

Trans Officer Guide

**How to secure representation for
trans students in your union.**

NUS LGBT+ and NUS Trans Campaign

Contents

Introduction	2
What is NUS?	3
Terminology	3
A note on terminology	3
Useful terms	3
Winning the Argument	4
Campaigning Tactics	5
Case Studies	6
Durham	6
Royal Central School of Speech & Drama	6
Example Motions	7
KCL	7
DURHAM	8
Keeping it LGBTogether	9
Put the "T" back in "LGBQ+"	9
Things to consider	10
Do you want one or two officer positions?	10
Reserving space for people who experience transmisogyny	10
Do you want a committee?	10
Dedicated resources	10
How do you want the officers to relate to wider union democracy?	11
What do we want?	11

Introduction

I'm proud to say that the student movement has always been at the forefront of trans representation and organising. In 2016, following years of tireless campaigning from volunteer trans activists, a landslide motion passed at national conference to create an autonomous campaign and officer within our union. The officer role was the first of its kind in Europe and NUS Trans Campaign has since led the way on issues from student drug use to gender recognition. The campaign has also set the tone for trans representation at a local level as an increasing number of activists are lobbying their students' unions to create autonomous positions and spaces for trans students where previously there has been none.

After meeting many trans students across the UK in my role, it has become clear that trans representation is high on the agenda for many activists, hence the creation of this guide. I hope that it helps to equip you with the knowledge and arguments needed to push for trans representation on your campus, especially in this increasingly hostile environment for trans students.

Finally I'd like to give a huge thanks to Jasper Williams, Max Riley and Leo Siebert for reading over this resource and providing crucial feedback. Thanks also to Jaelyn, J Smith, King's College London SU and Manchester Students Union for contributing case studies.

Love and pride,

Rob Noon
NUS LGBT+ Officer (open place)

"As a trans student, I often don't see myself represented in my curriculum or faculty. But knowing that my national union has opened up space for trans people gives me hope for a future where that isn't such a special thing."

Student involved in the original #transformNUS campaign

What is NUS?

The National Union of Students represents over 4 million Higher and Further Education students. Each year at our National Conference, the President and Vice Presidents (VPs) are elected to represent students and lead on campaigns, covering FE, HE, Welfare, Union Development, and Society & Citizenship.

Terminology

A note on terminology

The language that the LGBT+ community used to describe itself is constantly evolving, meaning resources from our campaigns often require regular updates to be inline with our policy and values. We'd recommend reading [Julia Serano's blog](#) on the "activist language merry-go-round" for adopting a more nuanced approach to trans terminology. With this in mind, here are definitions, terminology and acronyms currently widely accepted in the community and campaign.

Useful terms

LGBT - Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender

Transgender - mostly shortened to just "trans", a person whose gender doesn't fully line up with the one they were assigned at birth

Cisgender - mostly shortened to just "cis", a person whose gender fully lines up with the one they were assigned at birth

Non-binary - someone whose gender is not entirely male or female

Transphobia - the hatred, oppression, and marginalisation experienced by trans people

AMAB/AFAB - refers to the gender (male/female) a person was assigned at birth in accordance to their body

Outing - when an LGBT person has their sexuality or gender identity revealed to others without their consent

Autonomous - having the freedom to politically organise without the authority of others.

Winning the Argument

Specific identity needs specific representation and although LGBT+ officers or societies may technically be representing the interests of trans students, it is very easy for the 'T' to fall off the end of the acronym as it covers a huge variety of experiences and barriers.

There's much more to being a trans student than using [gender neutral toilets](#); Whilst there is a cross-over between trans and cis LGB+ students, there are many issues that go unexplored, including how our healthcare can impact our education, and the barriers we face when accessing housing. There is a need for more welfare and political spaces in the trans community, and having trans-specific representation enables this. While cis activists can and should support our campaigns, we believe it should be trans people leading them.

Many trans students may feel disempowered by the lack of campaigning on the issues that impact them, but representation encourages engagement. If your SU shows support for trans students, we'll want to get involved - not just with the things that directly affect us, but on other issues too. We have interests outside of being trans, and engaging with your union's democracy empowers us to realise our voice matters and signals that there is space for us within your union.

NUS can support officers with resources and events directly relevant to trans students on your campus. It's an exciting time to be involved with NUS as a trans student, and the recent launch of an autonomous campaign means there's lots of opportunities for students to get involved. NUS trans campaign is about more than a conference, and our elected officer is there to support your local campaigns throughout the year.

NUS has both Trans and LGBT+ liberation campaigns, so it makes sense for your union to have the same.

Campaigning Tactics

We've put together some helpful tips for how to campaign for a Trans Officer on your campus.

1. Before you begin the process of getting a trans officer, it's important to consult with trans students about their needs as this will strengthen your case further down the line. If there is enough interest, consider creating a short online form where trans students can anonymously outline why trans representation matters to them. Make sure to be clear about who will be reading their answers and get consent from the students if you might want to use what they say in future campaigning materials. You can speak to your SU for guidance on ensuring it is compliant with data protection.
2. Find out what your union's democracy structure is and figure out how the role needs to be created. Sometimes a motion needs to be passed in accordance to your union's constitution but if not it's possible that the role can be created without the need for engaging in democratic processes. Your students union staff should be able to advise with this.
3. Map your stakeholders! It can be incredibly useful to write up a list of all the relevant groups and people who may be involved in the campaign. Examples include: your LGBT+ society, sympathetic sabbatical officers, SU and university staff who work on diversity, student media and local trans groups. It's important to collaborate and ask for support when you can, as running an entire campaign off the back of one person isn't sustainable or good for your health.
4. Unfortunately it is possible that you will face abuse of some kind while campaigning. Before you get stuck in, consider how you want to deal with this from people both inside and outside your institution. Your SU and university will likely have procedures for dealing with harassment from other students but transphobia from the wider public is often difficult to properly address - having trans comrades and allies on hand to provide support in the case of hostility is vital.
5. Social media can be an incredibly powerful campaigning tool, but also a frontier for transphobic harassment. Don't be a stranger to the block button and remember that it is OK to simply not engage with trolls as they will eventually lose interest and move on. One tactic you can use to reduce the chance of abuse from outsider transphobic groups is by altering or obscuring your use of common searchable phrases on social media sites like Twitter - for example, you can abbreviate "gender neutral toilets" to "GNTs".

Case Studies

We've pulled together two examples from different students unions, outlining how their students won trans representation at their institutions.

Durham

"It was a bit tricky initially we tried to form an Autonomous Trans Campaign within the LGBT+ Association with voting rights on the SU Assembly and our Welfare Committee, but the board of trustees blocked it after being passed through our Assembly because it would create a constitutional anomaly. So we decided just to go for creating an Association, which started with discussing it through our LGBT+ Association including creating a motion which mandated the LGBT+ Association to support any proposal for the creation of a Trans Association and to amend the LGBT+ Association's remit to ensure there was a clearer distinction between what each Association would do when it was proposed to our Assembly. One of the main obstacles was reflecting a clear distinction in both Associations including the importance of why it was needed and concerns the T would be dropped. We felt it was important to ensure Trans and Non-Binary students were still being actively represented on issues around sexuality, polyamory and intersex related issues and kept the T within the LGBT+ Association name. I think one of my big worries is when SU's created a Trans Officer but then remove the T and the Officer or Campaign becomes LGB+. Our LGBT+ Association now represents LGBT+ students on issues around Sexual and Romantic Orientation, Intersex and Polyamory issues, whilst the Trans Association represents Trans, Non-Binary and students questioning their gender identity."

J Smith, Durham University

Royal Central School of Speech & Drama

The Royal Central School of Speech & Drama is a small and specialist university in London that prior to a part-time Trans officer role had two "Gender & sexuality" officers. A trans student observed how this structure meant that trans issues were broadly not explored by the SU, especially during LGBT history month. This led to them posting on social media to see if there was any interest in running trans-related events, to which the reception was overwhelmingly positive and led to a push for trans representation on campus. After attending NUS trans conference and chatting with other delegates, the student got in touch with the SU president who was enthusiastic about creating the role. Later that year a motion was passed unanimously at a council meeting. When I asked the student what advice they would give to others campaigning for trans officer positions at their SU, they said "Keep communicating with your SU and make sure you're chasing up people who have taken up actions".

Example Motions

If your union democracy structure needs you to pass a motion, you can adapt motions passed by other unions for your own. Check out these two examples below:

KCL

KCLSU Notes

1. That the KCLSU Bye Law (2) states that student councils principle purpose is to represent the views of all members of KCLSU, this includes trans and non binary students.
2. That the Union is committed to supporting all students at KCL as part of its charitable status, this includes the support of trans and non-binary students
3. With the exception of this year, there has not been an openly trans LGBT+ officer on council.
4. That in 2015/16 the LGBT+ place has been filled by an openly non-binary officer, Travis Alabanza, and that this has led to a significant focus on trans liberation: e.g the successful Gender Neutral Toilets Campaign.
5. That there have been student council caucuses that have not had any open trans and non-binary representation within meetings, therefore not representing the views of all its members.

KCLSU Believes

1. That liberation groups need particular and specific representation on council in order to meet their specific needs.
2. That although they are part of the wider LGBT+ community- liberation for trans and non-binary students is specific to their community, and therefore it is vital that there is a reserved and guaranteed trans identifying student on council every year.
3. In the UK the trans community still faces marginalisation, discrimination and prejudice with regard to, but not limited to; legal recognition, equal marriage, health care and equal rights.
4. Liberation campaigns should be autonomous and led by people from the liberation group because they have the specific lived experience, therefore a cisgendered officer is only able to do so much for trans liberation.
5. In order to ensure that the representation of trans and non binary students on council is heard, a guaranteed position on student council is needed for the community – as has been agreed by both the Trans Officer on iFemSoc, Lexi Turner, and the trans officers Daniel and Ed Donal from LGBT+ society.
6. That the creation of this position will ensure there will always be at least one student who identifies on the trans spectrum of student council each year.

KCLSU Resolves

1. That a reserved space for trans students will be created and maintained in its representative structures, alongside other reserved Liberation positions.
2. That a new 'Trans officer' position will be created for the 2016/17 Student Council elections, and any student council elections thereafter. This position will be reserved for all students who identify as trans (this including non binary, genderqueer).
3. That the addition of this position will create two LGBT+ council positions. One will be LGBT+ (Open Place), the other LGBT+ (Trans Place).

DURHAM

This Motion Notes:

1. The Autonomous Trans Campaign Executive Committee have unanimously voted in support of becoming a full association.
2. The Autonomous Trans Campaign have gathered service-user feedback, which has shown support of becoming a full association.
3. A motion on becoming an independent association will be submitted by the Autonomous Trans Campaign Executive Committee to the upcoming Autonomous Trans Campaign TGM.
4. The Autonomous Trans Campaign currently has autonomy in all matters other than its name, and finances.

This Motion Believes:

1. In respect of autonomy, the LGBT+ a should support the future democratic decision of the Autonomous Trans Campaign at their TGM on whether to become an association, and the final decision should rest with the Autonomous Trans Campaign.
2. The LGBT+a should ensure that the process to become an association is as smooth as possible for Autonomous Trans Campaign. Hence any resolutions to change their name at their upcoming TGM should be automatically approved.
3. If the Autonomous Trans Campaign votes to become an association at their upcoming TGM:
 1. The LGBT+a should support the Autonomous Trans Campaign in their decision to become an association, and make any necessary relevant changes to Appendix II.
 2. The LGBT+a should work with the Autonomous Trans Campaign to ensure the process of becoming an independent association is as smooth as possible.

This Motion Resolves:

- 1) The LGBT+a shall automatically approve any amendments to the Autonomous Trans Campaign's name voted on at their upcoming TGM.
- 2) If the Autonomous Trans Campaign votes in favour of becoming an independent association at their TGM:
 - a) The LGBT+a Executive Officers shall create a Trans Representative who shall liaise with the Trans Association, in addition to representing trans (including non-binary) individuals within the LGBT+a, similar to other association-specific representatives, as attached.
 - b) The LGBT+ a shall fully support the Autonomous Trans Campaign in becoming an association, including at Assembly, and within the SU as a whole.
- 3) Upon the approval and ratification of the Trans Association by the SU:
 - a) Appendix II, Section 1, shall be removed from the constitution.
 - b) Appendix III, in its entirety, shall be removed from the constitution.

Trans Representative

There shall be a Trans Representative who shall:

- a) represent all service-users who self-define as trans (including non-binary), service-users who are uncertain of or questioning their gender identity, and any other service-users who wish to be represented by them. This includes, but is not limited to, those who self-define as trans women, trans men, genderqueer, genderfluid, genderflux, intergender, agender, non-binary, and any other individual who is not cisgender;
- b) liaise with the Trans Association;

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- c) act as a point of contact for the represented group;
 - d) liaise with the Executive Committee to ensure any specific needs of the represented group are being met by the Association;
 - e) liaise with other organisations primarily involved with members of the represented group;
 - f) assess the demand for, and be able to hold, events and campaigns aimed specifically at members of the represented group; and
 - g) g) sit on both the Representative Advisory Committee and the Liaison Advisory Committee.

Keeping it LGBTogether

Our information sheets have a consistent look and feel. You can choose any of our three designs. The current political climate of hatred towards trans people has permeated the LGBT+ community, leading to a rise in trans-exclusionary cis LGB+ spaces and people. This means it is important, arguably now more than ever, to ensure that the struggle against cis and heteronormativity is united within our students' unions as well as wider society.

While taking a step forward for trans representation, many unions have taken a step back for intra-community solidarity and have separated LGB+ and T officer positions. Although this is rarely an intentional act of transphobia, it is vital that trans representation is not viewed as existing at the expense of cis LGB+ representation - one way to achieve this is by adding the T back to LGB+ officer positions while also keeping the part-time trans officer role.

Below is a model motion passed at Manchester Students' Union, where there was previously Trans and LGBQ+ officer positions.

Put the "T" back in "LGBQ+"

This Union Notes:

- That currently, there are two part-time LGBQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Queer) Officer positions, and two Trans Officer positions in the Students' Union

This Union Believes

- That while we believe in the autonomy of the Trans campaign, the LGBQ+ Officers should also be concerned with the representation and advocacy of Trans students, and should actively support and bolster the work the Trans campaign does
- That if the "T" is not present in the acronym, it could be unclear to some people that the LGBQ+ Officers are also required to represent and advocate for Trans students
- That if the "T" is not present in the acronym, this could be weaponised by transphobic members of the LGBTQ

This Union Resolves:

- To change the title of the "LGBQ+" Officers to "LGBTQ+" Officers, so that the Union has two LGBTQ+ Officers and two Trans Officers

Things to consider

Do you want one or two officer positions?

Many students' unions who have part time officer positions as a part of their democratic structure chose to have two representatives from each liberation group. This can strengthen campaigning as it doubles the capacity of the elected leadership, as well as allowing for collaboration between different skill sets and approaches to organising. However, having multiple officer positions does have its own challenges to consider - splitting resources, especially if they are limited, can be tricky, as can campaigning when each officer has wildly different priorities.

Reserving space for people who experience transmisogyny

Transmisogyny is not simply a combination of transphobia and transmisogyny. Transmisogyny refers to the specific oppression and experiences of trans women and transfeminine people who are assigned male at birth.

Transmisogyny and transphobia are linked but ultimately separate oppressions. Those who experience transmisogyny are often shut out by student activism as it is predominantly AFAB and/or transmasculine activists who run in elections and are credited for work. One action we can take to challenge this gendered inequality within our organising is by reserving space for people who experience transmisogyny - for example, your union could have a Trans Officer (open place) and Trans officer (anti-transmisogyny place), or by reserving spaces for people who experience transmisogyny on your trans, LGBT+ and/or women's committees. For more reading on how transmisogyny materialises within our organising spaces, check out Julia Serano's writing, specifically *Whipping Girl* and *Excluded*.

Do you want a committee?

Some students unions' may have the size and capacity to also have a trans students committee. Having a committee can encourage more trans students to get involved in shaping the work that takes place, but can also make campaigns more inward-facing. It is also important to remember that elections can act as a barrier to participation as not all students will be able to openly run in an election. Alternatives to having a committee include annual open meetings, in which all trans students are invited to discuss issues. These can double up as both political and welfare spaces.

Dedicated resources

Similarly, some students unions' may be big enough to reserve a pot of money for trans student activism. It's worth doing some research to see how other forms of liberation representation are resourced at your SU - for example, there might be a dedicated staff member who works on liberation issues. Even if your SU can't afford to provide a budget to the trans officers, there should still be the opportunity for you to fundraise to support the activities of the officer(s). Check out XYZ resource for ways to fundraise.

How do you want the officers to relate to wider union democracy?

Many students unions' have a decision-making body of some kind, where representatives of the student body shape the work of the SU throughout the year. Something to consider is how you want the trans officer(s) to relate to this wider union democracy - for example, you might want them to automatically have a seat at union council meetings.

What do we want?

When campaigning for trans representation, you may be faced with questions about what specific issues need addressing. It can be useful to have a list of a handful of these issues and how they relate to your campus, such as:

Housing

- Access to en-suite accommodation
- Negative experiences of gendered facilities
- Homelessness

Healthcare

- Lack of trans-competent mental and sexual health services
- Waiting times and gatekeeping for transition-related healthcare
- Lack of funding for specific treatments (such as hair removal)
- Travel costs and financial barriers

Education

- Pathologization of trans experiences within medical subjects and social sciences
- Experiences of transphobia and transmisogyny from staff
- Poor administrative support for trans students such as name change and mitigating circumstances policies

Discrimination

- Experiences of social media harassment
- Fetishisation
- Being "outed" without consent
- Stereotyping

We hope that this guide enables you to run effective campaigns, cementing trans representation and supporting the inclusion of a Trans Officer in your student union. If you have any further questions, you can email trans@nus.org.uk or lgbt@nus.org.uk.

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