**Alex Gooch President of Education - National Union of Students National Conference Report**

*This is Alex’s conference report – the below is his explanation of how and why he voted on various motions at NUS conference.*

**General Conference feedback**

National Conference 2022 was finally back in person after a few years of Zoom. It was held in Liverpool to delegates from Student Unions across the UK over 2 days. The aim of Conference was to Network with other Sabbatical Officers and students, vote for the next leaders of NUS and debate and amend policy that would shape what NUS works on and prioritises over the next year.

For myself, Liverpool was my first taste of in-person networking and was extremely valuable to talk to other delegates from SUs that were both smaller and larger than ours and the Sus that have existed for decades.

Unfortunately, conference had many issues this year which did leave somewhat of a sour taste. It was not made clear to delegates how our deeper conversations and debates in our policy discussions groups would actually affect the motions and amendments and we were not given the opportunity to vote on them whilst attending conference, as was the case in previous years, creating a disconnect and a feeling that we did not reach nationwide consensus before voting. In previous years, each policy discussion had clear debates and amendments that reached consensus or more backing from their breakout rooms which were valuable in clearly showing the rest of the voting delegates what had been discussed, how they amended and what the whole room concluded. Without this, it was harder to know how each amendment would in-fact impact different types of union and students within them. The core message of each policy was extremely important, and I voted “for” for all, though due to the lack of this debate and lack of opportunity to give detail to amendments, I abstained on amendments. And whilst the core message and theme of every policy was important and valuable, this lack of amendment reflection is reflected in my voting by the number of abstentions.

The conference was not as well organised as I would have hoped, the main highlight being the main auditorium sessions. Policy discussion, as already mentioned, and the facilitated network sessions were ill-structured and disappointing. With these thoughts in mind, my signature is included on an open letter to NUS-UK Leadership & Senior Management which asks that NUS produce a plan on how to ensure the new reform regime is truly democratic, gives delegates the opportunity to speak to conference, and will no longer silence students and quotes:

*“Dissent and negative feedback has been ignored in favour of a false “broad consensus” for policies which delegates have had no opportunity to oppose, to alter, or to speak to conference on… Alarmingly, in policy sessions we have been told that we ought not to discuss matters of wording and detail, but rather to focus only on broad-strokes direction and concepts. This would have been appropriate at early drafting or brainstorming sessions, but when motions have already been submitted for us to consider and ultimately vote on, wording is incredibly important and deserving of scrutiny. Instead, the implementation of the feedback from our engaging & important discussions into written lines of policy has been delegated to the Steering Committee; we have to take it on faith that our opinions will be duly represented and not unintentionally misinterpreted, and we have minimal oversight of this process.”*

**Candidate Policy Votes**

Fight For Funds – voted FOR

*“1.The National Union of Students should work alongside the UK Government, and devolved governments, to put in place a national standard for Hardship Funds to improve visibility, accessibility and impact of the work that is already done at institution level.  This should be available to learners in times of financial challenge, be flexible in order to account for individual circumstances, and be subject to consistent standards developed in partnership with learners across the UK.  This should also include ring fenced funding for learners leaving care.
2.The National Union of Students, and the entire movement, should lobby the UK Government to increase the National Minimum Wage for apprentices to be in line with the Living Wage, to reflect that apprentices are not free or cheap labour.
3.The National Union of Students should push for a system that enables more individuals to access apprenticeships across the UK, and not just in major cities.
4.The NUS, and students’ unions across the country, should explore avenues with their institutions to improve postgraduate access, even where not required by the OfS, in the interests of driving the sector and government forward in a positive, pro-active way on this critical topic.”*

Making University Accessible To Students Of All Backgrounds – voted FOR

“*●NUS should campaign for university providers to make the student experience more inclusive to ensure that non-traditional and under-represented students continue to be represented in the higher education space.
●NUS should campaign for universities to re-examine their approach to the student experience, particularly in light of the new OfS proposals.
●NUS should lobby for Universities to improve key student support structures that are of particular importance to students from non-traditional and under-represented background. E.g
○More regular academic monitoring to enable students to feel more confident to approach academic staff for advice, as well as more constructive and comprehensive assessment feedback to enable students to identify key areas for improvement in their work
○University-administered student liberation groups or networks aimed at building community and academic confidence amongst some of the most ‘at-risk’ groups in higher education i.e. BAME students, student carers or mature students.
●NUS should campaign for Universities to adopt the following inclusive timetabling policies (in consultation with staff/student communities):
1.When academic sessions are longer than 1 hour, students and staff should be given 10-minute breaks before the end of each hour (or an equivalent arrangement of the same time). If appropriate, universities may combine this break with the time allocated for session changes. Where applicable, this change would allow for most students of faith to pray during the breaks.
2.Universities should grant the daily provision of a minimum 1-hour lunch break between 12:00 and 14:00 to all students and staff. This measure could be adapted to be used to provide a break for Muslim Friday Prayer and universities should consult relevant student and staff bodies on what specific time would be appropriate.
3.Universities should proactively include students in the scheduling process and consult with students and staff before publishing the final versions of academic timetables. Consultations could either be via open meetings or through individual surveys. Universities should provide draft timetables to students and staff to review one week before the consultation period. Universities should publish final versions of academic timetables at a minimum of three weeks before starting academic terms/periods of formal assessment.
4.If requested during the consultation period, universities should avoid scheduling academic sessions during religious observances. They should recognise religious observances (like the Jewish Sabbath) as valid reasons to request alternative arrangements for academic sessions.
5.In all cases where universities cannot make alternative arrangements requested during the initial consultation period, universities should offer an open meeting with that community to reach a resolution and explain why they cannot meet the original requests.
6.If universities cannot make alternative arrangements, universities should consider the following advice: Regarding lectures, seminars or tutorials, universities should ensure that high-quality audio-visual recordings are available to all students and that affected students can ask their lecturer questions regarding their course.”*

New Vision for Education – voted FOR

*“-A broad campaign to reverse marketisation and increase democratic engagement of students in university structures by NUS, SUs and student campaigners, working alongside staff trade unions, could start to reverse the harmful policies of the past 40 years, restoring education as a public service instead of a commodity. This campaign should not solely focus on fees but demand a public, inclusive, accessible education.*

*-We want to replace the ineffective consumer rights legal framework with one centred on our rights as learners. NUS could develop a new ‘Bill of Rights for Students’. Initially an aspirational vision it would in time form the basis for an act of parliament to demarketise our education system.*

*-NUS should deliver political education at all levels on the history and importance of workers’ and students’ unions, with a focus on reaching those in our school system.*

*-NUS should propose a motion to all Student Unions to strike when union members in UK Universities strike in solidarity for working rights and a new model for public education.*

*-NUS should offer full support to General Teaching Assistants, who are mostly PhD Students. GTAs are the most pressured and precarious members of the academic community.*

*-NUS, through NUS Charity, could provide a greater deal of support to FE unions and help them become more established and structured with full-time officers and democratic procedures in place. As well as investigating other ways in which they can be funded. As well as this they should support officers in participating in the student movement at a national and local level. This way FE students can have more of a say in their education as well as in the student movement as a whole. NUS should campaign to make democratic student representation a legal requirement for all FE institutions.”*

Tackling Gender Based Violence – voted FOR

*“Around public sexual harassment, in line with the campaign Our Streets Now, NUS should support the following demands for our educational institutions:
•To promote awareness of the experiences of students and SU staff, primarily women, facing PSH.
•To provide safe, clear and timely support networks for students who experience PSH on campus.
•To establish a clear and consistent zero tolerance policy of PSH in HE and FE institutions.
•To educate students that are men to become uplifting allies, active bystanders and vocal denouncers of PSH as they are the main perpetrators of PSH.
•To encourage the institution to monitor reports of PSH off campus and develop strategies to tackle it, for example, on buses and local bars/clubs.
•Creation of a toolkit that could be supported to train staff and students across campuses, that could be outsourced by an external provider.
Support and initiatives from NUS on a national scale to try and combat the issue of GBV could really improve the safety, security and welfare of students across the UK.”*

Student Housing Co-Operatives – voted FOR

*“NUS would be one of the leaders in growing the student housing co-operative movement. NUS would:
-run political education on the co-operative alternative to exploitative landlordism to grow the co-operative movement to more campuses.
-work with SCH to train students to develop the skills needed to set up housing co-operatives including financial literacy and growing grassroots membership.
-link fledgling student housing co-operatives with free legal advice and professionals to support their growth e.g. surveyors and community-led housing experts.
-support fledgling student housing co-operatives to consider the needs of different marginalised communities when shaping their future home.
-clarify and support the acquisition of finance for student housing co-operatives, including by publicising their share offers.
-support student tenants of housing co-operatives with liability issues arising from being a director of a legal housing co-operative.
-support student unions to develop policies to support student housing co-operatives.
-encourage more students to join SCH and connect with other co-operatives.
-advocate to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities for greater grant support for community-led housing, particularly student housing co-operatives."*

The International Student Experience During And Post-Study – voted FOR

*“The international student experience comprises of a spectrum of different experiences which can directly affect students’ academic performance, mental health and well-being. There are a range of issues affecting International Students both during their time studying and as they move into work. This policy brings together these issues looking specifically at:
•   Awareness and institutional accountability
•    Greater integration in university communities
•    Employability
•    Post-study work visas*

*In the policy workshops, it was clear that there was a consensus on what is mainly being discussed in this proposal and one of the main theme was the lack of structures for international students to work with NUS, and the element of intersectionality when it comes to talking about International students - specifically in the context of Post study Visas, which has now been added to the proposal with the recommendation of DPC.”*

Officer votes

We also voted for the new NUS Officer team.

For the President role I voted for Shaima Dallali, who won.

Since their successful election, SHaima has come under scrutiny for alleged antisemetism. Neither myself, nor does the SU condone this. Part of the open letter I have signed about conference asks that she apologise at minimum. NUS have since released information and a statement that can be found here: [https://www.nus.org.uk/articles/no-place-for-antisemitism-within-the-student-movement?utm\_campaign=888724\_Copy%20of%20NUS%20UK%20launch%20independent%20investigation%20into%20antisemitism%20allegations&utm\_medium=email&utm\_source=NUS%20Charitable%20Services%20Ltd&dm\_i=5BGA,J1QS,436IRG,27PYR,1](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nus.org.uk%2Farticles%2Fno-place-for-antisemitism-within-the-student-movement%3Futm_campaign%3D888724_Copy%2520of%2520NUS%2520UK%2520launch%2520independent%2520investigation%2520into%2520antisemitism%2520allegations%26utm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3DNUS%2520Charitable%2520Services%2520Ltd%26dm_i%3D5BGA%2CJ1QS%2C436IRG%2C27PYR%2C1&data=05%7C01%7CB.Allsop2%40UOS.AC.UK%7C69979273cade44f6f9fc08da221b2383%7Cee265dd904ad41b7b409e6699705d35d%7C0%7C0%7C637859797188896997%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=yWA4ALyrOQyMWFyZmy6HXe2K%2Fg4RIl%2F%2BXdxX%2FlNRcTk%3D&reserved=0) and [https://www.nus.org.uk/articles/nus-statement-on-antisemitism-allegations?utm\_campaign=883629\_Copy%20of%20Charity%20update%20%207%20April%202022&utm\_medium=email&utm\_source=NUS%20Charitable%20Services%20Ltd&dm\_i=5BGA,IXT9,436IRG,2796M,1](https://eur03.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.nus.org.uk%2Farticles%2Fnus-statement-on-antisemitism-allegations%3Futm_campaign%3D883629_Copy%2520of%2520Charity%2520update%2520%25207%2520April%25202022%26utm_medium%3Demail%26utm_source%3DNUS%2520Charitable%2520Services%2520Ltd%26dm_i%3D5BGA%2CIXT9%2C436IRG%2C2796M%2C1&data=05%7C01%7CB.Allsop2%40UOS.AC.UK%7C69979273cade44f6f9fc08da221b2383%7Cee265dd904ad41b7b409e6699705d35d%7C0%7C0%7C637859797188896997%7CUnknown%7CTWFpbGZsb3d8eyJWIjoiMC4wLjAwMDAiLCJQIjoiV2luMzIiLCJBTiI6Ik1haWwiLCJXVCI6Mn0%3D%7C3000%7C%7C%7C&sdata=ssi3hS87MN%2FBII1y%2FCCRULI25GEB47Q2Fo3pkxvZ5AM%3D&reserved=0)

For the Vice-President Higher Education role I voted for Chloe Field, who also won.