

Student Sex Worker Briefing (2018)

NUS LGBT+ Campaign, [English Collective of Prostitutes \(ECP\)](#) and [Sex Worker Advocacy and Resistance Movement \(SWARM\)](#) and [SCOT-PEP](#) have come together in solidarity for student sex workers. This resource aims to explain the issues that student sex workers face, the reasons for focusing on the issue, and suggest ways to support sex workers and their campaigns.

Why have we created this guide?

In 2016, NUS worked with ECP and SWARM to conduct the first piece of research of its kind into the experiences of student sex workers. From the [NUS Student Sex Work Survey](#), we found that student sex workers say they are not getting the help they need. Since then, policy has passed through the [NUS LGBT+](#)¹, [Women's](#)² and [Trans](#)³ Campaigns to continue our commitment of solidarity and support, and to further the work that we do for student sex workers.

Our survey shows, a large proportion of student sex workers (and perhaps sex workers in general) are from marginalised backgrounds or are vulnerable. 71% of respondents identified as women, and 17% identified as non-binary. Over 70% of respondents identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Queer. Over 55% described themselves as having a disability. And 14% were International Students (7% from within the EU, and 7% outside of the EU).

¹ Motion 103: Standing up for LGBT student sex workers, supporting the decriminalisation of sex work; Motion 309: abolish the prison-industrial complex

² Motion 303: supporting the decriminalisation of sex work; Motion 505: improving the lives of student sex workers; Motion 303: prison abolition is a feminist issue

³ Motion 303: No Pride in the Police

Many sex workers also face class barriers and discrimination, financial difficulties, which leads or keeps them into sex work. Whilst coercion and trafficking exists, we firmly support and stand for a person's right to choose and engage in sex work. We also understand that discrimination, stigma, and a level of isolation can exist due to engaging in sex work. Therefore, we aim to support and provide advice through this toolkit educating others how to do so too.

It is not our place to discuss why someone may go into sex work. However, we found that the majority of respondents were motivated to work in the sex industry to pay for living expenses, bills and food, rent, and consumption of other necessities such as clothes and books for education. This is because sex work often provides revenue with the flexibility that may suit the lifestyle of a student. At least 35% of those responded said they started sex work to pay for university fees. This is an even bigger issue now, with the increase of tuition fees to over £9000, the lack of maintenance grants and other financial aid, and the increasing real life cost of education (including accommodation, study materials, disability support, etc.). Most graduates leave with upwards of £50,000 in debt.

Risks of sex work

Sex work can be a dangerous job. From our survey, 65% of respondents had faced harassment. Even more concerning is that 47% had experienced sexual assault. Whilst we are producing guidance on what sex workers can do to keep themselves safe we also understand that this issue exists due to pervading rape culture within society and lack of understanding of consent. Sex workers may engage in sexual acts with clients but that does not mean that their boundaries can be crossed nor that they always give consent to all sexual acts (no matter working or not). No survivor is ever at fault of their assault, no matter their job.

Accommodation

Student Sex Workers often have to conduct work from their place of residence. 47% of respondents from our survey worked in their own home. Even if a student sex worker does not work the majority at their place of residence, if it is perceived that they are involved in sex work there can be far reaching ramifications due to the discrimination that sex workers face. This affects students who live both on and off campus, whether they are conducting work on premises, using facilities and amenities including internet (to advertise, using web cams, porn, etc.), or it is generally known that they are involved in sex work.

Due to "morality clauses" in tenancy agreements if you are found to be a sex worker you can face eviction. This can lead to not getting your deposit back (causing further financial strain), inability to get references and of course homelessness. It is also distressing and often difficult to navigate without guidance or professional help. If a student is evicted from hall, it can also be put on their accommodation record which could stop them being allowed accommodation in the future or can even be accessed by other departments at the institution.

If your university or college finds out you are sex working, they can also possibly suspend or expel you. This has enormous ramifications for your ability to get an education at that

institution or another, it is also stressful and could be damaging to your welfare.

Isolation

Due to the aforementioned risks, many student sex workers experience isolation and difficulty building trusting relationships. Sex workers can lead lonely lives, working often 'unsociable' hours and finding it hard to confide in others. It is also hard to disclose their work to peers or staff (academic or otherwise) for fear of repercussions that will affect their finances, education, wellbeing, or even lead to legal action against them. Unless they have a proper network of those who support and understand, and who are also willing to protect and support them, it can be difficult to study and lead a healthy life.

Decriminalization

NUS supports the movement for the decriminalisation of sex work. We believe that sex work is work, the same as any other form of labour. Therefore sex workers should receive the same rights and employment. Currently in the UK, whilst sex work itself is not illegal, there are a number of laws that criminalise the activities around it. These depend on region and nation, but throughout it is still highly stigmatised, and many forms of engaging in sex work are socially and legally discriminated against.

Many sex workers understand the legal status of their work, with 52% of our survey respondents saying so. However, due to this, 48% are reluctant to go to the police with a matter that involves their work (including harassment and assault) and 82% have never contacted them. There is a well-held belief that any report will result negatively on them, and will not result in prosecution or have repercussions for the perpetrator. There is a pervasive fear that engagement with the police will often end up negatively impacting upon them, including possibility of prosecution.

There are many instances of legalised/ decriminalised sex work across the world. The

two most commonly talked about models often discussed regarding sex work are:

- *Nordic Model:* Different ways of selling sex are legal, but buying it is illegal. This shifts criminality from the sex worker onto the client. Some see this as a good move, however this often makes it more dangerous for the sex worker.
- *New Zealand Model:* Sex work, brothel ownership and management are legal and regulated. This, with various other laws, allows sex workers to work together, often in co-operatives, which allow them to be safer, free from harassment of clients and employer, report crimes and assault, and also stay healthier through regular checks.

There are other forms but these are two which provide examples of the discussion being had regarding decriminalisation. 75% of our respondents are in support of decriminalisation. But what would decriminalisation do? It is widely believed that decriminalisation would:

- Increase safety - sex workers could work together in a supportive environment.
- Enhance health - sex workers could access services without discrimination.
- Provide legal recognition – establish that sex workers are workers like other workers.
- Help protect migrant sex workers – police would have less power to target migrant workers in raids and arrest.
- Help end the hypocritical stigma attached to sex work – it brings violence and discrimination.
- Recognise sex workers' contribution - most sex workers are mothers supporting families and communities.
- End criminal records - they bar access to other jobs preventing sex workers from getting out if they choose to.
- Reduce police corruption - enable sex workers to report wrongdoings.
- Stop rapists - sex workers could report violence without fear of arrest.
- Stop profiteering by the state - fines and confiscation orders are an incentive to policing consenting sex.
- Free up police time - rape, murder, trafficking and racist attacks urgently need tackling

We have even seen movement in wider politics, with [the leader of the Labour Party coming out in support of decriminalisation in 2016](#).

How you can get involved:

Sex workers are their own greatest advocates, with organisations like [ECP](#), [SWARM](#) and [SCOT-PEP](#) supporting their rights. But the movement has grown from strength to strength with many allies now standing alongside. Here are some ways that you can campaign for sex worker rights and decriminalisation:

1. Help distribute this briefing. Organise an event at your college or university to launch it. Invite one of the sex worker organisations listed to speak.
2. Work with fellow students (and student sex workers if they feel able) to create a solidarity network, campaign or group. Confidentiality and safety of sex workers is key but providing space and support is a great way to start seeing change in their lives and in society.
3. Pass a motion for decriminalisation at your student union or society (model NUS motion below).
4. Sign the ECP Pledge: "Decriminalise Sex Work for Safety's Sake at www.pledgedecrim.com. Ask other organisations in your local area to sign the pledge, including: trade unions; women's, anti-poverty, anti-racist, religious, prison reform groups; residents associations; public health and legal professionals
5. Watch the video explaining in practical steps how to use the pledge to engage with organisations and key individuals in your local area to ask them to support decriminalisation and, if any refuse to do so, find out why at <https://www.pledgedecrim.com/pledge-video>.
6. Write to your MP asking them to support the recent recommendations by the Home Affairs Select Committee for decriminalisation.
7. Monitor the local press for raids and arrests against sex workers and write letters complaining and making the case for decriminalisation.
8. Keep in touch! Follow any of us on Facebook, Twitter etc. and check out our websites for our upcoming know your rights resource for student sex workers and more information.

NUS LGBT+ [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

ECP [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

SWARM [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

SCOT-PEP [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#)

Model Motion: Supporting the full decriminalisation of sex work

Student Union/Association/Guild believes:

1. Sex work refers (but is not limited to) escorting, lap dancing, stripping, pole dancing, pornography, webcams, adult modelling, phone sex, and selling sex.
2. The current regime of austerity, and cuts to services and support have disproportionately affect trans women, trans migrants and trans people of colour.
3. Whilst sex work is not illegal in the UK it is still criminalised, sex workers who work on the street can be picked up on soliciting or anti-social behavioural order charges, and sex workers who work together indoors for safety can be charged with brothel keeping.
4. The rise in living costs, debt, the increase in tuition fees, and the slashing of benefits for disabled people, it is highly likely that some students do sex work alongside their studies in order to get from month to month.
5. Regardless of the reasons for entering into sex work, sex workers of all backgrounds deserve to have their rights protected.
6. Transgender Europe's recent report declares that 88% of murdered trans people in Europe are sex workers¹.

Student Union/Association/Guild further believes:

1. The pushes for legislation which would criminalise the purchase of sex (and introduce what is known as the 'Nordic Model') are often spearheaded by anti-choice, anti-LGBT+, right-wing fundamentalists and radical exclusionary feminists.
2. Often, legislation of this kind is brought forward in the name of anti-trafficking programmes, when in reality they are laws which aim to control what people can and can't do with their own bodies, combined with dangerous anti-immigration initiatives.
3. Criminalising the purchase of sex puts sex workers, especially those who work on the street, in danger.
4. Decriminalisation reduces police abuse, harassment and violence against sex workers.
5. Organisations that support the decriminalisation of sex work include the World Health Organisation, UN Women, Amnesty International, the Global Commission on HIV and the Law, Human Rights Watch and NUS Women's and LGBT+ Campaign.
6. Decriminalisation would ensure that sex workers feel able to report unsafe clients or violence at work without the worry of criminal repercussions, and that those who wish to leave the sex industry are not left with criminal records as a result of their job.

Student Union/Association/Guild Resolves:

1. To support and campaign for the full decriminalisation of sex work.
2. To support sex worker led organisations, such as the English Collective of Prostitutes, SWARM, Sex Workers Alliance Ireland, and SCOT-PEP, who work to improve the lives of sex workers across the UK and beyond.
3. To campaign against any attempted to introduce the Nordic Model in the UK

¹ <http://transrespect.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/TvT-PS-Vol16-2017.pdf>