

# ACCESS DENIED

The stories the Government don't want you to hear about tuition fees



A UK Youth Parliament report by  
James Greenhalgh MYP



# FOREWORD

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East Staffordshire Member of Youth Parliament

**I have always held the belief that university should be accessible for all young people, and that it should be a right and not a privilege for those who have the intellectual capabilities and the desire to go onto further education.**

Unfortunately, there are many thousands of young people who struggle with their finances at university, are worried by debt and, in some cases, feel they cannot physically afford a university education. The following pages clearly illustrate moving stories of young people who are struggling. The sad reality is that there are many more people who are adversely affected by student fees, too many people for us to 'showcase' within this document.

Many students and prospective students are going to struggle even more as a result of the recession. Just like everyone else, their incomes will be squeezed and things are going to be tough; support is being offered to pensioners, to business, the banks, to those struggling with mortgages – pretty much everyone. But not students.

Bearing in mind the current stormy economic climate, I feel that any possible increase in tuition fees would be disastrous. The following pages will illustrate that there are serious issues which must be addressed by the Government, sooner rather than later.



**James Addressing Members of Youth Parliament at the Annual sitting**

<b>Contents</b>	<b>page</b>
Foreword	3
Background	4
Key Findings	5
Case Studies	6-10
Recommendation	11

## **Acknowledgements**

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## BACKGROUND BEHIND THE REPORT

University fees have been an issue for many students ever since they were introduced a few years ago, and this prompted Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) to begin a lobbying campaign, to try and make the Government listen to the views of young people and university students on the issue of university fees – which many feel that currently, they are not.

A consultation launched last year by the UK Youth Parliament (in which 5850 responses were received) established that over 60% of those surveyed (aged 15-18) had aspirations to go onto university; disappointingly only one in three of those students said they would be able to afford to go.

We wanted to hear the stories behind these statistics. Throughout the next few pages you will be able to read first hand the shocking real life stories of the brave young people and families who came forward to talk about the real concerns and problems they have encountered.

What came up time and time again were concerns about the current uncertain economic climate. These concerns, coupled with the possible rise in tuition fees, prompted us to look at how young people's university choices are being dictated by financial pressures.

We consulted over 1000 young people from across the UK to find out. The main conclusions are summarised on the following page.



Members of Youth Parliament delivering the report 'Uni fees – are they fair?' to The Prime Minister at Downing Street last year

*“I cannot afford my accomodation  
without asking my parents to  
subsidise my maintanace grant  
and during this time they too  
are feeling ‘the pinch’ so they are  
finding it hard to find me money.  
I cant even afford all the books  
I need,yet alone food!”*

**Anonymous consultation respondent**

## KEY FINDINGS FROM THE SURVEY

- ❖ Two thirds of those young people surveyed said that the recession will affect their ability to pay for university.
- ❖ 1 in 3 young people said the recession will affect their choice of university and/or course, with many opting for cheaper courses or choosing a local university so they can live at home.
- ❖ Half of young people who aspire to attend university have not thought about how they will pay off their debt after university.
- ❖ 9 in 10 students plan on getting part time jobs whilst at university, however nearly 60% feel they will struggle to get one.
- ❖ 65% have had no education in school/college in how to manage finances and 90% want more, or better, financial education.
- ❖ 95% of young people surveyed said the Government should not lift the cap on fees.

*“My mother is a single parent, and although me and my brother have part time jobs, paying for accommodation and transport as well as tuition fees is going to prove very difficult to afford”*

Anonymous consultation respondent

The next few pages highlight the stories of young people who have been adversely affected by student fees and the cost of university.

## Katherine and Stacey Hall, aged 17 from Somerset

As you can probably guess, we are twins and our dream, ever since we have been really young, has been to go to university and study Veterinary Science. So far we have given ourselves every opportunity to be able to get a place at university; we have studied hard in our GCSEs and have done many different work experience placements to improve our CVs to boost our chances, and we feel that we have worked hard and put ourselves in a strong position to get on a university course.

This was until our parents started looking at the funding and finance of university in the last few weeks and realised the cost.

Our parents have taken into account all the available support with student loans and maintenance grants etc, but we still fall short by a huge margin of being able to go. The course is 5 years long, and we will be too busy with work experience throughout the course to be able to commit to a part time job, which is something many students do to help out with living costs. And even if we did find the time to work a couple of hours a week – there aren't any vacancies to apply to. For the both of us combined; the 5 years will cost us about £70,000-£80,000. Money we definitely haven't got. Because of this, our dreams of becoming vets have now been shattered.



**Adrian Sanders**, Liberal Democrat MP  
for Torbay

*“Fair access to education is essential for a socially mobile society. At the moment only 1 in 5 from poorer backgrounds goes to university, compared to 1 in 2 from more well off families”*

We have done everything possible to make our dream happen through our own hard work and sheer determination, only to be let down by the system.

We don't know what to do as it looks as if university is out of the question. Our parents and extended family are trying their best to try and find the cash to make this work and we really, really hope that the money can be found, but it's not looking very good. This is what we have always wanted to do and we feel so sad and confused that we might have to try to lose our dream and interest and waste our talent.

*“our dreams of becoming vets have now been shattered”*

## Sue Burt, a parent from Norwich

Me and my husband have four children, and the two eldest have both been to university (my daughter is studying in her final year, and my son graduated this summer). I work in admin and my husband is a teacher so between us we don't have an enormous household income, but our annual earnings seem to exempt us from any financial help. The kids have never qualified for any support during their time studying, whether it be EMA at college or the maintenance grant at university – they never got any financial help from the Government. We have been supporting the kids the best we can; you have to – you do anything for your children and as they wanted to go to study at university, we made sure that they could, but it wasn't easy.

My son has accumulated less debt than my daughter, as fees were less when he started university. Luckily they are both pretty frugal with their cash, but nevertheless they both still have the burden of a colossal debt, which as a parent is very worrying.

Like most people, they will one day start saving for a deposit to get their first house and will want to start their own families, yet it worries me how they will be able to do this with a great big cloud of debt overshadowing them.



*“We believe there is an alternative way to fund higher education that is fairer for students, but still generates the kind of income the sector so badly needs. We will be talking to MPs about a number of radical proposals, including making higher education free at the point of use, with graduates making a contribution depending on how much they are benefitting financially from their own use of the system.”*

**Wes Streeting**, President of the National Union of Students

*“Sometimes I stop  
and think, is the debt  
really worth it”*

Sometimes I stop and think, is the debt really worth it, especially now with the job market in the state it is. I just hope that the Government resists the temptation of lifting the fees cap – it was hard enough supporting my older two children whilst at university. I want all my kids to go to university, but at the same time I worry about what we would do if my younger two children decided to follow their brother and sister, especially with the potential fees increase.

## Sholto David, aged 17 from Bridgewater

**I won't be applying to university for another year, but I have serious concerns about my ability to pay. I currently live in a hostel and am in receipt of income support, and apart from EMA that is my only income.**

I have done pretty well with my GCSEs and am now studying for my A levels with the aim of getting a place on a course to study Chemistry, but I am seriously worried trying to think how I will be able to finance my time through university.

Unfortunately, I am estranged from my parents and so I'm not expecting any financial support from them, and to make it through university I will undoubtedly accumulate a huge debt, and with no accommodation to return to after university or out of term time, my debts are going to rocket.

I have enough worries about how I am going to afford life before university, and now I have the added worry of paying for all of university when I am there as well as the immediate time afterwards – I just think to myself, is this really all worth it? I am so tempted to quit college and just get a job (although I doubt with the recession there are any jobs left out there) – life would be so much easier; I just hope that I will be able to find a way to realise my aspirations.



*“The Government must stop putting off the inevitable and start the tuition fees review immediately. Further delay will only add to the uncertainty currently facing students and parents. Universities should be open to people from all backgrounds and the funding regime should reflect this.”*

**David Willetts MP**, Shadow Secretary of State for Universities, Innovation and Skills

*“I am so tempted to quit college and just get a job”*



## Joe Stubbs, aged 22 from Manchester



**As a child of a middle income family, I receive minimal assistance (which is again in the form of a loan). Subsequently, I need to supplement my income by working long or anti-social hours in order**

**to survive. I often compensate by going without social activities, clothes or transport (opting to save myself £30 each week by walking the seven miles to university). I've lived in accommodation that I'm almost certain would be deemed illegal and often miss out on key opportunities for career development through lack of funds.**

I would have no problem in principal with borrowing additional funds from the Government, even on a higher rate of interest, but this is not an option for me. Subsequently, my grades are suffering as a result of having to work long hours. I also worry that I have burdened my parents with additional debt in order to fund my time in education.

It would seem to me that the system is not open to all, and in fact supports only the extremely poor or the affluent.

I have had to choose to aim for a mediocre degree as the time spent on study becomes juxtaposed by time spent working, or not getting a degree at all. This system clearly does not offer value for money, and thus I end up resenting the debt I accumulate through tuition fees. There is no conceivable way that the product of university offers good value. In my opinion, the entire system is quite a rip off!

*“The system... supports only the extremely poor or the affluent”.*



*“Whilst it's clear that no government is going to pull the financial plug on the university sector by simply abolishing fees, it would at this time of global financial downturn be unacceptable to lift the cap and have a free-for-all across universities”*

**David Blunkett MP,**  
Education Secretary 1997- 2001

## Lisa Carroll, aged 20 from Nottinghamshire



**I was once told that I would never be anything – that I would never achieve anything with my life. Why? Because I'm from the Gypsy traveller community.**

Fortunately, the fantastic people at my local travel education service have helped me get skilled up and got me onto a childcare course which I really enjoyed, and I finished with a fantastic qualification at the end. They also helped me complete my Duke of Edinburgh Bronze award and introduced me to the UK Youth Parliament – which was one of the best things I ever did.

All of this boosted my CV and meant I had qualified for the basic entry requirements to get a place studying politics at Nottingham Trent University. I'd come so far, yet there was one final obstacle in my way. Money

Because I have no fixed address, I don't qualify for any support from the Government – not maintenance grants, not maintenance loans, not even the standard fees loan. It's really upsetting and it makes you feel so devalued - my parents pay their taxes and we are law abiding people,

but I receive no support whatsoever. It is as if the Government don't want to support young people from marginalised groups, it just makes me feel worthless.

Most people like me from Gypsy backgrounds won't be able to go to university because the system fails them, and the only reason I'm able to go is because I received my inheritance this February. I have enough money to be able to pay my fees upfront for the two year course, and I have thought about living at university on campus. This would be a fantastic and a totally new experience to me, as I have grown up living all my life in a caravan, but this isn't a realistic option as I just would not be able to afford it.

Increasing fees would make things even more difficult for young people from all walks of life across the whole of the UK. It shouldn't matter where you come from or your background as to whether you have the opportunity to go to university. But clearly in the real world, that isn't the case.



*"The whole community benefits from the education of each of us and all should contribute to the cost of that education"*

**Rt Hon Tony Benn**, Former Labour MP and Cabinet Minister

## RECOMMENDATION

**The Government has a real opportunity to listen to the views of a broad range and collectively representative group of young people within the UK Youth Parliament, and the views of thousands of others from across the UK who have taken the time to take part in our consultations. Furthermore, the Government have the chance to read the personal stories of a handful of young people who have been negatively affected by the higher education funding system.**

The UK Youth Parliament has a firm commitment to free education and we believe that university fees should be scrapped, however, we urge the Government not to increase the cap on fees, and to increase support through the maintenance grant to many more students.

We are confident that the Government has the best interests of young people at the heart of its policy, and that they share the aim of the UK Youth Parliament in ensuring that as many students from all backgrounds can access higher education, and we urge the Government to involve the UK Youth Parliament in the fees review to ensure that the views and opinions of young people are fully taken into account.



## **CONTACT AND INFORMATION ABOUT UKYP**

### **Get involved with the UK Youth Parliament**

There are many ways you can get involved with the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP). You can:

- ❖ Vote in your UKYP election
- ❖ Stand for election to become an MYP
- ❖ Support our campaigns
- ❖ Debate in our online forums
- ❖ Attend a UKYP event
- ❖ Take part in consultations
- ❖ Sign up to our e-newsletter 'Debatable'

**For more info about getting involved  
please go to:**

**[www.ukyp.org.uk/info](http://www.ukyp.org.uk/info)**

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