

#iwill Higher Education Roundtable on Social Action, 11 May 2016

What happened?

University Vice-Chancellors and other leaders from the higher education sector came together to discuss collaborative support for the [#iwill campaign's](#) 2020 goal of ensuring over 60 per cent of 10–20 year-olds are engaging in meaningful social action, and to explore how to embed and scale opportunities for students to take part in social action across universities.

The event was chaired by NUS Vice President (Union Development) Richard Brooks and Universities UK Chief Executive Nicola Dandridge, both of whom are committed to supporting the 2020 goal and sit on The Prince of Wales' Advisory Council to the #iwill campaign.

The delegates heard from Liam Rodgers (Student Volunteer of the Year 2016), Stephen Isherwood (CEO, Association of Graduate Recruiters), Sir Anthony Seldon (Vice Chancellor, University of Buckingham) and Professor Joy Carter (Vice Chancellor, University of Winchester and Chair of GuildHE).

Two key themes emerged:

(1) There are significant benefits for universities to prioritise social action.

Student social action has a transformative impact on students, local communities and universities and this is already recognised by many senior university leaders.

(2) There are demonstrable steps that can be taken to embed and scale social action across all UK universities, and to ensure that every student has access to high quality opportunities.





1. The benefits and rationale for student social action

The event highlighted the wide range of **opportunities** and **benefits** that social action provides - for students, universities, employers and the wider community.

Social action transforms students' experience of university. Universities are increasingly aware that **students want more than just a degree from their university experience.**

"Student satisfaction depends on the quality of the whole student experience and providing high quality social action opportunities is an excellent way of improving that experience."

Nicola Dandridge, Chief Executive, Universities UK

Social action can improve mental health and wellbeing. Donating time to good causes has been proven to make people happier and more productive, giving students a deeper sense of purpose and belonging.

"The best way to feel good is to do good."

Sir Anthony Seldon, Vice Chancellor, University of Buckingham and member of The Prince of Wales' Advisory Council to the #iwill campaign

Universities benefit from increased student satisfaction and a greater sense of belonging amongst the student body. Liam Rodgers emphasised that taking part in social action had made him an ambassador for his university in the community.

"It is the duty of students to take part in social action."

Liam Rodgers, Student Volunteer of the Year

Social action supports student employment prospects. In an increasingly competitive employment market, it is becoming the norm for recruiters to expect a rounded set of experience and skills, which are developed by taking part in social action.

"Employers want people who are motivated, who get stuff done."

Stephen Isherwood, Chief Executive, Association of Graduate Recruiters

Student social action also makes a huge difference in local communities and contributes greatly to a wide range of social causes.

"Students want to take action to help others and to change the world and on the whole, through students' unions, we're pretty successful at it. I don't need extensive research to tell us that, although we have it."

Richard Brooks, NUS Vice President (Union Development)



The government's white paper, *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*, highlights the important role universities play in contributing to social mobility. As shown above the provision of high quality social action opportunities is an integral part of this process.

2. There are demonstrable steps that can be taken to embed and scale social action across all UK universities

a. Provide visible support for social action from a senior level

Senior leaders in universities have a major role to play in embedding social action in their institutions and acting as influencers across the sector.

"If senior university leaders are seen to be supportive of the social action agenda, the tone will be set on campus and help to normalise activities such as volunteering, campaigning and fundraising".

Professor Joy Carter, Vice Chancellor, University of Winchester and Chair of GuildHE

b. Leverage contacts and networks to influence senior leaders

Leveraging personal contacts, groups and networks was also seen as essential for scaling social action across the sector. Senior leaders who are already demonstrating their commitment to social action can influence their peers and use their membership bodies, such as GuildHE and Universities UK to encourage others to commit to social action.

c. Ensure all students have access to opportunities

All agreed that access to social action opportunities was important. At the 2016 NUS National Conference Richard Brooks reported that students had passed a motion to keep Wednesday afternoons free for students to engage in extra-curricular activities. Students, student bodies and universities all have a role to play in thinking creatively to ensure that no students are excluded. For example, some universities have embedded social action opportunities into the curriculum; this has the added benefit of giving students' academic studies a real-world application as well as enabling all students to participate.

"In 2015, UUK and NUS published [Breaking down the barriers to youth social action and opportunities](#) includes a social action framework to support both universities and students' unions in removing barriers to social action."

Professor Paul Layzell, Vice-Chancellor, University of Royal Holloway and member of Universities UKs' Student Policy Network

d. Ensure there is not a drop-off in participation between school and university

To support the continuation of social action from secondary and further to higher education, universities can develop their partnerships with schools to allow students to continue their volunteering activities once they start university. Students and universities could consider how they could use their outreach work to inspire school students to get involved in social action and to take part together in community activities.

In 2015 UCAS and the Charities Aid Foundation produced [guidance](#) to support potential applicants in articulating the skills gained from social action in writing their UCAS applications.

e. “Shout out” about what works and share good practice across the sector

It was evident that there were already many great examples of different approaches to student social action across universities, and that more could be done to showcase these across the sector. Reference was made to the important role [Student Hubs](#) can play by supporting students to tackle social challenges, learn about issues and connect with each other.

Share your support for youth social action – 8 June ‘Share Your Pledge Day

On 8 June, during National Volunteers' Week, the #iwill campaign is calling on [500+ partners who've pledged #iwill](#) to highlight what they are doing to enable youth social action and celebrate the difference young people are making in their communities. In 2015 many [campaign partners](#) were involved highlighting the fantastic collective progress being made all over the UK.

The campaign has developed ways for pledging organisations and supporters to engage their volunteers, young people, employees, suppliers, customers, media, local communities and digital communities to share their #iwillPledge this June. You can download the resource [here](#), or view online [here](#). Information on how to make a pledge is [here](#).

