

**SENATE**

**Title of paper:** Student Cost of Living

**Main purpose of the paper:** For information

**Presenter(s):** Yvonne Chase, Head of Student Life

**Date of paper:** 11 September 2024

**Purpose of the paper**

This paper summarises the progress made and key initiatives to support our students with the high cost of living.

**Relation to strategy and values**

Education Strategy; Values: Equity, diversity and inclusion

**Recommendations:**

For Senate to note progress made in supporting our students with the high cost of living.

Senate are invited to contribute ideas and views to the discussion, which can be taken forward by the Working Group so we can continue to make a difference to our students.

**Consultation to date (including any previous committee consideration and its outcome):** N/A

**Background** Senate considered a report on 21 September 2022 setting out work taking place to support students experiencing significant increases in the cost of living. This report provides an update on the next stage of this important work. The Office for Students 2023 poll highlighted that almost 20% of respondents considered dropping out of university/college due to the high cost of living. The Newcastle University Students' Union Cost of Living Survey in 2023 also found that 41% of respondents had thought about dropping out because of financial pressures. The survey found that students are concerned about the price of food and necessities increasing, with some concern about not being able to afford to eat nutritional food impacting upon their health and wellbeing. The purpose of the Cost of Living Working Group has been to work with students to create a comprehensive support offer to address their main areas of concern.

**Impact evaluation** Many of the interventions first set up by the Cost of Living Working Group such as the £1 Meal deals were intended as a short-term crisis response. The ongoing high cost of living continuing to affect students has meant it has become necessary to take a long-term view of this work and consider how we most effectively allocate our limited resources to deliver impact on the students who need it most. As a result, we have become more strategic in developing targeted initiatives and working on a comprehensive evaluation framework, with student input, to allow us to better understand the impact of our work and priorities to focus on in future.

**Priorities and on-going initiatives** The following priorities have been identified through this work.

1. **Bursaries and scholarships:** In 2023/24, £6.9m was allocated to support 4,663 undergraduates through the Opportunity Scholarship scheme. Of this £1.9m in means-tested scholarships supported 1,191 new undergraduate students from low-income families who might otherwise have been unable to afford the costs of going to University. This constituted 21.3% of our full-time UK and EU undergraduate entrants. A further £5m supported 3,442 undergraduates continuing their studies. In addition, £531k was allocated to support 1,010 students with various hardship awards and bursaries. Over £20,000 across 83 students was awarded by the Make It Happen Fund, supporting students to achieve their career goals, through funding to attend interviews, conferences or engage in career enhancing opportunities.
2. **Affordable meals on campus:** Over the last academic year, we have provided £1 meals for students funded through the Student Disbursement Fund. Our feedback showed that the meals run out quickly and that students who needed them most were not able to purchase them. This academic year, we are investigating options for a new scheme, details of which will be finalised in the coming weeks, where the funding will be targeted at students most in need. We also launched a free instant pasta scheme with NUSU, located in the Marjorie Robinson Library Rooms during the summer exams, and plan to replicate this at other sites during exam periods.
3. **NUSU Pantry:** The Student Pantry, run by NUSU and stocked through a partnership with Fareshare, a surplus food redistributor, has received £25k from the Student Fund over the last two years – providing access to basic supplies for students in need. New funding sources are currently being explored.
4. **Free Period products:** Thanks to Alumni donations, we have now distributed free sanitary products in over 80 locations across campus directly addressing the issue of period poverty.
5. **Information about cost of living and budgeting:** One of the more significant aspects of the work of the group is to better understand what information students need around finance, financial support and budgeting, and when they need it. We worked with students to map “pain points” throughout their University journey allowing us to proactively plan and tailor communications campaigns. We have brought together useful information in easy to access resources such as providing [Budgeting Tips](#) to new students and creating the [Cost of Living Hub](#). We have also identified areas where the information is not clear. For example, we are working with Sabbatical Officers and Schools to give more transparency around the real costs of living and studying at Newcastle University. We aim to make this information available pre-entry through new web pages and engaging content such as animation videos.
6. **Housing:** Jointly with NUSU, Newcastle City Council and Northumbria University, the Cost of Living Working Group is addressing common issues around housing safety through training events for local landlords and the introduction of the Rate Your Landlord scheme, which allows students to feedback on their rented accommodation.

The group continues to meet fortnightly to review the evidence and impact of the activities, listen to the concerns of students and identify new opportunities for supporting our students.

Senate are invited to contribute ideas and views to this discussion, which will be taken forward by the group in order to continue to make a difference to our students.

**Yvonne Chase, Head of Student Life – Newcastle University**

**Leo David, Union President - Newcastle University Students Union**