

#whenstudentslead



WHEN STUDENTS LEAD

Choosing your issues.

2019 General Election campaign briefing

Choosing Your Issues

Use this briefing for advice and information on choosing your issues for a general election campaign.

What issues should we campaign on?

Deciding which issues you would like to focus on is a key part of your General Election strategy.

The issues you choose will influence the extent to which you are able to rally both students and other allies behind your campaign. The more people you mobilise, the more power you have when speaking to the election candidates.

The NUS 'When Students Lead' [manifesto](#) has been launched and contains the main issues that we will be campaigning on for this election. This could give you some ideas of the issues you would like to focus on.

Key things to consider when choosing your issues include:

- Your power in the election ultimately comes from students' voting and swinging elections. Registering students to vote should therefore be a key part of your campaign throughout, as it demonstrates the power of your campaign.
- Who has the power? There is no point in running a campaign aimed at General Election candidates if MPs do not have influence over the issue. Choose issues that MPs have power over – if you are unsure, email policy@nus.org.uk.
- What are people's personal experiences? Strength is in numbers when it comes to this election but you also want dedicated campaigners. Work on campaigns which students have real experience of and their passion will shine through.

Listening action

A 'listening action', where you seek out students' views in a structured manner, is an effective way of going about choosing your issues.

You can use this method both to choose which policy issues you would like to focus on, but also to develop your own custom choices.

The advantages of a listening action are:

- Provides an opportunity to recruit supporters by ensuring you are focusing on what students care about.
- Helps you to narrow down your asks from a topic such as housing to a specific issue such as tenants' rights.
- Allows you to recruit people directly affected by the issue to play a leading role.

Running an effective listening action

To be effective, a listening action needs to be proactive and systematic. You shouldn't expect students to come to you! Methods include:

- Door knocking on student halls / neighbourhoods
- Approaching students in café / dinner / nightclub queues
- Approaching students as they come out of the library, gym or lectures.
- Asking clubs or society chairs for a few minutes of time at their meetings to talk to their members about what they care about.

When you are speaking to students, always keep a look out for students who may be keen to play a more active role in the campaign. See

the 'Building your team and mobilising support' briefing for further information on setting up follow up meetings, or 1:1s.

Listening action example

Here is an example of the listening action process. N.B. you may not want to start with a specific topic but with an open discussion with students about what they care about.

- Find your topic. This can be as wide and broad as you want. For instance, poverty.
- Go out on campus and in your local area armed with your issue. Ask them what their experiences of poverty are and why it frustrates them.
- Listen. People will be really keen to tell you what makes them angry. It might be that the student finance termly loan system leaves them with almost no money at the end of the month.
- Once you've spoken to lots of students or local residents, you will have a greater understanding of the specific problems within the wider issue of poverty.
- Contact those you've spoken too. They shaped the issues that you want to take forward so it's essential that they come on board with the campaign!

Who else should we involve?

Clubs and societies within your union are a great source of campaigning ideas and can be very effective at mobilizing students. Think about societies such as the LGBT, feminist or other popular societies and how you can involve them when you are deciding which issues to prioritise.

If you have more than one officer at your union, involve them all in choosing your issues. For example Liberation officers may be able to mobilise groups of people who have personal experience of an issue, a very powerful tool in your campaigns. The more support from officers you can build at this stage, the more momentum your campaign will build.

How does it fit in with your democratic structure?

As a students' union or an officer team you may have identified certain priority campaigns for the year already.

However think about the strengths of the 'listening action' method outlined above and how you might include it in your General Election campaign.

You may also want to consider how you can include the democratic process in choosing your issues, for example by narrowing down the options through a listening action and then putting the shortlist to a student wide vote.

The more people you involve in your campaign throughout, the more support you can build and the more you can demonstrate to candidates that students are a force too powerful to be ignored at this General Election.

Next steps

Plan your own listening action to inform your union's choice of campaign issues.

Get in touch

If you have any questions or would like further information, contact policy@nus.org.uk and be sure to post anything that you do on [Slack](#)!