

NUS Wales Conference 2019

Final proposals

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Living Wage Motion for NUS (Wales)

Zone: Union Development

Proposed by: Swansea University Students' Union

Conference believes:

1. The current minimum wage set out by the government is not sufficient to properly subsidise students during their time at university.
2. As of April 2018, the minimum wage for those aged 16-17 is £4.20, 18-20 £5.90, 21-25 £7.38 and £7.83 for those over the age of 25.
3. By April 2019, the minimum and living wage is set to rise.
4. As evidence shows many students struggle with the cost of living, NUS Wales' 2015 "Pound in your Pocket" survey found many students must work or take on personal debt to support their study.
5. Around 55% of students working 0-8 hours a week feel they struggle with their course due to work commitments, with close to 70% of students who work more than 25 hours a week feeling they struggle with their course due to work commitments.
6. Students also have high levels of personal debt beyond their student debt
7. Close to 50% of undergraduate students have personal debt ranging from overdrafts to payday loans.

Conference further believes:

1. This is an area where Students' Unions across the country have a responsibility and an ability to take action.
2. Concerns over debt and money, often linked to socio-economic background, shouldn't be something which inhibits a student's ability to study.
3. Current government legislation has not gone far enough to address these problems.
4. The current structure of the minimum wage is insufficient to address these problems.
5. The age structure represents a form of discrimination which disproportionately affects students.

Conference resolves:

1. That Students' Unions across the country should pay the national living wage to all students in place of the minimum wage, regardless of age – this is currently set at £7.83 per hour.
2. Furthermore, that Students' Unions should increase the wage paid to SU staff in line with increases set out by the government.
3. That NUS should campaign to make every Students' Union across the country a Living Wage employer.

Rent Retainer Motion for NUS (Wales)

Zone: Welfare

Proposed by: Swansea University Students' Union

Conference believes:

1. That many Landlords charge some rent over the summer to "save" the house for the tenants.
2. That despite this, many students live in terrible conditions.
3. That many students do not know their tenancy rights.
4. That summer retainers are not compulsory, they are put on by landlords, even though in many cases students wouldn't be able to live there in the first place due to repairs.

Conference further believes:

1. That rent retainers are unfair and disproportionately affect lower-income students and care leavers.
2. That cost of living is one of the main factors stopping students from lower-income backgrounds going to University.

Conference resolves:

1. To lobby the Welsh Government and Housing Minister Julie James AM, to abolish rent retainers.
2. To lobby the NUSW to provide information on students letting rights to all students across Wales.

NUS Wales Motion on reaching out to campuses

Zone: Society and Citizenship

Proposed by: Swansea University Students' Union

Conference believes:

1. That there are a large number of campuses in Wales, with the majority being affiliated to NUS Wales.
2. These universities are not all active and engaged within NUS politics.
3. Furthermore, NUS Wales sends campaign material to Students' Unions across the country, however, many Unions do not use this material effectively or don't have time to fully understand the campaign.

Conference further believes:

1. That NUS Wales aims to run good quality campaigns, which benefit students across the country and address issues that need resolution.
2. However, this Union further believes that these campaigns are not always run effectively due to the limited time commitment and resources available to the individual unions in Wales.
3. Campaigns across the country would improve if Unions were to hold events with a representative of the campaign or NUS Wales, which would allow for the campaign material to be used effectively and launch a campaign on campus.

Conference resolves:

1. That NUS Wales creates the policy, then a member of the NUS Wales Executive and/or someone who's part of the campaign travels around Wales visiting all Students' Unions to launch the campaign at each one.
2. NUS Wales should create a travel fund/bursary for NUS Executive/Campaign Members to travel around Wales to achieve this.
3. Furthermore, that NUS Wales works with all Students' Unions to create launch events for the campaigns to advertise the good work NUS Wales are doing and encourage Union members to engage with the campaign.

NUS Wales Student Housing Campaign

Zone: Welfare

Proposed by: NUS Wales NEC / University of Wales Trinity St David Students' Union

Conference believes:

1. That every student and learner in Wales has the right to good quality housing and accommodation, regardless of provider, throughout the entirety of their time in post-16 education in Wales.
2. Poor quality student accommodation or housing is one of the key inhibitors of academic success and positive mental health and wellbeing.
3. 90% of students live in privately rented accommodation, university-owned halls or private halls (Save the Student, 2018).
4. 44% of students struggle to keep up with their rent payments with 45% noting that accommodation costs have a detrimental effect on their mental health (STS, 2018).
5. The average weekly rent in Wales is £122, while the average maintenance funding works out to be £139, leaving many students in Wales just £17 per week to live on from maintenance support.

Conference further believes:

1. The increased cost and poor value for money accommodation offering for students across the UK has an undoubted effect on retention of students by the university due to being priced out of their studies and/or the knock on effect this has on mental health.
2. There are many examples of students having to pay 12 months of rent on a lease when only occupying and utilising a property for circa 30 weeks of the year.
3. The vast majority of students are not in full time and/or high paid employment, and this must be considered within leases to students.
4. A national, grass-roots level inquiry into student housing should be carried out by UK and/or devolved governments or sector organisations.
5. Tighter, fairer and better regulation of the student housing sector is needed to avoid further manipulation of students - this regulation must be informed by students as partners within the process and in close partnership with NUS.

Conference resolves:

1. NUS Wales should lobby universities, local authorities, UK and Welsh govt representatives and other colleagues/partners to achieve the following: A fairer economy for student accommodation, which sees a reduction of rental fees and/or an improvement in maintenance support.
2. To better inform students of their rights prior to searching for private rented accommodation and offer a guidance/advice service which is easily accessible by all to provide clear support.
3. NUS Wales to work in partnership with stakeholders to conduct localised student accommodation and housing surveys on an annual basis in order to ensure that private landlords and commercial providers are delivering a value for money service for students and to identify areas of improvement, concern and good practice.
4. NUS Wales to collate this data and interpret to provide a national picture for Wales, allowing stakeholders to remain informed of the developing picture of student housing and accommodation and call for changes as appropriate.

NUS Wales Divest Barclays Campaign

Zone: Society and Citizenship

Proposed by: University of Wales Trinity St David Students' Union

Conference believes:

1. That fossil fuels are a major contributor to climate change and that by dramatically reducing their usage would have a significant beneficial effect in the efforts to reduce global warming.[1]
2. That climate change has racist [2], sexist [3] and classist[4] connotations, which whilst adding to the complexity of the issue at hand also highlight the need to address climate change multilaterally.
3. That Barclays Bank is a major financial contributor to fossil fuels, with approximately £15,653,000,000 (£15bn) invested in the fossil fuel industry [5], notably in controversial initiatives such as the North Dakota Access Pipeline [6] and fracking in Ryedale, Yorkshire.[7]
4. That Barclays is a major stakeholder in the UK Higher Education sector[8], investing in multiple HE institutions throughout Wales and the wider UK and as such, should be taking the views of its fellow sector stakeholders, students, into account when using our sector's finances to fund other initiatives.

Conference resolves:

1. That NUS Wales supports Students' Unions in Wales in opening a dialogue with their institutions about the ethical (or otherwise) nature of their corporate banking and finances.
2. That NUS Wales supports the People & Planet 'Divest Barclays' campaign[9], to lobby institutions to divest from Barclays in order to pressurise them into withdrawing their financial backing of the fossil fuel industry.
3. That NUS Wales liaises with other sector stakeholders (such as HEFCW and Welsh Government) to raise awareness of these issues within the wider sector, thus increasing pressure on Barclays and the fossil fuel industry from as many positions as possible.

References

- [1] <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2019/jan/15/immediate-fossil-fuel-phaseout-could-arrest-climate-change-study>
- [2] <https://peopleandplanet.org/blog/2019-02-11/gogreen19-climate-change-racist-issue>
- [3] <https://psmag.com/environment/fixing-sexism-at-the-intergovernmental-panel-on-climate-change>
- [4] <https://www.damemagazine.com/2018/08/09/the-environmental-movement-has-a-classism-problem/>
- [5] <https://theecologist.org/2018/oct/16/boycott-barclays-while-it-fails-fracking>
- [6] <https://twitter.com/CarolineLucas/status/836553203567165441>
- [7] <https://frackfreeryedale.org/fracking-company-is-barclays-bank/>
- [8] <https://www.barclayscorporate.com/sector-expertise/public-sector/education.html>
- [9] <https://act.peopleandplanet.org/efforts/divest-barclays/lookup/new>

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