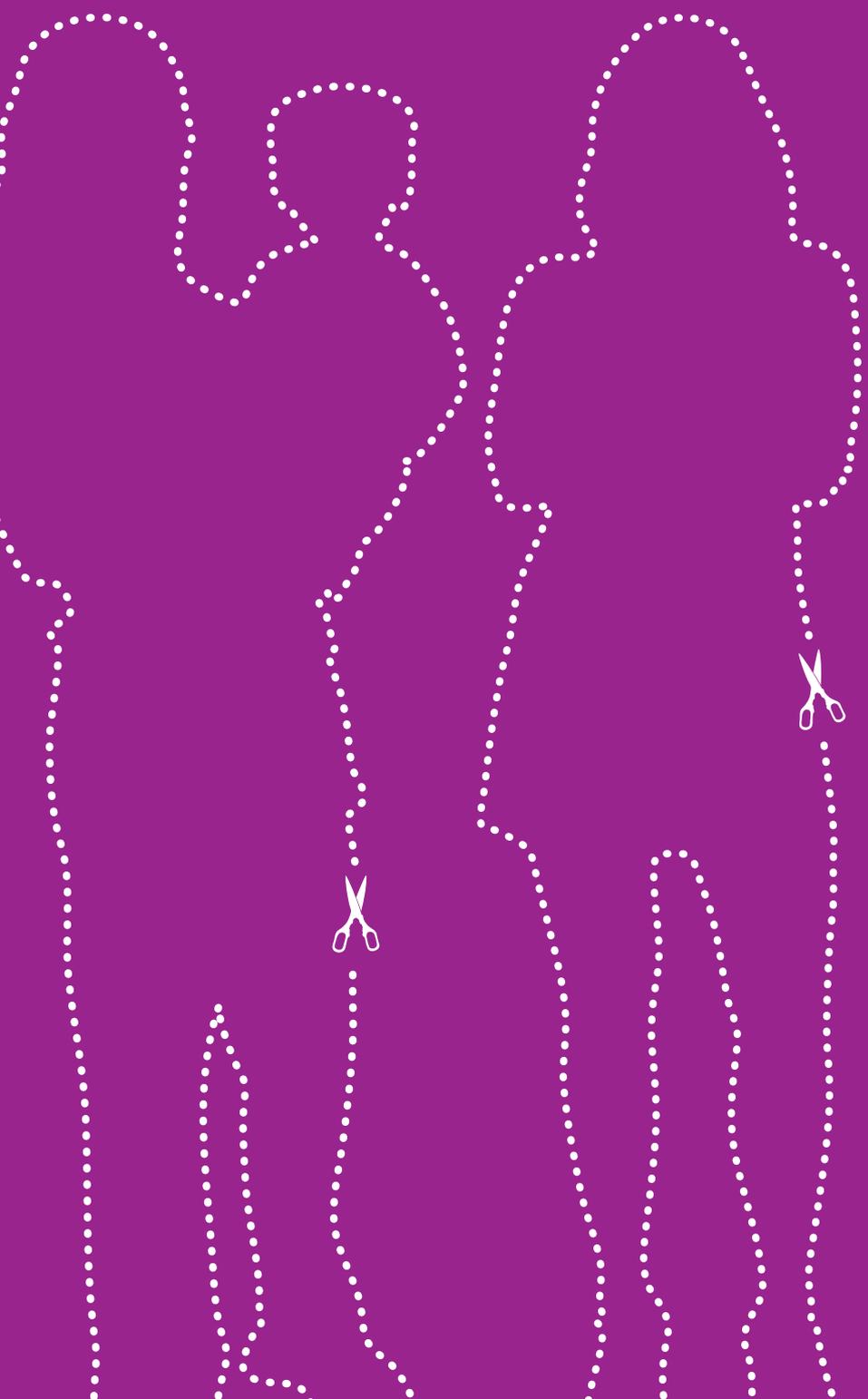

Cut to the quick

The impact of government reforms and cuts on women students



national union of students



Acknowledgement

Thanks go to Ailsa Bristow, Liberation Campaigns Assistant (Women's) and Rob Holland, Research and Policy Officer (Liberation) for researching, developing and writing the briefing. Thanks also to Sarah Wayman, Senior Research and Policy Officer (Social Policy) for her final edit and Philippa Bell, Junior Designer, for the design and layout.

We would like to acknowledge the support and guidance provided by the **Women's Budget Group** and **Fawcett Society**. Their knowledge and expertise has proved invaluable in writing this briefing. We look forward to continuing to work closely with them in the future.

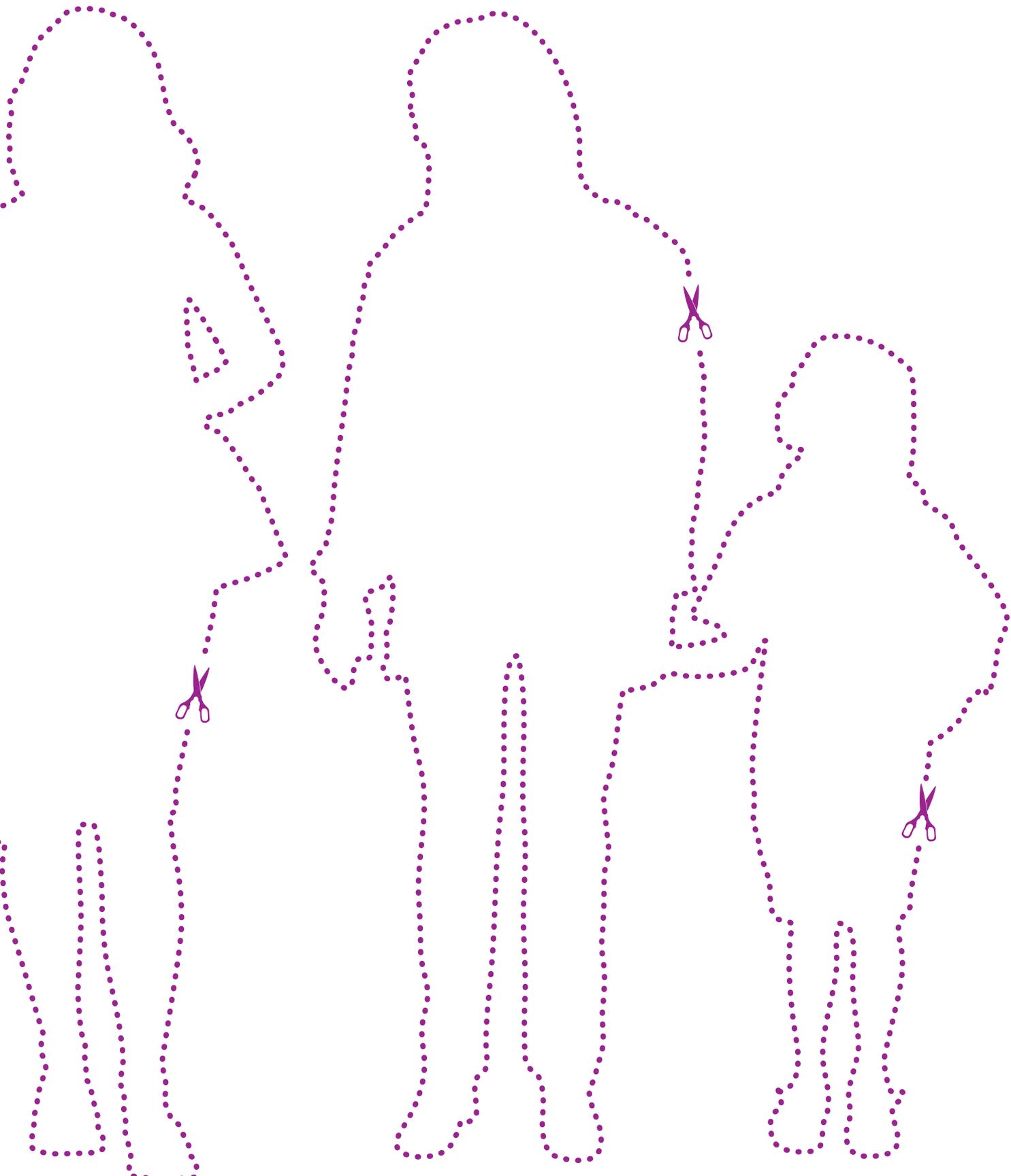


Contents

Who is this briefing for?

This briefing is for activists, officers, students' unions and those working on the cuts agenda. It focuses mainly on England but is relevant to those in Wales and Scotland as the Government's reforms and cuts have a wide reaching impact. We hope to reissue an addendum including specific reference to Wales and Scotland and this will be available online.

Foreword	5
Further Education	6
Higher Education	10
Women as parents and carers	14
Safety	17
The Equality Act and Freedom of Information requests: Challenging reforms and cuts	19
Useful organisations	22
Bibliography	23
Endnotes	24



Foreword

The months since the Coalition Government came to power have been turbulent ones. A series of reforms to the public sector of a scale never seen before have been characterised by the belief that the private sector is all-knowing and that severe cuts to public spending are the only way to tackle the deficit.

The Coalition Government's reforms have been made without thought to the massive inequalities that already exist in our society and their vast cuts are further unbalancing our society, and disproportionately hitting the poorest and most vulnerable members the hardest.

The cuts agenda also hits women disproportionately. Research by the House of Commons Library found that 73 per cent of the savings identified in the 2011 Autumn Financial Statement came from women's pockets and subsequent budgets and policies have failed to redress this imbalance.

This is because many of the benefits to be cut or frozen – such as the Health in Pregnancy Grant, the Sure Start Maternity Grant and Housing Benefit – are benefits that more women than men rely on.

The Coalition Government's blinkered approach to reducing the deficit also threatens to cut women out of education. There is a significant negative impact of both the cuts and the Coalition Government's education reforms on women students in Further Education and Higher Education.

In addition, women graduates face bleak employment prospects. Official figures in February 2012 showed that unemployment for women had hit its highest level since 1987 and is rising at a faster rate than for men. This is unsurprising as the Coalition Government is brutally cutting back the public sector, where 65 per cent of employees are women. For women, the promise of the private sector filling the jobs gap has proved hollow.

NUS has been campaigning at a national level to ensure that women's access to education is protected, but we need your help and support! The aim of this briefing is to provide activists, officers and students' unions with up to date knowledge on how government reforms and cuts are impacting on women. The briefing also gives you tips and ideas on how to campaign on these issues both within your institution and at a national level, together with NUS and our allies.

In solidarity

Estelle Hart

NUS National Women's Officer

Further Education

The further education (FE) and skills sector has taken a huge hit in terms of budgetary cuts. In total the reduction is 25 per cent and it is estimated that nearly every FE and sixth form college has had their budget cut for 2011/12.¹ This, together with the scrapping of the Education Maintenance Allowance and the introduction of fees, will undoubtedly have a negative impact on equality.

Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA)

EMA was a vital fund which aimed to help young people from low-income families stay on in education by providing a payment of up to £30 a week to cover books, travel and so on. The £560m fund was replaced by a £180m bursary scheme in 2011.

The introduction of fees

In the strategy 'Skills for sustainable growth' the Government set out how it would introduce fees into FE based to some extent on the new model in higher education. This means that from 2013-14, students aged 24 and over undertaking level 3 or higher qualifications will need to pay or take out a loan.

The new policy will hit women in two ways. Firstly, it penalises those women who wish to return to learning, perhaps after a period of time away from employment to look after children or care for a relative.

Secondly, the introduction of fees and loans may dissuade women from retraining, particularly as there is evidence to show women are more debt averse than men, most likely because of the anticipation of lower earnings.²

Fees and access to higher education courses

The introduction of fees is particularly likely to hit women hard who wish to take Access to Higher Education courses. These courses are vital in giving

people a second chance at higher education and are often taken by those who missed out at school. Women made up 72 per cent of students on these courses in 2011 and as a group will therefore be disproportionately affected.

The rise at many institutions is likely to be steep and students will undoubtedly need to take loans. At Bournemouth and Poole College, for instance, access students who are over 24 have been warned that because of the loss of £3,000 in government subsidy students will face fees of about £3,750 instead of a current maximum of £750.³

The chief executive of adult education body NIACE described how:

*"There is a certain car crash in 2012/13 for lone parents and women at home with children who don't receive active benefits, and who will then be priced out of a return to the labour market through education."*⁴

Repaying loans

Due to the gender pay gap in the work force, some women may take longer to pay off their loans. The Report 'Sex and Power' from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)⁵ showed that while women often leave education with better qualifications than men, many remain trapped in lower paid positions. Others may work their way up to relatively well paid positions but return to lower paid positions after child birth.

If the Government is to tackle this inequality it will need to offset the financial disadvantage faced by mothers and women carers who wish to retrain or perhaps gain qualifications for the first time. This might be done through waiving the new fees for these groups.



Scenario 1

Demonstrates the impact that further education reforms might have on a mature student

Beth is in her late 20s. She left school at 16 and has a young daughter. She lives with her partner who earns around £21,000 pa, whilst she stays at home looking after their little girl. However, Beth has decided she would like to return to education, to increase her employment prospects and provide a better future for her family. She decides to go to her local FE College in an outer London Borough and sit her A-Levels.

Beth decides to take A-Levels in Business Studies, Psychology and Law: areas she is interested in and which she hopes might lead her towards a fulfilling career. The total fees for taking her A Levels over two years will be £2730, for which she receives a loan. Beth is at a disadvantage to younger learners on her courses, who do not have to pay these fees.

Previously, Beth and her family had relied on a range of benefits to help them make ends meet, including working tax credits, council tax benefit, housing benefits and child benefit. However, this money isn't going as far as it used to: for example since 2011, the level of child benefit has been frozen, despite rising living costs, and the amount of housing benefit they received has been significantly reduced.

It is also a struggle finding affordable child care for Beth's daughter. The college has recently closed its own nursery due to cuts, and the level of childcare tax credits have been reduced from covering 80 per cent of childcare costs down to 70 per cent. London has some of the most expensive childcare in the country and Beth and her partner find themselves having to pay £3315 in nursery costs each year.

Beth also finds her course has additional costs that she hadn't previously been aware of including £234 in exam fees over two years, the cost of books, going on day trips etc. All of these costs make a significant strain on the family budget, and they must cut back on little luxuries, leaving Beth feeling guilty about depriving her daughter of the treats that other kids enjoy.

As she comes to the end of her two years of study, Beth's tutors talk to her about applying to carry on her studies at university. She is keen, but worries about the mounting costs of her education. She already has one loan to worry about and is unsure about taking on more debt. Whilst Beth knows she will not have to pay the fees back until she earns over £21,000, she is already worrying about still being in debt by the time it comes to support her daughter through her education.

.....

Support for student mothers: NUS campaign win

The government announced in 2011 that it intended to cut Care to Learn funding. Care to Learn is a critical pot of money providing childcare funding for teenage parents up to 19 years old in school and FE. The fund is overwhelmingly accessed by young women who make up 99 per cent of claimants.

Ultimately, Care to Learn is about access and the fund provides many young mothers with the opportunity to gain skills and qualifications. Indeed, 77 per cent of recipients described it as essential in enabling them to access education.⁶ The Government's own review described how:

.....
“Before starting learning in the 2008/09 academic year, 69 per cent of all young parents receiving Care to Learn had been not in education, employment or training (NEET), in line with national figures. However, by the time of the interview in early 2010, only 27 per cent were NEET.”⁷
.....

NUS campaigned hard with partners, such as the Daycare Trust, Platform 51, the British Youth Council and the University and College Union, to preserve the fund and are delighted that the Department for Education has announced it will not cut Care to Learn for 2012/13. However, NUS and our partners will need to remain vigilant and the fight will continue to preserve this for future years.

Apprenticeships

One area which the Government has committed to funding is Apprenticeships. In its skills strategy it commits to increasing investment by up to £250 million over the spending review period, ensuring a further 200,000 Apprenticeship starts each year.

Currently gender segregation within Apprenticeships mirrors that of the workplace, thus women make up 9 in 10 Apprenticeships in children's care and hairdressing sectors, but less than 1 in 30 in construction or engineering.

The gender pay gap for apprentices is greater than the gender pay gap in the wider labour market. Data shows that female apprentices earn, on average, 21 per cent less than male apprentices.⁸ This is primarily because the Apprenticeship frameworks women are more likely to participate in pay less than those that men are more likely to participate in.

For example, women make up only one per cent of those on Electrotechnical frameworks, a framework that pays well at £207 per week (2007). However, women make up 92 per cent of hairdresser apprentices, a framework which pays on average just £109.⁹

As the Government strives to increase the number of apprentices it is critical to address the gender segregation and increase participation of women in apprenticeships where historically they have been underrepresented. This includes promoting positive case studies of women Apprentices as well as ensuring Apprenticeships are flexible for mothers and carers to complete.

The Government and its partners also need to promote the importance of equality and diversity training among employers. In particular, this should focus on raising awareness amongst men of what the real and perceived barriers to entering a male-dominated workplace might be for a young woman.



Campaigning tips and ideas

- Find out what women at your institution think about the government reforms within FE. This will give you a strong evidence base from which to go on and campaign with. You can do this by holding focus groups, meetings, sending out an online survey or a combination of both.

NB It's important to get a diverse selection of views from as many women as possible as their experiences will be very different. Try to include mothers, mature students as well as carers and women who might not be in college all the time, such as Apprentices.

- The introduction of fees are likely to dissuade mothers and women carers from returning to education. You can join NUS in campaigning against fees at a national level, however, you can also find out what your college is doing to address this within the institution. One step colleges might take is to target discretionary bursaries at mothers or perhaps women coming to education later in life. Why not get mothers involved in your campaign? Their voice can be powerful in persuading decision makers.
- Care to Learn funding is a vital fund for parents and is still under threat of being cut. Find out from women in your institution how important this fund is and put together some case studies. NUS is likely to need them for future lobbying work!
- Encourage your college to promote positive case studies of women Apprentices doing frameworks where historically representation is low such as engineering, construction and science based frameworks. These case studies can be promoted online and in literature sent out to potential students and schools.
- Encourage your institution to set up networks of women apprentices who can share experiences and offer support. You may want to think about particularly doing this for frameworks which are male dominated.
- Promote the importance of tackling gender segregation within Apprenticeships and talk to your institution about providing equality and diversity training for employers.
- Raise the issues facing women students with your local MP. Go along to your local MP's surgery and raise some of the issues. MPs are often keen to know what's happening in their local educational institutions and might be able to take action if needed. NUS can support you in working with your local MP.

Higher Education

The increase in fees

Currently there are more women in higher education (HE) than men. In the 2009/10 academic year, women made up 57 per cent of the student population in the UK. Women also make up a larger proportion of part-time students (61 per cent)¹⁰

In December 2010 the Government lifted the cap of tuition fees to £9,000 per year. The majority of higher education institutions (HEIs) have moved towards charging the maximum amount and the average fees for 2012/13 are now £8,354 per year.¹¹ The result means that the majority of students will need to take substantial student loans which have to be paid back once the graduate begins to earn over £21,000.

The rise in fees has impacted on the number of people thinking about going to University. Figures from UCAS show that there are 7.4 per cent fewer applicants for the 2012/13 academic year.¹² This is broken down by gender below.

Table: Applicants to university

By gender	2011	2012	Diff (+/-)	Diff (%)
Female	331,801	309,731	-22,070	-6.7%
Male	251,745	230,342	-21,403	-8.5%
Total	583,546	540,073	-43,473	-7.4%

The figures therefore show that there has been a drop in women applicants as a figure although less so as a percentage. While we might infer from the above that women are not more likely than their male peers to be put off by fee rises we must remember that these figures are for the first year of fee rises and that this may not be a trend. We must further be mindful that there is some evidence to show men are less worried about debt than women. In addition, research shows that student parents are amongst the most worried about debt.¹³

Furthermore, it's likely that age and lifestyle of students means that some are more likely to be affected. For example, application figures for mature students are down significantly. There has therefore been a decrease of 11.8 per cent for the 25-29 age group and a decrease of 9.9 per cent for the 30-39 age group.¹⁴ This is important as women make up the majority in these age categories. Thus 57.8 per cent of students in the 26-35 age category are women and 64.1 per cent in the 35 and over age category are women.¹⁵

It is also unclear what the impact of fee rises will have on mothers and women carers who are being doubly hit with cuts to services and benefits. The fees are likely to dissuade those groups and work is urgently needed to look at these impacts.

Loan repayments and the gender pay gap

Due to the gender pay gap in the work force, women graduates will, on average, take longer to pay off their student loans with some never repaying them at all. The Report 'Sex and Power' from the Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC)¹⁶ showed that whilst women had a higher attainment at university they were not entering management positions at the same rate as men, with many remaining trapped in lower paid positions.

The London Economic Consultancy estimated that 70-80 per cent of women would not be able to pay off their loan in the 30 years after they graduate.¹⁷



Scenario 2

Demonstrates the impact that higher education fees might have on an undergraduate

Anthea is 18 at the start of her full-time 3-year course in History at a university in the Midlands, charging the full £9,000 fees. She comes from a middle income family (£42,600 pa). She lives away from home over the course of her studies.

Anthea has a loan to cover her fees, and a maintenance loan of £5475. She also receives a higher education maintenance grant of £50. She hasn't qualified for a bursary from her institution. She is likely to graduate with a student debt of £43,425.

Anthea has calculated that her annual cost of living (including accommodation, transport, food, clothes, books etc) will be around £8170. Without any help from her parents or getting a part-time job she will be £2645 short of money over the course of each year. Whilst she is keen to look for a part-time job, she finds that many have inflexible hours and are difficult to fit in with her studies.

Finally she hears about opportunities to work at a local 'gentleman's club', where she's told the money is quite good and there are flexible hours which she can fit around her degree. She decides to take the job. However, she feels she has to keep her job secret and often worries about whether it will affect her future employment prospects. She finds that with the late nights her grades begin to drop, and after the 'house charges' and fines the club charges for breaking rules, the money isn't even as good as she had hoped.

Following graduation, Anthea gets a job, and by the time she is 25 she is earning £24,979 (£1,310 less a year than her male counterpart). Over the course of her lifetime, Anthea has significantly lower earnings than the men who graduated in the same year as her. This is partly because of the continuing gender pay gap and partly because, when she has children, she and her partner find it cheaper for her to stay at home and look after the children, rather than pay for childcare.

This means, like the majority of her female friends, she will never pay off her student loan, saddling her with a life time of debt.

Figures are based on Student Finance England's predictions and calculations on the cost of living for the Midlands.

The result of the dramatic rise in higher education fees is two fold. Firstly, there is a disincentive for women to enter higher education in the first place as they are more likely to struggle with debt repayment.

Secondly, it is likely to impact on women considering retraining, perhaps after a period of time looking after children or caring for a relative.

Funding for arts and modern languages

In addition to raising the fee level, the Government has also substantially cut funding for those subjects that women are more likely to study such as arts, humanities and social sciences.

In contrast, subjects that are more likely to be studied by men, in particular the science, engineering and technology (SET) subjects, have had their funding protected. Thus men are more likely to study engineering and technology (83.9 per cent) and computer science (81.3 per cent) where investment continues and graduate salaries are high.

Furthermore, the Government has committed to a number of high profile infrastructure projects, such as the high speed rail project (HS2), which will create jobs for SET graduates, the vast majority of which are male. This comes at a time when women face record levels of unemployment.

Subjects where a significant proportion of women are studying have had their funding reduced. Thus 67.1 per cent of those on modern language courses are women and 62.9 per cent of those on social studies courses are women. At the moment it is difficult to see what impact this might have, but it may well lead to larger class sizes, coupled with an impact on course quality.

In addition for those women who do graduate from more traditionally male-dominated SET courses, moving into SET occupations is by no means a given.



Goldsmiths Students' Union

In 2010 Goldsmiths University announced that it was going to close its on-site nursery facility. The nursery had a good Ofsted score and provided places for 30 children of staff and students. Goldsmiths Students' Union Exec decided that keeping the nursery open would be a campaign priority and joined forces with UCU, UNISON and NUS to campaign against the closure. They also contacted local MPs, who gave their support for the campaign. A turning point in negotiations with management came when they threatened to disrupt a student open day.

It was finally agreed that Goldsmiths would close down its nursery at the end of August 2011 and would reopen again in early September in the same building, but would be run by Goldsmiths Students' Union. The campaign won NUS Campaign of the Year award. More info on NUS Connect at: <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/welfare/2241/>

Thus only 29.8 per cent of all female science, technology, engineering and maths (STEM) graduates of working age in the UK are employed in SET occupations compared to half of all male STEM graduates of working age.¹⁸

In April 2011 the Government compounded the issue by significantly reducing the funding for UKRC, an organisation focused on offering advice and services to address the under-representation of women in science and technology.

Higher education services

As central funding is reduced some HEIs may look to reduce the services they offer students. This may have a disproportionate effect on women who in many cases access services such as welfare services more frequently. This is particularly the case for childcare/crèche facilities as well as support services. It is critical that any HEI looking to alter such services carries out a full Equality Impact Assessment in line with their legal duties under the Equality Act 2010 and consults students' unions and student parents.



Campaigning tips and ideas

- You can play an active part in monitoring the impact of fee rises on women and in particularly mothers. Why not get the views of students on the issue and put together case studies where students are struggling to make ends meet. You can use them to campaign locally or we can use them when we are campaigning nationally.
- Discuss with your university how government reforms are impacting on the institution. Your Education Officer might be able to help you out. Are there risks to the provision and quality of subjects that women are more likely to do such as social sciences and humanities? What is your university doing to increase the participation of women in SET subjects which are traditionally dominated by men?
- Carry out an audit of the services that your university offers women. You could arrange interviews with advice and welfare staff and assess whether or not these services are under/over used. Do they meet the needs of all women including mothers, carers and disabled women?
- If your audit shows that services are insufficient or in threat of closure you can campaign to have them improved or saved. You can use social media to organise your campaign and promote it through student and local media. Get student's doing journalism involved as well as local organisations and MPs.

Women parents and carers

Currently further education (FE) and higher education (HE) institutions do not collect data on the number of student parents. However, the 2010 NUS report *Meet the Parents* drew together a number of research reports showing that in FE approximately 24 per cent of full-time and 40 per cent of part-time students are parents. In HE, seven per cent of full-time and 37 per cent of part-time students are parents. Through focus groups and surveys, the report also showed that the majority of these parents were women, mature students and in many cases lone parents.¹⁹

Government reforms in FE and HE and in particular the introduction of fees in FE and the dramatic raising of fees in HE will undoubtedly impact on mothers. It is likely to dissuade many from studying for the first time or going back to college/university to retrain.

In addition, women students are also being hit by cuts to local services that support parents as well as benefit cuts.

Cuts to services that support student parents

Sure Start Children Centres

These provide vital support for many student parents at a local level, particularly for those within FE. Amongst a wide range of services they offer:

- child and family health services, ranging from health visitors to breastfeeding support;
- high quality childcare and early learning; and,
- advice on parenting, local childcare options and access to specialist services for families like speech therapy, healthy eating advice or help with managing money.

The Government has now lifted the protection or 'ring-fence' of the funding for these important centres and instead it is now up to the discretion of local authorities to provide funding.

While some local authorities are maintaining Sure Start projects, they are faced with severe cuts, and many have chosen to cut back on these vital services.

A survey of children's centre managers carried out by the Daycare Trust and 4Children found that:

- 250 (7 per cent) will close or are expected to close, affecting an estimated 60,000 families.
- 2,000 (56 per cent) will provide a reduced service.
- 3,100 (86 per cent) will have a decreased budget.
- Staff at 1,000 centres (28 per cent) have been issued with "at risk of redundancy" notices.²⁰

Benefits

Many student parents rely on benefits to support them during their studies. In our report *Meet the parents* we found that 78 percent of respondents claimed some kind of benefit.²¹ As benefits are cut the impact on student parents is potentially devastating and could mean many struggle to complete their courses or may even be dissuaded from participating all together. Below are some of the important benefits that apply to mothers and recent cuts or proposed reforms.

Pregnancy and maternity benefits

The Health in Pregnancy Grant, a one-off grant paid to women in the 25th week of pregnancy to promote maternal nutrition and engagement with health services, was abolished in January 2011.

The Sure Start Maternity Grant of £500 paid to low-income women from the 29th week of pregnancy is now only available to women with their first child.



Scenario 3

Demonstrates the potential cumulative impact of benefit cuts and reforms²⁵

Loveday is made redundant from her job. (A) She tries hard to find another job and eventually finds a part-time position. She starts to claim tax credits and housing benefit. She discovers that she will only be entitled to support with rent up to the Local Housing Allowance (LHA) rate of £121 and will have to make up the difference herself. (B) She decides that she will have to sort out more regular maintenance from her ex-husband. However, he refuses to discuss the matter and will not speak on the phone or reply to any texts.

She approaches the Child Maintenance and Support Commission (CMSC) and has to pay £100 for them to start action against her former husband. Her husband contacts her and agrees to start making payments. She agrees to a private arrangement to avoid the charge that the CMSC would make if they enforced payment. He makes a few payments, and then stops again. She contacts the CMSC again and is told she will have to make another £100 payment. (C) Loveday has used up her savings and is starting to get into debt. She starts to look for a smaller three bedroom house. It is hard to find something suitable as many landlords have stopped letting to tenants receiving LHA. (D) Eventually she finds somewhere on the other side of Coventry. Her eldest daughter now has to take two busses to get to college every day. The college say they cannot give her a bursary as they have a limited fund and are prioritising people whose parents are unemployed. (E)

- A. West Midlands police is expected to lose over 2000 staff
- B. The rate for a three bedroom house since April 2011.
- C. The Child Maintenance and Support Commission will charge resident parents £100 plus 7–12% of money recovered to enforce payment.
- D. A 2010 survey of landlords showed that 43 per cent said they were likely to scale back on accepting Local Housing Allowance tenants.
- E. Education Maintenance Allowance would have been worth £30 per week. The new bursary fund is up to colleges to distribute but is only worth £180 million compared to the £560 funding EMA.

The above, together with the facts and figures were taken from the report: *Unraveling Equality? A Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Spending Cuts on Women in Coventry*, University of Warwick and Coventry Women's Voices (2011)

Child benefit

This is a universal benefit paid to the main carer of the child – who is usually the mother. Child Benefit has been frozen for three years from April 2011 amounting a cut in real terms. The freeze will therefore reduce the income of nearly all mothers, including student parents. In addition, the Government is intending to abolish the benefit completely for families where at least one person is earning over £44,000 per year.

Childcare

The 2010 budget reduced the amount of childcare costs the state would cover for low-income families from 80 per cent to 70 per cent. This will particularly affect single mothers trying to combine work and childcare where 60 per cent of the recipients of the childcare element are single parents.

This cut combined with others means that for many parents, child care is simply too expensive and study is not an option. This is in the context of the rising cost of child care. Parents can expect to pay £4,576 over the course of a year for 25 hours a week of nursery care, rising to £11,050 per year for parents based in London.²²

Housing benefit

The 2010 budget and Comprehensive Spending Review both cut and introduced a new cap to housing benefit. Single women, many of whom are single parents, make up 53 per cent of the recipients of housing benefit and will therefore be hit harder. In fact, currently 1 million more women than men claim housing benefit.²³

Universal Credit

The Welfare Reform Bill 2011 sets out plans to introduce a Universal Credit from 2013, combining out-of-work, in-work and housing benefits/tax credits including child tax credits into a single means-tested benefit. We know from Meet the Parents that a fifth of student parents surveyed claim a Working Tax Credit.²⁴



Campaigning tips and ideas

- Consider partnering with a local women's organisation. They might be able to talk to you about how local services are being impacted and can be powerful allies. The Women's Resource Centre has a list online of local women's organisations. Their details are at the back of this briefing.
- Write to and lobby your local MP to take action against the cuts that are hitting women the hardest. You can also go along to your MP's regular advice 'surgery' to raise issues.
- You can also lobby online. Check out if your MP is on Twitter via www.tweetminster.co.uk and message them on key concerns.
- Online organising – set up or join Facebook groups to spread the message and organise events on the cuts.

Safety

There are a number of reforms and cuts which will have an impact on the safety of women students. Local and voluntary services that support women who have experienced violence or abuse have undoubtedly been affected while cuts to the police threaten to stop crime being prevented. In addition, proposals under the Government's Legal Aid Bill threaten to undermine women's right to recourse.

The impact on women students is extremely concerning as women students face violence and sexual violence in both FE and HE. The NUS report *Hidden Marks* found that one in seven women students have experienced a serious physical or sexual assault during their time as a student.²⁶

Street safety

The Government is cutting police budgets by 20 per cent. This amounts to a £2 billion reduction of their budget. The steepest reductions will be in the first two years. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary have confirmed this means 16,000 police officers will be lost and by March 2012, there will be 2,500 fewer frontline police officers.²⁷

In addition, our streets will become darker. A Times survey in October 2011 found that of the 133 local authorities that responded, 98 said they were scaling back street lighting, or were looking into doing it. This is concerning as a large number of respondents in *Hidden Marks* referred to feeling unsafe because of inadequate street lighting.

Domestic violence and sexual violence services

Local services that support women who have been the victim of domestic and/or sexual violence are also under threat. These organisations, often local authority funded but delivered through the voluntary sector, are in many cases seeing the funds reduced or face being cut completely.

A recent report found that:

- 31 per cent of the funding to violence against women (VAW) services from local authorities was cut between 2010/11 to 2011/12.
- 230 women, just under nine per cent of those seeking refuge, were turned away by Women's Aid (a charity that provides services for victims of domestic violence) on a typical day in 2011 due to lack of space. This has led to support workers being forced to suggest places for women to sleep outside, such as the Occupy camps, accident and emergency departments or night buses.
- Smaller organisations are being hit harder: the average cut for organisations with local authority funding of less than £20,000 was 70 per cent, compared with 29 per cent for those receiving over £100,000.²⁸

The Legal Aid Bill

The Government's Legal Aid Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Bill introduces changes to legal aid, which the Government admits will disproportionately affect women.

The Equality Impact Assessment of the Bill found that approximately 361,200 women will lose their access to legal aid in a variety of areas, but most disproportionately in debt, education, family, housing, public law and welfare benefit cases.²⁹

The category facing the largest withdrawal of legal aid support is family law, including divorce, residence and contact arrangements for children and child maintenance. Clients in this category are more likely to be female than in any other legal aid category, with the exception of education. 62 per cent of cuts to legal aid for family law are expected to be shouldered by women.

Whilst the Government asserts that it will still provide legal aid for victims of domestic violence, the truth is that far fewer women will come within the new, narrower definition of domestic violence. This definition is not the standard Association of Chief Police Officers definition, which includes physical, psychological, emotional, financial or sexual abuse and one which the Courts are familiar with.



Campaigning tips and ideas

- There are lots of things you can do to work on this agenda and tackle violence against women on campus. These can be found in the recommendations section of the NUS report *Hidden Marks*. These include campaigning for your union to become a Zero Tolerance Union. For more information please go to: www.hiddenmarks.org.uk
- Raising the profile of this agenda will also help highlight the importance of funding to support women's organisations working in this important area.
- You can also support local organisations many of which are increasingly under financial pressure. Hold a fundraiser for your local women's refuge: from coffee mornings to craft nights, your imagination is the limit!
- You can also support them in raising the issue with local MPs and Councillors. They can work to protect funding for these vital services.
- Stage awareness raising events on campus: teach-ins, seminars, lunchtime lectures, flash-mobs, poster and writing competitions, run self-defence classes...Get people talking about the issues.
- Write articles in your university newspaper and contact your local press to advertise any events you're organising.

The Equality Act 2010 and Freedom on Information Requests: Challenging cuts and reforms

The Equality Act 2010 is the key piece of equality legislation in England, Scotland and Wales which provides legal protection against discrimination. It's important to know about this when campaigning as education providers are subject to the law.

All staff and students in the higher and further education sectors are covered by the Act. Specifically, the Act protects staff and students based on their 'protected characteristics.' These are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race (including colour, nationality and ethnic or national origins)
- religion or belief (including lack of belief)
- sex
- sexual orientation

The Public Sector Equality Duty

The Act also introduced a public sector equality duty on public bodies including further and higher education institutions, local authorities and even government departments. The duty means that they must work to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it
- foster good relations between persons who share a protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

How does the duty apply to cuts and reforms?

The duty applies to decisions over cuts and reforms just as it does to any other decisions a public authority makes. This means that education providers must consider the impact of the proposed cuts on women and where there is evidence of negative impact, take alternative or mitigating action.

Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs)

In order to fulfil the requirements of this legal duty and demonstrate that they have done so, most public bodies carry out an EIA. These assessments vary considerably. Some are well resourced and examine all the issues while others appear to be more of a tick box exercise to justify a change in policy or a cut.

Challenging public authorities

There have been a number of successful legal challenges to cuts decisions because public authorities have failed to show such consideration during the process. In such cases, the public authority will almost always be required to start the decision making process again, with proper consultation and evidence gathering to identify the impact on particular groups.

Whilst it is unlikely that you would want to legally challenge a public authority you may want to campaign against a decision that a public authority has taken or a cut that they have made. An important tool in your armoury is a Freedom of Information (FOI) request. FOI requests can provide a sound basis on which to campaign and can be useful when encouraging people to join your campaign as well as engaging with the media.

You may wish, for example, to put in an FOI request where a local authority closes a service which particularly benefits women such as a women's refuge centre. Your request can uncover the reasoning behind



Example of a further education college carrying out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

The Government has replaced Education Maintenance Allowance with a much reduced bursary scheme. The Government obliges institutions to concentrate the bulk of the funding on young people in care, care leavers, and disabled young people in receipt of benefits. In addition the college can choose to focus the remaining funds at its own discretion on the students who need it.

Initially it is proposed to focus the remaining bursaries on students from a lower socio economic background. They decide to use parental earnings as a measure for this.

The college decides to carry out a full EIA and consults guidance from the Equality and Human Rights Commission as well as engaging with the Students' Union. It also surveys students to find out those who are struggling the most.

Through carrying out the EIA the college finds using parental incomes is not enough to reach all students who need it. In particular they find that there are other groups that would benefit from bursaries. In particular they are disabled students with high support needs, LGBT students who are estranged from their parents and young mothers.

The college publishes the EIA and amends its policy of bursary distribution.

Example of a university failing to carry out an effective Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

A university has had its student and welfare support budget reduced significantly and is looking to make 'efficiency savings.' It decides to reduce the hours that its welfare office is open from 5 to 3 days a week. The justification is that few students use the service and sometimes only a handful of students come in on a particular day.

The students' union raises concerns about the decision and finds out that the university has failed to carry out an EIA. The union decides to carry out its own research and finds out that for a small number of women students the service is invaluable and offers vital support for those who have experienced domestic violence and sexual harassment.

The students' union takes the findings of the research to the university who agree to put on hold the proposed cut and carry out a full EIA. The university engages with students and staff and finds that the service is indeed valuable to a small number of women students but also disabled students and parents and carers. In addition they discover that one of the reasons few visit the office is that it is poorly advertised and signposted.

The university reverses the decision and works to promote the service more effectively.

this decision and whether or not an equality impact assessment has been carried out. If the reason behind the closure is unfounded you can campaign to reverse the decision.

Further guidance

There is lots of information on the Equality Act on the internet. NUS and Equality Challenge Unit have also produced a guide for students unions which is available on: www.nusconnect.org.uk

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced useful guidance 'Using the equality duties to make fair financial decisions' which you may want to refer your college or university to. The Equality Challenge Unit has also written guidance on carrying out effective equality impact assessments. Their web addresses are at the back of this briefing.

The National Council for Voluntary Organisations has written a guide on freedom of Information requests, how to make them and how to use them in campaigning. You can download it from: www.ncvo-vol.org.uk

Useful Organisations

Equality and Human Rights Commission

Offers advice and guidance on Equality and Human Rights Law. <http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/>

False Economy

Campaign website that collects information on cuts across the country. Find out what's happening in your local area: <http://falseeconomy.org.uk/>

The Fawcett Society

Fawcett have (in partnership with the women's budget group) produced gender analysis of the government's cuts. Resource and campaign actions can be found on their website: <http://fawcettsociety.org.uk>

Fawcett also has a number of local groups, many who are measuring the impact of cuts in their local area. These include South London Fawcett Group (<http://www.sloufawcett.org.uk/>), who contributed to this briefing, and a full list of Fawcett local groups on their website.

National Campaign Against Fees and Cuts

Campaigns against education cuts and fees, includes an active women's caucus. <http://anticuts.com/>

TUC

The TUC have put together a Women and the Cuts toolkit, which provides guidance on how to monitor the impact of cuts and reforms locally. Find it online at: <http://www.tuc.org.uk>

UK Feminista

Network of grass-roots activists, organising actions across the UK. You can search their database for women's group in your local area. <http://ukfeminista.org.uk/>

University and College Union

The lecturer's union have their own campaigns against higher and further education cuts, and may prove useful in helping co-ordinate action. <http://www.ucu.org.uk/>

The Women's Budget Group

A group formed of academics, representatives from NGOs and trade unions who produce gender analysis of economic policy. <http://www.wbg.org.uk/>

The Women's Resource Centre

The WRC is a membership organisation for women's groups in the UK. As well as their own analysis and reports, their database can help you find women's groups in your local area. <http://www.wrc.org.uk/>

Women Against the Cuts

Grass roots campaigners who organise local campaign actions. <http://womenagainstthecuts.org/>

Bibliography

Daycare Trust (2011) *250 Sure Start children's centres face closure within a year* (press release). Available online: <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/250-sure-start-childrens-centres-face-closure-within-a-year.html>

Department for Education (2010) *The Impact of Care to Learn: tracking the destinations of young parents funded in 2008/9, 2007/8 and 2006/7*.

Equality Challenge Unit (2011) *Equality in Higher Education: Statistical Report 2011*.

Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011) *Sex and Power*.

The Fawcett Society and Women's Budget Group (2011) *The Impact on Women of the Budget 2011*.

HECSU (2010) *Futuretrack: Working Paper 3. The impact of paid and unpaid work and of student debt on experience of education*.

House of Commons (2011) *Hansard: Parliamentary Debate on Police Forces*. Available online: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110705/halltext/110705h0001.htm>

Ministry of Justice (2011) *Reform of Legal Aid in England and Wales: Equality Impact Assessment*.

National Union of Students (2010) *Hidden Marks: A study of women student's experiences of harassment, stalking, violence, and sexual assault*.

National Union of Students (2010) *Meet the Parents*.

National Union of Students (2010) *Spending Review Cuts Briefing: Student Parents*. Available online: <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/studentparents/923/>

Office for Fair Access (December 2011) *OFFA announces decisions on revised 2012-13 access agreements* (press release). Available online: <http://www.offa.org.uk/press-releases/offa-announces-decisions-on-revised-2012-13-access-agreements/>

South London Fawcett Group (2011) *Do you know what's happening on your doorstep?*

Times Education Supplement (July 2011) *Threat to surge in demand for HE-access courses*.

TUC & YWCA (2010) *Apprenticeships and Gender*

UCAS (2012) Press Release 15 January 2012. Available online: http://ucas.com/about_us/media_enquiries/media_releases/2012/20120130

UKRC Key Facts and Figures. Available online: <http://www.theukrc.org/resources/key-facts-and-figures>

University of Warwick and Coventry Women's Voices (2011) *Unravelling Equality: A Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Spending Cuts on Women in Coventry May 2011*.

Endnotes

- ¹ *Skills for sustainable growth. Equality Impact assessment.* (November 2010)
- ² HECSU (2010) *Futuretrack: Working Paper 3 The impact of paid and unpaid work and of student debt on experience of higher education*
- ³ Times Education Supplement article (July 2011) *Threat to surge in demand for HE-access courses.*
- ⁴ Ibid.
- ⁵ Sex and Power, Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011)
- ⁶ *The impact of Care to Learn: tracking the destinations of young parents funded in 2008/09, 2007/08 and 2006/07 Department for Education* (2010)
- ⁷ Ibid.
- ⁸ *Apprenticeships and gender*, TUC and YWCA, 2010.
- ⁹ Ibid.
- ¹⁰ *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2011*, Equality Challenge Unit (2011)
- ¹¹ The Office for Fair Access, December 2011 (press release)
- ¹² Data is taken from the UCAS website and refers to applications received in time for the 15 January 2012 deadline.
http://ucas.com/about_us/media_enquiries/media_releases/2012/20120130
- ¹³ Survey of higher education students' attitudes to debt and term-time working and their impact on attainment. Universities UK (2005)
- ¹⁴ Ibid.
- ¹⁵ *Equality in higher education: statistical report 2011*, Equality Challenge Unit (2011)
- ¹⁶ Sex and Power, Equality and Human Rights Commission (2011)
- ¹⁷ Unravelling Equality? A Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Spending Cuts on Women in Coventry, University of Warwick and Coventry Women's Voices (2011)
- ¹⁸ <http://www.theukrc.org/resources/key-facts-and-figures>
- ¹⁹ *Meet the parents*, NUS (June 2010)
- ²⁰ <http://www.daycaretrust.org.uk/pages/250-sure-start-childrens-centres-face-closure-within-a-year.html>
- ²¹ *Meet the parents*, NUS (June 2010)
- ²² Childcare costs and holiday childcare costs survey, Daycare Trust (2011)
- ²³ The Impact on Women of the Coalition Spending Review 2010, Women's Budget Group (November 2010)
- ²⁴ <http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/news/article/studentparents/923/>
- ²⁵ Unravelling Equality? A Human Rights and Equality Impact Assessment of the Public Spending Cuts on Women in Coventry, University of Warwick and Coventry Women's Voices (2011)
- ²⁶ *Hidden Marks, A study of women students' experiences of harassment, stalking, violence and sexual assault.* NUS (2010)
- ²⁷ Parliamentary debate on police forces.
<http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110705/halltext/110705h0001.htm>
- ²⁸ *Measuring the impact of cuts in public expenditure on the provision of services to prevent violence against women and girls*, Judy Towers and Sylvia Walby, Lancaster University Report for Northern Rock Foundation and Trust for London (February 2012)
- ²⁹ Reform of Legal Aid in England and Wales: Equality Impact Assessment Ministry of Justice (June 2011)



Notes





Notes



National Union of Students
4th floor
184–192 Drummond Street
London NW1 3HP
t. 0845 5210 262
f. 020 7383 0794
w. www.nus.org.uk



national union of students