

Sections Conference 2019

Motions





Purpose of this document

The work of the Sections is determined by policy passed at Sections Conference. This document contains motions that have been submitted by Constituent Members. These motions are subject to compositing and may be moved by the Steering Committee at their discretion.

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Mature and Part Time Students

Motion 101: Support for a National Education Service

Proposed by: Eden Ladley, NUS LGBT+ Campaign

Seconded by: Natalia Mole, NUS NEC

Zone: Education

Conference Believes

1. The current system of marketised education in the UK does a massive disservice to mature and part-time students. The rise in fees makes further and higher education a poor “investment”, which can put off mature students who often must make difficult choices about their education and vocational future.
2. Since 2010, the funding of public education has become a lot more difficult for mature and part-time students, which has led to a fall in the number of mature and part-time students in further and higher education.
3. Part-time education should be better supported not just by student finance organisations, but also by universities and colleges. It is often the best format of studying for disabled students and students with caring responsibilities.
4. In 2017, the Labour Party announced a vision of a National Education Service. This vision was of public education as a cradle to grave system of equipping people to advance their own futures and develop personally.

Conference Further Believes

1. The marketing of “the student experience” as overwhelmingly youth-oriented and as a step to get a career is negative to approaching education as a lifelong endeavor which people should be able to access at any age and in different modes of study.
2. A National Education Service-style format of public education would be much more inclusive of mature and part-time learners than the current system. It should be possible for students to study at a variety of levels alongside work, caring responsibilities etc.

Conference Resolves

1. To support the concept of cradle-to-grave public education, free at the point of delivery, funded by taxation.
2. To oppose cuts to adult education, with a focus on defending access for working class people.
3. To encourage mature and part-time student groups to discuss radical models of funding lifelong education.



Motion 102: Mature Students are 'Students' Too

Proposed by: Adrian Ellis, Leeds University Union

Seconded by: Flavia Pessoa Seraphim, Leeds University Union

Zone: Education

Conference Believes

1. Labelling students as 'mature students' is stigmatising.
2. Whilst the number of overall applications to Higher Education continue to rise, the number of mature student applications since 2008 has fallen. This unnecessary marginalisation contributes to the stigma faced by students, acting as a barrier to a collaborative educational environment.

Conference Resolves

1. To change the branding of people as 'mature students', and a person as a 'mature student'. Instead, for people to be referred to as 'students', or, if referring to an individual person, a 'student'.
2. To challenge Universities to stop the use of the 'mature students' label in external communications.
3. We do not challenge the categorisation of students for procedural purposes, metric analysis, or for any other necessary function.



Motion 103: For Student Unions to facilitate a Family Friendly Study Space in their Academia.

Proposed by: Kelly Madden, Sheffield Students' Union

Seconded by: Lilian Jones

Zone: Union Development

Conference Believes

1. There are currently 1.3 million mature students in the UK.
2. The majority of mature students are parent students and this number is increasing as we see more non-traditional students attending university.
3. Even with this increase, Universities have not been able to increase their support of the nontraditional students and university libraries and study spaces are not child friendly environments (Nuffield Foundation , 2018).
4. A report conducted in 2012 stated that some students were un able to bring children into the library which limited their time and encouraged the feeling of "not-belonging" to the academia (Moreau & Kerner, 2012).
5. Students with parental responsibilities are less likely to graduate than their childless counterparts (Petit, 2014).
6. Family Friendly study spaces have been introduced in colleges across America, such as Portland State (Petit, 2014), Bingham Young University (BYU Library , 2018) and Long Beach State (Kiley, 2018), and have been a success with the parent students.

Conference Further Believes

1. Parents are inevitably put at a disadvantage as they do not have the same access to educational facilities as the standard school leaver.
2. Family friendly study spaces will improve the student experience for parent students and make them feel included.
3. This family friendly study space will give parents more freedom in accessing the library and resources after school and in the weekends.
4. This will increase their access to resources, study environments, and overall student experience, making parent students feel valued and apart of the academia.

Conference Resolves

1. To encourage all Students' Unions to facilitate a family friendly study space for parent students who attend their University



Postgraduate Students

Motion 101: A fair deal for Postgraduates Who Teach

Proposed by: David Evans, Durham Students' Union

Seconded by: Jessica Oshodin, King's College London Students' Union

Zone: Education

Conference Believes


1. Many postgraduates are engaged in the teaching of undergraduate and some postgraduate taught students, and the marking of their assignments within their institutions.
2. In 2012-13, NUS conducted a survey and associated report of postgraduates engaged in teaching ("Postgraduates Who Teach") to examine their perception of their conditions.
3. National Conference 2018 saw the passing of motion 'HE104 – Quality of Teaching' which, though focused on provision for undergraduates, resolved to "develop more effective support mechanisms for postgraduate students engaged in teaching activity".
4. How such teachers are trained in preparation for delivering teaching varies wildly between institutions, and often within institutions.
5. These postgraduates are often some of the most dedicated teachers at their institution, working hours long beyond those they are paid for.
6. Such postgraduates are frequently contracted on casual terms and lower rates of pay than other members of University staff delivering the same level of educational experience and of a similar level of expertise.
7. Income from teaching may make up a vital element of financial support for some postgraduates, in particular during long research degree programmes.
8. Whilst the University and Colleges Union (UCU) currently extends free membership to postgraduates who teach, union negotiations regarding their pay and conditions often fall outside of the scope of national pay bargaining.

Conference Further Believes

1. We know there are national and local issues with the pay and conditions of postgraduate teachers, but information on the scale of the problem is disparate.
2. The report created by NUS in 2012-13 and associated recommendations are helpful, but did not go far enough in critically examining case studies of practice at various institutions to see where best practice can be shared and problematic practices identified.
3. Access to opportunities for postgraduates to be able to teach are an important experiential element that can supplement a research degree programme, preparing the student to be an effective future academic and delivering unique personal development, in addition to being a sometimes vital income stream.
4. The practice of allowing postgraduates to teach should be lauded, but support for them improved in the interests both of the postgraduate and the students they teach (in keeping with motion HE104), and careful consideration made so as teaching does not to compromise the postgraduate's academic prowess.
5. UCU currently campaigns nationally on Anti-Casualisation in Universities, with the potential for direct impact to improve conditions for postgraduates who teach and are contracted for casual work – there is strength in collaboration with sector allies in this area.

Conference Resolves

1. To commission a national report into the pay and conditions of postgraduates who teach within Higher Education institutions, including in-depth case studies of practice at a diverse set of institutions, with specific focus on:
 - rates of pay compared across institutions and to employed academic staff delivering equivalent provision;
 - mechanisms for reviewing these rates of pay;
 - the contractual conditions on which postgraduates are engaged to teach;

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- the benefits and drawbacks to students and institutions in utilising postgraduate students in undergraduate teaching;
 - the use and appropriateness of studentships where funding is conditional on postgraduates being required to teach;
 - training, development and support provided to postgraduate students engaged in teaching;
 - mode of employment, whether outsourced or within the institution
 - unpaid labour in preparation and marking time; and
 - any discrepancies in how relevant policies are applied within a given institution.
2. To use the outputs from this investigation to identify best practice to be encouraged across the sector and the most appropriate methods of doing so, and to identify institutions where conditions for postgraduates who teach are particularly poor in the sector, for the purposes of NUS explicitly supporting the Students' Unions at these institutions to lobby for improved conditions.
 3. To recommend Students' Unions collaborate with UCU on local implementation of their Anti-Casualisation campaign to secure better pay and stronger contractual conditions for postgraduates who teach in their institution.

Amendment 101a: PhD studentships that require teaching

Proposed by: Jessica Bowyer, Postgraduate Students' Committee

Seconded by: Amelia Horgan, Postgraduate Students' Committee

Zone: Education

Conference Believes

1. That several universities and research councils offer PhD studentships that require that students teach a compulsory number of hours.
2. The number of teaching hours required by these studentships varies wildly between and within universities.
3. That these studentships are usually expected to be completed within a strict three-year limit, without taking into account the time lost to compulsory teaching.
4. That as pay for these teaching hours are included in the overall stipend, it is not clear how much students are actually paid for teaching and whether this is equivalent to the remuneration received by other staff.
5. That students undertaking one of these studentships are often unclear about their employment rights and do not receive a contract of employment.

Conference Further Believes

1. That all work undertaken by postgraduate students, whether as part of a studentship or not, should be fully and fairly remunerated.
2. That as a union, it is the responsibility of NUS to campaign for the employment rights and working conditions of postgraduate students.
3. Postgraduate students should be free to choose whether they teach or not during their studentship.
4. That very little is known about the frequency and scope of these studentships.

Conference Resolves

1. To campaign against universities introducing compulsory teaching as part of PhD studentships.
2. To campaign for all work undertaken by postgraduate students as part of a studentship to be fully and fairly remunerated.



Motion 102: LGBT+ students as co-researchers, not subjects

Proposed by: Eden Ladley, NUS LGBT+ Campaign

Seconded by: Amelia Horgan, Postgraduate Students' Committee

Zone: Education

Conference Believes

1. Many postgraduate students undertake research with student populations as part of their study or research.
2. LGBT+ students have become a "research fatigued" community in recent years, who are used to students and academics asking for their participation in studies.
3. This is especially the case for transgender students. As a result of the increased media scrutiny on trans people, they have become a keenly observed population while often having little input into the research process.

Conference Further Believes

1. That the pattern of researching marginalised communities, asking for their time and labour and then leaving them and benefiting from their (often unpaid) efforts has become increasingly criticised by sociologists.
2. Research on LGBT+ communities and individuals by often cisgender and/or heterosexual researchers often fails to treat LGBT+ people with respect and agency. This reinforces the framing of the experiences of marginalised communities as for the academic consumption of The Academy.
3. Ideally, research done on LGBT+ communities should be co-authored and co-produced by members of those communities. Collecting knowledge about and developing perspectives on LGBT+ communities should play a part in liberating LGBT+ people from oppressive power structures.

Conference Resolves

To work with the NUS LGBT+ and NUS Trans Campaigns to create a guide on the co-production of knowledge about LGBT+ people, and to distribute this to postgraduate groups, LGBT+ groups and education officers in students' unions

Motion 201: Building on National Conference 2018 'UD105 – National Postgraduate Representation': A Practical Implementation

Proposed by: David Evans, Durham Students' Union

Seconded by: Matthew Johnston, Northumbria Students' Union

Zone: Union Development

Conference Believes

1. There has been a trend amongst Students' Unions to introduce Officers dedicated to improving the postgraduate student experience, whether on a full-time, part-time or voluntary basis.
2. Postgraduate students make up approximately 23.8% of students studying in Higher Education (HESA data, AY16/17), yet issues affecting them are not represented by NUS in a proportion reflective of this.
3. The NUS Postgraduate Campaign has regrettably not produced significant outputs or wins for postgraduate students for some time, and the quality of the administration of conference varies annually.
4. The above issues have largely been noted in policy 'UD105 – 'National Postgraduate Representation' passed at National Conference 2018, which resolved to review NUS' postgraduate representation, as well as its governance and funding.
5. The current problems with NUS' resourcing cannot be ignored – we must be pragmatic in setting policy and organising our structures to provide the most benefit to postgraduate students with the scant resource available.



Conference Further Believes

1. The best, most realistic hope of building an effective national Postgraduate Campaign with limited NUS resource is in the expansion of Postgraduate Officer positions in member Students' Unions, and building networks between them with NUS acting as a hub.
2. The lack of wins from the campaign is due in part to the lack of resource historically allocated to the campaign, both directly and through the de-prioritisation of postgraduate issues by relevant NUS officers.
3. To lose further resource, permit an ineffective Postgraduate Committee or similar forum for discussion of postgraduate issues, or remove Postgraduate NEC places, would send an unacceptable signal – given the significant size of the postgraduate student body – that the NUS has no interest in campaigning on postgraduate issues.
4. NUS has a duty to encourage Students' Unions to do more to represent the interests of and engage their postgraduate constituents, to forge links between Students' Unions and staff who deal with postgraduates in their parent institutions, and support any of their initiatives in these areas.

Conference Resolves

1. To commission a national report into postgraduate representation within Students' Unions, in particular the trend towards full-time Postgraduate Officer positions and case studies into these, with specific focus on:
 - the remits of postgraduate representatives, in particular full-time officers;
 - the interaction of representatives of postgraduates with committees and bodies within their parent institution;
 - the impact of the introduction of representatives of postgraduates on postgraduate engagement within institutions and on improvements to the postgraduate experience;
 - issues arising at Students' Unions and institutions as a result of and since the creation of representatives of postgraduates, and lessons learnt from such;
 - current methods of collaboration between representatives of postgraduates within and between Students' Unions, and the effectiveness of such; and
 - candidate nomination, conduct of elections and voting eligibility for representatives of postgraduates.
2. To use the outputs from this investigation to identify best practice to be encouraged across the sector, as regards postgraduate representation within Students' Unions, and the most appropriate methods of doing so.
3. To recommend Students' Unions consider whether creating a full-time officer position dedicated to representing postgraduates within their Union is appropriate in their context.
4. To demand the continuation of representative positions for Postgraduate Taught and Postgraduate Research students on the highest NUS political decision-making body in whatever format.
5. To demand the protection of the level of resourcing currently allocated to addressing issues affecting postgraduates and the possibility of providing an increase to the level of resourcing to be genuinely considered in the NUS' Turnaround activities.
6. To set a deadline for the resolutions of Policy UD105 to be completed by NUS, expecting that these are completed as part of the NUS Turnaround Strategy, of 1 year from the date of the passing of the policy in which this clause is contained. The VP Higher Education or a successor position following any restructure of NUS shall be responsible for ensuring this.
7. To require the NEC Postgraduate Representatives to maintain some mechanism for full- and part-time Postgraduate Officers at Students' Union members of NUS to regularly collaborate on addressing the issues of postgraduates nationally, and receive updates on progress on policy implementation for the Postgraduate Campaign, particularly throughout the duration of any review or restructure of the governance of NUS' Postgraduate Campaign.
8. To create resources to encourage and assist Student Unions to address local issues affecting postgraduates within their parent institutions that are suitable for use by those Students' Unions with postgraduate members but no specific representatives of postgraduates.



Motion 301: Hardship Funding for Postgraduate Students

Proposed by: Matthew Johnston, Northumbria Students' Union

Seconded by: Jessica Oshodin, King's College London Students' Union

Zone: Welfare

Conference Believes

1. Currently, Postgraduate students are being put-off from applying for hardship funding (also known as access to learning funds).
2. Universities, in their criteria for postgraduate students applying for hardship funds, are placing restrictive language and criteria to discourage postgraduate students from applying, a few examples of this are:
 - o Northumbria University placing a £9,000 income requirement on any postgraduate wishing to apply for the hardship fund.
 - o University of Warwick intending the fund to be for final-year PhDs, or master's students in the final three months of their degree.
 - o University of Essex students needing to show they have £5,000 to cover living costs, on top of the money they need to pay their fees.
3. This criteria is set to deliberately discourage postgraduate students from applying for their institutions hardship fund.

Conference Further Believes

1. With the introduction of the postgraduate loan, postgraduates have had access to government funding to help pay for their postgraduate degrees.
2. However, since the introduction of the loan, universities have seen this as an opportunity to up their postgraduate tuition fees, with some fees even going above the £10,690 provided by the loan.
3. With the increase in fees not being accommodated by the loan, this increases the risk of postgraduate students ending up in financial hardship, increasing the need for access to university hardship funds.

Conference Resolves

1. To push universities to make their eligibility criteria fair for all students and to ensure there is no criteria set that discourages postgraduate students from applying.
2. To ensure that selection processes for hardship funding are fair and not biased based on level of study.
3. To push the Vice President Higher Education to review existing recommendations to universities by governmental and non-governmental sources when it comes to setting hardship funding criteria.
4. For NUS to publish its own recommendations to universities around the hardship fund, based on existing information around cost of living for students, the increase in postgraduate tuition fees and the current postgraduate loan pay-out.



Motion 302: Developing Staff-Student Sexual Misconduct Policy

Proposed by: Jessica Bowyer, Postgraduate Students' Committee

Seconded by: Amelia Horgan, Postgraduate Students' Committee

Zone: Welfare

Conference Believes

1. That postgraduate students are particularly vulnerable to issues of staff-student sexual misconduct in universities, evidence for which has been reported in research conducted by the 1752 Group and NUS Women's Campaign.
2. That postgraduate research students who are employed as Graduate/Postgraduate Teaching Assistants are classed as both staff and students by their universities, leading to further confusion about their rights and ability to access help.
3. That the majority of UK universities do not have adequate policy in place to deal with staff-student sexual misconduct, which leads to postgraduate students being unable to access help.
4. That all universities should have clear and explicit policy regarding staff-student sexual misconduct and that the process should be accessible, inclusive and clear.
5. That any university policy regarding staff-student sexual misconduct should specifically account for the power dynamics of the relationship(s) between postgraduate students, their supervisors and other departmental staff.

Conference Resolves

1. To work with the Women's Campaign to develop model guidelines for university policy regarding staff-student sexual misconduct.
2. To develop resources and campaign materials around staff-student sexual misconduct to help postgraduate students who are campaigning to develop or change policy at their universities.
3. To lobby universities to introduce, or develop existing, policy around staff-student sexual misconduct.



Motion 303: Fair pay and contracts for postgraduate students employed by universities

Proposed by: Jessica Bowyer, Postgraduate Students' Committee

Seconded by: Amelia Horgan, Postgraduate Students' Committee

Zone: Welfare

Conference Believes

1. That NUS is a union, and therefore the working conditions and employment rights of students should be a central part of the work that the Postgraduate Committee undertakes.
2. That Graduate/Postgraduate Teaching Assistants, or postgraduate students otherwise employed by their universities to undertake teaching and/or research work, provide invaluable labour without which many university courses would be unable to run.
3. That postgraduate students employed in this capacity are predominantly employed on temporary or insecure contracts, with very few (if any) employment rights.
4. That postgraduate students also undertake a significant volume of unpaid labour, which is too often encouraged by universities.
5. That postgraduate students employed in this capacity should receive a full and proper contract and should be paid for all of the labour that they undertake.
6. That postgraduate students employed in this capacity should receive the same rights and working conditions as any other member of staff, including annual leave, sick leave and pay, payment for any compulsory training and induction, and regular and accurate pay.
7. That postgraduate students employed in this capacity should be included in the union recognition agreements between their union and the university, and should therefore be entitled to full union representation (both individually and collectively).

Conference Resolves

1. To provide support for postgraduate students employed in this capacity by developing resources around what postgraduate employees' contracts and working conditions should look like.
2. To support postgraduate students engaged in disputes and/or negotiations at their universities regarding employment rights and contracts.
3. To work with the UCU Anti-Casualisation Committee, and other relevant trade unions, to lobby universities to develop and introduce suitable contracts and employment rights for postgraduate students who are employed by universities.