on this before the general election, it is still an incredibly important topic given the context of a European Referendum. Caroline Lucas agreed that it would be useful to share best practice on student voter registration and how to put pressure on institutions to act on voter registration.

Paul Blomfield agreed that it would be useful to look to hold a further meeting on voter registration before the summer recess. He outlined the case for integrated enrolment: Sheffield University have managed to integrate two questions into their enrolment system related to voter registration which the students must actively choose to answer or not answer in order to progress through the system. The system saw registration rates of 64%.

Paul Blomfield suggested that an 'off the shelf' data contract is needed to address data protection concerns which universities have. Universities UK have developed advice around this, and they are writing to all Vice Chancellors to ascertain intelligence about their current voter registration activity. NUS are also providing resources to their students' unions on how to lobby their institutions to introduce integrated enrolment.

Daniel Zeichner added that there was a particular challenge in voter registration in getting accurate information about the number of students on the electoral register. Inflated registration figures can lead the institution to say that student voter registration levels are satisfactory. Cat Smith agreed that the way registrations are added to the register, in batches, can give the impression that all spikes in numbers are new registrations.

Liz McInnes added that it would be useful for the Group to also look at voter registration activities in FE colleges, and Paul agreed that it would be useful to discuss with AoC.

Caroline Lucas suggested there could be ways for integrated enrolment to be prompted by legislation. Jo Stevens suggested an opt-out system rather than an opt-in system. Paul Blomfield said that this was suggested when individual electoral registration was introduced, including suggestions to introduce block registration, but these failed.

The consensus in the Group was that the first full meeting of the Group should be on voter registration.

Other topics

Other items for future APPG on Students meetings were suggested.

Daniel Zeichner proposed a session on student safety, and Ben Howlett agreed that this would be an interesting topic and he knows that there are some interesting initiatives being run by students' unions in Bath on this.

Cat Smith agreed that the Group should examine housing, including issues around choice, the private rented sector and student halls companies.

There was consensus in the Group that it would be useful to discuss communities and students. Rebecca Long-Bailey suggested this should also look at the impact of council funding, for example around issues of rubbish collection which tend to exacerbate problems in areas where a lot of students live. The Group should also look at how local councils can promote integration. Paul Blomfield highlighted that there are good initiatives being run by students' unions as well. Jo Stevens pointed out that very often landlords aren't upholding their responsibility.

Ben Howlett also made the point that the Group should consider how they disseminate their findings to institutions. Paul Blomfield agreed that they should work with NUS and UUK to look for a strategy for this.

Paul Blomfield also highlighted the scope of future APPG on Students activity, including holding inquiries to draw attention from the public to particular issues.