NUS Liberation Conference Notes and Thoughts

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# Policy Proposal

## Brexit

This policy feels late. While yes, retaining international relations for students is incredibly important, approaching it as a Brexit policy just won’t work and will cause unnecessary conflict among students who may or may not support Brexit. As a result, I have decided this is a low priority for me.

## Careers Education

This is an excellent policy in my opinion. Minorities have the hardest time trying to find experience, usually due to not having learnt social queues and other insider tricks to get work experience or jobs. By exposing minorities to career education, there is a higher change that minorities can access the jobs they want to when they graduate, as a high percentage of jobs come from knowing other people within the industry.

## Climate Activism

This policy seems well researched and thought out. I agree that while climate activism is important, diverse backgrounds, experiences and abilities need to be considered when implementing and encouraging an environmentally conscious approach.

## Decolonisation – VOTED FOR

This is an extremely important policy and is one of the major issues that is present in many universities across the country. By implementing this policy, we are indirectly contributing towards all other liberation proposals as colonization has a large effect on all these different areas and issues.

## Disability discrimination

I think this proposal doesn’t contain the same passion as the other policies on the table, and as a result it risks being poorly implemented. While this is an incredibly important issue, I think it needs more thought and debate behind the best way to implement it before we commit to the final policy.

## Gender Recognition Act – VOTED FOR

As the trans delegate, this is an incredibly important policy for me. Trans rights seem to be being attacked from every corner, so knowing that NUS is supporting us in our fight for equal access and rights is invaluable for Trans+ students, whether this be current students or those that will access higher education in the future. In addition, the policy seems well researched (they’ve referenced their points throughout the proposal). The solutions could be debated though to make them more in-depth.

## Healthcare

This is a policy which covers bases for all the different minority areas, which makes it incredibly important. Frankly, healthcare for minorities is lackluster and, in some cases, hardly there to begin with. The one issue with this policy is that it doesn’t focus on what NUS can do to help with these issues, rather providing more general solutions. As a result, a debate/discussion on what NUS can do to support students going through this, and how they can approach campaigning for these desired changes needs to occur before it is a fully functional policy.

## Student Internationalism and Solidarity

This policy is incredibly thought out and is very clear in its aims and solutions, which I absolutely support. It is very clear on what NUS should do, and has a clear focus.

## Liberating Education – VOTED FOR

This policy is very well thought out and I support both the proposal and the amendment re: hate crime. I think that it includes relevant and achievable goals, with a focus on both evidence and supporting students.

## Neurodiversity

Overall, I think this policy is heavily needed. I know, for example, the dyspraxia assessment is £100 (subsidized, £400 if not). Often secondary schools will not get a diagnosis – just enough proof to get extra time in exams. This is fundamentally destressing for new students as it can often take months to get these assessments done and by this point, they may have struggled through their first few exams and now be stressed and potentially behind in their work due to not passing. The only issue with this policy, in my opinion, is that the solutions are too unrealistic. This is easily solvable through debate though.

## Polyamory/Non-Monogamous relationship discrimination

This policy, while important (many LGBTQ+ students do not have stereotypical monogamous relationships), is not well thought through and doesn’t specifically apply to the NUS. I think this policy would need a lot of refining before it could be used as a policy in the NUS.

## VOTES:

1st

Liberating Education

2nd

Healthcare

3rd

Decolonisation

4th

International Solidarity

5th

Gender Recognition Act

6th

Careers Education

7th

Climate Activism

8th

Neurodiversity

9th

Disability Discrimination

10th

Polyamory/Non-monogamy Discrimination

11th

Brexit

# Disability Caucus

## Accessibility on Transport

This was specific to Northern Ireland. While important, I think it would be better to hear debate on topics which are of wider issue to the disabled community as a whole.

## BSL

This is something I am very passionate about. While not every deaf person uses BSL, there are still a fair amount of people who do. By making it more widespread, we also allow deaf students who wish to learn but see little reason to do so to have access to this resource which may make communication easier for them – which is essential at university.

## DSA

This is probably the most important thing to be discussed. DSA is essential to ensure that students who need it have access to equipment and support which can make their university experience easier to access.

## Education Experience

This I think is a very good idea. It means that everyone can access the equipment and information that they need to. Often, making things more accessible to disabled students makes everything more accessible to non-disabled students as well.

## Independent Living Skills

This is something I consider essential, and it annoys me that this is not already available to students. Disabled students often experience major stress when moving away from home and their support systems/carers, so having access to life skills would make this experience less stressful.

## Learning Disabilities Assessments

This is an excellent idea. As mentioned above, it is extremely expensive to get funding for assessments for learning disabilities, and there is often little support while doing so.

## VOTES:

1st

Disabled Students Allowance

2nd

Learning Disability Assessments

3rd

Education Experience

4th

British Sign Language

5th

Independent Living Skills

6th

Accessible on Transport

# LGBT Caucus

## Ally Schemes

While I agree with the sentiment that allies are an important part of progressing LGBT standing in society, having a focus on this topic during a time when the LGBT+ community is facing other major issues seems backwards. Allies are great but celebrating being a good human being isn’t something I see as necessary. While some SUs may decide to have schemes to promote allies, making this an NUS priority is something I do not feel comfortable voting for when there are other higher priority topics.

## Collaborative Campaigns

This caucus makes sense. It is a true that we live in a country where LGBT+ students – generally – are supported and safe. As a result, it is a good idea to partner with wider organization to tackle issues that the LGBT community face, and forging bonds with regional and national groups is essential in making further strides.

## Gay Men Committee Places

I, frankly, don’t deem this a necessary addition to LGBT society committee members, at least on a NUS level. It doesn’t say who submitted this topic, and it may be that it came from an area where gay men don’t engage as much, but in general gay men are one of the larger demographics. I also hold the belief that a society committee needs passion and creating too many places can cause barriers into creating a successful society. Considering many universities don’t have seats for BAME LGBT or trans+ LGBT members on the committee, suggesting one for the largest demographic seems unfair and may leave quieter voices unrepresented.

## LGBT Conversion Therapy

I think this is a major issue within the LGBT community, especially among T+ members. Considering the news and famous celebrities calling for ‘Gender critical therapists’ (ie transphobic conversion therapy), this is an issue that continues at large.

## Mental and Sexual Health Support

Considering I proposed similar commitments within my Officer Manifesto, I think this is an area that can often be severely lacking. Due to taboo, it can often be difficult for LGBT students to seek sexual and mental health support – considering LGBT students are more likely to need this support, this is a policy I deem very important.

## Safe Spaces

This caucus contains many good ideas that I think many universities would benefit from implementing. Although entitled ‘safe spaces’ (which, if that was all it was suggesting I probably wouldn’t find it as compelling), it includes things like extra training for societies and encouraging hate crime reporting. I strongly agree with the premise of this topic which is ensuring that LGBT students are able to find and express their true selves without discrimination.

## VOTES:

1st

Mental and Sexual Health Support

2nd

LGBT+ conversion therapy

3rd

Safe Spaces

4th

Collaborative Campaigns

5th

Ally Schemes

6th

Gay Men committee places in societies

# VP Liberation and Equality

## Husting Notes:

Sara:

Although doesn’t use alt text on images, does provide a plain text version of them.

* Opening Speech:
  + Represents all 5 liberation divisions. Liberation + access at Manchester. Decolonization campaign on campus, alongside LGBT+ campaign.
* Interconnectivity
  + Makes an emphasis that too much of activism is given to part time officers who have other commitments and that it is irresponsible to not ease the burden. Emphasis on supporting these officers. Speaks about campus visits, zoom calls etc to provide this support.
* National Experience
  + They’ve developed political education and resources on building anti-racist LGBTQ+ spaces.
* Further Education
  + Ensuring that FE institutions have funding for liberation campaigns and resource support, such as supporting strikes and staff. Also mentions fighting to abolish the predicted grade system which has been proven over and over again to disadvantage BAME and disabled students.
* Working with Trade Unions
  + Working with Unions is vital to providing excellent teaching and learning conditions.

Nelly:

Does not use Alt Text on their images.

* Opening Speech:
  + Falls into BAME and LGBT and women. Fought for equal treatment in institution, collaborating with students’ unions etc. No one is liberated while someone remains oppressed.
* Interconnectivity
  + She has many experiences that allow her to empathize with liberation groups and minorities within those liberation groups. Speaks of different issues she has seen on her campuses and how she has tried, and succeeded, in combatting them.
* National Experience
  + Has done multiple campaigns nationally, and has allowed knowledge that communities knows what is needed the most, and will use this knowledge to work with them.
* Further Education
  + Has come from an FE background and has built unions in these institutions from scratch. As a result, will continue to do this if she gets the position as she recognizes the issue on a personal level.
* Working with Trade Unions
  + Collaboration is key as you cannot win a campaign on your own.

Amelia:

Provides extremely detailed alt text on her images.

* Opening Speech:
  + Falls into women, disability. No education without liberation. Won disabled student activist of the year.
* Interconnectivity
  + Building it from the ground up. Working closely with volunteer committees to ensure that all voices are heard.
* National Experience
  + Has worked on multiple national campaigns and with government to change legislation, and has acknowledged that for some it is a lot more difficult to access no matter how hard they try.
* Further Education
  + Journey to liberation shouldn’t start at HE. FE students are not given as much weight as HE students and this is unfair. Mentions the need to stop framing it as a two tier system and rather as just ‘education’.
* Working with Trade Unions
  + Ensure that students are educated on their rights and have been given access to information on education. Making sure that people are choosing the right path for them, whether higher education or apprenticeship.

Hamza:

No Alt Text, does provide plain text.

* Opening Speech:
  + BAME, Women. Has been a part time officer, school representative, NUS black student representative, VP lead student movement for marriage equality and abortion rights.
* Interconnectivity
  + The next two years there needs to be a focus on not allowing the liberation side of the NUS to become one small section but rather integral to the association. Wants to work to reintroduce the full time individual liberation officers alongside her to ensure that no voice is forgotten.
* National Experience
  + She’s worked on national campaigns, and recognizes that one of the largest issues face with them is budgets getting cut and having limited resources.
* Further Education
  + Demand increased funding for FE students. Also ensure that FE apprentices are paid a living wage + get the training they deserve.
* Working with Trade Unions
  + We need to work with unions to ensure that both students and workers have access to support and protection during this pandemic and afterwards. Working with union is the only way to achieve the aim of free, accessible and liberated education.

Joshua:

Doesn’t provide alt text, has to be prompted in most cases.

* Opening Speech:
  + Fighting for the voiceless/powerless. Came from a background of being in care and being homeless.
* Interconnectivity
  + Acknowledges that he cannot represent all the different liberation groups and says that it would be dangerous to do so. As a result, he wants to focus on passing the mic to those who are more able to speak on specific issues that cause disruption in their communities. Also brings up specific niches that can be ignored such as care leavers and post graduate students.
* National Experience
  + Has worked on national campaigns for care leavers, which allowed understanding of policy and legislative changes. Says that to do this, we need to uplift minority students.
* Further Education
  + Is upset that there is not more FE voices in the NUS and wants to work to ensure that they are heard in the campaign to ensure that they are not left behind in activism and liberation.
* Working with Trade Unions
  + A lot of unions are led by white men, or white women which isn’t always effective. We need to go back to the roots where black women are fighting an achieving change. We need to be constructive and critical to ensure that individuals are not being let down by unions.

## Final Thoughts:

Overall, I think that all of the candidates have strong backgrounds in campaigning for justice among liberation groups and understand both their strengths and weaknesses in these positions. Overall, I believe that Sara Khan is probably the strongest candidate, and thus I will be voting for her as my first vote. The following is the order I have decided on based on these hustings:

1. Sara Khan
2. Hamsavani Rajeswaren
3. Amelia McLoughlan
4. Nelly Kibirige
5. Joshua Williams

# Votes for Steering and Campaign Committees

* Volunteer Campaign Committee – LGBT Place
  + There were two people running for this role in the committee – Shane and Tony. While both strong candidates and both active activists in their university communities, I decided to vote for Tony over Shane due to his intersecting identities amount LGBT+ and BAME.
* Volunteer Campaign Committee – Trans Place
  + Only Rosa was running for this role, but during her speech and while interacting with her on twitter, I am confident that she will be a good fit on the campaign committee and is dedicated to her activism.
* Volunteer Campaign Committee – Disabled Place
  + This one was incredibly difficult as both Leo and Molly are exception activists in their respective communities. However, I decided to vote for Leo as ze seemed to engage others in caucuses in activism which I think is a necessary asset if you are on a campaigning committee.
* Volunteer Steering Committee – Open Place
  + There are three roles open to run for, and only two candidates ran – Adam and Giang. As a result, it is incredibly likely both will have a place on the committee. However, this is good as both seem passionate in this area.
* Volunteer Steering Committee – LGBT Place
  + I decided to vote for Molly over Ish as Molly seemed more engaging during her speech and very committed to the role.
* Volunteer Steering Committee – Trans Place
  + Only Lucas ran for this role, but they are passionate so I didn’t see any reason to RON.