

Policy name: Universal Credit

Date Presented: 27/5/2020

Lapse date: April 2022

*Student Council notes:*

*Universal Credit was introduced in NI as part of the UK-wide welfare reform strategy, adopted in NI under the Northern Ireland (Welfare Reform) Act 2015. It was introduced in NI on a phased geographical basis on 27 September 2017 until December 2018 (first introduced in Jobs and Benefits Centres in Ballymoney and Limavady). Its purpose was to replace multiple claims for six state benefits with a single claim form for those aged over 18 and under State Pension age. Applicants apply through an online system who then receive access to the online management system and are expected to maintain information regarding their individual claim using this.*

*Student Council believes:*

*The continued use of Universal Credit by the Department for Communities is detrimental to students with additional needs and/or caring responsibilities. The only way for the DfC to acknowledge this is through decisive action by UUSU and other Student Unions in NI and further afield.*

*Current rules for students who meet the eligibility criteria dictate that although grants made by Student Finance NI are not considered as income, Maintenance Loan payments are. Therefore, their benefit entitlement is likely to be reduced pound-for-pound after an initial disregarded amount. The impact of this is that many students who may already experience barriers to higher education may also experience a higher rate of poverty compared to other students. Due to the circumstances of the individual, they may not be able to supplement their income through paid employment or additional support.*

*The Student Council also believes that Universal Credit has not kept its promise of being a simpler system to navigate; the system may create errors that may have a detrimental effect on those with complex claims such as students. Students are still expected to attend meetings at their local Jobs & Benefits Office throughout certain stages of their claim as well as attending highly stressful medical assessments. With no one to talk to directly about issues, students face increasing frustration which may lead to a significant impact on mental and physical health for individuals and their dependents. This may have an added impact on an individual's studies as well as a range of other aspects which may contribute toward this.*

*The current provision for support with such issues within Ulster University and UUSU is lacking. There needs to be joined-up provision for students claiming Universal Credit, who may be particularly vulnerable, ensuring that all of the information is available for them in one place.*

*Student Council resolves:*

- Ulster University and UUSU need to work together to develop an appropriate system by which to support students who claim Universal Credit.*
- UUSU should continue to conduct research to determine how Ulster University students and those attending partnering colleges and other NI universities are affected by Universal Credit.*

- *UUSU will lobby the NI Government to “stop and scrap” Universal Credit, feeding the Student Voice into these conversations.*
- *UUSU will lobby Student Union organisations both in NI and Eire to support “stop and scrap”.*
- *UUSU will follow suit with NUSS who have received 28 signatures (as at 25 Nov 2019; FE News, 2019) from Student Union Presidents across Scotland in support of “stop and scrap” by writing an open letter for supporting NI Student Unions to sign.*
- *UUSU will lobby the NI Government to introduce support for students who would not ordinarily be entitled to claim Universal Credit to access the benefit in times of national crisis.*

*Name of Proposer: Colette Ansell*

*Name of Seconder: Ryan McFall*

*Name of Proposer:*

*Name of Seconder:*