

## 1. STANCE TITLE: FREE EDUCATION

Ulster University Students' Union believes that education is a public good and a fundamental right and should not be dependent on an individual's financial circumstances.

We recognise the ongoing financial pressures facing students in Northern Ireland, including rising living costs, increasing dependence on part-time work, and the limitations of existing student financial support mechanisms such as maintenance funding caps and inadequate support thresholds. These pressures disproportionately impact students from low-income backgrounds, widening existing inequalities in access to and success within higher education.

We further recognise that the current system places a significant burden on students and their families, often requiring students to take on unsustainable levels of debt or employment in order to access and remain in education. This undermines the principle of education as an equalising force in society.

As a Students' Union, we affirm that access to higher education should be based on ability and potential, not financial capacity. We believe that the current funding model does not fully meet the needs of students in Northern Ireland and contributes to structural inequality in educational opportunity.

### What we stand for:

- The principle of free and accessible higher education for all students.
- The removal of financial barriers that prevent participation in education.
- A funding system that adequately supports students to live and study without financial hardship.
- Fair and equitable access to education regardless of socioeconomic background.
- A student funding model that reflects the real cost of living and studying in Northern Ireland.
- This stance reflects our commitment to equity, social justice, and the belief that education should serve as a pathway to opportunity rather than a source of financial burden.

**Stance Passed:** 06.05.26

**Date Due to Lapse:** May 2027