

**NUS-USI POLICY FILE 2018-2019**





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This document collates those democratically decided policies that direct the work of NUS-USI and, in particular, its executive committee. The policy file has been updated after the annual conference of NUS-USI Northern Ireland which took place in March 2018. We hope member unions find it a helpful resource.

There are many reasons why such a file is useful to members:

- To let member unions be aware of NUS-USI policy on a variety of issues.
- To ensure that member unions are aware that policy is upheld by NUS-USI executive.
- To convince member unions to submit more motions to NUS-USI conference.
- To prevent replicating of already binding motions.
- To allow NUS-USI executive to plan for the year, and allow binding policy to be incorporated into the NUS-USI executive plan of work.
- To enable Unions to answer queries on NUS-USI policies from student members

All motions passed at NUS-USI conference are then categorised by steering committee into the eleven subject areas, which are:

1. Campaigns
2. Community Relations, Human Rights and Political Issues
3. FE Student Union Development
4. Higher Education and Student Financial Support
5. International Affairs
6. NUS-USI Region
7. Sport, Clubs and Societies
8. Training and Student Development
9. Welfare and Health
10. Liberation Issues
11. Environmental Issues

All NUS-USI policy is binding on the NUS-USI executive for three years. Where a policy heading contains a year, such as 2021 in brackets, this means that a particular policy is binding until 2021 and is due to lapse immediately after the 2021 conference. We hope that all member unions add to this policy file by submitting motions at NUS-USI conference, and steering committee would welcome your opinions on the document.

NUS-USI steering committee  
June 2018

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## **CAMPAIGNS**

### **Maintaining our momentum (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. NUS-USI's #OwningOurFuture campaign ahead of the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly election has been continually shaped by students and students' unions as it has developed.
2. Much of the impact and success of the campaign can be measured by the significant increase in engagement between the student movement and Northern Ireland's political parties.

#### **Conference further notes:**

1. One of the headline asks within NUS-USI's Student Manifesto calls for the formation of an All-Party Group for students at the Northern Ireland Assembly.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Conference believes:**

1. The creation of an All-Party Group for students, with secretariat provided by NUS-USI provides a strategic and sustainable channel within current Government structures to lobby and influence on behalf of students.
2. The creation of an All-Party Group for students, with secretariat provided by NUS-USI should be deemed as a priority for NUS-USI following the formation of the next Northern Ireland Executive.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. That the NUS-USI President should seek to make preparations to ensure that NUS-USI has the resource and capacity to support the work of an All-Party Group for Students.<sup>2</sup>
2. That the NUS-USI President should engage with political parties represented at the Northern Ireland Assembly to ensure that an All-Party Group for Students is formed as soon as is feasible following the 2016 Assembly election.

### **Online voter registration (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

That, unlike the rest of the UK, the only method of registering to vote in Northern Ireland is via paper registration forms

#### **Conference believes:**

That this is incredibly outdated and is a barrier to democracy for people here.

#### **Conference mandates:**

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<sup>1</sup> NUS-USI Student Manifesto for the 2016 Northern Ireland Assembly elections:

<http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/nus-usi/articles/nus-usi-launch-their-elections-manifesto>

<sup>2</sup> Northern Ireland Assembly: Rules of All-Party Groups -

[http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/publications/all-party-groups/apg\\_rules.pdf](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/publications/all-party-groups/apg_rules.pdf)

The Regional Executive Committee to lobby and campaign for the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland to provide the option for online voter registration.

### **Graduate unemployment (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The totally unacceptable levels of graduate unemployment reported in recent labour market surveys, and in anecdotal evidence provided to student representatives.

#### **Conference recognises:**

A general right to work, and a responsibility on the part of government to ensure this right is honoured.

#### **Conference believes:**

That graduate unemployment is symptomatic of an unacceptable and iniquitous labour market, and further recognises the social and economic damage wrought by youth unemployment in general.

#### **Conference believes:**

That the national and devolved governments are not doing nearly enough to tackle, or mitigate the effects of graduate and youth unemployment.

#### **Conference resolves:**

That the NUS-USI and its affiliated unions must work together to measure the scope of the problem in Northern Ireland in a more systematic way.

#### **Conference mandates:**

The President and Regional Executive to work with member unions and NUSUK to measure the problem, develop a robust campaign centred on lobbying and media awareness and, if necessary, pursue a campaign of non-violent direct action in response to this problem.

### **Internationalisation and international students (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

An increasing drive in the Higher Education sector to attract a much greater number of international students, while recognising the hugely positive affect that international students have on the student body within each institution and on the movement as a whole.

#### **Conference notes with concern:**

That this drive among HE institutions is founded, not with multi-culturalism or shared learning in mind, but rather on an agenda of profiteering. International students are now seen as 'cash cows' in a sector that has steadily been de-funded by government, and in an effort to drive revenue, HE institutions are actively exploiting an international 'market'.

### **Conference asserts:**

That international student fees are exploitative, and do not always reflect the quality of education and support that students receive when they arrive on our shores. Further, not only are international fees extortionate, that a lack of regulation of these fees is of particular concern and should be tolerated by the student movement.

### **Conference mandates, that NUS-USI:**

1. Actively lobby the Department of Employment & Learning, and all relevant bodies, for a regulated international fee system, coupled with a cap on international fees to prevent deliberate exploitation.
2. In all lobbying on student fees, that the international student perspective is included, to highlight disparities and unfairness.
3. In its fight against tuition fees and for a publically funded HE sector, that the issue of international fees remains a key point of contention.
4. Actively raise awareness of issues of international students in its campaigning; highlighting the need for all students to stand in solidarity with international students.

### **International students and immigration law (2019)**

#### **Conference notes with concern:**

The policies and actions of the Home Office under the stewardship of Theresa May in regards to international students.

That the UK Government is actively considering the inclusion of international students in net migration figures. Further, that in a recent tribunal, Mr Justice McCloskey ruled against the Home Office's forced mass deportation of students, based on very little evidence and with no right to appeal from within the UK.

#### **Conference asserts:**

That the inclusion of international students in net migration will actively deny those students the chance to settle-in and contribute to our society after they have completed their studies. The contribution that these students make is immeasurable, and they should have the right to stay indefinitely upon completion of their studies.

#### **Conference mandates:**

1. NUS-USI to work with, and actively support, NUS efforts to fight against the inclusion of international students in net migration figures.
2. That NUS-USI raise these issues at every available opportunity, and lobby DEL to make representations to the UK Government to that affect.

### **Brexit (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The Westminster government recently announced a referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union, to be held on 23 June 2016.

**Conference believes:**

1. The UK losing EU membership would create massive uncertainty for EU students studying in institutions in Northern Ireland, putting them at risk of losing funding and student places.
2. A UK outside of the EU may see future applicants to universities in Northern Ireland from EU countries forced to pay exorbitant international student tuition fees.
3. Access to free movement and academic exchange (such as the ERASMUS programme), as well as institutional research funding, is vital for the vibrancy of Northern Ireland's education system.
4. While the EU is by no means a perfect organisation or expression of European community, we have more to lose if the UK leaves the EU than we have to gain. The UK's membership of the EU is vital for the protection of our EU students and our education system as a whole, as well as workers and communities.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI will take a position in favour of Northern Ireland and the U.K. remaining a member of the EU.
2. NUS-USI to make best use of the time between the Northern Ireland Assembly election and the EU referendum to support students' unions to campaign in favour of a 'remain' vote, and mobilise students to vote.

**Brexit (2020)****Conference notes:**

On the 23rd June 2016 the UK voted to leave the European Union with a 51.9% majority.

**Conference believes:**

Universities and FE colleges have inextricable links with the EU and there is no doubt that students and staff benefit from EU funds and projects.

The potential impact of Brexit on higher education and young people is far reaching.

As negotiation plans are being drawn up its imperative that MLAs, MPs and MEPs are representing their constituents. It's imperative they are repeating young people and securing the best deal for students as the UK withdraws from the EU.

Voters in Northern Ireland opted overwhelmingly to maintain a position within the EU. It is imperative that public representatives reflect this view and argue accordingly for a special position within the EU for Northern Ireland.

**Conference resolves:**

The views of those in higher education and young people must be sought and considered, especially over the next two years.

NUS-USI should lobby decision makers to deliver a deal with the EU which:

- ensures the continuation of funding previously provided by the EU to higher education;

- allows for easy collaboration with universities in the EU for study and research;
- allows the continuation of student mobility both into and out of the UK.

### **March for Science (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The election of Donald J. Trump as President of the United States of America.
2. Earth Day takes place on April 22<sup>nd</sup>.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Conference believes:**

1. The election of President Trump has invigorated a growing movement from across society to advocate for the value of science and evidence-based policymaking.<sup>4</sup>
2. This growing movement has particular relevance in light of the potential implications that the new US administration could have for global efforts to tackle climate change.
3. Plans are underway to hold events across the USA and globally to demonstrate how recent policy changes have given cause for concern in terms of how seriously evidence-led policy is taken and the implications that has for global issues such as climate change.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. The NUS-USI President to make contact with local campaign groups, activists, scientists, researchers, civil society networks and US citizens within Northern Ireland to determine the appetite for local action in solidarity with campaigners in America and elsewhere around the world.
2. That if there is a clear appetite for local action, to work to organise such activity to coincide with Earth Day on April 22<sup>nd</sup> 2017.

### **Teaching excellence framework (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The Westminster Government have, in the last year, sought to carry out the biggest overhaul to Higher Education in a decade.
2. Part of the reforms seek to introduce a, 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF) as a means to measure the quality of education in Universities across the UK.
3. Much criticism has been levelled at the proposed metrics within the TEF as not being appropriate to effectively or accurately measure the quality of teaching and learning, and rather are being used as a smokescreen to further marketise education and allow higher levels of tuition fees.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. At the time of writing, none of the Institutions in Northern Ireland who are eligible to take part in the TEF have currently agreed to participate.

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.earthday.org/>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.climatecentral.org/news/scientists-march-washington-dc-21111>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.marchforscience.com/>

2. In Northern Ireland we have currently secured guarantees that, should an Institution here enter the TEF, there will be no link between TEF awards and tuition fee levels.<sup>6</sup>
3. This in itself is a positive development, but the TEF in its current form is still inadequate at best and poses risks and challenges to the wider tertiary education sector.

**Conference resolves:**

3. The NUS-USI Executive to carry out work to compose an alternative Teaching Excellence Framework, working alongside students' unions and UCU to determine a framework for what good quality teaching and learning means, without encouraging further marketisation of our education system.

**Brexit (2020)**

**Conference recognises:**

- That on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016, the United Kingdom voted in a referendum to leave the membership of the European Union.
- That 56% of the electorate in Northern Ireland voted to Remain in that referendum.
- That young people and students in particular voted overwhelmingly to Remain within the EU on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016, in Northern Ireland, and across the UK.
- That, as a result, there exists a democratic deficit between the north of Ireland and other regions in the UK.
- That due to this democratic deficit, there exists a possibility that the rights of students, and the values of the students' movement in Northern Ireland, may be diminished, neglected or ignored during Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU.
- That there will also be a number of worrying ramifications for the Republic of Ireland.
- That there has already been a fall in the number of international students, particularly EU students, applying to study in Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

**Conference is concerned that:**

- That withdrawal from the EU will have profound political, economic and social effects on our society, and on opportunities for students.
- That hugely successful initiatives for student mobility such as the Erasmus+ scheme may be severely curtailed.
- That the number of students who are from Northern Ireland and want to study in the Republic of Ireland, or vice versa, will reduce as a result of withdrawing from the EU.
- That access to healthcare via the European Health Insurance Card will be under threat.

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<sup>6</sup> <http://data.niassembly.gov.uk/HansardXml/plenary-28-11-2016.pdf>

- That the number of people from the island of Ireland who want to access reproductive healthcare in Great Britain will now face additional barriers due to withdrawing from the EU.
- That EU nationals, including students and academics, living in the UK may be used as 'negotiating capital' in Brexit negotiations and their 'right to remain' will be threatened.
- That civic society in Northern Ireland, and the needs and interests of our society and citizens will be neglected during Brexit negotiations.
- That issues of border control and immigration in Britain will have a profound impact on the Irish border and on citizens who live there, with freedom of movement curtailed, and trade on the island hampered.

**Conference instructs:**

- The NUS-USI President and NUS-USI Officer Board to actively campaign to ensure that the rights and values of the student movement are not diminished or ignored, and are reflected and promoted, during Brexit negotiations between the UK and the EU, and during any negotiation between Governments in London and Dublin.
- These rights, opportunities and values include, but are not limited to:
  - o Access to EU funding and participation in EU teaching, learning, travel and research programs.
  - o Freedom of movement through Europe, especially for students and academics
  - o Protection of Equality Legislation and the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement in Northern Ireland.
  - o The 'right to remain' for EU nationals living in Northern Ireland and throughout the UK.
  - o Retaining the Erasmus+ Scheme
  - o Access to European Healthcare
  - o Retention of the Common Travel Area, and the right to unhindered free movement, across the island of Ireland
- NUS-USI President and NUS-USI Officer Board to highlight the democratic deficit that exists between Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK, and to raise awareness of its implications on life for students and citizens living here.

**Irish Language Act (2020)**

**This conference recognises:**

- That an Irish Language Act was promised within Annex B of the 2006 St Andrew's Agreement but that it has still not been passed within the Assembly.
- That every other region in the UK has passed a minority language act to protect and enhance native and minority languages, and provide adequate service provision for speakers of these languages.

- The Irish language is an official EU language, is spoken, used or understood by over 180,000 citizens, including thousands of schoolchildren educated through the medium of Irish.

**This conference welcomes:**

- The legal decision on the 3<sup>rd</sup> March in judicial review brought by Conradh na Gaeilge which condemned the Stormont Assembly for failing in its legal imperative to legislate for an Irish Language Act.

**This conference calls for:**

- NUS-USI President and Campaigns & Citizenship Officer to support An Dream Dearg (alongside USI) and other civic groups and activist networks in campaigning for an Irish Language Act in Northern Ireland.
- NUS-USI President and Campaigns & Citizenship Officer to lobby local political representatives to fulfil their legal requirement and legislate for an Irish Language Act as soon as possible.

**Public Transport for Students (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Public transport in Northern Ireland is not entirely student friendly.
2. Public transport does not always prove to be the most cost effective way for students to travel.
3. Currently Translink only offers discounted travel to people between the ages of 16-23 through their Y-Link card

**Conference believes:**

1. Public transport should be student friendly and not a drain on students' money.
2. More could be done to make public transport more suitable for students.
3. Students over the age of 23 should be able to avail of discounted public transport

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI lobby Translink to extend the current Y-Link discount cards to all students.
2. NUS-USI identifies key public transport routes commonly used by student and lobby Translink to ensure they are student friendly.

**Votes at 16 (2021)**

**NUS-USI Conference believes:**

1. In November the Northern Ireland Assembly unanimously voted in favour of supporting the implementation of Votes at 16, echoing the political support across

the Nations in the Welsh Assembly and Scottish Parliament.

2. That the UK government voted to adopt Votes for 16 year olds with a clear mandate in January 2013
3. That the lack of MPs present for the vote signifies a lack of interest in youth engagement in politics
4. That the failure of the UK government to adopt this policy would be undemocratic
5. That the Scottish Parliament will allow 16 year olds to vote in the Scottish referendum in September 2014, but not currently in other elections.

**NUS-USI conference further believes:**

1. That citizenship education is vital to youth engagement in politics, which Northern Ireland is crying out for.
2. That the scaling back of citizenship activities in schools and colleges is just part of the on-going attack on the rights of young people
3. The Northern Ireland Assembly and Westminster would think twice about the constant attack on young people if 16 and 17 year olds had the vote
4. That the adoption of votes at 16 would be significant for policy makers and would challenge the status-quo of young people paying for the financial crisis and being excluded from having a say.

**NUS-USI Conference resolves:**

1. To continue the push on Westminster and the Northern Ireland Assembly to adopt and fulfil their political mandate
2. To organise around local and national elections, starting in May 2013 to get 16 and 17 year-olds along to ballot stations and stage actions in direct protest against
3. To work with partners across Northern Ireland and the other Nations to mobilise the youth vote and get 16 year olds registered to vote
4. To organise stunts as part of a "day of action" in the run-up to elections outside local authorities and electoral offices

**Beat the Gagging Law (2021)**

**Conference believes:**

1. The Transparency of Lobbying, Non-Party Campaigning and Trade Union Administration Bill was brought in as the UK government's answer to the issue of commercial lobbying.
2. This bill has been rebranded by a wide civil society campaign as the 'Gagging Law'.
3. The Gagging Law places limits on the resources non-political party campaigning organisations can spend, including staff time, in the period leading up to an election.

4. The Gagging Law has been criticised by everyone from the Royal British Legion to Oxfam for silencing campaigning activity
5. Many of the motions submitted to this conference, were they to pass, would be impossible for NUS-USI to carry out due to the implementation of this bill.

**Conference further believes:**

1. The Gagging Law represents a chilling curtailment of freedom of speech.
2. This law is a direct attack on NUS' and Student Unions' ability to campaign and organise.
3. It is no surprise that this law has been brought in by a government which has consistently broken its promises and attacked society's most vulnerable.
4. The student movement has a proud tradition of using civil disobedience to stand up for progressive ideals in society.
5. Our movement changes lives - we can't let the important work we do be impeded by this undemocratic attack on our rights.
6. Of particular importance in the lead up to the next elections is the work NUS-USI does on liberation. Marginalised groups of students in particular rely on NUS-USI to be their voice in what is an extremely conservative and bigoted political environment.

**Conference resolves:**

1. To publicly oppose the Gagging Law and denounce it as undemocratic.
2. To call for the repeal of the Gagging Law.
3. To work in partnership with local campaign organisations in Northern Ireland who will also be badly affected by this law.

**Against zero-hour contracts, for a Living Wage (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Many students are forced to seek employment during their studies to supplement their meagre loans and measly grants.
2. Many students, particularly in large higher education institutes, seek employment on campus as the most convenient means to support themselves.
3. Institutions are frequently outsourcing campus jobs in a bid to cut costs and undermine workers' rights in the workplace.
4. Outsourcing to private companies often results in these companies using zero-hour contracts and paying the minimum wage to their staff.
5. In-work poverty is rampant, and a high proportion of people living in poverty in Northern Ireland are from working households.

**Conference believes:**

1. The minimum wage is insufficient to support a person or student with no dependents, never mind supporting working students with dependents, student carers, or student parents.
2. Outsourcing leads to precarious working conditions of workers, both students and non-students.
3. Unionising student workers and non-student workers is essential to ensure that working students are protected.

**Conference resolves:**

1. To campaign for the minimum wage to be raised to the living wage.
2. To equip students' unions with campaigning resources and appropriate training in order to help them to campaign for the living wage to be adopted and zero-hour contracts banned at their institutions.
3. To encourage students' unions to pay their staff the living wage.
4. To campaign to unionise students who work.
5. To campaign for a national campaign for the Living Wage in Northern Ireland.

**Against Privatisation of Student Services (2021)****Conference notes:**

1. That some colleges and universities outsource some of their services to outside companies when it can be done themselves, such as catering, cleaning, and security. Outsourcing of services to outside companies means that people previously working there lose their jobs, this company is also outside of the college/universities control and so the students have no control on how it is run.

**Conference believes:**

1. That outsourcing of facilities that colleges/universities can run themselves is a lack of student representation and doesn't allow the students to voice their opinions on the matter. This usually has a negative impact on students' experience with these services.

**Conference resolves:**

1. That the NUS USI should be against outsourcing of services, such as the canteen and cleaning facilities, as the students have no say in what way it is run and therefore cannot help to improve the facilities for others in colleges/universities. The conference also resolves that NUS-USI should run a campaign showing the benefits of services being run by students, and for students. NUS-USI should also act as a pressure group to try to convince colleges and universities to adhere to this motion.

**Cross Border Funding (2021)****Proposed by Southern Regional College Students' Union****Conference notes:**

1. That students from the Republic of Ireland coming up to study in Northern Ireland are not entitled to receive maintenance loans, travel, EMA, or any other form of bursary that exceeds the cost of the course loan. We believe that this is unfair because students from Northern Ireland that study in the Republic of Ireland are able to receive all loans and bursaries that are available to any other Republic of Ireland student.

**Conference believes:**

1. That this is the case because students in Northern Ireland are classed as Irish

citizens and are able to receive a Personal Public Service number when they move to the Republic of Ireland to study. This gives them access to the extra loans outside of the main course loan. This is not true for the reverse. Conference believes that two students each living 10 minutes away from the college in either direction, one could be across the border and the other is not. These two students would be treated differently just because of where they live, one would have to pay for travel to/from college/university themselves and the other person would not.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. That all FE/HE colleges and universities should have a hardship fund, which is available to all students, not just ones that live in Northern Ireland. These hardship funds are for people who are struggling to pay for their loans and these are funded by the individual college/universities and so are not Government money. Conference also resolves that NUS-USI should campaign for the equality of Irish students within Northern Ireland and that they should be able to apply for all loans that are available to Northern Irish students.

#### **Campaign against austerity (2021)**

##### **Conference notes:**

That years of austerity implemented by Westminster governments and the Assembly Executive have had a devastating impact on our economy and people's living standards. These policies have created mass youth unemployment, reduced access to education, gutted public services and, according to Oxfam, created 'Great Depression levels' of poverty.

##### **Conference notes:**

That while we are told the economy is growing, real wages in Northern Ireland continue to fall and that, while the number of jobs is growing, this largely reflects the destruction of public sector jobs with relatively good conditions and their replacement with low-paid, precarious jobs, often on zero-hour contracts. This paints a bleak picture of the future facing graduates on the basis of current economic policies.

##### **Conference notes:**

That the Stormont House Agreement and the Budget have seen the Stormont politicians commit to a further four years of austerity. Further and higher education funding will be cut by 10.8%, resulting in the loss of 1,500 jobs and the scrapping of many courses. Across the public sector, we will see the sell-off of public assets, ongoing 'pay restraint' and the destruction of up to 17,000 jobs, which will no longer be available for graduates.

##### **Conference opposes:**

The proposed cut in corporation tax - championed by all the Assembly Executive parties - which will see at least £400 million extra cut from public services in order to subsidise the profits of big business. This policy would see the destruction of thousands more socially useful, decent, public sector jobs in the vague hope of attracting more low-paid, precarious, service sector positions.

##### **Conference rejects:**

The need for austerity. Austerity has failed to cut the deficit as it has strangled the economy, but it has succeeded in shifting wealth from ordinary people to the super-rich. The average family's real income has fallen 13% since 2008. Meanwhile, the UK's

billionaires have quadrupled their wealth and big business continues to avoid around £120 billion in tax every year. Conference believes the bankers, super-rich and big business must be made to pay for their crisis.

**Conference mandates:**

NUS-USI Executive - following on from the successful action on March 13th - to work towards the building of a sustained, co-ordinated and escalating campaign against austerity, involving trade unions, students' unions and communities which will be impacted upon by the cuts. Such a campaign should involve mass demonstrations, peaceful civil disobedience and strike action by both workers and students. Conference mandates NUS-USI Executive to fully support all industrial action against austerity by workers in education.

**Conference believes:**

That elections can also be used to challenge the austerity agenda being implemented by the five Assembly Executive parties.

**Resisting cuts to skills programmes and studentships (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. The Department of Finance has published a briefing paper on the broad strategic issues that will help inform decisions on a Budget for 2018-19 and 2019-20.<sup>7</sup>
2. The [Budget briefing document](#) sets out a number of scenarios. Their purpose is to illustrate the kinds of choices that will need to be considered by Ministers in reaching agreement on a Budget.
3. The section on the Department of the Economy contains suggestions of particular relevance to NUS-USI.
4. The document considers the 'Potential cessation of skills programmes that offer entry level and Level 1 qualifications, through Further Education Colleges and the Training for Success Programme.'
5. The document further suggests the 'Potential cessation of support for Post Graduate Studentships'.

**Conference believes:**

1. The cessation of skills programmes at Further Education Colleges would be detrimental to students and potential students.
2. The cessation of support for Post Graduate Studentships would be detrimental to students and potential students.
3. Some students will have already undertaken a three year studentship, with funding paid to the institution annually, any cessation of funding would particularly impact them.
4. The provision of these schemes should be expanded, not restricted.
5. The Department of Finance recognised in their briefing document that these actions would have a detrimental impact on students and society as a whole.

**Conference resolves:**

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/Briefing%20on%20Northern%20Ireland%20Budgetary%20Outlook%202018-20 3.pdf](https://www.finance-ni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/dfp/Briefing%20on%20Northern%20Ireland%20Budgetary%20Outlook%202018-20%203.pdf)

1. To publicly oppose potential and actual cuts to these schemes.
2. To campaign for extended provision of skills programmes at Further Education colleges.
3. To resist changes to the Post Graduate Studentships that would be detrimental for PhD students, such as mandatory unpaid teaching.
4. To campaign for improved Post Graduate Studentships.

### **Brexit (2021)**

#### **This conference recognises:**

The detrimental impact of Brexit on this island and on the young people who voted overwhelmingly to remain. As the issue continues to be on the forefront of the political agenda, we once again reiterate that the majority here (56%) voted to remain.

#### **We call on:**

The British and Irish government to respect and defend that right, and to recognise the need to uphold the Good Friday Agreement, in all of its parts.

## **COMMUNITY RELATIONS, HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICAL ISSUES**

### **Legalisation of marijuana (2019)**

#### **Conference recognises that:**

1. Criminalisation of drug users has been an abject policy failure in combating illicit drug trade. The so-called 'War on Drugs' has failed to combat criminal activity, while ruining the lives of users.
2. Legalisation of marijuana use in some States of the USA and in other nations has seen a noticeable drop in drug-related crime and in usage.
3. A regulated system, with the necessary age and distribution restrictions, has significant economic and social benefits that far outweigh the devastating consequences of criminalising students and members of society.

#### **Conference further notes:**

That the effect of criminalising those who use drugs creates a taboo culture, and a fear of seeking necessary supports, including among our students.

#### **Conference mandates NUS-USI:**

1. To support efforts of students and other organisations to legalise the sale and use of marijuana.
2. To raise awareness of the negative effects of criminalising students who use drugs, and the pressing need for reform.

### **Fresh start agreement (2019)**

#### **Conference notes that the 'Fresh Start' Agreement:**

1. Paves the way for brutal cuts to benefits, which will not be mitigated by limited and temporary extra funding, and a stepping-up of harassment of welfare recipients, driving vulnerable people further into poverty and desperation.
2. Will see Stormont borrow £700 million to fund around 20,000 public sector redundancies, which will have a devastating impact on the economy, public services and job opportunities.
3. Aims to cut corporation tax to 12.5% by April 2018, transferring hundreds of millions directly from public services to the profits of big business and beginning an unwinnable race to the bottom.
4. Lays the basis for the sell-off of public assets and new austerity taxes as Stormont aims to meet "challenging cost reduction targets" across departments.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. That 'Fresh Start' is a bad deal for students, workers and the people of Northern Ireland in general
2. That this deal is fundamentally no better - and, in some ways, worse - than the Stormont House Agreement which provoked the public sector strike on 13th March 2015.

#### **Conference resolves:**

That NUS-USI will work with the trade union movement to rebuild meaningful resistance to cuts through campaigns, demonstrations and, crucially, co-ordinated industrial action and student strikes.

### **Petitions of concern (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The petition of concern mechanism within the Northern Ireland Assembly was created under provisions within the Good Friday/Belfast Agreement specifically to protect the rights of minorities.<sup>8</sup>
2. The petition of concern mechanism was discussed as part of *Fresh Start* negotiations in 2015 but was left unchanged.<sup>9</sup>

#### **Conference believes:**

1. At its creation, nobody envisaged that any one party would ever hold enough seats within the Northern Ireland Assembly to use a petition of concern on their own.
2. In recent years the petition of concern mechanism has been used in a way which runs in contradiction to the spirit in which it was intended, such as being used to block marriage equality where there was an outright majority for it within the Assembly.

#### **Conference resolves:**

4. NUS-USI should call for the petition of concern to be reformed, ensuring there are robust protections for the rights of minorities.
5. NUS-USI should also call for enhanced checks and balances for the Assembly Speaker in relation to the conditions that must be met before they can accept a petition of concern.

### **Off-campus conduct regulations (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The important role that our further and higher education institutions, and the student movement, play within the local community.
2. Those who commit criminal acts or are involved in anti-social behaviour should be dealt with by the appropriate statutory body and reprimanded in accordance with the rule of law.
3. That some higher educations in Northern Ireland impose draconian financial and academic penalties on students for off-campus behaviour that often far exceed the action taken by external agencies such as the Police, or the City Council, for the same, or a similar, offence.
4. These institutions have no statutory, moral, or ethical right to do so.

#### **Conference believes:**

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<sup>8</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/136652/agreement.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/479116/A\\_Fresh\\_Start\\_-\\_The\\_Stormont\\_Agreement\\_and\\_Implementation\\_Plan\\_-\\_Final\\_Version\\_20\\_Nov\\_2015\\_for\\_PDF.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/479116/A_Fresh_Start_-_The_Stormont_Agreement_and_Implementation_Plan_-_Final_Version_20_Nov_2015_for_PDF.pdf)

That NUS-USI should play a constructive role in working with the Further and Higher Education institutions, local residents, and the statutory authorities to ensure that Northern Ireland is a safe and peaceful place to live, work and study.

**Conference further believes:**

Student activity that has taken place outside of an institution's property should not be subject to the relevant institution's conduct regulations, unless the students in question have been representing the applicable institution in an official capacity.

**Conference resolves:**

To mandate the NUS-USI President, and the organisation, to work with local unions to assist them in any campaigning activity relating to their institutions conduct regulations.

**Trade union solidarity (2020)**

**This conference recognises:**

- The widespread exploitation of labour and the growing casualisation of labour, particularly young workers
- That the interests and values of the trade union and students' union movement are invariably aligned, as they both seek a democratic, socially just and equal society and fight for members' rights and progressive social change
- The solidarity and support historically afforded to students' unions by the trade union movement, both domestically and internationally
- That students' unions are stronger and more effective as campaigning bodies when embedded within the wider civic struggle for progressive change, allowing them to draw on support and solidarity from allies across society.

**Conference also recognises:**

- That in the context of higher education, the marketisation of HEIs has led to a proliferation of casualisation, corporate opacity, overworked staff, gender inequality in pay and promotion, attacks on academic freedom, damage to staff wellbeing and a redefinition of academia
- This attack on staff wellbeing, and the unions that represent them, threatens the quality of education received by our student members and the overall University community
- That students' union are ethically and politically obligated to oppose these attacks on the rights of academic workers
- The most effective way of combatting marketisation is building alliances with staff unions in Universities to combine the voices and campaigning resources of staff and student representatives in offering a vision of a democratic, public University.

**Conference instructs**

- NUS-USI President and Campaigns & Citizenship Officer to build stronger and more formal links with the University & Colleges Union (USU) to oppose marketisation of higher education and to protect the rights and experiences of staff and students

- NUS-USI President and Campaigns & Citizenship Officer to build stronger and more formal links with the wider trade union movement to engage with and protect student workers and non-academic staff.
- NUS-USI Women's Officer campaign alongside the trade union movement on challenges and issues faced by women student workers
- NUS-USI President and Campaigns & Citizenship Officer to offer active public support and solidarity to the trade union movement, build on the existing agreement with NIC-ICTU, and support instances of industrial action by student workers or otherwise.

## **NI Assembly (2020)**

### **Conference notes:**

This year has been a turning point within the politics in Northern Ireland. This year NUS-USI lobbied each party to ensure that Further and Higher Education is the top of each of the party's agenda.

### **Conference also notes:**

Primary Education has been at the forefront of educational debates in recent years.

### **Conference notes with concern:**

That Top up Fees were introduced in Northern Ireland with direct rule and that our education system, students and economy will now suffer under a system which is clearly not right with evidence of a drop in applications and little opportunities for our graduates here in Northern Ireland.

### **Conference mandates:**

The President and NI Executive to continue to lobby the political parties and make them stand up and invest in an education where everyone in Northern Ireland will benefit.

The President should set up a forum where education spokesperson and policy heads communicate with the student body.

Extra resources are put into place to empower the student leaders in the students' unions around the region to use their voice.

The President should lobby for representation on committees that can raise concerns at executive level.

## **Community Relations (2020)**

### **Conference notes:**

The University of Ulster Students' Union, in conjunction with the Queen's University of Belfast Students' Union, has worked hard to improve relations between students and residents living side by side within the community.

### **Conference further notes:**

The Unions have worked closely with the Media/Press to promote the community relations work they have engaged in, and to address the negative perceptions that many people have of students living within local communities.

**Conference mandates:**

The NUS-USI President to work with the universities and colleges throughout the region on a campaign to further promote and enhance good relations between students and long term residents in the community.

Conference mandates NUS-USI to set up a working group to ensure the continuation of the good work of the students' unions in the area of community relations.

**Challenging Sectarianism (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Sectarian tensions in society are being whipped up by both unionist and nationalist politicians.
2. It is students, workers and their families in both communities who will bear the brunt of an upturn in sectarian violence.

**Conference affirms that:**

1. People from all backgrounds have the right to engage in peaceful protest without harassment.
2. People from all backgrounds have the right to live, work and study free from sectarian threats and intimidation.
3. There is no policing solution to questions of sectarian division - solutions must be based on the coming together of ordinary people from both communities in dialogue.

**Conference resolves:**

1. That the students' movement has a duty to challenge all forms of sectarianism and will take action to do so, alongside the trade union movement.
2. This will potentially include calling and supporting protests, student walk-outs, strikes and other forms of action aimed at mobilising ordinary people to isolate sectarian forces.
3. The students' movement can best challenge sectarianism by building a united fight-back, alongside the trade unions, against austerity and challenging the right-wing policies of all the parties in the Assembly Executive.

**Fighting Sectarianism (2021)**

**Conference believes:**

1. Northern Ireland is still affected by sectarianism

2. Students in Northern Ireland experience sectarianism on and off campus in FE and HE
3. Sectarianism is not just a problem for students from Protestant or Catholic backgrounds, but also for students from other religious or ethnic backgrounds
4. Sectarianism is completely unacceptable and will not be tolerated in any shape or form

**Conference notes:**

1. Sectarian hate crimes and incidents make up the largest portion of hate crimes and incidents in Northern Ireland
2. NUS-USI has created a partnership with Unite Against Hate to tackle this problem

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI to continue its partnership with Unite Against Hate to tackle all types of sectarianism on and off campus
2. NUS-USI to encourage student unions to adopt a zero tolerance policy on sectarianism

**Fighting Racism (2021)**

**Conference believes:**

1. Students in Northern Ireland face racism on and off campus
2. Racism and racist hate crimes are soaring throughout Northern Ireland every year
3. Political parties aren't doing enough to tackle racism in Northern Ireland

**Conference notes:**

1. The ethnic minority population in Northern Ireland has more than doubled in ten years from 08.% in 2001, to 1.8% in 2011
2. According to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI), in the 12 months to June 2014 racist incidents rose by 36%, from 830 to 1,132. In the same period, racist crimes increased by 51%, from 525 to 796<sup>10</sup>.
3. There is an average of 2 racist hate crimes every day in Northern Ireland with 70% of these taking place in Belfast and there is a fear that Belfast may become the race hate capital of the UK.
4. NUS-USI has partnered with Unite Against Hate to address racism and hate crime across Northern Ireland, in our communities and on our campuses.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI to continue to work with Unite Against Hate and local FE and HE student unions to provide them with the skills and knowledge to fight against racism on campus
2. NUS-USI to encourage student unions to adopt a zero tolerance policy on racism.
3. NUS-USI to encourage student unions to work with the NUS UK Black Students campaign and to encourage black students in Northern Ireland to engage in the campaign.

**Integrated Education for a shared future (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. There are around 70,000 empty desks in the schools system in Northern Ireland.
2. That divided education systems create a lack of consistency in the education received, particularly in areas such as sex education.

**Conference believes:**

1. That divided education isolates communities and does not contribute to progress towards a shared future in Northern Ireland.
2. That educating all children together is an essential part of the reconciliation process and of building a society that celebrates respect, understanding and friendships across traditional divides.

**Conference resolves:**

1. That NUS-USI should lobby for fully integrated education in all Northern Ireland educational institutions.
2. NUS-USI should work with The Integrated Education Fund (IEF) to achieve this.

**Supporting Refugees and Asylum Seekers (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Northern Ireland is a relatively new host to asylum seekers and refugees, and currently doesn't have a refugee integration strategy in place
2. While asylum and refugee laws still come to Northern Ireland from the UK Home Office, Northern Ireland is responsible for integration.

**Conference believes:**

1. Northern Ireland must do much more to accommodate greater numbers of people who are seeking refuge.
2. Asylum seekers and refugees experience extreme hardship, lack of mental health support and lack of educational opportunity
3. Many asylum seekers experience the asylum legal system in Northern Ireland, as characterised by bureaucratic failures, miscommunication and a system of interview and assessment

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should call for the development of a refugee integration strategy and an accompanying organisation resembling a refugee council in Northern Ireland, working with relevant organisations to do so.
2. NUS-USI should increase its engagement with students of refugee status, to better represent their needs.
3. NUS-USI should lobby institutions to provide more grants for students who are refugees.

**Quality Assurance (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. That Office for Students came into effect on 1 January 2018
2. That HEFCE has now dissolved

3. That this poses some level of uncertainty about the direction of regulation for Higher Education at a Northern Ireland Level.

**Conference believes:**

1. That Higher Education regulation should be a devolved matter, recognising the vast similarities and differences with that of English regulation
2. That in some instances, it may be wise to diverge from the policy setting of English Higher Education regulation

**Conference resolves:**

1. For the NUS-USI President to explore a range of options for how issues around quality assurance in Northern Ireland should be governed, in areas such as quality assurance, and annual provider reviews.
2. For NUS-USI to consider the feasibility of other jurisdictional adoptions such as Quality Assurance Scotland
3. For NUS-USI President to report back via Regional Council meetings and officer reports.

## **FE STUDENT UNION DEVELOPMENT**

### **Cost of Public Transport in FE (2021)**

Conference notes:

1. Most FE students use public transport to attend college
2. Public transport outside of Belfast and in rural areas is often limited and there are often timetabling conflicts
3. Translink already offer a discounted student service known as yLink. Many students are still unaware of the yLink card and the student services Translink currently offer
4. The free travel pass from Translink is funded by Education and Library Board and only applies to full-time FE students studying FE courses under the age of 19 who live 5 or more miles from their nearest college and is only valid Monday-Friday 8-6

#### **Conference believes:**

1. Transport links outside of Belfast and in rural areas needs to be improved as many students often need to use more than one service to travel to and from their accommodation
2. The restrictions on the free travel pass from Translink mean that the majority of students within colleges are unable to access it including part time students, mature students and students who don't study at the nearest college
3. The validity of the free travel pass means that students that must travel outside these times in order to attend college must pay for the extra services they use
4. Students often resort to using a car to travel to and from college as public transport just isn't an option for them due to issues such as poor timetabling, lack of services or cost
5. Students that use a car to travel to college often end up incurring more travelling costs due to the high running costs of a car
6. The yLink service is inaccessible to many students and is complicated to apply for and often students aren't even aware of the service
7. Colleges are not required to provide parking for their students and often students are left to park on the road near college or at local, private or council-owned car parks which are at a premium in availability and cost along with cost of learning to drive, car payments, insurance and petrol

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should continue to work with and lobby Translink to improve their services outside of Belfast and in rural areas during term time to ensure that students can utilise their services to attend college
2. NUS-USI should continue to engage with Translink to encourage them to add themselves to the NUS Extra card, widening the availability of their already discounted student services or where possible, allow students to use their own student card to gain student fares on travel services without having to apply for a yLink card
3. NUS-USI should lobby the Education and Library Board to reduce the restrictions on the free travel pass to include a wider bracket of students especially those who receive little or no funding for travel

4. NUS-USI should lobby the Department of Employment and Learning to ensure students are funded for excessive travel costs, especially if the only way they can travel to attend their classes on time is by car

### **LGBT in FE (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The NUS-USI resource 'LGBT in FE' which provides advice, support and materials to support the development of LGBT issues in Further Education.

#### **Conference also notes:**

How the potential for this resource to support the creation of a vibrant LGBT student community is significant. How, in conjunction with an active NUS-USI LGBT Officer this resource could provide support for LGBT students and Student societies on campus in organising, campaigning, and challenging stigma and discrimination

#### **Conference resolves:**

For NUS-USI to work with FE Students' Union to utilise the resource in supporting LGBT students and Students societies on campus.

### **Apprentices belong in the student movement, let's make them feel welcome (2021)**

#### **Conference believes:**

1. Over 6,000 young people started an apprenticeship in Northern Ireland last year.\*
2. Apprentices are an essential party of the student movement in Northern Ireland and that their experiences are unique and their voices must be heard at every level of NUS-USI as an organisation.
3. Apprenticeships come in many different forms and at many levels. The experience of apprentices is often different to the experience of full time FE learners. We believe that it is time for us to allow apprentices to represent apprentices within NUSUSI.
4. NUS-USI also recognises that apprentices are often in the work place in the week and can't attend NUS-USI events.

#### **Conference notes:**

That NSoANI now holds its leadership team events at the weekend which has seen an increase in participation from apprentices.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. To introduce a quota of 2 apprentice delegates from institutions with apprentice members. That this quota also be gender balanced.
2. For NUS-USI FE committee to reserve one space specifically for an apprentice.

3. To hold at least 50% of NUS-USI FE events on weekends to make them more accessible to apprentices.

\* <https://www.economy-ni.gov.uk/publications/apprenticeshipsni-statistics-august-2013-april-2017>

### **Working with NSoANI to make apprenticeships in Northern Ireland better (2021)**

#### **Conference believes:**

1. That NSoANI is the voice of apprentices in Northern Ireland.
2. That NSoANI worked with colleges and NUS-USI and held membership events with 250 apprentices in 2017/2018
3. That NSoANI used over 100 bags of starburst to engage apprentices with policy and democracy

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. That NUS-USI support the work priorities defined by the leadership team in January 2018.  
Namely to work on:
  - Apprenticeship Pay
  - Quality Apprenticeships
  - Cost of Living
  - Transport
2. That NUS-USI officers engage with NSoANI and wider NSoA and consider apprentice experience and engagement in all they do
3. NUS-USI holds 15% of its events at accessible times for apprentices to be able to attend.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND STUDENT FINANCIAL SUPPORT

### Higher education funding (2019)

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The Northern Ireland Executive's Department for Employment & Learning carried out what was arguably its biggest ever public consultation in relation to the future of Higher Education funding earlier this year, The 'Big Conversation'.

#### **Conference further notes:**

1. The student movement became a credible and legitimate voice within the 'Big Conversation', developing a robust economic argument alongside an ideological narrative to argue for publically funded higher education in Northern Ireland, opposing tuition fees and debt.

#### **Conference recognises:**

1. The outcome of the consultation saw an options papers published by the Department which detailed a number of potential routes to resolving the current funding crisis within our Higher Education system in Northern Ireland.<sup>11</sup>
2. This paper included an option to abolish tuition fees entirely, and to meet the funding gap in Higher Education through increased public investment.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. The inclusion of tuition fee-free education as a viable option within the Department's paper would not have happened if it hadn't been for the strategic, collaborative effort of the student movement over the course of the consultation process.
2. That 'free education' does not only relate to the abolishment of tuition fee-free education, but also the need to ensure that students are funded holistically to support them financially whilst they are studying.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. There is clear merit to developing factually-based arguments centred on social justice and fairness and grounded in economic literacy.
2. Given the sometimes complex nature of politics in Northern Ireland, continued constructive engagement with political parties has the potential to shape political decision-making in our favour.

#### **Conference therefore mandates:**

1. The NUS-USI President to continue to make the case for the abolishment of tuition fees.
2. The NUS-USI President to continue to engage in constructive political engagement as a priority, especially given the formation of the Department of the Economy which

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<sup>11</sup> Securing a Sustainable Solution for Higher Education in Northern Ireland: An Options Paper:  
<https://www.delni.gov.uk/sites/default/files/consultations/del/HE%20options%20paper.pdf#page=38>

will assume responsibility for Higher and Further Education following the 2016 Assembly election.

### **Course costs (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The findings of NUS-USI's Pound in Your Pocket research, published in May 2014.<sup>12</sup>

#### **Conference further notes:**

1. One of the most worrying sections of the research highlighted that across both higher and further education, an average of around two-thirds of students had paid for materials, activities or other costs associated with completing their programme of study
2. Within these costs, on average, just over a third of all reported costs were not known in advance.
3. Some of the most 'hidden' costs were also some of the more expensive costs.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. It is neither right nor fair that students should be expected to pay for resources and materials that are often required for them to be successful in their course, which they were not made aware of in advance of enrolment.
2. Students are already under significant pressure in relation to meeting the costs of their basic living expenses.
3. Having to pay for additional course related materials can have a significant and negative impact on students' wellbeing.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. The NUS-USI President should investigate what guidance, if any, is issued to Universities and Colleges in relation to transparency of additional course related costs.
2. The NUS-USI President should lead an inclusive campaign, incorporating Higher and Further education students, as well as apprentices, to highlight the impact of hidden course costs.
3. NUS-USI should lobby the relevant Northern Ireland Executive Department and members of the relevant Northern Ireland Assembly committee(s) to work to introduce guidance to Institutions making clear that the costs of all additional, mandatory course-related resources and materials must be detailed in course prospectuses and all other relevant information available to potential students.

### **Postgraduate students (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

Postgraduate students are currently under represented, and play a significant role in the up

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<sup>12</sup> NUS-USI Pound in Your Pocket summary report: <http://www.nus.org.uk/Global/NUS-USI-Pound-in-Your-Pocket-summary-report.pdf>

skilling of the Northern Ireland workforce and for some occupations in the private and public sectors; these qualifications are a key pre-entry requisite.

**Conference further notes:**

The funding routes to access postgraduate provision are complex and student support systems are weak.

**Conference believes:**

Part-time, flexible and accessible postgraduate provision which meets the needs of students as well as employers is critical to future expansion and should be incentivised by research and funding council funding regimes. Robust equality impact assessments should be applied to postgraduate funding regimes to ensure that they promote fairness and opportunities across all the potential postgraduate student population.

**Conference resolves:**

To encourage further detailed research to be commissioned to assess the mechanisms and the merits of alternative funding and student support models with the aim of developing a system that increases access to and expands postgraduate provision.

**Student parents (2019)**

**Conference notes:**

Student Parents face unprecedented difficulties in both FE and HE institutions, with the levels of support varying dramatically from institution to institution. The proposed changes to tuition fees, the threat of EMA funding being terminated and complicated support funds put these students under extra pressures.

**Conference believes:**

Institutions need to offer accessible and uncomplicated support structures for student parents. Many students' parents feel their needs and requirements are not being met, and would welcome more collaboration with DEL and HE/FE Institutions to ascertain how to provide adequate assistance. A lack of funding and support is a massive barrier to participation in education for student parents.

**Conference resolves:**

1. For NUS-USI to instigate a review into the structures of support currently offered by DEL and the funding models used and the adequacy of these structures.
2. To work on behalf of student parents in liaising with DEL and HE/FE Institutions to improve participation and engagement.

**Students and workers - Fairer PhD terms and conditions (2020)**

**Conference notes:**

On 21 March 2017 Ulster University Student's Union passed policy committing to working

with Trade Unions on issues including PhD terms and conditions. This policy is similar to the Staff- Student Alliance policy passed by Queen's University Student's Union on 7 December 2016.

Many PhD students at Queen's University and Ulster University are in receipt of a scholarship from the Department of the Economy.

PhD Students are not classed as university employees, however many are paid to teach undergraduates. This teaching can give PhD Students valuable work experience.

PhD students at Queen's University Belfast are paid £33 per hour for teaching, and PHD Students at Ulster University are paid £15.20 per hour with some students receiving a lower £10.80 demonstrator rate. This rate is per hour of teaching and often does not include any preparation or marking time.

The UCU published a report in 2016 'Undervalued, Overworked, Taken for Granted' criticizing the rate of pay for PhD students at Queens University (<http://ucuatqub.blogspot.co.uk/2016/10/text-here-from-our-phd-student-report.html>).

PhD students pay extension fees if they submit in a fourth year. At Queen's University Belfast the fee is £290 for the fourth year, at Ulster University the extension is free for the first 4 months, the fee is £630 every subsequent 3 months.

PhD students are not entitled to any work related benefits such as statutory sick pay, paid paternity leave or shared parental leave. While there is a provision for Maternity Leave in the Department of the economy scholarship, this is only during the funding period and not in any extension period.

#### **Conference believes:**

PhD students need the support of both their Student's Union and Trade Union to campaign for better terms and conditions. The commitment by Student's Union to work with Trade Unions as outlined above should be strengthened by action at NUS-USI level.

PhD students should be treated equally regardless of the institution that they are studying at.

When preparation and marking time are taken into account many PhD students are earning below minimum wage. UCU suggests 5.5 hours of preparation work per hour of teaching.

Punitive extension fees detrimentally impact the mental health of PhD students.

There is a disparity in the distribution of Research Training and Support funds within and between institutions.

#### **Conference resolves:**

To investigate why there is a disparity between the treatment of PhD students at Queen's University and Ulster University in relation to payment, fees, and support funding.

To lobby Queen's University and Ulster University for a fair rate of pay for PhD Students

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To lobby Queen's University and Ulster University for a reduction in extension fees.

To lobby the Department of the Economy for better terms and conditions for PhD students.

To work with the relevant Trade Unions to achieve these aims, in accordance with policy passed by both Ulster University Student's Union and Queen's University Student's Union.

### **Student Support Funds (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The rapidly increasing cost of living and the worsening economic conditions in Northern Ireland.

#### **Conference further notes:**

The contribution that the DEL Student Support Funds make to supporting students who get into financial difficulty or other hardship during their courses. In both HE and FE, vulnerable students benefit immensely from this.

#### **Conference directs:**

NUS-USI to campaign to ensure that the Support Fund budget is not cut, or negatively affected in any way by a changeover of departmental responsibility for HE and FE.

### **Governance in Further and Higher Education (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The publication of the recent review into education institution governance in Scotland, and the opportunities that has provided for making education in Scotland more democratic, with more opportunities and representation for students.

#### **Conference also notes:**

The anomalies and problems arising in Higher & Further Education governance in Northern Ireland – particularly the Education Order (Northern Ireland) 1996, which omits all the legal protections offered to students' unions provided in the Education Act 1994 in England & Wales.

#### **Conference further notes:**

The serious repercussions this is having at some institutions, and how this could disadvantage other students' unions in the future.

#### **Conference resolves:**

To call for a full review of Further & Higher Education Governance in Northern Ireland by the Northern Ireland Executive and Assembly.

### **Education is a right (2021)**

### **Conference notes:**

1. Students who have studied at Northern Ireland's universities owe £3bn in tuition fee and maintenance loan debt, according to reports in 2017.
2. Students in Northern Ireland who had to start repaying their loans in 2017 owe £20,990 on average.
3. Almost 250,000 (222,700) students in Northern Ireland have taken out loans to cover tuition fees and living costs since the current loans system began in 1998/99.
4. Only 28,100 who have taken loans in Northern Ireland have fully repaid them, according to reports in 2017.
5. Collectively, students across the UK now owe over £100bn in loans.

### **Conference believes:**

1. That education is a right and not a privilege.
2. There is an alternative to university tuition fees or a graduate tax - public investment for free education.
3. Replacing tuition fees with a 'graduate tax' is simply replacing one form of student debt with another.
4. Investing in free education would not only offer opportunities for young people but would play a central role in reviving the economy now and in promoting longer-term prosperity and growth for the future.
5. That basing financial support for students on parental income is unjustified as many students will not be financially supported by their parents.
6. That this system allows students who are not supported by their parents to fall through the cracks, and does not allow students the freedom to develop independently.

### **Conference resolves:**

1. To lobby the NI Executive to create free, publically funded education for all at the point of access, funded by:
  - Delivering an increased regional rates system based upon ability to pay to resource additional investment
  - Scrapping industrial derating which costs £58m annually, so that the money can be reinvested in FE, HE and apprenticeships.
  - Reducing funding for InvestNI by half to deliver additional funding for tertiary education.
2. To oppose any increase in fees for students studying in HE and FE institutions in Northern Ireland.
3. To maintain the continued access to maintenance grants for students in Northern Ireland, and to lobby for increased access to this on the basis of young people needing financial support to achieve independence, regardless of the income of their parents.
4. To challenge the allocation of loans and grants based on parental income, and lobby for increased financial support for all students.

### **A National Student Partnership Framework (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The student voice in quality assurance in education is a fundamental part of any higher or further education institution's enhancement process. Northern Ireland remains the only devolved nation to not have a national student partnership or engagement framework.

**Conference believes:**

Whilst a number of institutions are progressing with institution-based partnership or engagement frameworks, there remains the need for support and investment at a national level to ensure that students are not only having their say on their education, but working in partnership with their institutions to co-create the best possible educational experience.

**Conference resolves:**

For NUS-USI to lobby and work with the Department for Economy, higher and further education institutions in NI, and building on the work that has already been done, to research, draft, and fund a national student partnership framework.

## **INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS**

### **Syria & the refugee crisis (2019)**

#### **Conference sends:**

Its solidarity to the Syrian people, who remain caught up in a protracted and bloody civil war which has claimed the lives of hundreds of thousands and forced millions from their homes.

#### **Conference condemns:**

The reactionary barbarism and terrorism of the so-called Islamic State (IS), of which ordinary Muslims are the primary victims. Conference believes this brutal group has been able to grow due to the instability created by the Iraq war and the poverty created by the pro-capitalist policies of the corrupt regimes in the region. Conference notes the hypocrisy of the Cameron government in condemning IS while remaining allied to the Saudi dictatorship, which promotes the same fundamentalist agenda and beheaded twice as many people in the last year as IS.

#### **Conference believes:**

That military intervention can only add to the suffering of the Syrian people and deepen the crisis they face.

#### **Conference condemns:**

Moves by the EU and various member states to prevent refugees from entering Europe and exercising their basic right to asylum.

#### **Conference calls:**

For all necessary support for refugees.

### **Trips to Israel (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

That each year the Union of Jewish students invite student leaders on free trips to Israel in order to campaign against and stifle Palestine solidarity activism within the student movement.

That the Union of Jewish Students has active policy, 'to oppose BDS in all its forms'<sup>13</sup>, which smears the BDS movement and is antithetical to the policies held by both NUS-USI and NUS

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<sup>13</sup> [https://www.ujs.org.uk/pageassets/conference/motions-2016-4\\_12.pdf](https://www.ujs.org.uk/pageassets/conference/motions-2016-4_12.pdf)

in support of BDS.

That at the end of January 2017 the current NUS-USI president participated in one of these UJS trips to Israel with the Union of Jewish Students and that it is alleged they visited an illegal Israeli settlement<sup>14</sup>

That during the 2016-17 period, NUS-USI has a live policy 'Justice and human rights for Palestine (2017)', which resolves to adopt, implement and adhere to the non-violent and Palestinian-led Boycott Divestment and Sanctions campaign.

**Conference believes:**

That offers of fully-paid trips to Israel by organisations that advocate against furthering Palestinian human rights, liberation and justice are made specifically to student leaders because of their roles as elected representatives within the student movement in order to influence policy, undermine Palestine solidarity and promote positions that contribute to shutting down much needed Palestine solidarity activities.

That by accepting a fully-paid trip to Israel, in the context of it being with an organisation that specifically advocates for Israel, elected student officers violate the very clear guidance from the BDS movement<sup>15</sup> and the policy on file which supports BDS.

That for any clarifications and interpretations of the BDS policy on file, student officers within NUS-USI should engage directly with the BDS movement and also consult with the wider membership.

That visiting Israel-Palestine in order to learn more about the conflict is not an issue or violation of BDS; but rather the agenda underpinning free trips that are offered to students and student leaders by organisations is and thus must be carefully considered after consultation with relevant stakeholders.

That NUS-USI should encourage solidarity visits to Occupied Palestinian territory (OPT) and Israel as long as such trips ensure non-participation in activities sponsored or supported -- directly or indirectly -- by the Israeli government or any of its agencies or organisations seeking to stifle Palestine solidarity.

That trips to Israel-Palestine should, ideally, occur under the auspices of ethical organisations that do not seek to undermine Palestine solidarity and which promote genuine approaches to human rights, social justice and an end to violent conflict.

That a boycott of Israel, as defined by the BDS call and guidelines, is explicit in terms of Israel's entire oppressive regime, including all of the Israeli companies and institutions that are involved in violations of international law, and is a reasonable non-violent activity that can be taken to register opposition to such crimes.

That the Palestinian-led BDS campaign does not target anyone or anything based on identity, religious background, ethnicity or race; but is actually based solely on actions, political views and complicity in denying Palestinian rights.

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<sup>14</sup> <http://www.middleeasteye.net/news/nus-settlement-story-1306623668>

<sup>15</sup> <https://bdsmovement.net/call>

That BDS is a strategy for effective solidarity, not a dogma or ideology and certainly not an attack or threat upon Jewish communities or individuals and absolutely doesn't require student officers to boycott communal Jewish organisations or the Union of Jewish Students in its entirety - only its Israel advocacy activities.

That it remains unclear where the Union of Jewish Students and other organisations receive their funding in order to carry forward Israel advocacy activities and trips to Israel.

That the UJS and other organisations should reveal all their funding sources publicly for transparency and accountability reasons.

#### **Conference resolves:**

That NUS-USI elected officers should not accept fully-paid trips to Israel offered by organisations that are advocating against furthering Palestinian human rights, liberation and justice.

That should those bound by NUS-USI policy mandate wish to travel to Israel and Palestine then due consideration and diligence must be taken, including consultation with the BDS movement and the NUS-USI membership.

That visits to illegal Israeli settlements on any kind of trip to Israel and Palestine cannot be perceived as an act in the best interests of the student membership, especially Palestinian students in Northern Ireland and trips to illegal settlements are not acceptable.

To condemn student executive officers accepting paid trips to Israel provided by organisations that actively advocate against furthering Palestinian human rights, liberation and justice.

That NUS-USI commends the work of the Union of Jewish students and shall continue working with the Union of Jewish Students in areas unrelated to Israel-Palestine and that elected officers should aim to draw a clear distinction of non-participation where the Israel advocacy policies of UJS are concerned.

#### **Anti-Semitism (2020)**

##### **Conference notes:**

That 'anti-Semitic attacks are on the rise in Britain', with incidents such as brick attacks on synagogues, anti-Jewish graffiti and even bomb threats occurring in recent years.<sup>1</sup>

The Community Security Trust (CST) recorded 924 anti-Semitic incidents across the United Kingdom during 2015.<sup>2</sup>

Northern Ireland's only Rabbi, David Singer, told BBC Radio Ulster's Sunday Sequence on Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2016 that he has received suspicious e-mails and came across anti-Jewish graffiti in the centre of Belfast.<sup>3</sup>

The national student movement has been rocked by allegations of anti-Semitism and the concerns of Jewish students have been repeatedly downplayed by some of those in leadership positions.<sup>4</sup>

NUS motion 404 'Anti-Semitism on campus' resolved to lobby Students' Unions in order to encourage them to have clearer policies on responding to anti-Semitic incidents and situations in which Jewish students feel threatened.<sup>5</sup>

April Rosenblum, in her 2007 pamphlet 'the past didn't go anywhere: making resistance to anti-Semitism part of all our movements', expands in great detail on the nuances surrounding modern day anti-Jewish oppression and why it is absolutely vital to integrate a radical analysis of, and opposition to, all manifestations of anti-Jewish hatred and oppression into the work we already carry forward.<sup>6</sup>

### **Conference believes:**

Regardless of whether an anti-Semitism problem exists or not on our own campuses it would still be advisable to hold a policy that addresses anti-Semitism on campus, provides a workable definition of anti-Semitism and gives guidance on what steps can be taken to combat this particularly odious form of hatred.

All forms of racism and oppression are abhorrent and should be uncompromisingly opposed with as much effort and energy as can be mustered.

Anti-Semitism is a specific form of racism, relating to Jews and Judaism.

Anti-Jewish oppression is the system of ideas passed down through a society's institutions to enable scapegoating of Jews, and the ideological or physical targeting of Jews that results from that.

The definition of anti-Semitism has been debated and disputed as a result of political influences relating to the Israel-Palestine conflict.

A workable definition of anti-Semitism can be found provided by noted scholar Brian Klug who has defined anti-Semitism as a '*form of hostility towards Jews as Jews, in which a Jew is perceived as something other than what they are*'.<sup>7</sup>

Anti-oppression ethics, coupled with a thorough understanding that multiple oppressions can manifest at one time and are often complex and multi-layered, is crucially important in our efforts to acknowledge anti-Semitism as still being a major problem in society today.

That anti-Semitism includes, but is not limited to:

- (i) Questioning the loyalty of Jews to their state of citizenship simply on the basis of their Jewish identity, which includes claims that Jews as a collective or a community engage in efforts to subvert or mislead the general population, as well as the claim that Jews are more loyal to the state of Israel than their country of citizenship, is an anti-Semitic position to hold;
- (ii) Claiming or making any effort to create a reality in which Jews do not have the same rights as any other religious, cultural or ethnic group, including the right to free speech, free practice of religion, free use of native languages (i.e. Hebrew, Yiddish, Ladino, etc.) and self-determination;
- (iii) Denying, trivializing and misconstruing the Nazi Holocaust. This includes denying the fact, scope, method, or motivation for the genocide of six million Jews at the hands of the National Socialist regime. It also includes the accusation that Jews or the state of Israel have fabricated, cause or over-exaggerated the Holocaust;

- (iv) Calling for, aiding or justifying the killing or harming of Jews for the sake of their Jewish religion, ethnicity or identity;
- (v) Making mendacious, dehumanizing, demonizing, or stereotypical allegations about Jews as Jews or for being Jewish. This includes accusations of Jewish control of the world, of our political structures and government, the media, as well as blaming Jews collectively for imagined and real atrocities;
- (vi) 'Equating Jews or maliciously equating Jewish organisations and the polity of the state of Israel with the Nazi Regime. This includes, but is not limited to equating Zionism with Nazism and claiming that 'History is repeating itself' with regards to the Nazi Holocaust and the state of Israel. This also includes using Jewish symbols and religious imagery alongside Nazi symbols and imagery. However, this does NOT necessarily include reasonable analogies between historical events';
- (vii) Using Jewish symbols to antagonize, harass, and intimidate Jewish students.
- (viii) Assuming that because a person is Jewish that they will automatically hold particular political views and positions regarding Zionism and Israel;
- (ix) Demanding a Jewish person or group of Jews collectively to present an opinion or position on the Israel-Palestine conflict and where those demands are often aggressive, intimidating and harassing;
- (x) Labelling Jews that hold differing political positions on Zionism and Israel as 'kapos', 'self-hating Jews' or 'traitors';
- (xi) Deliberately using terms 'Zio' and 'Zionist' as pejorative terms of abuse in order to isolate and attack Jewish students and members of Jewish communities.

Criticism of the Israeli government, its policies and actions are not inherently anti-Semitic and neither is reasoned criticism of Zionism and its impact in Palestine and upon the Palestinian people.

#### **Conference resolves:**

NUSUSI is mandated to publicly oppose actions on campus that are anti-Semitic based on the aforementioned definitions.

NUSUSI be mandated to publish a bi-annual report detailing all incidents of racism, including anti-Semitic incidents and instances of anti-Jewish oppression.

NUSUSI executive should communicate and engage with the Jewish Community in Northern Ireland - particularly the Rabbi and the Belfast Synagogue in order to discuss issues affecting them and also Jewish students in Northern Ireland.

NUSUSI is mandated to work with relevant educational institutions in order to address racism and anti-Semitism on campus and methods to alleviate it.

The work of organisations such as Jewdas<sup>8</sup>, NUS, Jewdents<sup>9</sup>, Community Security Trust (CST) and the Union of Jewish Students is to be consulted when developing work against anti-Semitism so as to ensure resources are provided to help Students to understand the nuances and fully comprehend these policies.

The pamphlet of April Rosenblum<sup>10</sup> is viewed as a key resource and must be made available (once permissions have been sought and granted) for students and relevant parties to access on the NUSUSI Website, under a section specifically designed to tackle all forms of racism, including anti-Semitism, in order that the NUSUSI might better promote and enhance legitimate debate regarding the morality, problems and human rights issues

surrounding international conflicts whilst also remaining resolutely committed to opposing the manifestation of illegitimate and illegal acts of anti-Jewish oppression on campus.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/israelgaza-conflict-rise-of-antisemitic-attacks-in-uk-as-crisis-rages-in-the-middle-east-9631174.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://cst.org.uk/news/blog/2016/02/04/cst-antisemitic-incidents-report-2015-published-today>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-northern-ireland-37533746>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-37489745>

<sup>5</sup> [https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-](https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/24818/Welfare_Live_Policy_201417.pdf)

[1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/24818/Welfare\\_Live\\_Policy\\_201417.pdf](https://nusdigital.s3-eu-west-1.amazonaws.com/document/documents/24818/Welfare_Live_Policy_201417.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.buildingequality.us/prejudice/antisemitism/rosenblum/the-past.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> See Brian Klug, 'The collective Jew: Israel and the new Anti-Semitism', *Patterns of Prejudice*, vol. 37, no. 2, 2003, 117-138.

<sup>8</sup> <http://jewdas.org/how-to-criticise-israel-without-being-anti-semitic/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://facebook.com/jewdents/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.buildingequality.us/prejudice/antisemitism/rosenblum/the-past.pdf>

## **Justice and human rights for Palestine (2020)**

### **Conference notes:**

1. That the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territories, the State of Israel and occupied Golan Heights is progressively worsening in terms of equality, justice, human rights and sustainable peace for all.
2. The discussion surrounding the Israel - Palestine conflict is often polarized, with the radical viewpoints espoused usually given precedence, resulting unhelpful propaganda battles being fought which moves focus away from human rights and political focussed progressive debate.

### **Conference believes:**

1. Israel is currently occupying Palestinian territory in the West Bank and Gaza strip.
2. That Israel is in breach of International law in respect to its obligations as an occupying power which are stipulated within the 1907 Hague Regulations (arts 42-56) and the Fourth Geneva Convention (GC IV, art. 27-34 and 47-78), as well as in certain provisions of Additional Protocol I and customary international humanitarian law.
3. Israel is using an oppressive regime which fits the legal definition of Apartheid as stipulated within the 2002 Rome statutes and the International Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid
4. Israel follows a policy of home demolitions and forced relocations to effectively control the demographics of those deemed undersirable by the state.
5. Israel does not allow Palestinian refugees or their descendents to return to the territory from which they were expelled in 1948 by Israeli forces both before and after the existence of the Israeli State.

6. The refusal to accept responsibility, or permit a viable solution to the refugee crisis which Israel itself created, is an obstacle to a just peace in the region.
7. A diverse range of Palestinian and Israeli organisations have called for a policy of boycott, divestment and sanctions against Israel pertaining to goods, services, economic ties and any other activities which assist the Israeli government in the continued oppression and occupation of Palestine.
8. The National Union of Students - Union of Students Ireland has so far held no policy in support of the growing movement to support Palestinian & Israeli human rights.
9. That there is no excuse or justification for the abuse of human rights and international law.
10. Terrorism, in all its forms, must be fully condemned and organizations which are defined as terrorist do not hold the principles or interests of the basic rights of Palestinian and Israeli people as a priority and cannot be said to represent the population of the region as a collective whole.
11. Palestinians have a right under international law to resist occupation and to democratically determine their own future.
12. Settlements built by Israel or Israeli citizens within the Occupied Palestinian territories are illegal as stipulated within the 4th Geneva convention and other relevant international law.

**Conference resolves:**

1. That support should be given to individual students and student groups within Northern Ireland that work in a progressive, human rights based manner to ending the Occupation of Palestinian territories deemed occupied by the International community in 1967
2. Where "support" is to be taken as meaning: The facilitation of events, speakers, positive engagement, debates, nonviolent direct action that is within the law and support for student members of NUS-USI within Israel - Palestine itself.
3. To demand freedom for Palestine, calling for an end to the military occupation of the Palestinian territories and the right to return for refugees who chose to exercise that right.
4. That a progressive adoption of the Boycott Divestment and Sanctions campaign should be implemented and promoted with a focus on the educational aspects so as to Boycott goods made in Israel's illegal settlements and divest from any company which is complicit in the abuse of Palestinian human rights and the occupation of Palestinian territories.
5. To implement the BDS campaign using a progressive approach that utilizes an assessed look at companies and products to determine if they fit the Palestinian call to BDS.
6. To use the much needed educational approach that sends a clear message as to why there is a BDS campaign along with what it is and is NOT about.

7. That we must support Israeli and Palestinian Human Rights NGO's such as that of B'tselem. Organisations such as these are typically demonised and attacked by the Israeli government in an undemocratic way.
8. Strongly condemn Israel's activities and policies which allow for continued human rights abuses and the perpetuation of a conflict based status quo that allows for such things as home demolitions, evictions and the brutal use of military power to put down nonviolent demonstrations for civil and human rights.
9. To support the Palestinians right to education by building links with Institutions of Education such as Bethlehem University and other such educational Institutions.

### **Internationalisation of Students in Northern Ireland (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

There are an increasing number of international students coming to study at FE and HE level in Northern Ireland.

#### **Conference further notes:**

There is a lack of integration between international and local students.

#### **Conference believes:**

Internationalisation of students within Northern Ireland will not only be beneficial to the international student experience but also help submerge our home students in a more diverse range of cultures and experiences.

#### **Conference resolves:**

For NUS-USI to promote and raise awareness of the benefits of internationalisation within our institutions and community.

### **Internationalism and Europe (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. When students come from abroad to study within the UK from outside the EU, they are expected to pay huge fees in order to study.
2. These fees are extremely high when talking in terms of British pounds and even higher when these figures are converted into most currencies.
3. International students who do not have access to loans have difficulty paying these fees. Along with living expenses this puts a huge burden on these students.

#### **Conference believes:**

These financial burdens stop people from abroad coming into the UK to study.

**Conference resolves:**

NUS-USI to put pressure on government to review this.

## **NUS-USI REGION**

### **Regular networking (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

NUS-USI elected officers have an influential role in networking across the students' unions in Northern Ireland with information sharing and experience.

#### **Conference believes:**

A stronger connection between students' unions and NUS-USI elected officers is essential to build an accurate reflection of the cross-section of current issues faced by students.

#### **Conference mandates:**

Each NUS-USI elected officer to meet once per semester with each NI college/university.

### **Democracy week (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

6. Student Officers in member organisations are elected by students on an annual bases.
7. Engaging students in officer elections is extremely important to maintain strength in the student movement.
8. Many students interact with students from other institution.
9. Some member unions hold their elections around the same time of year as other member unions.

#### **Conference believes:**

7. A coordinated approach to elections by member unions across NI would help raise the profile of officer elections.

#### **Conference resolves:**

5. That NUS-USI explores the willingness of member organisations to aligning their election timetables.
6. If some member unions agree to align their timetables; NUSUSI should help coordinate joint efforts to promote elections.

### **Fair Representation (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. That NUS-USI Conference should be as representative as possible.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. That a large proportion of our student population are women yet women are continually under represented at all levels of the student movement including on the NUS-USI Conference floor.
2. If the NUS-USI Conference floor is more reflective of the student population who identify as women we can begin to ensure women's issues are not neglected by the student movement.
3. Ensuring that at least 50% of NUS-USI Conference floor is made up of women students is the key next step to ensuring fair representation of women within the student movement

**Conference resolves:**

1. That all delegations to NUS-USI Conference must be made up of at least 50% self-defining women, rounded down.
2. That NUS-USI produce guidance and support Member Unions on how best to apply this policy during their election of delegates for Conference.

**NUS-USI 2<sup>nd</sup> NEC position accountability (2019)**

**Conference notes:**

2. The National Executive Council is NUS' interim decision-making body between meetings of NUS National Conference.
3. The NUS-USI 2<sup>nd</sup> NEC Position is elected annually at NUS-USI Conference and represents students from across NI at meetings of the Council.

**Conference believes:**

1. Our elected officers should be accountable to those who represent them.
2. Elected officer of NUS-USI are asked to produce a report of their work to be presented at Regional Council.

**Conference resolves:**

7. That the office bearer of the NUS-USI 2<sup>nd</sup> NEC Position should produce a report detailing their work to NUS-USI Regional Council.

**Officer networking (2019)**

**Conference notes:**

1. The tri-lateral agreement that gives members of NUS-USI membership to NUS and USI.
2. That Conference is the often the first time in the year that Students' Union Officers across the NUS-USI membership meet and get the opportunity to network
3. That Conference is often attended by a number of officer of NUS and USI

**Conference believes:**

1. That collectivism is key to the student movement and through unity we are stronger.
2. That this collectivism must be nurtured and enhanced early in the year in order for the entire membership to work together throughout the year.
3. That geographical barriers often make it hard for officers in Northern Ireland to engage with NUS and USI

**Conference mandates:**

1. The NUS-USI President to organise and facilitate an event at the earliest opportunity for officers from HE & FE Students' Unions to network and build on the collective nature of NUS-USI
2. To extend an invitation to all officers of NUS and USI to this event to maximise on the potential for engagement with all of our national unions.

**'Consumer'-oriented language (2019)**

**Conference notes with concern:**

That students are commonly referred to as 'customers' or 'consumers' in government policy and institutional publications.

**Conference asserts:**

That students are not customers, and that such language devalues the inherent value of education, and subtly reflects the unacceptable transition towards a market in education.

**Conference mandates:**

The President and Regional Executive to work with member unions to erase this way of thinking from existing policy and practice.

**Volunteering (2019)**

**Conference notes:**

The increasing competitive nature with regards to jobs for new graduates. With increased volunteer opportunities students can enhance employability skills and build life experience.

*87% of employers think that volunteering can have a generally positive effect on career progression for people aged 16-25.*

<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/News/mediacentre/keyvolunteeringfactsandfigures>

**Conference resolves:**

NUS-USI to practice small scale volunteer schemes striving towards the future development of volunteer centres in each institution.

**St Patrick's day preparations (2019)**

**Conference recognises:**

The hard work put in by a number of organisations in trying to avoid a repeat of the scenes

of St Patrick's Day 2009.

**Conference notes:**

That a large amount of resources both physical and financial are required to ensure the day goes as peacefully as possible and there is never a guarantee that the day will pass of peacefully.

**Conference believes:**

That these resources could be much better spent by holding some other form of event such as an open air concert in Botanic Gardens or a street carnival like Notting Hill as these events could be much easier and more effectively managed and stewarded.

**Conference mandates:**

The President of NUS-USI to make contact with relevant government departments such as DEL and DCAL to establish if this would be possible and how plans could be formulated to make this a reality.

**Implications of Brexit for the student movement (2020)**

**Conference notes:**

1. That on June 23<sup>rd</sup> 2016 a UK-wide referendum on membership of the European Union was held.
2. The UK turnout was 72.2% and delivered a 51.9% *leave* result, with 48.1% voting to *remain*.
3. Regionally, the turnout here was 62.7% with 56% voting to *remain* and 44% voting to *leave*.
4. Scotland, Gibraltar and the London region also voted by majorities to *remain* whilst the remainder of England and Wales voted to *leave*.

**Conference believes:**

1. Clearly, the various regions of the UK have a different view in regards to their future relationship with the European Union.
2. NUS-USI should prioritise working to eliminate or at least mitigate the potential negative implications that leaving the European Union will have for students, for higher and further education and for Northern Ireland generally.
3. Some of the specific areas of concern relate to:
  - (i) Human Rights & Equality under the Good Friday Agreement
  - (ii) Continued access to EU funding
  - (iii) Freedom of movement for students and academics across Europe and continued access to the Erasmus/Erasmus+ programme
  - (iv) Retention of the Common Travel Area and the freedom of movement across the Island of Ireland
  - (v) The 'right to remain' for EU nationals living in Northern Ireland and throughout the UK.
  - (vi) Workers' rights, and the implications any lessening of those rights could have for students and apprentices.

**Conference resolves:**

1. For the NUS-USI President and Regional Executive Committee to make use of all possible networks, within NUS UK, USI and the European Students' Union to elevate the specific and unique circumstances that Northern Ireland now finds itself in regards to the areas outlined in *Conference Believes 3. (i) – (vi)*.

**Special status for Northern Ireland in Brexit negotiations (2020)****Conference believes:**

1. The majority of the population in Northern Ireland voted to remain in the EU in the referendum.
2. It is clear that we will be at the bottom of the list in the negotiations for the British exit of the EU.
3. Northern Ireland will lose £2.5 billion in funding for cross-community programs that help keep young people away from paramilitaries.
4. It could lead to a 'hard border' with the Republic, which will lead to further degeneration of relations between the unionist and nationalist communities.

**Conference further believes:**

1. The economy of Northern Ireland will be severely affected if not given any representation in the Brexit negotiations.
2. Funding for all institutions, including HE and FE, will be in jeopardy.

**Conference resolves:**

1. Campaign for better representation of the interests of the students and people of Northern Ireland in negotiations.
2. Provide information to students on the possible effects, both positive and negative of Brexit.
3. To provide students with information involved with a border poll should one be called.

**Regional Council (2021)****Conference notes:**

That all Higher Education and Further Education members are not adequately represented at NUS-USI Regional Council, this is in accordance with attendance monitoring, and not to the fault of efforts of NUS-USI. Also Council has shown that it is not willing to travel across all member institutions in order to encourage this participation of members.

**Conference believes:**

That through the academic year Regional Council should adopt the same policy as USI National Council in that Regional Council should move more freely across its jurisdiction and quorum cannot be made without representation of all members.

**Conferences notes:**

1. That NUS-USI should hold Regional Council in all regions across its jurisdiction to encourage participation and that quorum can only be made if all members are present.

2. It was agreed that the words 'and quorum cannot be made without representation of all members' be removed to read: -

**Conference believes:**

1. That through the academic year Regional Council should adopt the same policy as USI National Council in that Regional Council should move more freely across its jurisdiction.

**Conferences notes:**

That NUS-USI should hold Regional Council in all regions across its jurisdiction to encourage participation.

## **SPORT, CLUBS AND SOCIETIES**

### **Recreational Sporting Activities (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

Student sport is an integral part of student life for many of our members.

#### **Conference further notes:**

Sport has many benefits for students for both personal development and physical wellbeing.

#### **Conference believes:**

By increasing recreational sport within member institutions we can not only get more students involved in our unions but also promote a healthy lifestyle amongst students.

#### **Conference resolves:**

NUS-USI should develop a campaign to promote student sport focusing on recreation, social and health benefits to students

### **Sport (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

Due to the pressure of finding time for all lessons there is not much time available in many colleges when all students are free to participate in clubs and societies.

#### **Conference believes:**

That a time on the timetable should be made when all students are free.

#### **Conference further believes:**

1. That this free time can also be used for Tutorials, Student Union and Class Reps Meetings.
2. That if the same time, such as Wednesday afternoons, was made free throughout colleges this would allow colleges to compete with each other.
3. This would improve students' lives at FE colleges.
4. This would provide equality for all students as they would all have access to participating in all clubs and societies.
5. This would also provide many health and social benefits.
6. This would also help in developing the students' union clubs and societies.

#### **Conference resolves:**

That NUS-USI puts pressure on DEL to enforce that every college has a time slot on Wednesday afternoons when all students are available to participate in clubs and societies.

### **Students Participation in Sporting Activities (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

That in many cases students who may have been previously physically active can fall into a rut of inactivity once they attend University. Not only does this result in the depreciation of their physical health but also affects their mental well being.

#### **Conference believes:**

That institutions should invest money in order to provide appropriate on campus facilities for students to take part in sport at a recreational level. Failing these institutions should work with local Sports Centres/ complexes to provide students with easy access to facilities at a subsidised rate.

#### **Conference further believes:**

That this will have a positive effect on the general well being of students.

#### **Conference therefore mandates:**

NUS-USI to work alongside appropriate sporting bodies with in institutions to provide campaigns in order to increase the level of student participation in sporting activities, pushing the idea that a healthy body = a healthy mind.

## **TRAINING AND STUDENT DEVELOPMENT**

### **Part-time officer training (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

That Part Time Officers play a significant role in their Student Unions and are essential to the growth, development and representative nature of the Student Movement.

#### **Conference believes:**

That training is essential for Part Time Officers to maximise on their time as officers.

#### **Conference commends:**

The work done by NUS-USI to ensure that Part Time Officers in Further Education Students' Unions are adequately trained.

#### **Conference mandates:**

NUS-USI to offer training to Part Time Officers in Higher Education Students' Unions and to work with NUS and USI where relevant to deliver this training.

### **Course Reps (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

That student reps are an invaluable group amongst the student body. Conference also notes that Student's Unions have limited resources to support these students.

#### **Conference believes:**

That student reps are at the heart of our institutions. Conference also believes that there is a need for additional resources and support to improve how effectively we represent our students.

#### **Conference hereby mandates:**

The Regional Executive to lobby, and support our Student's Unions when they lobby, both their institutions and government for more funding to support student reps.

### **Street Reps and Community Funding (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The inception of the Street Reps Scheme at Queen's Students' Union, which connects students more closely with their local neighbourhoods and improves community relations.

#### **Conference also notes:**

The wide range of funding that is available for community groups and community initiatives from various agencies.

**Conference resolves to:**

Work to expand the Street Reps scheme to other institutions and to use NUS-USI's influence to push for funding to improve the initiative.

## **WELFARE AND HEALTH**

### **Mental health (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. For many years NUS-USI carried out significant campaigning work in relation to mental health.
2. In recent years this work ended due to lack of sustainable funding.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. It is of vital importance that NUS-USI continues to campaign on the issue of mental health.
2. There are a number of charities and organisations which exist within Northern Ireland that work in the field of mental health.
3. NUS-USI should take an evidence-based approach to campaigning on this issue.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. The NUS-USI President and NUS-USI Welfare Officer to seek to convene a student mental health working group, comprising:
  - (i) Representatives from NUS-USI Regional Council
  - (ii) Representatives from the various organisations and charities operating within Northern Ireland
  - (iii) Relevant officers from NUS UK & USI (as deemed appropriate by the President)
2. The NUS-USI President and NUS-USI Welfare Officer to seek to use the expertise of this working group to inform and structure a piece of research with the aim of examining the current state of affairs in relation to student mental health in Northern Ireland.

### **Consent survey mandate (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The Association of American Universities conducted a survey of students at 27 universities across the US and uncovered nearly 1 in 4 undergraduate women were the victims of unwanted sexual contact, either by force or because they were unable to consent due to drugs or alcohol. The survey collected responses online from 150,000 graduate and undergraduate students, approximately a 19% response rate from the 779,170 students who were asked to participate in the research. While the rates of reporting varied by institution, from a low of 17% to a high of 46%, the most common reason for not reporting it was that the respondent didn't consider it "serious enough." A third of those girls also felt "embarrassed, ashamed or [thought] it would be too emotionally difficult."<sup>16</sup> While the most extensive research has been done surveying women students' sexual assaults against men and transgender students occur and are to be condemned.

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<sup>16</sup> <http://bit.ly/2mAPq6n>

**Conference believes:**

NUS-USI have a duty of care and a duty to educate our students. Many are leaving Secondary School without a full understanding of consent due to poor sex and relationship education. Students should have a full understanding of the importance of consent and should know how to report a sexual assault if they are the victim of unwanted sexual contact.

**Conference resolves:**

NUS USI should carry out a consent survey, focusing on HE and FE institutions, to gauge students understanding of sex and relationship education. NUS-USI should collate the finding and present them to government as part of efforts to lobby for the improvement of sex and relationship education in schools. The research may help shape the direction of the sexual health campaigns that some Students' Unions may undertake.

**Housing survey mandate (2020)****Conference notes:**

Students have far too often been mistreated and taken advantage of by renting agencies and landlords. It should be noted that in NUS' Homes Fit for Study research (2870 students – UK wide),

- 61% had damp, mold, or condensation in their home
- 24% had slugs, mice or other infestation
- 52% have felt uncomfortably cold in their home.

These are unacceptable standards of living.

UUSU has experienced first-hand some of the issues relating to students not knowing their rights when it comes to renting for the first time.<sup>17</sup>

**Conference believes:**

Students deserve and should have a right to good quality, affordable and suitable student accommodation. NUS-USI has a duty of educating our students and lobby for improvements in the standard of housing.

**Conference resolves:**

NUS USI should carry out a housing survey across the region, focusing on HE and FE institutions, to find out the issues students face in renting accommodation. NUS-USI should then collate their finding and use the results to lobby for improvements to the private rental sector.

**Private Rented Sector Tenants' Association (2020)**

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<sup>17</sup> <http://bit.ly/OE5XS3>

**Conference notes:**

The poor state of private rented sector accommodation in Northern Ireland – way behind the rest of the UK and Ireland. Damp, cold and poorly maintained student accommodation is rife and often peddled by unscrupulous landlords.

**Conference further notes:**

That the NI Housing Executive expects the private rented sector to continue to expand, and if that is to happen, tenants need a dedicated representative body to represent their interests to the Northern Ireland Assembly and Executive and

**Conference resolves:**

To support the efforts of the Housing Rights' Service to establish a Northern Ireland Tenant's Association.

**Suicide Awareness (2020)****Conference notes:**

There has been an increased level of work on mental health campaigns amongst the student population.

**Conference further notes:**

Suicide awareness is key to suicide prevention.

**Conference believes:**

By training students beyond the regional executive will help our message to reach a wider range of students who may not necessarily engage with their students' union.

**Conference resolves:**

That NUS-USI provides a platform for suicide awareness training to larger groups of students within the various institutions.

**Campaign for More Sexual Health Clinics (2020)****Conference recognises:**

The importance of sexual health clinics in providing testing for sexual transmitted infections, information on sexual health, and contraception and specifically the positive impact this has in women student's lives.

**Conference notes with concern:**

The worryingly small number of sexual health clinics across Northern Ireland and the reduced funding for provision of this key service, particularly on campuses in rural areas.

**Conference resolves:**

To lobby local government and to campaign for more funding in this area, in order to provide more sexual health clinics across Northern Ireland.

### **Student Mental Health (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. Students are faced with increasing financial and academic pressures coupled with part time work commitments.
2. In their attempts to balance all these pressure, their mental health and well being is affected.

#### **Conference notes with concern:**

A recent MORI poll illustrates that year-by-year more students are experiencing stress.

#### **Conference mandates:**

The NUS-USI to continue their student mental health campaign in partnership with local Unions and to help coordinate mental health campaigns on an annual basis in all member colleges.

### **Housing rights (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. An increasing number of students in Northern Ireland continue to choose to live in privately rented accommodation, particularly in the Belfast area.
2. In 2012/13 the student population in the Greater Belfast area was believed to be around 43,638 with just under half of this being students who live in privately rented housing.<sup>18</sup>
3. Unlike many UK university areas, first year students in Belfast tend to have a preference for privately rented accommodation instead of university accommodation.
4. Despite the above, there is no centrally run housing rights training currently being provided to students in Northern Ireland.
5. Similarly, despite the coverage afforded to student areas in the run-up to St Patrick's Day, there is limited interaction between councils and students in dealing with accommodation issues.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. Many students in Northern Ireland are living in sub-standard accommodation.
2. The continual focus on anti-social behavior in the Holylands area detracts away from the wider issue at hand with the quality of accommodation in student areas like South Belfast.
3. Despite the legislation currently in place, there is little work currently being carried out at a council level to deal with landlords and agents who breach tenancy law.

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<sup>18</sup> Belfast City Council, *Belfast: A Learning City. A framework for student housing and purpose built student accommodation.* (Belfast, 2014)

4. Students have been at the forefront of campaigning for housing rights.<sup>19</sup>
5. Whilst many member unions have previously conducted campaigns on housing rights in order to educate their students, many students do not know their rights when renting privately.
6. Given the high concentration of students in the Belfast area, there's a need to build a true community partnership with the local council that provides a true forum for liaison between universities, students and local authorities.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should work with NUS UK and with local partners such as Housing Rights NI in the roll out of housing rights training to students across the province.
2. NUS-USI and its member unions should work with Belfast City Council, local residents and local authorities to establish a student community partnership that gives students and city authorities an opportunity to work together in resolving relevant issues, following best practice examples in cities such as Bristol and Manchester. This can also be used as a pilot for further roll-out in other student areas such as Derry~Londonderry and the Causeway Coast.
3. NUS-USI to work with member unions to lobby local authorities and local government to adequately deal with sub-standard student accommodation and to drive up standards in the sector.

**Tackling Homelessness (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. The number of people deemed homeless in Northern Ireland has increased by almost a third (32%) over the past five years.<sup>20</sup>
2. In 2016/17, nearly 12,000 households (individuals and families) were declared homeless.
3. There was public anger in December 2017 after Belfast City Council removed benches from Jubilee Square that were commonly used by rough sleepers.

**Conference believes:**

1. Not enough is being done to tackle the homelessness crisis in Northern Ireland.
2. There needs to be recognition that homelessness is about not having a suitable permanent dwelling as opposed to just being about sleeping rough.
3. The homelessness strategy being employed by the Housing Executive has had limited success and needs to be reviewed in order to make it more effective.
4. Organizations such as Simon Community and Shelter NI carry out great work in dealing with homelessness and offer opportunities for other people to get involved in their work.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should work with homelessness charities such as Simon Community and Shelter to promote volunteering opportunities to students.

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<sup>19</sup> <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/qub-student-wins-battle-over-letting-agents-fees-36428988.html>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.niauditoffice.gov.uk/publications/homelessness-northern-ireland-0>

2. NUS-USI should lobby the Government, Housing Executive and other relevant public bodies to do more to tackle the homelessness crisis in Northern Ireland.
3. NUS-USI and its members should lobby for more protection for homeless people, including publicly opposing actions like the aforementioned by Belfast City Council and lobbying for funding protection for homelessness charities.

### **Consent (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The law regarding the definition of rape in the UK is limited and not fit for purpose.
2. That sex education in Northern Ireland is inconsistent and both hetero and cis-normative

#### **Conference believes:**

1. That lack of standardised and diversified sex education has a detrimental impact on the social wellbeing of young people in Northern Ireland.
2. That consent, and education around the current law regarding rape are lacking and perpetuating a damaging culture

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. That NUS-USI should lobby for standardised and diversified sex education
2. NUS-USI should lobby for consent to become part of the curriculum
3. That NUS-USI should lobby for reform in the law regarding sexual assault and other areas relating to consent
4. That NUS-USI should begin a campaign with these aims and consult students for an evidence base with which to run this campaign

### **Supporting Student Parents and Carers in Further and Higher Education (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. Student parents and carers face additional pressures when in further or higher education due to the responsibilities that arise when supporting dependants
2. The exact numbers of student parents and carers in further and higher education are unknown
3. FEs and HEs need to make adequate arrangements to ensure students with dependants are fully supported in education

#### **Conference believes:**

1. It is essential to know the numbers of student parents and carers in further and higher education
2. Student parents and carers need additional support arrangements and flexibility in their studies
3. Student parents and carers need to be able to communicate the issues they are having with their student representatives to advocate on their behalf

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI work with member unions to launch a nation-wide student parent and carers survey to gather data on the needs of these students
2. NUS-USI will use the data collected in this survey to support member unions in advocating for student support agreements for student parents and carers, similar to the support agreements made for students with disabilities
3. NUS-USI will launch a national student and parents' network to provide a forum for support for student parents and carers

### **Organ Donation Opt-Out (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. That NUS-USI do not have an official stance on whether or not people should be automatically registered for organ donation or not. Organ donation is vital because around 5,000 people die each year in the UK in circumstances where they can become a donor, these are thousands of organs which are buried that could be used again by a different person to help save their lives.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. That viable organs should not be wasted as people die while they are on the waiting list. Each year approximately 200 patients in Northern Ireland are on transplant waiting lists. If all viable organs were used in transplantation, the waiting lists would be drastically reduced and the unnecessary deaths of waiting list patients would be reduced also.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. That NUS-USI should have a stance of automatic registration of organ donation, with an option to opt-out. The conference also resolves that NUS-USI lobby legislators to change the law so that the law reflects NUS-USI's stance and until this happens, NUS-USI should promote this stance by running campaigns and help Students' Unions run registration days to get people to register to donate their organs.

### **Cyber-bullying (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The lack of policy in the area of Cyber-bullying. Given the increased use of social media, there are more risks for young people to become targets or victims and even aggressors of Cyber-bullying.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. There is a lack of awareness and understanding on the topic of Cyber-bullying.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. That NUS-USI:
  - Provide guidelines on this issue
  - Adopt and promote a Cyber-Bullying Charter

- Work towards ensuring all officers, SU staff and student representatives are appropriately trained and informed in relation to the issue
- Ensure that information and resources on the identification, prevention, reporting and response of cyber-bullying are made available and promoted

## **LIBERATION ISSUES**

### **SRE (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The standard of age appropriate Sex and Relationship Education in the region is patchy and barely meets the bare minimum necessary at best, if it is even taught at all beyond a few squeamish sentences in a biology class.
2. Primarily, abstinence is taught as the only real option and scare tactics and guilt trips are used to caution teens into not engaging in sexual behaviour.
3. There is also no consideration given beyond heterosexual couples and that sex is primarily for procreation.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. Age-appropriate sex and relationship education should form part of the national curriculum at all levels of education. This will allow a consistent building of knowledge and understanding
2. SRE should be a dialogue that continues through life during and beyond education.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. To lobby government to make improvements to SRE at all levels of education into the national curriculum, as age appropriate.

### **Breast ironing (2019)**

#### **Conference commends:**

The hard work NUS-USI has previously done on lobbying Stormont for a change in Law on Female Genital Mutilation.

#### **Conference notes:**

Breast Ironing, where hot instruments are used to mutilate a girl's chest, is becoming a growing concern in the UK, where it is believed at least 1,000 girls in are at risk. Conservative MP Jake Berry and Home Office Minister Karren Bradley want to bring the debate to Westminster to make the practice illegal.

#### **Conference further notes:**

That an emergency forward was bought to USI congress by QUBSU, where it was passed. They now a policy to support the campaign of criminalisation of FGM in all its forms, including supporting the North.

#### **Conference believes:**

FGM, no matter in what form it happens, should be illegal and awareness of these practices is vital to help both present and potential victims seek support.

#### **Conference mandates:**

The NUS-USI President and Women's Officer to campaign for the criminalisation of Breast Ironing. They are also to promote awareness of FGM, and work alongside USI in this struggle.

### **Disabled students in NUS-USI (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

The work done to date by NUS-USI to raise awareness of disabled students' issues and to engage disabled students in the student movement.

#### **Conference notes with concern:**

That the NUS-USI Disabled Students Officer role has been vacant now for some time, and in this academic year there was no Conference for disabled students'.

#### **Conference further notes:**

That there is a distinct lack of policy specific to disabled students. No doubt exacerbated by the lack of an Officer or an effective conference to discuss the issues and policies relevant to disabled students.

#### **Conference mandates:**

1. That NUS-USI work with Member Organisations (MOs) and with disabled students' to urgently look at the issues faced by the disabled student community in the North.
2. That NUS-USI work with MOs to develop disability awareness campaigns that are easily transferable across all MOs, if they wish to roll them out.
3. That NUS-USI look for innovative ways to engage disabled students, recognising that a physical Conference is not always the most accessible forum for these students.

### **Disabled students' allowance and needs assessment (2019)**

#### **Conference condemns:**

The attack on the Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) by the UK Government, which will result in hardship, illness, and the death of UK domiciled students with disabilities.

#### **Conference notes:**

That the cuts to DSA have not been replicated by the Northern Ireland Executive, but Conference recognises the danger that the UK Government may in future try to force a further alignment of the welfare system across the UK.

#### **Conference further notes:**

1. That currently DEL is responsible for the administration and oversight of over £200,000 annually in DSA payments to 5 HE institutions.
2. That the current framework for Needs Assessment means that students are often not receiving the necessary adjustments until a considerable length of time after their initial assessment.

3. That any changes to an individual student's needs assessment mid-term causes significant delays and problems, which create huge issues around student health, safety, and retention.

**Conference mandates that NUS-USI :**

1. Work with Member Organisations and disabled students to take an evidence based approach to the issue of needs assessment reform.
2. That NUS-USI actively lobby and raise awareness with DEL the issues of needs assessment and the effect of delays in implementing reasonable adjustment and supports for disabled students.

**Gender neutral toilets on and off campus (2019)**

**Conference recognises:**

1. That Transgender and non-binary students face incredible barriers in society and in their education.
2. That transphobia is rife in our society, and that there is a lack of awareness

**Conference notes:**

The work of Member Organisations and the student movement on Trans\* rights to date, including work to implement gender neutral toilets on campus. Further, that these efforts are an important step towards creating an inclusive, understanding, and safe environment for all students regardless of gender identity.

**Conference mandates:**

1. That NUS-USI facilitate and support MOs to lobby for and implement gender neutral toilets across their campuses, not just in their SU facilities.
2. That NUS-USI work with other organisations to lobby for the implementation of gender neutral toilets across the public sector and in public places, recognising that gender identity does not begin and end at the boundaries of tertiary education campuses.

**Abortion guidelines for patients (2019)**

**Conference notes:**

Current legislation is currently being challenged in the Courts, but that recent changes to guidelines are not too dissimilar to the previous ones.

**Conference further notes:**

That when registering with a GP, even students from GB to not get the same access to services as they would expect.

**Conference believes:**

That women when registering at a GP in Northern Ireland are not fully aware of their reproductive rights. Since all the available leaflets are focused on GB rather than NI, or with very sparse detail, it is not easy to understand their rights until they happen to have a

pregnancy. We believe this adds unnecessary stress and is not helpful.

#### **Conference mandates:**

The NUS-USI President and Women's Officer to lobby Stormont and associated organisations for the creation of a simple health information leaflet which outlines current legislation and guidelines that could be given to women when they register at a GP surgery.

#### **Flexibility in assessment (2020)**

##### **Conference notes:**

- 1) That students in FE and HE are required to complete assessments in their respective courses, which could include examination, coursework, group work or other;
- 2) That different students have different preferences for learning and can work better under certain circumstances;
- 3) That the majority of courses only offer a singular form of assessment, universally applied to students;
- 4) That certain kinds of assessment may be an incompatible option for disabled students;
- 5) That students perform better academically in certain kinds of assessment, and poorer in other kinds;

##### **Conference believes:**

- 1) That students should be allowed to choose an assessment which offers the student flexibility and preference;
- 2) That colleges and universities should be expected to provide a learning experience, including assessment, that meets the needs of students;
- 3) That institutions rarely actively promote the alternative forms of assessment that are available to students, unless they are registered with their disability services;
- 4) That it would not be overly logistically different for academic staff to offer different kinds of assessment;
- 5) That choosing from a list of options would lead to better student satisfaction and better academic results;

##### **Conference resolves:**

- 1) To work with institutions to ensure students receive an education which is fit for purpose, which then allows them to be assessed in a way which is suited to the needs of the student;
- 2) To encourage academic staff to offer multiple options for any assessment to allow the student choice;
- 3) To do this at an early stage in the module to minimise additional stress;

#### **Ramifications of PIP (2020)**

##### **Conference notes:**

- 1) That Disability Living Allowance (DLA) was ended, and replaced with Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in Great Britain and later extended to Northern Ireland;

- 2) That this has led to a number of reassessments for disabled people;
- 3) That a large number of disabled people have either not applied because of changes, or had their applications rejected;
- 4) That thousands of people have had their cars or wheelchairs and equipment taken away from them

**Conference believes:**

- 1) That these reforms have been incredibly damaging for disabled people;
- 2) The application process and assessment process is deeply stressful and harmful for disabled people;
- 3) Disabled people are being unfairly attacked by the Government;

**Conference resolves:**

- 1) That Disabled Students Campaign write to the Minister for Communities and the Executive Office expressing their disapproving and condemnation of reforms to PIP;
- 2) To emphasise that the Government has a duty to provide proper, adequate welfare to disabled people and PIP does not currently provide this;
- 3) To express solidarity to any protests against PIP;

**Promotion of Institutional Disabled Support for International & GB Students (2020)**

**Conference notes:**

- 1) That disabled students from Great Britain or International countries are not entitled to Disabled Students Allowances (DSA);
- 2) That because of the reforms to DSA in Great Britain, institutions in Northern Ireland are now required to pay for any support for GB disabled students from their own internal sources;
- 3) That some institutions only have ad-hoc provision for international disabled students, determined on a case-by-case basis
- 4) That whilst the Equality Act 2010 does not extend to Northern Ireland, Institutions must provide reasonable adjustments for their students and staff;

**Conference believes:**

- 1) That all students, home and international, should receive access to the same levels of support;
- 2) That institutions should provide information about support they are eligible to at all stages of the student's course;
- 3) That institutions should have written policies on the support they will provide for all disabled students;

**Conference resolves:**

- 1) To encourage Institutions to have specific policies on disabled student support services for home and international students;
- 2) To ensure this information is widely circulated to all students who may need it;

**Guidance on benefits for Students (2020)**

**Conference notes:**

- 1) That some students are unaware that they may be eligible for some benefits, including Housing Benefit and Employment Support Allowance, depending on their circumstances;

**Conference believes:**

- 1) That students should be provided with accurate, up-to-date information on their eligibility for social security benefits;

**Conference resolves:**

- 1) To produce guidance which outlines in a clear and accessible format what benefits students may be eligible for, particularly those who already receive student finance;

**Disabled people in leadership (2020)**

**Conference notes:**

- 1) That the number of elected representatives who are disabled is extremely low;
- 2) The Stormont Assembly does not reflect the diversity of Northern Ireland including gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, or disability;
- 3) Disabled people face a huge number of barriers for being in positions of leadership;

**Conference believes:**

- 1) That disabled people should not be prevented from being in positions of leadership;
- 2) That programmes and initiatives which support and mentor disabled people are extremely useful in addressing the systemic barriers;
- 3) That diversity in positions of leadership leads to better decision-making;

**Conference resolves:**

- 1) To develop a workshop or similar event which specifically looks at and endeavours to address the underrepresentation of disabled people in positions of leadership;

**Extending the Equality Act 2010 to Northern Ireland (2020)**

**Conference notes:**

- 1) That the Equality Act 2010 does not extend to Northern Ireland;
- 2) That our equality laws are made up of a series of acts and regulations;
- 3) That these series of laws are now weaker than that of Great Britain's laws;
- 4) That section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 does not extend to schools;

**Conference believes:**

- 1) That our Equality laws should consist of one single, comprehensive act which strongly protects the rights of individuals, including disabled people;
- 2) That this law should apply to all public and private sector organisations, including schools;

**Conference resolves:**

- 1) To lobby all MLAs, especially the Executive Office and Department for Communities to extend the Equality Act 2010 to Northern Ireland, or create a law which is just as robust, if not more robust, than GB's Equality Act 2010.

**Ratification of UNCRPD in Ireland (2020)****Conference notes:**

- 1) That Ireland is the last member state in the European Union to not ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities;
- 2) That this important document protects the rights and dignity of disabled people internationally;
- 3) That Ireland has had over a decade to ratify the convention;

**Conference believes:**

- 1) That Ireland has already signed the Convention, but now must ratify it;
- 2) That the Irish Government must be held accountable for failing to ratify the Convention, despite making promises that they would;
- 3) That the rights enshrined in the Convention would dramatically improve the quality of life and protection for disabled people in Ireland;

**Conference resolves:**

- 1) To lobby Irish TD's and the Taoiseach to ratify the UNCRPD in 2017 as soon as possible;
- 2) To make a strong statement to support the provisions and ethos of the UNCRPD;

**Accessible Housing (2020)****Conference notes:**

- 1) That much of the housing in Northern Ireland, particularly in student areas is inaccessible for a number of reasons;
- 2) That disabled students find it difficult to find housing which is suitable for them in meeting their needs such as accessibility, budget, and location;
- 3) That it can be of greater financial cost to disabled students to find accommodation which is suitable for them;

**Conference believes:**

- 1) That disabled students deserve to live in accommodation which is accessible and of a decent standard;
- 2) That there is currently very little regulation for landlords to make their housing more accessible;
- 3) Disabled students should not be exploited nor used as a cash cow for rent costs;

**Conference resolves:**

- 1) To campaign for more availability for accessible housing for disabled students;
- 2) To write to councils in Northern Ireland demanding stronger regulation and scrutiny

of the accommodation landlords provide to tenants;

### **Accessible Activism (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

- 1) That activism is something which is to be welcomed from citizens and a great way to express a political viewpoint;
- 2) That the student movement has a proud history of being at the forefront of effecting change for social issues;
- 3) That this activism tends to take the form of marches, rallies, or speeches;
- 4) That this can be inaccessible for disabled people;

#### **Conference believes:**

- 1) Activism which is accessible should be promoted;
- 2) Disabled people should be allowed to lead and participate in activism without any barriers;
- 3) That activist events being organised by others should be mindful of those with disabilities;

#### **Conference resolves:**

- 1) To have an appointed access officer for NUS-USI's activist events;
- 2) To campaign on making activism accessible to everyone;

### **Repeal the 8th and Abortion Rights on the island of Ireland (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

- 1) That women & trans men are not permitted access to abortion in the North and South of Ireland, except for very limited circumstances;
- 2) That Article 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution prevents a woman from accessing reproductive healthcare;
- 3) That the Abortion Act 1967 does not extend to Northern Ireland;
- 4) Dozens of women travel every day to other countries in order to access healthcare;
- 5) That people are being harassed outside healthcare clinics by anti-choice protestors;

#### **Conference believes:**

- 1) That abortion should be free, safe, and legal;
- 2) That the Government should not be limiting the bodily autonomy of its citizens;
- 3) That forcing women to travel to another country to access healthcare is physically, emotionally, and financially difficult
- 4) That the Irish Government should hold a referendum on repealing the 8th Amendment;
- 5) That the Stormont Assembly should allow bodily autonomy to its citizens;
- 6) That people should not be abused, harassed or intimidated by anyone for accessing healthcare;

#### **Conference resolves:**

- 1) To support access to abortion;
- 2) To stand in solidarity with those who have been prosecuted for accessing reproductive healthcare;
- 3) To publicly campaign and support for free, safe and legal access to abortion;
- 4) To publicly campaign and support for the creation of legal buffer zones, which would protect people for entering healthcare facilities without fear of harassment;

### **Protection of Rights of Disabled People in a Post-Brexit Society (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

- 1) That the United Kingdom voted in a majority to leave the European Union;
- 2) That Northern Ireland and Scotland both voted to Remain, whilst England and Wales voted to Leave;
- 3) That the European Union currently provides a number of rights for disabled people;

#### **Conference believes:**

- 1) That the democratic wish of the people of Northern Ireland should be respected and upheld in any Brexit negotiations;
- 2) That if we are forced to leave, the rights of disabled people will be fully protected;
- 3) That there cannot be any dilution of the rights and protections disabled people currently receive;

#### **Conference resolves:**

- 1) To publicly lobby all MLAs, MPs, and other key stakeholders to protect the rights and protections of disabled people in a Post-Brexit Society
- 2) To monitor the effects of any Brexit and ensure politicians and decision-makers are held to account for any unsatisfactory effects;

### **Accessible Public Transport (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

- 1) That Disabled people are required to give 24 hours' notice for wheelchair access;
- 2) That wheelchair users should receive priority access as a result of the UK Supreme Court judgment;
- 3) That public transport in Northern Ireland can be at sporadic times with many difficulties for disabled passengers;

#### **Conference believes:**

- 1) That the 24-hours' notice requirement is hugely inconvenient and inaccessible;
- 2) Disabled passengers should not be discriminated against by public transport companies or its employees;
- 3) Disabled passengers should be permitted the same flexibility with travelling as any citizen;

#### **Conference resolves:**

- 1) To write to Translink NI calling for a more robust framework for disabled passengers;

- 2) To lobby for passengers to be more considerate and accommodating of those with additional access requirements;

### **Student Support for Disabled Students (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

- 1) That Disabled students face an additional number of barriers to access to FE and HE;
- 2) Many of these barriers are financial in nature, including hidden course costs, additional costs to living, transport, and bills;
- 3) HE Institutions currently do not publish a detailed summary of hidden course costs for prospective and current students;
- 4) The Competitions & Markets Authority (CMA) have outlined that Universities are required to produce a list of hidden course costs;
- 5) DSA does not cover many of the financial elements of studying as a disabled student. Of the few that do, it is based upon expenditure and reimbursement, which can be overly administrative for disabled students;

#### **Conference believes:**

- 1) That education should be a public good, including disabled students;
- 2) That education as a disabled student should not be hindered by the financial implications;
- 3) That students should be able to make an informed choice based on any hidden course costs;
- 4) This information should be easily accessible and clearly written;
- 5) That Universities and Colleges should be required to support their disabled students financially and pastorally;

#### **Conference resolves:**

- 1) To make NUS-USI lobby for a student access bursary for Disabled students;
- 2) To inform Universities and Colleges to produce a detailed list of their hidden course costs, including but not limited to, additional expenses, books, other learning materials, materials fees, specialist equipment, uniforms or other clothing required for work placements, field trips; accommodation and travel costs;

### **LGBT Rights and Israel (2020)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. That the State of Israel engages in Human Rights abuses against its minorities and those it occupies in the Palestinian Territories and Golan Heights
2. Israel partakes in the phenomena known internationally as "Pink Washing" which is the calculated flaunting of LGBT rights in an area, region or State that is designed to cover up or "wash" human rights abuses.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. LGBT rights are a fundamental part of any equal and diverse Society

2. That LGBT rights in Israel or the Occupied Palestinian Territories should not be detrementaded because of the Palestinian cause however LGBT rights should also not be used to hide Israel's Human Rights abuses.
3. The State of Israel's LGBT Rights record should be commended and celebrated.
4. Israel uses malicious and manipulative rhetoric to shift focus from the plight of the Palestinian people in order for the International community to focus on the LGBT rights record of the Palestinian Authority and Terrorist Organization Hamas which is then used to create a false judgement of the Palestinian people as a whole.
5. Use of "Pinkwashing" for any purpose should be condemned, particularly in regards to the Israel - Palestine conflict

**Conference resolves:**

1. To declare solidarity with the oppressed people of Palestine and work with Al Qaws (the rainbow) for gender and sexual diversity in Palestinian society.
2. To oppose the use of "pinkwashing" by the Israeli State and Foreign Ministry.
3. Condemn the abuse of LGBT rights within the occupied Palestinian territories by the so called "Palestinian Authority" and the Terrorist organisation Hamas
4. Progress a dialogue to discuss the merits of Israel's LGBT rights whilst maintaining a firm stance against the Human Rights abuses of the State of Israel.

**Engagement with LGB and T People (2020)**

**Conference notes:**

There are an increasing number of transgender people studying in Northern Ireland.

**Conference further notes:**

There is a lack of understanding between LGB and T people.

**Conference believes:**

That transgender student issues are different to mainstream LGB issues, as it is gender orientation, not sexual orientation.

**Conference resolves:**

For NUS-USI to promote and raise awareness of transgender issues and recognise the need for transgender student peer support with in LGB and T societies.

**Marriage Equality (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Conference notes that the Marriage Order (Northern Ireland) 2003 states that there is a legal impediment to marriage if the parties are of the same sex.

**Conference recognises:**

1. Conference recognises that the current Marriage Order (Northern Ireland) 2003 discriminates against LGBT people. Conference further recognises that changing to Marriage Order (Northern Ireland) 2003 to allow parties to be of the same sex does not weaken the institution of marriage – on the contrary, it strengthens it.

**Conference resolves:**

2. To mandate the NUS-USI regional executive to strongly campaign for marriage equality to ensure that the ban on same sex marriage and mixed sex civil partnerships in Northern Ireland is removed.

**Trans inclusivity (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. The trans community experiences some of the highest rates of mental health conditions (over 80% in Northern Ireland), almost half (40%) have attempted suicide.

**Conference believes:**

1. That long waiting lists, inappropriate questioning, denial of treatment and enforcement of outdated stereotypes make medical transition an unnecessarily distressing period.
2. In addition to difficulties accessing services transgender/non-binary people are frequently the victims of harassment and violence
3. Despite frequently being victims, trans people are often excluded from the conversation on gender based violence
4. All people should be able to access public services, education and employment. They should be able to walk down the street or use public bathrooms without the fear of harassment or violence.

**Conference resolves:**

1. That NUS-USI must ensure that it is working to be inclusive of the Trans community in all of its work, not just within the LGBT campaign
2. That NUS-USI works with relevant organisations to contribute to the work already being done to further trans rights in Northern Ireland
3. That NUS-USI in its entirety stands in solidarity with its trans students, and works to educate and commit to bringing about the societal change needed to end the suffering of the transgender community.

**Supporting International Students with Disabilities in Further and Higher Education (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. International students already face significant barriers when they are studying in Northern Ireland
2. These barriers can be even more monumental for international students with disabilities
3. Local students with disabilities can apply for Disabled Students' Allowance through their Education Authority, but this is not available for international students

**Conference believes:**

1. International students are currently not receiving the same support as local students in terms of managing their disabilities
2. No students should ever have to personally pay for the additional costs that arise with having a disability
3. FEs and HEs charge higher fees to international students, therefore, they should be receiving at least the same support as local students receive

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should work with all member unions to gather data and case studies on the numbers of international students registered in each institution with a disability
2. NUS-USI should also work with all member unions to gather data on the additional personal cost international students are currently facing due to not having access to Disabled Students' Allowance
3. NUS-USI should campaign nationally for FEs and HEs to use some of the revenue raised from the higher fees international students pay to create a programme similar to DSA for international students

**LGBT Mental Health Crisis (2021)****Conference notes:**

46.9% of LGBT people in Northern Ireland have considered suicide.  
25.7% of LGBT people in Northern Ireland have attempted suicide.  
35.3% of LGBT people in Northern Ireland have self-harmed.  
70.9% of LGBT people in Northern Ireland have suffered from depression.  
48% of trans people in Northern Ireland have attempted suicide.  
90% of trans people in Northern Ireland have considered suicide.

**Conference further believes:**

There is a mental health crisis in the Northern Irish LGBT community.  
Fragmented anti-discrimination legislation, marriage inequality, anti-LGBT rhetoric and policies from leading political figures and limited protection under current legislation contribute to the current mental health crisis.

**Conference resolves:**

For the NUS-USI LGBT Officer to campaign for awareness of mental health and for the LGBT Officer to campaign on tackling the mental health crisis.  
That the NUS-USI LGBT Officer must campaign against the reduced rights of LGBT people in NI

**Supporting Societies (2021)****Conference notes:**

That there are 11 member unions in NUS-USI.  
That, as far as NUS-USI is aware, there are only 3 active LGBT Societies in member unions.

**Conference further believes:**

That LGBT societies act as a contact point for many LGBT students exploring their identity in a new surrounding.  
That LGBT societies are essential in every union as they act as a point of support and

inclusion for students.  
That it is often difficult to establish societies due to logistical issues.

**Conference resolves:**

That the NUS-USI LGBT Officer assist member unions in establishing LGBT societies, however the Officer holds no responsibility for the running of these societies.  
That the NUS-USI LGBT Officer may act as a point of contact between LGBT students in a union and their union representatives and/or staff.

**Tackling the Blood Ban (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

Legislation from a lifelong ban on gay/bisexual men and sex workers donating blood previously existed in Northern Ireland.  
This previous lifelong legislation was redacted on September 1 2016, where the Health Minister changed the legislation for Northern Ireland to a one-year deferral.  
However, within the rest of the UK there is more freedom within their respective legislations with people being allowed to donate blood after as little as 3 months of being in sexual contact with their partner(s).

**Conference further believes:**

That the blood ban is effectively permanent due to its very nature.  
That there is no scientific basis behind the blood ban.  
The ban itself has proven to be a contributing factor towards mental illness of those affected by the ban.

**Conference resolves:**

NUS-USI will lobby the government for reform of current legislation that is not discriminatory towards gay/bisexual men as well as sex workers.  
NUS-USI will lobby to try and gain the same level of support as the rest of the UK.  
If Northern Ireland manages to achieve a reform to 3 months, NUS-USI continuing to lobby for further change.

**Gender Recognition Reform (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

That current legislation for changing gender in Northern Ireland the rest of the United Kingdom exists under the Gender Recognition Act (2004).  
That there are proposed changes to the Scottish Gender Recognition Act which the Scottish Government has launched a consultation on.

**Conference further believes:**

That the existing legislation is not far-reaching enough and acts as a barrier to transitioning.  
That waiting lists of up to and exceeding three years is excessive and outrageously inefficient.  
That the lack of legislative progress is contributing to the mental health crisis reported in the trans community.

That the Scottish government's review of GRA (2004) has found the legislation insufficient.

**Conference resolves:**

To support campaigns in Northern Ireland which aim to achieve gender recognition reform.  
To lobby government to act on gender recognition reform.

**Lobbying for Gender Neutral Bathrooms in Student Unions (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

Accessible Bathrooms exist in all institutions.

Over the last number of years, many SUs have lobbied their Council and University to have Gender Neutral Bathrooms introduced, which improves the wellbeing and level of equality for trans students.

Due to there being a lack of suitable bathroom facilities this is actually a breach of the Equality Act 2010 which covers discrimination over those affected.

**Conference further believes:**

There should be a sufficient number of Gender Neutral Bathrooms on campuses for trans, non-binary, intersex and questioning students.

There should be a sufficient number of Accessible Bathrooms on campuses for people with disabilities.

Whilst efforts to increase the number of Gender Neutral Bathrooms are welcomed, efforts must be made to ensure that this is not only achieved by changing the signs on the doors of Accessible Bathrooms.

The need for Gender Neutral Bathrooms and Accessible Bathrooms must be given equal priority, and efforts must be made to ensure proper planning is done by estates to satisfy the need for both, in existing buildings and in any new developments.

The lack of gender neutral bathrooms can contribute negatively towards mental health, well being, and in a large number of cases has actually caused increased gender dysphoria.

The lack of gender neutral bathrooms also contributes towards isolation of the students involved as due to the facilities not being available for them, they have to often leave the building, or some even choose not to go at all which has a bad impact on their mental and physical health.

**Conference resolves:**

NUS-USI should work with the Disabled Students' Officer, LGBT+ Officer and member unions to create an effective strategy to lobby universities to ensure adequate planning is put into the introduction of Gender Neutral Bathrooms across all of campus.

NUS-USI should work with the Disabled Students' Officer and LGBT+ Officer to gather information from other SUs across the UK and Ireland on how to ensure there are sufficient number of Accessible Bathrooms and Gender Neutral Bathrooms across all campuses.

Gender Neutral Bathrooms and Accessible Bathrooms ensure accessibility for students with disabilities and those who are members of the trans community, and universities should take planning on this matter very seriously.

**NUS-USI Part-Time Trans Officer (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

Over a third of trans university students have experienced negative comments or behaviour from staff in the last year.

Young Northern Irish trans people are currently facing a mental health crisis with 50% having self-harmed and 48% have attempted suicide and 90% have considered both.

Two in five trans people accessing general healthcare felt that staff lacked understanding of specific trans health needs whilst 62% undergoing medical intervention felt that had to wait too long for their appointment.

The only group in Northern Ireland more marginalised than the transgender population were travellers. In the last year 41% of trans people experienced a hate crime.

#### **Conference believes:**

Many institutions in Northern Ireland do not have sufficient policies, training or support in place for transgender students.

Safety on campus is a concern and access to facilities is a concern for many trans students.

The trans community is currently facing a resurgence in negative media attention, scaremongering, ridicule and discrimination that has a negative impact on trans people's lives.

Some of the LGB community actively exclude and discriminate trans people and LGBT officers that are not trans are typically unaware of the issues affecting trans students.

The voice of cisgender people (i.e. those who are not trans) does not equate to a trans voice, even when they have educated themselves on trans issues.

#### **Conference resolves:**

To elect a part time trans officer to specifically represent transgender, non-binary and intersex students and those questioning their gender identity.

To immediately hold an extraordinary conference to enable the election of a trans officer for the 18/19 academic year.

To develop a campaign to improve the experiences of transgender, non-binary, intersex and questioning students in further/higher education and to campaign for healthcare and legal reforms.

### **Annual Student Bloc (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

That Belfast Pride 2017 included the first ever registered student bloc, with over 100 students taking part.

#### **Conference believes:**

This annual student presence at Belfast Pride acts as a show of support and an empowering symbol for LGBT+ youth, due to its history of resistance and representation of LGBT+ people.

That is it is important to show the student movements solidarity with Pride and equal rights movements.

#### **Conference resolves:**

That NUS-USI should have a registered student bloc Belfast Pride, organised by the LGBT Officer.

### **Accessibility to Conference and Other Named Events (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The registration to NUS-USI Disabled Students' Conference is not accessible in its current format.
2. The registration to other NUS-USI events are not always accessible to all disabled students.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. That the application form to conference and events should be available online as to aid those who find travelling difficult whether that be due or impairment, inaccessible transport or other reason.
2. Application forms need to be available in various formats; such as large print options, alternative background colours for those with dyslexia, accessible to those with visual impairments.
3. The application to conference and events currently not being accessible leads to potentially a lack of interest and opportunity to attend these events.
4. The lack of interest or opportunity to attend these events may have a direct impact on the Disabled Students' campaigns and the external perspective overall of NUS-USI as an organisation.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. All interactions with NUS-USI should be possible in person, online and in various formats as to aid the above.
2. NUS-USI should ensure that all events are accessible, including, but not limited to, registration and conference.
3. NUS-USI need to invest in software to make application forms to conferences and other events more accessible.

### **Accessible Disabled Students' Support in HE and FE (2021)**

#### **Conference notes**

1. Disabled Students' Support is provided to some students in Higher Education and Further.
2. Application for this support can sometimes be very stressful and difficult, particularly when trying to gather adequate amounts of medical evidence.
3. Students must reapply for the same student support each year for the duration of their course.
4. International students are not eligible for Disabled Students' Support, as it is provided from the Northern Ireland Executive, and often face significant barriers in trying to get accessibility support for their degrees.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. Disabled Students' Support applications should be accessible and easy to understand.
2. Support should be made available to assist disabled students in completing application forms for DSA.
3. Students should not have to reapply for DSA annually, with the exception of providing further evidence if conditions worsen and more support is needed, as this adds additional stress, financial strain, and pressure on top of their studies.
4. If an international student needs support due to their impairments, they should be afforded the same resources as NI students without any personal cost, as currently the cost of additional support has to be paid by the international student themselves despite already paying significantly higher fees.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI and the Disabled Students' Officer will work with member unions to ensure that adequate measures are put in place to minimise the stress induced by applying to Disabled Students' Support, such as making forms more accessible and adequate assistance with applications.
2. NUS-USI and the Disabled Students' Officer will work with member unions to lobby Student Finance Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Executive to reach a model of support that does not require students to apply for DSA annually for the same levels of support.
3. NUS-USI and the Disabled Students' Officer will work with member unions to ensure universities adequately support disabled international students, as no one should be at a financial disadvantage in order to get support they are legally entitled to.

**All Inclusive Bathrooms Should Not Be in Place of Accessible Bathrooms (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Accessible Bathrooms exist in all institutions.
2. Over the last number of years, many SUs have lobbied their Council and University to have Gender Neutral Bathrooms introduced.
3. Quite often, Accessible Bathrooms are turned into Gender Neutral Accessible Bathrooms.

**Conference believes:**

1. There should be a sufficient number of Accessible Bathrooms on campuses for disabled people.
2. Whilst efforts to increase the number of Gender Neutral Bathrooms are welcomed, efforts must be made to ensure that this is not only achieved by changing the signs on the doors of Accessible Bathrooms.
3. The need for Gender Neutral Bathrooms and Accessible Bathrooms must be given **equal priority**, and efforts must be made to ensure proper planning is done by estates to satisfy the need for both, in existing buildings and in any new developments.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should work with the Disabled Students' Officer, LGBT+ Officer and member unions to create an effective strategy to lobby universities to ensure

adequate planning is put into the introduction of Gender Neutral Bathrooms across all of campus.

2. NUS-USI should work with the Disabled Students' Officer and LGBT+ Officer to gather information from other SUs across the UK and Ireland on how to ensure there are enough Accessible Bathrooms and Gender Neutral Bathrooms across all campuses.
3. Gender Neutral Bathrooms and Accessible Bathrooms ensure accessibility for disabled students and those who are members of the trans and non-binary community, and universities should take planning on this matter seriously.

### **Disabled Students Liberation survey (2021)**

#### **Conference notes**

1. There is a lack of research around disabled students in NUS-USI.
2. It is very difficult to carry out and conduct surveys which aid the Disabled Students' Campaign.
3. The Disabled Students' Network is currently much smaller than the number of disabled students registered in FE and HE institutions, and in order to have more effective campaigns, it will be useful to research and ask disabled students of their experiences within educational institutions and society more generally.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. The use of surveys, questionnaires and qualitative/quantitative research will improve the effectiveness of the Disabled Students' Campaign and increase participation in the Disabled Students' Network in Northern Ireland.
2. The NUS-USI Disabled Students' Officer should carry out research during their term to improve understanding of the experiences of disabled students.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. The Disabled Students' Officer is responsible for conducting research and building networks throughout their term and collective qualitative and quantitative data will improve their reach and understanding of the students they represent.
2. The Disabled Students' Officer will run liberation surveys throughout their term, with assistance in promoting these surveys from any relevant officers in member unions, and NUS-USI staff to facilitate networking and the construction of research which will help solidify and increase effectiveness of the Disabled Students' Campaign.

### **Supporting Students when Applying for Disability Support (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. The application for disability benefits, such as Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), Personal Independence Payments (PIP) and Housing Benefit, can be an extremely difficult and arduous experience.
2. Many students have either lost their disability benefits completely, or had their income significantly reduced, due to Welfare reform, Disability Living Allowance change to PIP, and the introduction of Universal Credit.
3. There are not many resources available to assist students when applying for PIP, or to represent students when appealing decisions made by the Department for

Communities, therefore many student either do not apply for support they are entitled to or they do not appeal decisions that reduce or remove their income.

4. In recent years the suicide rates of disability claimants have raised from 21 to 43% in seven years.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. Disabled students should be fully aware of the benefits they may be entitled to, and they should have adequate support throughout their application process.
2. Disabled students are facing the adverse, disproportionate impact of welfare reform, and now struggle to complete their studies.
3. NUS-USI need to invest in training for staff to adequately support students when applying for disability benefits, or appealing decisions that may be unfair.
4. Research needs to be conducted into the numbers of students not claiming support they are entitled to and how many students have lost their support due to welfare reform, as action needs to be taken to lobby on behalf of these students.
5. Students are missing class due to the face-to-face assessment of PIP.
6. PIP assessment requires equipment (if you would like the assessment recorded) is very difficult to source and expensive to buy. It would be useful if institutions could provide or signpost to where students can access this and borrow for free.
7. Emotional support could be provided for students going through PIP assessments.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should work with member unions that do not have staff that provide similar support.
2. NUS-USI should lobby the Northern Ireland Executive and the Department for Communities to introduce disability benefits that are fit for purpose, as PIP has been proven to be discriminatory and unworthy.

#### **Accessible Events at Institutions (2021)**

##### **Conference notes:**

1. Careers fairs, fresher's fairs held by students' unions provide a plethora of support to students in terms of guidance, advice and social benefit.
2. These events are not accessible to all students (including but not limited to those with sensory/physical impairments)
3. Due to this these students lose out in the overall experience which is a situation of inequality.

##### **Conference believes:**

1. It may be impractical to ask businesses to come back another day, however there should still be access to a satisfactory level of resources/experience regardless.
2. One way of making these events more accessible is to introduce "quiet times" where event capacity is significantly reduced.

3. There should be a separate quiet area provided with resources from the main event so that students facing these barriers can still engage as well as experience the events.
4. There needs to be space provided for wheelchair users/students with mobility issues.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI will produce resources and campaign with member unions to promote a sense of equality in events to make them more accessible for disabled students.

**Supporting students with chronic illness/disability with local health services (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Students are travelling across Northern Ireland to other health trusts other than Belfast.
2. This is because of waiting lists.
3. Students cannot transfer to another trust due to losing places on waiting lists.
4. Trusts can transfer students to other health trusts for interim health services.

**Conference believes:**

1. As a result of the above, there is added stress to students with an impact on mental and physical health/wellbeing.
2. This exacerbates the likelihood of the student suffering academically.
3. This travelling takes away from students experiencing the student lifestyle and building friendships due to continuous travelling.
4. There is a financial burden created due to the travelling.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI will lobby local health services in order to push for change in the support provided to students facing chronic illness/disability.
2. NUS-USI will lobby with member unions to improve the awareness for students in seeking support with health services, and/or providing interim health support.

**Support for Disabled International Students (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Students with a dual title of 'International' and 'Disabled' are struggling to access relevant services.
2. Where there is disconnect between a student's school and the relevant support service, this

gap needs to be bridged.

3. International Students find it difficult enough to transition to a university in another country and should have additional support to navigate these services due to language barrier, or lack of translation services.

**Conference believes:**

1. There needs to be more of an integrated approach to Disabled International Students.
2. The disconnect between the services for International and Disability need to be bridged.
3. There is a clear detrimental effect on the students impacted.
4. Alternative forms of assessment need to be provided to help international students.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI will work with member unions to develop or initiate support and procedures to resolve this issue.
2. NUS-USI will work with member unions to try and find a balance between Disabled Students Support and International Students support for those students that come under dual title.

**Reforming 'Fit to Sit' for Disabled Students (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. Students who are declaring themselves as 'fit to sit' by putting pen to paper have no recourse should illness and/or episode occur during the exam.
2. Not every school can provide alternative forms of assessment due to the type or nature of the assessments.

**Conference believes:**

1. The 'fit to sit' rule is not fit for purpose for disabled students in its current form.
2. There should be a clause that supports disabled students in cases such as these.
3. Disabled students should be allowed to invoke extenuating circumstances and/or be offered a first sit resit.
4. Students making these decisions aren't always fit to make these decision, and often sit the exam under pressure of additional work in further semesters.
5. All schools within institutions should endeavour to offer alternative forms of assessments (when requested, and are feasible)

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI will work with member unions to work towards reforming the fit to sit policy.

2. NUS-USI will work to support students affected by the fit to sit policy.
3. NUS-USI will work towards ensuring that member unions provide support to students who are subject to the fit to sit policy.

### **Support for students with Caring Responsibilities (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. There are demands placed on disabled students with caring responsibilities that are not placed on all students.
2. There are additional financial constraints and impacts for students with caring responsibilities.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. This can have an impact on these students' academic work.
2. These students don't get to experience the student lifestyle.
3. There needs to be flexibility in assessment for students whose caring responsibilities impact their academic work, as currently flexibility is only given in relation to their disability.
4. There needs to be flexibility and understanding for leaving lectures and university early due to these caring responsibilities.
5. Disabled students with caring responsibilities need support from their member union in order to find relevant benefits and entitlements to help support them.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should work with member unions to provide a creche if this possible,
2. NUS-USI should work with member unions to ensure that an equal level of support is considered for the additional constraints these students face by member unions.
3. NUS-USI should lobby for change in support for disabled students with caring responsibilities.

### **University accessible bathrooms must include Changing Places facilities (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. Accessible Bathrooms exist in all institutions.
2. For 250,000 disabled people across the UK, standard accessible bathrooms do not meet their needs.
3. Muscular Dystrophy UK have evidence that young disabled people and students are getting surgical intervention because of the lack of Changing Places toilets.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. There should be a sufficient number of Accessible Bathrooms on campuses for all disabled people – namely Changing Places facilities.

2. Whilst efforts to increase the number of access Bathrooms are welcomed, efforts must be made to ensure that this is not only achieved by changing the signs on the doors of Accessible Bathrooms.
3. The need for Changing Places Accessible Bathrooms must be given **equal priority** to regular accessible bathrooms, and efforts must be made to ensure proper planning is done by estates to satisfy the need for both, in existing buildings and in any new developments.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI should work with the Disabled Students' Officer and member unions to create an effective strategy to lobby universities to ensure adequate planning is put into the introduction of Changing Places Accessible Bathrooms across all of campus.
2. NUS-USI should work with the Disabled Students' Officer and Officer to gather information from other SUs across the UK and Ireland, and the Changing Places Consortium on how to ensure there are enough Changing Places Accessible Bathrooms across all campuses.
3. Changing Places Accessible Bathrooms ensure accessibility for disabled students who have complex needs, or who are unable to get out of their wheelchair without the use of a hoist, and universities should take planning on this matter seriously.

#### **Campaign to Repeal the 8th amendment to the Irish Constitution (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. That people are not permitted access to legal abortion in Ireland except for very limited circumstances;
2. That Article 40.3.3 of the Irish Constitution prevents access to reproductive healthcare;
3. At least 10 women travel every day to other countries in order to access healthcare;
4. Unknown numbers risk up to 14 years in prison by using safe but illegal abortion pills.
5. The Citizens' Assembly recommended unrestricted access to abortion up to twelve weeks.
6. A referendum to Repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment, and permit the development of legislation for abortion access, is expected to be held in 2018.

#### **Conference believes:**

1. That abortion should be free, safe, and legal;
2. That the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment should be repealed
3. That the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly should be enacted by legislation
4. That the Irish Government should hold a referendum on repealing the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment as soon as practicable;
5. That people should not be criminalised for exercising bodily autonomy.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. To publicly campaign and support free, safe and legal access to abortion;
2. To publicly campaign in support of repealing the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment;

3. To publicly campaign for the implementation of the recommendations of the Citizens' Assembly;
4. To work with organisations such as Alliance for Choice, the Abortion Rights Campaign, The Coalition to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> Amendment, and Students for Choice to further the campaign to repeal the 8<sup>th</sup> amendment;
5. To stand in solidarity with those who are forced to access legal abortion healthcare outside of their home country, or to break the law by using safe but illegal abortion pills.

### **Support for the campaign to decriminalise sex work (2021)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. Sex work refers to escorting, lap dancing, stripping, pole dancing, pornography, web-camming, adult modelling, phone sex, and selling sex (on and off the street).
2. Currently in Northern Ireland the exchange of sexual services for money is not illegal for the seller, but associated activities (soliciting in a public place, kerb crawling, operating a brothel) are.
3. Currently the purchase of sexual services is illegal in Northern Ireland, criminalising the buyer
4. Financial reasons, and any criminal record gain due to the criminalisation of sex work, are usually cited as the main reason for staying in sex work.
5. The 2015 NUS Student Sex Work project report showed that significant numbers of students are turning to sex work in order to avoid debt and cover basic living expenses.
6. In 2012 the WHO produced guidelines recommending the decriminalisation of sex work
7. In 2014 Department of Justice research found the 98% of sex workers surveyed believed the criminalisation of purchase would put them in danger.
8. In August 2015, Amnesty International voted to adopt policy to protect human rights of sex workers. The resolution recommended that they develop a policy that supports the full decriminalisation of all aspects of consensual sex work. The policy will also call on states to ensure that sex workers enjoy full and equal legal protection from exploitation, trafficking and violence.
9. There is an ongoing judicial review of the criminalisation of purchase of sexual services in Northern Ireland.
10. Decriminalisation is the legal model preferred by many sex worker led organisations, including Sex Workers Alliance Ireland

#### **Conference believes:**

1. Sex work is work - Sex work is the exchange of money for labour.
2. With the rise in living costs, the increase in tuition fees, the attack on maintenance grants and the slashing of benefits for disabled people, it is highly likely that some students will do sex work alongside their studies.
3. The criminalisation of sex workers' clients has been proven to lead to further distrust of the police amongst sex workers, a willingness of sex workers to engage in more risky behaviour/safety procedures out of desperation.
4. Decriminalisation would ensure that sex workers feel able to report unsafe clients or violence at work without the worry of criminal repercussions, work together for safety, and that those who wish to leave the sex industry are not left with criminal records as a result of their job.

5. Following the criminalisation of purchase of sexual services sex workers in Northern Ireland have been subject to increased violence, both from clients and vigilante groups.
6. Human trafficking, coercion, and violence are rightfully illegal, and evident in many contexts not only the sex industry.

**Conference resolves:**

1. To support and publicly campaign for the full decriminalisation of sex work.
2. To support the ongoing judicial review on the criminalisation of purchase of sexual services in Northern Ireland
3. To resist any future introduction of the criminalisation of purchase of sexual services in Great Britain
4. To support efforts to decriminalise sex work in Ireland
5. To support and be led by sex worker led organisations, such as the Sex Workers Alliance Ireland and the English Collective of Prostitutes

**Decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland (2021)**

**Conference notes the following:**

1. Abortion is available in Northern Ireland only where there is a risk to the life or long term mental or physical health of the pregnant person, which excludes cases where there is fatal foetal abnormality, or a pregnancy as a result of sexual crime. In most circumstances, abortion is a criminal offence punishable by a maximum sentence of life imprisonment under the 1861 Offences Against the Person Act. The 1967 Abortion Act was never extended to Northern Ireland.
2. On 10 February 2016, the Northern Ireland Assembly voted against reform to allow lawful access to abortion in cases of fatal foetal abnormality and sexual crime. As a result, the abortion law in Northern Ireland remains the most restrictive in Europe and incompatible with minimum human rights standards.
3. The Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service has initiated criminal proceedings under sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act for unlawful procurement of abortion and abortifacient medications in a minimum of three separate cases since 2016. An April 2016 case resulted in a suspended sentence of 3 months' imprisonment, and in January 2017 a couple received formal cautions for attempting to procure an abortion with Mifepristone and Misoprostol.
4. In October 2017, the Department for Women and Equalities announced that it would cover the cost of treatment for pregnant persons who travel from Northern Ireland to England for abortion care. As a result, pregnant persons lawfully resident in Northern Ireland will now be offered free abortions at the point of access if they travel to England to exert that right.
5. Scotland's Chief Medical Officer announced in October 2017 that she will enable persons, for whom it is clinically appropriate, to take Misoprostol to complete an abortion at home. This change brings Scotland in line with French and Swedish health policy, which allows patients to take one or both abortion pills at home.

**Conference further notes with great concern that:**

1. In early 2017 the PSNI implemented a crackdown on the procurement of Mifepristone and Misoprostol to induce abortion.

2. These medications appear on the World Health Organisation's list of essential medicines and are already used in NI hospitals for miscarriage management and a very limited number of lawful medical abortions. However, Mifepristone and Misoprostol are regarded as 'poison' under the 1861 OAPA for the purpose of criminalising abortion.
3. Although people who travel from Northern Ireland to England to access a termination are eligible to receive free abortion care on the NHS as of November 2017, the cost and logistics of arranging transport, accommodation, time off work and childcare continue to present practical barriers to accessing abortion outside Northern Ireland.
4. Obtaining an early medical abortion by purchasing abortion pills online is a method of abortion which is frequently relied upon by persons who face additional barriers when travelling to access abortion, or find it impossible to travel altogether. Victims and survivors of domestic violence, people with disabilities and people with caring responsibilities can find themselves in this position.
5. The criminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland deters people from accessing aftercare, for fear of being reported to the PSNI if they disclose that they induced an abortion with medication.

**Conference believes that:**

1. Individuals who make the decision to terminate a pregnancy should be supported and cared for in Northern Ireland, rather than disempowered and isolated by having to travel elsewhere to do so.
2. Access to reproductive healthcare is a student welfare issue: students can face crisis pregnancies which have an adverse effect on their personal and academic lives. The inaccessibility of safe and legal abortion in Northern Ireland places an undue burden on these students in an already distressing situation.
3. Abortion should be governed by the same robust regulatory and ethical frameworks as all other medical procedures.

**Conference thus resolves:**

1. To campaign for reproductive justice for all and the removal of barriers to abortion access in Northern Ireland.
2. To work with organisations such as Alliance for Choice and Gender Jam in advocating for abortion reform in a manner which is inclusive of women, trans men, non-binary and gender fluid people.
3. To support the introduction of legislation which supersedes Sections 58 and 59 of the Offences Against the Person Act 1861, and has the effect of ensuring full decriminalisation of abortion in Northern Ireland.
4. NUS-USI Women's Conference will support legislation to decriminalise all aspects of abortion healthcare, including: to save the life of the pregnant person, to preserve physical and mental health, in cases of sexual crime, where there is a diagnosis of a fatal foetal abnormality, for socio-economic reasons, and at the request of the pregnant person.
5. To support the campaign for reproductive justice and decriminalisation of abortion worldwide.

**Opposing the Two Child Tax Credit Cap and Rape Clause (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

1. The Two Child Tax Credit Cap is contained in the Welfare Reform & Work Act 2016 and restricts child tax credits to only the first 2 children in a household, if any of those children are born after 6<sup>th</sup> April 2017. Any family usually entitled to child tax credits (soon to be the 'child element' of Universal Credit) will no longer get those tax credits for their third or subsequent child;
2. There are exceptions to the Two Child Tax Credit Cap, including the measure commonly known as the 'Rape Clause' contained in Social Security (Restrictions on Amounts for Children and Qualifying Young Persons) Amendment Regulations 2017 (Statutory Instruments 2017 No. 376);
3. The Two Child Tax Credit Cap will mostly affect women, as women make up the majority of primary carers for children in the UK. This policy is therefore discriminatory on the grounds of sex or gender;
4. It is well-known and well-documented that abusers often use pregnancy, poverty and financial dependence as means of establishing control over victims. This policy will enforce and facilitate that control;
5. Some women are also restricted in their ability to say no to sex, or insist on contraception, for cultural or religious reasons;
6. The criteria set out in order to qualify for an exemption under the Rape Clause requires that a woman no longer lives with the perpetrator. This fails to understand that much sexual violence occurs within domestic relationships;
7. Section 5(1) of the Criminal Law (Northern Ireland) Act mandates that all serious crimes must be reported to the police and therefore the implementation of this policy has significantly different consequences for women in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK, meaning women may face criminalisation for a delay in reporting;
8. The lack of access to abortion services due to Northern Ireland's restrictive law means that this policy will have significantly different implications for women in Northern Ireland compared to the rest of the UK;
9. Many students are already parents and will be impacted by this policy either now or in future.

**Conference believes:**

- 1) The 2-child cap does not appreciate the fact that not all women have control over their reproductive destiny. Domestic violence often takes the form of a spectrum of sexual coercion and restriction of reproductive choices. For many women in abusive situations, the choice of whether or not to have children is out of their hands.
- 2) Many UK families are struggling to cope with the high cost of rising energy bills, food and the burden of unmanageable debt. A report by Save the Children analysing the needs of 5,000 families with incomes of up to £30,000 a year found that to ensure their children get enough food to eat, nearly two-thirds of parents skip meals, go into debt, avoid paying bills and put off replacing worn out clothing. This policy will exacerbate already strained conditions for poorer families.
- 3) Many victims take years before they are ready to open up and talk about sexual violence that they have suffered. Forcing them to do so before they are ready, in order to access welfare, is profoundly cruel. Forced disclosure can exacerbate PTSD and mental health issues related to sexual assault, and will heighten the sense of shame and isolation felt by victims.
- 4) The NI executive is currently failing in its legal duty to adopt a strategy setting out how it will tackle poverty, social exclusion and patterns of deprivation based on objective need, as provided for in section 28(e) of the NI act 1998.

**Conference resolves:**

1. To publicly oppose the Two Child Tax Credit Cap and Rape Clause;
2. To highlight the particular impact of the Two Child Tax Credit Cap and Rape Clause on people living in Northern Ireland
3. To resist any future introduction of similar welfare caps;
4. To work with organisations such as Reclaim the Agenda and Women's Aid in opposing the Two Child Tax Credit Cap and Rape Clause.

### **NSoA (2021)**

#### **Conference believes:**

1. That self defining women apprentices often experience sexism on a daily basis, in the work place, in education and in wider society
2. That the experience of women apprentices may differ widely from the experience of students in institution only based courses

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. That NUS-USI women's committee shall reserve a place for a female apprentice and encourage more apprentice engagement with the women's campaign
2. That NUS-USI women's campaign must engage with NSoA's women in apprenticeships liberation group and consider apprentice experience in all the work they do.
3. That NUS-USI women's campaign hold 15% of its events at accessible times for apprentices to be able to attend.

### **Supporting student parents to stay in education (2021)**

#### **Conference believes:**

1. In 2009 NUS completed the first study into student parents, the Meet the Parents Report
2. Since Meet the Parents was published NUS has produced a series of briefing for unions on the subjects it covered
3. The vast majority of student parents are women
4. Education cuts are hitting the most vulnerable the hardest
5. The changes proposed by the welfare reform bill will have a disproportionately negative impact on single mothers
6. NUS' Meet the Parents Report showed that 60 per cent of survey respondents having thought about leaving their course. This figure rises to 65 per cent for lone parents.
7. When asked what one thing would most improve their experience as a student parent, half of the responses to Meet the Parents related to funding

#### **Conference further believes:**

1. For decades the women's movement has campaigned for better access to childcare
2. Cuts to support services and nurseries are seen as soft cuts
3. The government's economic changes are reliant on a social model that sees women do the majority of childcare

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. To produce a resource for education officers and students unions on the impacts cuts to budgets are having on student parents
2. Work with unions to ensure there is flexibility in courses for those with caring responsibilities
3. Work with unions to ensure that childcare is available over holidays
4. Continue to campaign for childcare funding in FE to come from a dedicated pot and not be discretionary
5. To continue to work with groups in the third sector such as Gingerbread.
6. That the NUS – USI Women’s campaign will empower and provide students’ unions with resources to improve the representation of student parents on their campus

### **Fighting government and institutional ignorance on rape (2021)**

#### **Conference believes:**

1. It is vital that an understanding of the facts surrounding rape and rape culture are embedded throughout our criminal justice system and our government.
2. A current lack of understanding in the justice system and in society is still preventing the appalling rape conviction rate of 6% from rising.

#### **Conference further believes:**

1. Proposals from government ministers such as Ken Clarke’s proposal to give rapists shorter jail terms in return for early guilty pleas are a dangerous threat to women’s safety.
2. Feminist outrage and lobbying by women’s organisations played a part in the scrapping of this proposal for convicted rapists shortly after it was announced, as it also did with the earlier proposal to grant anonymity to people accused of rape.
3. Proposals such as this and the subsequent comments made by MEP’s are part of a wider lack of understanding of violence against women from a deeply sexist government.
4. The Northern Ireland Executive and the PSNI have demonstrated a number of times that they have dangerously ignorant and misinformed attitudes towards the crime of rape, which have resulted in outrageous information leaflets and campaigns being displayed across the country.
5. Similar proposals are likely to emerge in the future, and in the face of such ignorance, women’s organisations need to stand together and be a strong voice against the government.

#### **Conference resolves:**

1. For the NUS-USI Women’s Campaign to respond strongly to any future government proposals on rape that would be damaging to survivors’ wellbeing and women’s safety, and to be prepared to organise a national campaign against any such proposals.
2. For the NUS-USI Women’s Campaign to join with other women’s rights organisations to call on the government to change its attitude towards rape and rape survivors.
3. For the NUS Women’s Campaign to produce resources on the myths surrounding rape, and to encourage women activists to lobby their local MLA’s and MPs to recognise and oppose ignorance over rape in the Executive and Westminster.
4. To lobby the PSNI to create an informed and victim sensitive set of resources and campaign that will stamp out the rape blame culture that is so prevalent within the law and institutions.

## **Women in Leadership (2021)**

### **Conference notes:**

1. Women make up the majority of the student population but are underrepresented in positions of power and decision making in the student movement.
2. This includes course representatives, sabbatical officers, and delegations to national decision-making conferences.
3. Despite accounting for 45% of the academic workforce, women make up only 20% of professors in UK universities and only 17% of vice-chancellors.
4. Black, LGBT and disabled women are marginalised further, with only 1.4% of professors in the UK being black and minority ethnic women.

### **Conference believes:**

1. The issue of women's inequality and underrepresentation will not be solved simply by getting more women into positions of leadership.
2. This is particularly important when talking about the underrepresentation of women in university management positions – a vice-chancellor who supports an increase in tuition fees or outsources to private companies who use zero-hour contracts is not a vice-chancellor who works for the betterment of and supports women students, even if they happen to be a woman.
3. Women in leadership is fundamentally about radically altering the structure of power, how we conceptualise power, and how it is used.
4. There are several strands to tackling the underrepresentation of women in students' unions. Structural barriers such as reserving places for women and further marginalised women in democratic structures and conference delegations are extremely important; as is changing the organisational culture, which includes (but is not limited to) tackling lad culture and everyday sexism, in addition to ensuring students' unions are accessible and child-friendly; and individual capacity building for women students, including public speaking workshops are run and protecting (and creating) women-only spaces on campus. These are all ways to start tackling the issue of women's underrepresentation in positions of power.
5. Black, LGBT and disabled women face further oppression, and any policies, schemes and programmes aimed at increasing the representation of women must take this into account and target these women in particular.
6. Intersectionality is at the core of the NUS-USI Women's Campaign. The first ever NUS-USI Women's Committee has been elected, and is proudly intersectional. We must ensure that any work we do on women in leadership has intersectionality at its core.

### **Conference resolves:**

1. To support students' unions in improving their democratic legitimacy by improving the number of women in leadership positions as well as the diversity of women in leadership.
2. For a women-only session at NUS-USI summer training to be compulsory, where women officers can share their experiences with one another whilst having the political experience of the power of a women-only space.

## **ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

### **Climate Change (2019)**

#### **Conference notes:**

1. Climate change presents a significant danger for the future.
2. All people and organisations should seek to be aware of their individual impact on the environment and to adjust themselves accordingly where that impact is excessively wasteful.

#### **Conference commends:**

The work that has been done by NUS-USI and that is currently being done to ensure the organisation is run efficiently and with its impact on the environment in mind.

#### **Conference mandates:**

The Regional Executive Committee to conduct a review of the events and work of NUS-USI to determine how we can reduce the impact of the organisation on the environment.

The review should include, but not be limited to

- Assessing the impact of Conference and other events
- Initiatives undertaken by member Students' Unions to address climate change
- Assessment of the impact of how NUS-USI works

#### **Conference further mandates:**

The review to include recommendations as to how NUS-USI could better tackle issues around climate change on an on-going basis.

### **No drilling at Woodburn (2019)**

#### **Conference opposes:**

Plans to drill in Woodburn forest near Carrickfergus, destroying a pristine natural habitat and threatening the pollution of a major water reservoir which serves the greater Belfast area.

#### **Conference condemns:**

1. That underhand tactics used by drilling company Infrastrata and its legal threats against peaceful protesters.
2. Heavy-handed tactics used by the police and failure of local politicians and statutory bodies to ensure that necessary planning, safety and environmental measures are rigorously adhered to.

#### **Conference calls:**

For an immediate and outright ban on fracking.

#### **Conference notes:**

That mass community mobilisation and direct action such as blockades defeated plans to frack near Belcoo, County Fermanagh, and believes that these tactics will be key to preventing drilling at Woodburn.

**Conference resolves:**

That NUS-USI will give its full support to the community campaign to resist this development.

**Environmentalism (2021)**

**Conference notes:**

That climate change poses a very real and severe threat to the future of our planet.

**Conference notes with concern:**

That prominent voices in Northern Ireland politics have recently been dismissive of this important issue and have irresponsibly denied that climate change is man-made.

**Conference believes:**

That urgent and radical action is required to stop climate change.

**Conference resolves:**

1. NUS-USI must provide strong leadership on environmental campaigning.
2. NUS-USI should emphatically challenge any future attempts by politicians to trivialise the issue of climate change.
3. NUS-USI must set an example by operating in an environmentally responsible way and support and encourage member unions to do likewise.