

Imperial College Union Council  
**Higher Education Funding Policy**  
*Proposed by the Representation and Welfare*

**Introduction**

The following is a policy based on the results of the recent Higher Education Funding Survey. The Representation and Welfare Board have discussed and amended the policy extensively before presenting it to Union Council. There are a number of discussion points that they have requested to flag up to Council for further debate:

- ICU Believes 10.** The inclusion of the phrase 'or defer starting a career.'
- ICU Believes 14.** The inclusion of the word 'unnecessary'
- ICU Believes 27.** The justification of this statement.
- ICU Believes 50.** The new wording of this point which was passed by Council as an NUS Motion reading 'Institutions failing to allocate their bursary money can learn from those who have.'
- ICU Believes 53.** The inclusion of the phrase 'without having to take out multiple loans or part-time work.'
- ICU Believes 54.** The wording and meaning of this phrase which RWB could see no merit to being in the paper. However it was previously passed by Council as part of an NUS Motion.

**Imperial College Union Notes:**

1. That October 2006 heralded the introduction of Top-Up fees of up to £3000 in the UK and that all courses at Imperial College are currently charged at the maximum rate.
2. That the cap of £3000 pounds will remain in line with inflation until the 2009 academic year when Top-Up fees will be reviewed in the House of Commons.
3. That the current undergraduate entry is entitled to a revised system of financial support from the Government in the way of means tested loans and non-repayable grants.
4. Leading up to this review there will be many opportunities to debate the pros and cons of the current system within the NUS and with Parliament.
5. That this policy is based on the results of the Imperial College Union Higher Education Funding Survey which was filled in online by 508 Imperial College Students during the period of 4<sup>th</sup> February until the 17<sup>th</sup> February 2008.
6. That the results and analysis of the Survey are attached as Appendix 1 of this paper.
7. That Imperial College has submitted two amendments to motions at NUS Annual Conference 2008 which are a direct result of the Survey and a pre-emptive of this policy.
8. That the delegates elected to NUS Annual Conference will be mandated to vote with this policy on all motions that discuss Higher Education.

The Purpose of Higher Education  
**Imperial College Union Believes:**

9. Higher Education is a privilege that provides students with opportunities and benefits unique to those who do not enter Higher Education.
10. That students enter Higher Education for a number of reasons including:
  - The pursuit of knowledge, academia and research;
  - The requirement of a degree to follow certain careers or to gain a head start in terms of promotion or salary;
  - To use their skills and knowledge to better themselves or to help others;
  - To meet expectations and pressures from others, which can include family, peers, schools or the Government;
  - To experience the student lifestyle [or defer starting a career.]
11. That Higher Education is not appropriate for everyone. A number of key stakeholders benefit from Higher Education:
  - Graduating Students who have increased their chance of finding a job and have invested in the development of their own skills and knowledge;
  - Industry employing Graduate Students who have gained the skills, knowledge and developed their methodologies and thought processes throughout their academic career;
  - Society through greater social mobility; the products and services offered by a highly skilled workforce and the advancement of knowledge.
12. That University places should be allocated to Students with the interest and ability to continue in academia at an Undergraduate level and that this should be regardless of ability to pay.
13. That all students have the right to apply to University

Targets and Quotas

14. That Government targets to get 50% of School Leavers into Higher Education is reducing the value of degrees and high achieving graduates by making qualifications easier to achieve and a more regular commodity. They may produce an [unnecessary] strain on limited resources and have a detrimental affect for students who are encouraged to continue their education when they are not best suited to it.
15. That attempts to introduce admission quotas on students from low socio-economic backgrounds are counter-productive and prioritise meeting targets over producing good quality graduates. Students should be awarded places on their enthusiasm and academic merit, not their background.

Vocational Training

16. That vocational training is best learnt 'on the job' through industrial placements, sandwich courses, internships, medical 'firms' and apprenticeships.

17. A surplus in Graduates means that some companies can now demand a degree where before A Levels, GCSEs or other qualifications would have sufficed.
18. Apprenticeship opportunities should be given a greater priority for school leavers and the scheme should be expanded to cater for the trades and industries that do not necessarily require a degree to pursue a successful career (e.g. plumbing, carpentry).
19. University based teaching should be reserved for fundamental aspects of academic courses, including theoretical and practical laboratory skills. These should cover the first principals in a wide range of elements in any academic course to provide graduates with the greatest choice in career progressions in their chosen field.
20. It should be recognised that for some careers it is necessary to have vocational training at a Higher Education Level (e.g. Medicine, Dentistry) alongside theoretical based teaching. This should be delivered in the most relevant practical environments.

### The Cost of Higher Education **Imperial College Union Believes:**

#### Free Education

21. That Education is not free. If Higher Education were to be fully funded by the Government then this would result in higher levels of tax for all tax payers regardless of the level of education they received.
22. That Higher Education is a privilege that is not utilised by all and therefore students should be expected to make a contribution to the cost of their education.
23. If students did not contribute to the cost of their education it would be easy to take it for granted. This would lead to increasing drop out rates, low enthusiasm for courses and inefficient investment of time and money in students who will not benefit from a University Education.

#### Tuition Fees

24. That the Top-Up Fee cap should not rise above £3000 to ensure that University is accessible for all.
25. The current model, where tuition fees are paid back after graduation according to your income level, is the fairest and strives to put all graduates on a level playing field.
26. Differential Prices within Higher Education would discourage students with poor socio-economic backgrounds from applying to the best Universities due to the high risk associated with taking on the increasing levels of debt needed to complete a degree.
27. **Graduate Tax is unfair as students who have succeeded at University and added value to their qualifications are likely to be earning the highest amounts. Putting extra tax burdens on the most successful graduates will mean that some Imperial Graduates will be paying more for their education.**
28. That the level of debt currently incurred by undergraduates is liable to affect their future career choices; specifically in careers such as

- academia and teaching which offer lower salaries than positions in industry and the City.
29. Not all Imperial Graduates continue into high paying jobs. Many choose to stay in academia, research or public sector services (e.g. Teaching, NHS). The decision of Graduates to use their knowledge and skill to benefit society in this way should be recognised by lowering payments of Top-Up fees or through tax deductions after graduation.
  30. Quality of teaching should not be reflected in the price of education because there is no accurate way to measure 'quality' of teaching. Also, having received a place at a more highly ranked University through fierce competition, students should not pay more for the standard of tuition.
  31. Tuition Fees paid by students should go directly to the institution at which they are studying.
  32. Universities should not be allowed to make a profit from tuition fees by charging the full £3,000 if this is more than the cost of the course.
  33. Universities should not charge the full cost of the course as this will lead to students deciding to follow a course because it is what they can afford rather than what they have the most aptitude for. Also vital professions such as Medicine and Engineering will suffer from a shortage of graduates because students will be priced out of the market.

#### Government Funding

34. The Government should make a contribution towards the education of Students continuing into Higher Education.
35. Government Contributions should be made directly to institutions and to individual students via a series of variable grants and loans allowing differentiation to be made between students.
36. Students from low income backgrounds should receive more financial help from the Government. Ideally all students should have an equal opportunity under the current system but in reality students from poorer backgrounds leave university with much greater levels of debt than their more fortunate peers. The current system where non-repayable grants are given to students from low income families should be maintained but much greater support is needed for middle income families who currently fall above the threshold for non-repayable grants but struggle to finance a University Education.
37. There should be fewer, better funded university places. Degrees should represent the core academic subjects of Science, Engineering, Maths, English, Humanities, Languages and the Arts. Courses with little or no academic content, limited benefit to society or questionable economic sustainability should not be funded by the tax payer.
38. University Funding should be allocated according to the cost of running the course. This should have a strong bias towards courses such as medicine which require large amounts of resources and time and courses which are heavily reliant on laboratory work and equipment. This should make these departments more competitive by maintaining the level of teaching and student satisfaction while preventing

expensive science and engineering departments being closed in favour of cheaper humanities.

39. Not all students are supported by their parents. Means testing should take into account that some students receive little or no support from their parents after they turn 18, even if their parents can afford it. There also needs to be a system developed that will take into account the number of other dependants there are in a family when calculating the amount of support a family should be able to afford.

#### Industrial Investment

40. Involvement and funding from the private sector is a positive addition to Higher Education Funding and should be encouraged.
41. Industry is a direct benefactor of the skills and knowledge generated through Higher Education and should be expected to contribute in some way towards this.
42. Industry should be able to target funding independently of the Government with the ability to differentiate between students as they see fit.
43. Industry will strategically target funding in the way that will be of the most benefit to them. This will encourage high quality students into areas of academia that will be of more benefit to industry and the economy as a whole.
44. Industry should be encouraged to target funding towards students with the most potential in their sector, including:
- Those studying courses where there is a low ratio of graduates to jobs to prevent a shortage in skills and expertise;
  - Those courses which are the most relevant to the industry so that there is a good market for high quality graduates;
  - Those students studying at the highest ranking Universities and Departments including, but not limited to, the Russell Group Institutions.

Bursaries, Loans and Student Support  
**Imperial College Union Believes:**

45. Financial support for students in Higher Education is vital to enable students to succeed regardless of ability to pay.
46. Financial support should include, but not be limited to:
  - Government grants and loans which are repayable after graduation. These should be means tested at a national level but take into account regional variations in living costs.
  - Study Support Bursaries from institutions to help finance students from poor socio-economic backgrounds and ensure fair access for all.
  - Further scholarships, bursaries and sponsorship from alumni, benefactors and industry that target students for other specialist reasons which should not be governed nationally.
47. Student loans should be interest free and only increase in line with inflation so that a student who needs to pay off their loan over a greater number of years does not pay more for their education than someone who is able to pay it off immediately.
48. Institutions should decide on and allocate a budget for bursary schemes within that institution.
49. There should be a national minimum standard for the amount of money institutions put into bursary schemes but how this is allocated should remain the decision of the university.
50. **Institutions should share methods of best practise in effective allocation of Student Support Bursaries and other funding schemes to ensure that improvements in spending can be made nationally.**
51. Institutional autonomy over student bursaries works at a diverse range of Universities where student support packages are more responsive to student needs because they are decided locally.
52. Larger bursaries and scholarships should be allocated to ensure that they are not merely token efforts but actually worthwhile (e.g. facilitates financial access for students who otherwise could not afford the costs of a course). Where possible bursaries should be allocated which allow students to afford basic necessities of studying such as tuition fees, accommodation, field work and text books **[without having to take out multiple loans or part-time work.]**
53. Hardship funds should still be allocated, regardless of amount needed or family background, to any student that is struggling financially.
54. **Attempts to lobby the government for realistic regional weighting have been unsuccessful. The government's failure to support students in expensive regions emphasises the importance of protecting student support arrangements from the vagaries of public spending decisions.**

**Imperial College Union Resolves:**

55. To oppose targets set by the Government to increase the number of students entering Higher Education to the detriment of students, the Education System and the Country as a whole.
56. To support Top-Up fees, capped at a maximum of £3,000, which should be re-paid after graduation. To oppose alternative models that see the cap lifted; marketisation of Higher Education or a Graduate Tax.
57. To support initiatives aimed at establishing a credible alternative funding model for Higher Education Institutions based on the cost of teaching and value of the degree course to society and the economy.
58. To defend Universities right to determine their own bursary packages and to work with the NUS to ensure that Universities failing to meet their commitments share and learn best practice to improve their performance in the future.

**Imperial College Union Further Resolves:**

59. This policy shall be the responsibility of the Deputy President (Education and Welfare) and will be used to inform the DPEW and the President of the opinions of Imperial Students when representing them externally.
60. To mandate the DPEW and President to write to relevant Government Ministers, shadow ministers and local MPs, at an appropriate time, setting out our position and attaching this policy.
61. To revoke all previous Union Policy on HE Funding and replace it with this policy.