

#SP2021 – SNP promise more support to students

Nicola Sturgeon will on Tuesday underline the SNP's commitment to supporting students through the pandemic and into the recovery by driving forward the Widening Access agenda and expanding student support.

The First Minister will be campaigning in Edinburgh today. Ahead of an NUS Scotland online debate on Tuesday evening, the SNP leader will confirm the party's key commitments for students including:

- Protecting free tuition and maintaining the Education Maintenance Allowance.
- Implementing the recommendations of the Commissioner for Widening Access, including a review of funding for post-graduate students.
- Expanding student support over the next three years to reach the equivalent of the Real Living Wage – with as much as possible being done through grants.
- A student mental health action plan – including action to tackle waiting times and ensure equity of access.
- Within the constraints of the devolved settlement, fighting for a fairer deal for young workers against exploitative zero-hours contracts, unpaid internships and workplace discrimination.
- Advocating for Scotland's inclusion in Erasmus+ – but

also create a Scottish programme of exchange to provide mobility and cooperation opportunities in higher education, vocational education and training, adult education, youth and sport.

Nicola Sturgeon will say: “During this pandemic, students have had to cope with many challenges that previous generations could never have envisaged – and ones which I hope no future generation will have to endure.

“I promise the young people of Scotland that I will do everything I possibly can to make sure you do not carry the legacy of this pandemic into your adult lives. That is why young people are at the very heart of this manifesto.

“I’m proud that the SNP abolished tuition fees in Scotland – and as long as we are in government, they will never be re-introduced. Full-time college students in Scotland benefit from the highest bursary of anywhere in the UK, and we’ve also expanded the Education Maintenance Allowance, which was scrapped south of the border.

“Record numbers of students from the poorest background are now attending university – but we need to go further.

“If re-elected, we’ll implement the recommendations of the Commissioner for Widening Access – including a review of funding provision for postgraduate students. We’ll expand our student support package to reach the equivalent of the Real Living Wage over the next three years.

“We’ll also promote student welfare by putting in place a student mental health action plan, and we’ll do what we can – with the relatively limited devolved powers – to tackle the exploitation of graduates through zero-hours contracts, unpaid internships and workplace discrimination.

“The UK Government’s unilateral withdrawal from the Erasmus+ scheme was an unnecessary and frankly spiteful act as they

dragged Scotland out of the EU against our will. We will continue to advocate for Scotland's inclusion in the programme – but also create a Scottish programme of exchange that will seek to recover some of the opportunities taken away from Scottish students.

“By giving both votes to the SNP in this election, students can elect a first minister and a government absolutely committed to supporting students through uncertain times – and to maintaining an education system which is based on the ability to learn, and not the ability to pay.”