

NUSUK and International Relations

**A Short History of NUSUK's
International Work 1922 - 2019**

NUS has from the outset been an outward looking and internationally engaged national union that seeks work in solidarity with fellow students across the world, to share experience and learn from others. We know that it is only through collectivism and collaboration we can tackle pressing global problems.

1. NUS is founded to represent students internationally

It was the desire to establish positive, outward looking international relations that was the catalyst for the creation of NUS. In the aftermath of the First World War there were a number of student led initiatives that sought to bring students, as future leaders, together to debate, discuss and ultimately understand each other, and, it was hoped build a better world. It was this spirit of internationalism that inspired student leaders to create a national organisation in England and Wales, Scotland already had a national body created in 1889. It was the French national union the Union Nationale des Etudiants Francais (UNEF) that called a conference in Strasburg in 1919, Francis Sidney Milligan represented Birmingham University Guild of Students at the conference, he returned determined to establish a national union, expressing the hope that: *"by establishing an intellectual brotherhood among the students of the world, from who will naturally be drawn the rulers of another generation (it) will contribute greatly towards the peace of the world"*¹. The inaugural conference of what was known as the Confederation Internationale des Etudiants (CIE) was held in August 1921 in Prague, the constitution stipulated that representation should be through national student representative bodies and so it was that NUS was created in February 1922, the founding President, Ivison S. Macadam was a true internationalist, eventually becoming the Director at the Institute of International Relations (Chatham House). His quote, that drives our international work to this day *"if the students of today are co-operating then there is hope for tomorrow"*, is painted on the walls of our London offices, a direct connection to our international roots.

¹ The Mermaid, March 1920 a report of a meeting of the Birmingham Guild of Undergraduates held on 9 February 1920



L-R: Ivison S. Macadam NUS' founding President; a meeting of the CIE at Oxford in 1925 and the CIE logo.

International tensions and geo-politics often intervened to stretch the idea of "hope for tomorrow", NUS withdrew from the CIE in 1937 after the organisation refused to condemn anti-Semitic attacks in Romania. During the war NUS hosted an international student council made up of student exiles and service personnel, to discuss the future of a student international.

2. NUS and the Cold War

It was this group of student leaders who agreed that 17 November should be designated as "International Students Day" in memory of Czechoslovakian students and academics executed by the Nazis following protests against the occupation. In 1945/6 a series of conferences established the International Union of Students (IUS) on a strong commitment to building a better world and combatting fascism. Hope was soon dashed when it became clear that the IUS was being used as a tool for Soviet foreign policy. NUS left in 1951, and by 1952 was working with SFS (Sweden) to create the International Students Conference (ISC). In effect the student world was divided on cold war lines. Both organisations put effort into amplifying the student voice and NUS in particular became involved with international student service and other voluntary activity whilst also running a successful travel operation that allowed students to travel and experience the world.



L-R: The first publication celebrating International Students' Day; Jan Opletal whose death at the hands of the Nazis triggered anti-fascist riots at his funeral; the logo of the International Union of Students.



L-R: Stanley Jenkins (NUS President 1949 – 1951) along with Olof Palme of SFS Sweden he helped to found the International Students Conference

In 1967 the ISC was found to have been predominantly funded by the CIA, in 1968 the crushing of the Prague Spring by Soviet tanks led to NUS distancing itself from any form of international body, preferring instead to develop bi-lateral relationships with other national unions.

3. Bi-laterals, Solidarity and European Co-operation

NUS had always campaigned against apartheid from its inception, it now also took on a stronger association with the anti-apartheid movement and campaigned on human rights in Chile, Iraq and gave support to Soviet Jewry. During the 70's delegates from NUS attended IUS meetings and meetings of the World Federation of Democratic Youth (again Soviet funded) but only as observers, delegates also attended bi-annual European meetings that brought national bodies in Europe together. Again, these proved frustrating as NUS challenges to human rights abuses in some Warsaw pact countries discussed was dismissed with the "western" unions denounced as imperialist war mongers.



L-R: Boerclay Bank poster credited with creating the "final straw" which led to Barclay's withdrawal from South Africa; Poster against the South African Cricket tour; Mike Terry former General Secretary of NUS who served as AA General Secretary until the release of Nelson Mandela.



Activist Angela Davis addressed the World Federation of Democratic Youth in East Berlin 1973

This frustration led to the creation of the Western European Students Information Bureau (WESIB) in 1983. NUSUK were founder members with SFS (Sweden), NSU (Norway), UNEF-ID (France) and SHI (Iceland), observing the meeting were representatives from VVS/UNES (Switzerland), SYL (Finland) and OH (Austria). The idea was to support each other in exchanging ideas and capacity building activity. With the breakup of the Soviet Union and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact new national unions were eligible for membership and in 1989 the name was changed to the European Students Information Bureau (ESIB), led by two NUSUK Directors Sarah Adams and Richard Hill the organisation adapted its structures to support the development of the new member national unions. With the Bologna Agreement in 1999 that established the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and greater student mobility, it was clear that there was a

WESIB

need for European level advocacy. It was in 2007 that ESIB evolved into the European Students' Union (ESU) allowing NUSUK a direct line into policy making that would help shape the EHEA and ultimately UKHE.

4. Tackling Global Issues



L-R: Logo of Global Student Voice the latest initiative to collaborate beyond continental boundaries; Announcing the "Bergen Declaration" on global student voice in 2015 at BM70, Bergen.

To celebrate its 90th year NUSUK hosted a Global Student Leaders Summit in London in 2012. Delegates identified education as a public good, sustainability, social justice and peace as areas on which national student organisations could co-operate, seek to make a difference and campaign together for lasting, progressive change enabling students to shape the future of education and create a fairer society. The initiative was taken forward with the ESU International Solidarity Working Group.

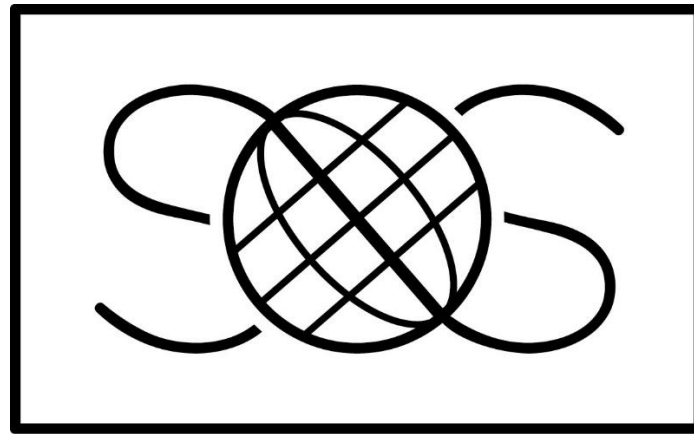


Members of the ESU International Co-operation Working Group in Warsaw 2015

In 2015 NUSUK was a signatory of the Bergen Declaration that identified key areas of student co-operation at a global level and represents the latest attempt to create international student collaboration. NUSUK is an active supporter of the Global Student Voice initiative. Its wider international focus has also been expressed by support for the creation and development of the Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA) and continued participation in the structures of the Association of College Unions International (ACUI), both of which will take on greater importance in a post-Brexit environment as the UK seeks to develop new partnerships beyond the EU.

NUS's sustainability team has become increasingly active internationally since 2008. Recognising that like many areas important to the student body, sustainability challenges are global, and will require global cooperation to solve we've been building relationships with like-minded sustainability and education student groups, membership bodies and charities around the globe. In 2008, we co-founded Students Organizing for Sustainability (SOS) to bring together student groups globally – to facilitate collaboration on research, campaigns and communications, to help increase capacity, and to forge a loud student voice on sustainability at a political level.

Since founding in 2014, SOS has members from all six continents. There's been huge desire from the tertiary education sector to see it succeed. However, we haven't had any resources and there's been no driving force to help nurture relationships and achieve our goals.



STUDENTS ORGANISING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

This is about to change. Through relationships built through SOS, NUS-UK and DSF in Denmark and NUS-UK have recently submitted an application to the Danish government to establish SOS as a formal organisation – we're going to have resources and time to really foster good relationships with members, reach more student groups and help us achieve those original goals. We're talking to the UN Environment programme about going into partnership with them, to lead their youth development programme. We will launch the new organisation at an event on March 2019. USI, the Irish NUS, will be the first member to join the alliance.



Rosie NUS Wales Women's Officer, Rebecka Stenkvis ESU Committee, Shakira Martin, VP Further Education, Piers Telemacque, VP Society and Citizenship at the launch of SOS in 2014

Our active work with ESU and SOS as well as that with the CSA and ACUI and Global Student Voice represents NUSUK's continued tradition of making sure the student voice is heard, listened to and acted upon at a local, national and international level. The worrying rise of authoritarian governments advocating policies based on xenophobia and racism which dismiss the value of education (recognising its threat to their position) means that our active commitment to internationalism is as important now as it was in 1922.



NUSUK delegation to ESU Board Meeting 70 in Gdansk, Poland

