

Leeds University Union

Leeds City Council Scrutiny Panel on Fees

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Submission to Local Council on Funding Scrutiny Panel

As part of our fees campaign LUU is keen to create a inquiry/ scrutiny panel on Leeds City Council which would be tasked with investigating what impact the current funding model has had on applications to our local institutions from local students, but also what wider impacts the city could face if a increase of fees was introduced following the 2009 review.

We want a scrutiny board to examine these key areas:

- If there is any evidence to suggest fees and financial concerns are currently preventing residents from accessing higher education.
- Undergo an examination of the range of information, advice and guidance prospective students receive, with a mind to streamlining the information in order to make advice more accessible.
- Identifying any new funding streams that could go to supporting more underprivileged children progressing to higher education.
- Assessing what potential impact changes to the fees structure could have on the aspirations of young people in Leeds, and identifying whether the Council needs to adjust services and information, or take action to ensure access is not denied.
- To discuss the issue of funding, looking from a perspective of access and examining what conditions the council may wish to recommend to the Government in the 2009 review.
- To inquire whether the 'Most popular destination for students' section of the Vision for Leeds strategy takes account of the possible impact of any changes to future funding models.

A similar scrutiny panel was adopted by Liverpool City Council last yr. Liverpool City Council requested submissions from local unions, institutions, community groups and other stakeholders. Their inquiry examined the impact of the forthcoming review of higher education funding on the City's economic development with a view to making a submission to the

Government's review. More information on the Liverpool example can be provided if required.

What have we done so far?

Sara Gill our community officer has attended the City Development Scrutiny Board where they are examining the economic impact of students in Leeds. She reported that the issue of top up fees and possible changes to the fees structure was reported.

We have spoken to the Liverpool councillor who was leading the work in Liverpool and gained his advice on how to approach this issue in Leeds.

We have spoken to some councillors about the issue, many of whom were keen to see this issue reach the scrutiny panels agenda.

Timescale

LUU is keen for this issue to progress rapidly. We believe there is an immediacy with this scrutiny work as the Government is currently undertaking several reviews within Higher Education, with a particular review examining access and widening participation. It would be ideal for the council to undertake a scrutiny examination in time to report to this body but also to feed into national discussions about higher education funding which are due to begin in 2009.

The Higher Education sector has already begun lobbying for increases in student fees before a full examination of the current structure has begun. This means the 2009 review could be very narrow and the outcome predetermined from day one. We therefore believe it is even more crucial to undergo local scrutiny work to ensure the concerns of the student population, and concerns around access are examined, scrutinised and if found presented to national decision makers.

From a LUU perspective our cycles are slightly different to the council. Our sabbatical officers run from July to June and it can be difficult to handover projects to new teams, so for continuity sake we would ideally wish to see a board set up as early as possible so it can report and we can take action in the same academic year. In terms of the national NUS perspective we are keen to see scrutiny panels set up and reporting in this academic year because of the pending 2009 fees review, but also importantly because NUS is undertaking a significant amount of work on access and admissions and would wish to assist Councils like Leeds in providing support and suggestions for improvements.

There is urgency at a local level. We believe the council can play an important role in improving the information that prospective students see, but also the scrutiny board could assist the access agenda, by feeding in recommendations to service providers and local institutions.

We would recommend an investigation begin early with an aim to publish a report by the December meeting.

We would recommend that this scrutiny investigation be sent to the City and Regional partnerships scrutiny panel.

Questions for Richard:

How do we take it forward?

What is the timescale?

Where should it go?

How do we make a formal request?

This request for a scrutiny panel comes from LUU, Leeds Met Students Union, Leeds College of Technology, Leeds College of Art and Design, Leeds College of Music Students Union and Park Lane College.