

Social Policy Briefing

Addressing Xenophobia

Key Points

- A recent study by York Student Think-Tank showed 1 in 4 non-EU, and 1 in 6 EU students have experienced Xenophobia or racism.
- There have been a startling number of cases where students are being discriminated against due to their nationality by institutions.
- The UK government has openly declared the intent to create a "hostile" environment for people from other countries.

Suggested distribution

Presidents; Student Liaison Officers; Advice staff;
Welfare Officers; International Student Officers;

Action

Information; Review union and university policies regarding discrimination

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Background

What is Xenophobia?

Xenophobia is a discrimination or prejudice based on nationality, and focused on nationalities which are "foreign" or "from outside" the society. Xenophobic behavior attempts to vilify, reject and exclude people based on the perception that they are foreigners to the community, society or national identity.

(www.unesco.org/Xenophobia) Xenophobia and racism are often used interchangeably but are in fact quite different. Whereas racism focuses on physical characteristics such as skin color or facial features,

xenophobia focuses on the idea that someone originates from outside the community or nation.

How is Xenophobia identified?

It can be difficult to identify the motivations for discrimination and prejudice, and xenophobia's obvious overlap with racism can make it even more difficult as physical characteristics are often used to identify the 'other' within the community. It can also mean that those subject to xenophobic discrimination may have a difficult time identifying it to others or finding appropriate support. Xenophobia can occur against people of identical physical characteristics but a perceived difference in nationality, as much as those with different physical characteristics to the dominant nationality. The focus of discrimination is based on cultural differences, rather than biological differences.

Xenophobia on Campus

The York Student Think-Tank (YSTT) commissioned a study in November 2013 which showed students from outside the UK were more likely to experience racial, ethnic or national discrimination at university. 1 in 4 non-EU students and 1 in 6 EU students said they have felt discriminated against, compared with 1 in 14 students from the UK.

Xenophobia in Law and Legislation

Nationality, national or ethnic origins are protected characteristics under the UK Equality Act.

Discrimination can also occur based on a perception of nationality, even if this perception is wrong. The Equality Act outlines these characteristics and how they are applied. It is illegal to discriminate against someone based on their nationality or citizenship in work, education, housing, public services, or when providing goods and services.

In November 2010 all EU legislation required member states to create criminal penalties for intentional public incitement to violence and hatred based on "race, colour, descent, religion or ethnic or national origin."

Xenophobia in the media

Ipsos Mori research conducted in 2013 showed a clear media bias against people from other countries in Britain. Newspapers across the spectrum were analysed to look at the common words associated with key descriptors of people from other nationalities. Across all newspapers the most common word next to the word 'Immigrant' was 'Illegal'. Other words included 'terrorist', 'suspected' and 'sham'. The most common word next to 'Asylum Seeker' is 'failed' with the most consistent words 'illegal', 'criminal' and 'stay'.

What NUS is doing

NUS is currently working closely on three initiatives to combat Xenophobia and has just passed policy at International Students Conference to launch a campaign against Xenophobia with research into discrimination on campus.

Open Generation

NUS has partnered with the Migrants Rights Network (MRN) to launch *Open Generation*, a project aimed at protecting the younger generations' views on migration, both in and out of the UK. The project is currently collecting the views of those under 30 through video contributions to www.opengeneration.org.uk and an ongoing photo competition. There are also five films being made by young film makers on their perceptions of migration. The work will culminate in a major event broadcast live on the Huffington Post Website, on April 3rd, 2014. Fringe Events are also being held in Students' Unions in Sheffield, Bournemouth, and at Strathclyde University Students' Union in Glasgow. To find out more visit www.opengeneration.org.uk or follow #OpenGen

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New Partnership with British Influence

NUS have launched a new partnership with lobby group British Influence which aims to help Students' Unions across the UK combat Xenophobia in the run-up to the 2014 European and local elections. Election debates around immigration have been stirring xenophobic rhetoric and encouraging xenophobic behaviour in our communities. This behaviour has not escaped our campuses as NUS has learned from case studies referred to the International Students' Officer. Our work with British Influence provides a platform and more for Students' Unions and students to undertake local campaigns which build a more positive environment for international students and others from different nationalities on our campuses and communities. Sign-up for updates and more information at www.britishinfluence.org/nus/.

Movement Against Xenophobia (MAX)

NUS has been working with the new campaign of the Joint Council for the Welfare of Immigrants (JCWI) called MAX or the Movement Against Xenophobia. This campaign brings together groups from across the country to speak-up for an inclusive and diverse society. The campaign hosts events and brings together groups to speak out against racism and xenophobia. Their website also hosts an example students' union motion which students can bring to their students' council to join the movement. Find out more at: www.jcwi.org.uk/policy/movement-against-xenophobia

What students' unions can do

1. Do your students feel confident in reporting xenophobia to the students' union? Checking complaints and advice mechanisms to ensure students feel confident reporting harassment and discrimination based on nationality can go a long way to supporting students.
2. Get involved - Join one of the above campaigns or start your own to ensure students challenge xenophobic behaviour on campus and in the community.

Social Policy Briefing is written to update officers and staff in students' unions on issues relating to social policy, including student finance, welfare, society and citizenship and liberation. Information is correct at time of writing and offered in good faith