

A STUDENT FINANCE NATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMME



**Recommendations for how
student finance information
can be clearer and more
accessible for everyone.**





The higher education funding system has changed dramatically over the last decade. This period has seen positive changes in higher education, with young students – including those from disadvantaged backgrounds – more likely to go to university than ever before.

Nonetheless, new challenges have arisen. While a loan-based funding system ensures that no one needs to pay up-front to study and individuals only repay when they are earning, it can be complex and information is not always easy to find or understand.

Research by Universities UK (UUK) and the National Education Opportunities Network (NEON) has found that only half of prospective students feel they are provided with enough information on the full, long-term costs and benefits of attending university, and that clearer and better-targeted financial advice is needed for prospective students to be able to make informed decisions.



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To address this problem, UUK and NEON are calling for the creation of a new ‘student finance national education programme’ aimed at ensuring all prospective students, and their families, are provided with the financial information they need to consider their options for higher level study.

This national education programme should build on the findings of the **report by the NEON and UUK** student finance information advisory group. The advisory group, made up of key stakeholders in the provision of information on student finance, assessed the main issues in communicating information on student finance and made a series of recommendations for how provision could be improved.

These recommendations can be used to frame what an effective student finance education programme should look to achieve.



A student finance national education programme must:

Develop an industry standard of core messages

While a key strength of the student finance information landscape is the range of different providers and the diversity of approaches they adopt, this can sometimes prove confusing for students where there is a lack of coherence in the advice provided.

The government and information providers should work together to make student finance information more coherent by developing an industry standard of core messages that student finance providers could be invited to sign up to.

Provide teachers, schools and parents with the skills and knowledge they need to perform their vital role

Teachers, schools and parents are some of the most influential actors in the education and career decisions of young people. Yet, currently, many parents feel uninformed about the student finance system and there are disparities between schools in the provision of student finance information.

Specific activities aimed at these stakeholders are needed to address this. Such activities could include connecting a student finance education programme with a more robust, better funded, national careers policy in schools.



Take a ‘student lifecycle’ approach

Most student finance information is currently focussed on prospective students and those considering higher education after leaving school or college. While pre-entry information is crucial, it is not the only time when a student will need information about available financial support or repayment terms.

A student finance national education programme should ensure that information is available from the moment an individual considers applying, throughout their study and after they graduate. To be most effective it should also account for the needs of different groups including mature and non-traditional students.

Ensure a holistic approach

The UK’s student population is larger and more diverse than ever before. A national education programme on student finance must reflect this with a balance of different approaches. This should reflect the needs and circumstances of prospective and current students, from school leavers to those in work considering study, and those with caring and other commitments.

There is potential to strengthen a range of different approaches, such as online and face-to-face provision, and explore implementing tailored approaches for groups like mature students and care leavers.

See the government and student finance information providers work together to adopt a strategic approach

While existing initiatives by the government to communicate information on student finance are welcome and have been helpful, there remain gaps in information provision which place schools, colleges and universities under pressure.

The government, in partnership with information providers, universities, and students, should develop a collaborative strategy that ensures the full range of potential students have a level of knowledge that enables them to make the right choices based on an understanding of the costs and benefits of higher education, prior to and during study.



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NEON is the professional organisation supporting those involved in widening access to higher education. NEON enables those working to widen access to higher education at all levels and in all sectors to affect change in their own organisations and communities. NEON is based in London Higher which represents over 40 universities and higher education colleges in London.



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