

“We won’t be the generation who turn the lights off on NUS”

NUS Reform

Conference Believes

1. The National Union of Students is in crisis.
2. If NUS does not reform, the cost of its student voice work will cause it to become insolvent.
3. NUS’ governance structure is complex, large, costly to NUS and members, and filled with unclear processes running concurrently. The result of this ‘over-governance’ is that the organisation is barely governed at all.
4. These problems are well known and there have been attempts to fix NUS’ democracy and governance as far back as 2004¹.
5. There are 5 Boards, 20 Officers, a total of 66 power-holding bodies, and a total of 200 power-holding individuals, making decision making and accountability impossible. In other words, there’s too many cooks in the kitchen...by far.
6. NUS’ democracy is tied to a model which prizes competition over consensus, argument over agreement, and in-fighting over fighting for the things that matter.
7. NUS’ democracy has suffered from a lack of engagement, lack of interest, and a lack of active participation from our members. 80 per cent of NUS’ Further Education members choose not to engage in National Conference and only one third (1/3) of the total possible delegates attend NUS Conference².
8. The burden of participation is currently set too high to enable mass participation in NUS’ democracy. In our current system, members’ ability to be represented by NUS is reliant on their ability to pay, their ability to give up significant amounts of time, and their knowledge of the inner workings of NUS. Our democracy shuts out too many members and must change.
9. NUS’ members want NUS to deliver a powerful national student voice on matters of major importance to students of the day. Members want NUS to offer a coherent plan of campaigning and influencing work that sets out clear priorities and measurable goals for winning.
10. Students’ unions are the members of NUS and the funders of NUS. Members want NUS to reduce its current offering down to core work. Rather than doing a thousand things badly, members want NUS to do a few things really, really, well and to make best use of the funds they invest in NUS.
11. The evidence base for reform is well established. These recommendations are born out of a history of consultations and reports which includes: *A New Settlement*, a report into the costs and benefits of NUS; *NUS 100* the roadmap for the future of NUS; *Independent Review into the Allegation of Institutional Racism*

¹ ‘A New Settlement’ report: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/a-new-settlement-report> ‘NUS 100’ documentation: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/nus100> ‘NUS 100’ Theory of change: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/nus100-how-we-seek-to-make-change> ‘NUS 100’ Strengthening Democracy and Governance: <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/strengthening-nus-democracy-and-governance>

² Data taken from NUS’ participation data from the previous academic year

in NUS, which made recommendations on NUS' political spaces; *Strengthening NUS Democracy and Governance*, a set of principles on the future of NUS' democracy built for and with NUS' members; *Membership Satisfaction Survey* which laid out the work our members really value; and finally *NUS Strategic Plan Analysis* which helped establish a direction of support in the future. Cumulatively, these reports have asked hundreds of students and students' unions hundreds of things hundreds of times, and again and again we find a common perspective that NUS needs to be more accessible, less complex, and be more fun to be a part of.

12. In this period of Turnaround (since October 2018), NUS has carried out lengthy consultation to get to the final proposed reforms, including: the largest ever Strategic Conversation; two consultations with responses from students and students' unions; two consultations with NEC; meetings with dozens of students' unions; and weekly meetings with NUS' full time officers.
13. Students' unions have told us they believe this could be our last chance to reform. They have indicated a failure to reform could endanger their ongoing affiliation to the national union.

Conference Further Believes

1. NUS has both a clear mandate and an existential requirement for radical reform.
2. In extensive consultation with members this year students' unions have overwhelmingly supported the reforms presented to National Conference.
3. The proposed Articles and Rules are based on the recommendations set out in the NUS White Paper. They offer a new vision of NUS – a lean campaigning machine able to affect significant change on, for and with our Members, and build an amazing movement of students engaged in their students' unions.
4. Like a plant that grows better once pruned, NUS must strip back to its core activity and give the next generation room to grow.
5. Detailed financial modelling has taken place³ showing the following things:
 - a. Students' unions are no longer willing to pay into NUS at the current rate – a new business model is required as outlined in the Notes & Guidance⁴;
 - b. NUS must reduce its costs by more than 50% in order to survive;
 - c. NUS must re-build its cash reserve by at least £3m in order to survive;
 - d. In this context, we must reduce our operations down to an absolute core in order to a) reduce the affiliation fee, b) rebuild the cash reserve, and c) deliver decent campaigns and services for and with members.
6. Full time officers need to be properly resourced within this smaller organisation. It is not acceptable for their work to be peripheral, 'priorities' to never get prioritised, or Officers to feel 'lost' in the organisation they are elected to lead.
7. Officer support levels are too low to enable them to have a productive and empowering experience. In the context of the financial modelling and the significant financial challenges ahead, the FTOs cannot be more than 7 in order to just maintain a similar level of support⁵.

³ The financial modelling was commissioned by the Turnaround Board and was undertaken by an external financial consultant. A summary of the modelling is contained in the Notes and Guidance document published to Members alongside this Motion.

⁴ See NUS Reform Notes & Guidance document

⁵ The Notes and Guidance document sets out that the staff:FTO ratio is 4:1 (pre-turnaround budget with 20 FTOs), 3:1 (2019/20 emergency budget with 12 FTOs) and 3.8 (proposed reform budget with 7 FTOs).

8. In our recent consultation⁶ 73% of students' union respondents preferred a full-time officer team with 7 Officers.
9. In the same consultation 84% of students' union respondents preferred the model of democracy described in the White Paper above either the current situation or the 2017 proposals.
10. In total, 4% of respondents favoured the current democratic model, and 7% favoured 14 full time officers.
11. There is a clear mandate from students' unions for radical reform as laid out in these proposals.
12. The new articles should give NUS the best chance of making it to its 100th birthday by giving NUS a simple governance structure where bodies are empowered to govern effectively, and by focusing its work on core activities and a set of clear priorities.
13. NUS should have one main Board which oversees all NUS' activity and is fully empowered to govern NUS in line with the wishes of the members (as expressed in the corporate and political spaces) and in line with the purpose set out in the Articles.
14. All full-time officers should be linked to the Board of the organisation, with a core group automatically holding a place on the Board. This gives them a direct route to power, the ability to govern and lead NUS, the ability to direct resources in line with political priorities, and means every officer has corporate as well as political accountability.
15. Above all else, NUS needs to simplify its governance. For that reason, it should be clearer that 'politics does politics' and 'corporate does corporate'. Students' unions should have corporate control of the organisation they fund, through a Company Law Meeting as defined in the Companies Act, while a representative democracy should set the political direction of NUS.
16. Part of the success of campaigns in Scotland, Wales and NUS-USI is that they present coherent plans of work to their respective members. This should be celebrated and amplified throughout the whole of NUS. A 'Cabinet' of FTOs (who are a sub-committee of the Board itself) should be empowered to develop a plan of work for the period of their election. The plan should be based on the political priorities expressed by members, and should take into consideration research, data and contextual information. This plan should be submitted to the Board for scrutiny and to ensure the plan can be fully resourced. This plan should then be communicated to members to aid their involvement and ensure scrutiny and accountability.
17. NUS-USI occupies a unique place in the history of NUS and this relationship should be preserved at all costs. As new rules and regulations come into force NUS will seek to maintain and strengthen the tri-lateral agreement.
18. The second recommendation of the *Independent Review into the Allegation of Institutional Racism in NUS* proposed that "NUS should consider moving elections to every other year as opposed to the current annual cycle". This is necessary, with stronger accountability mechanisms, to ensure stability, long-term planning, and a better political culture. It also means that members will get more from their officers because they won't waste months re-running in elections and can deliver work instead.

⁶ See NUS Reform Notes & Guidance document

19. On better political spaces NUS should hold elections separate to the formation of policy to ensure policy-making is not simply an extension of the elections themselves. This will enable more genuine discussion between members about their views and will enable us to use seminars, workshops, and consensus-building to form policy.
20. Voting should be open to more students' unions through digital technology. You should not be excluded because you are not in the room. Similarly, democracy should be easier to take part in, with pre- and post-conference ballots to clarify what members want to discuss, and to prioritise matters once discussed to give NUS a steer on campaign priorities.
21. Students' unions should be able to determine delegates within the rules set out in the NUS Articles. This brings our members to the heart of decision making while allowing students' unions to run a process closer to their local context.
22. NUS should commit to a new model of working in the regions, running organising, networking, campaigning and policy development activities on a regional basis to enable participating in NUS to be easier and less costly.
23. NUS needs a democracy which is both simpler and easier to take part in. NUS will run a small number of conferences run in such a way that enables maximum engagement from across the membership.
24. NUS needs to give members a chance to set political priorities and to hold officers to account through the following new mechanisms: (a) ballot pre and post-conference to determine priorities (b) introduce financial and operational detail into motions (c) introduce accountability surgeries for members (d) enable new types of SUs to join NUS to reflect modern modes of learning.
25. NUS will ease the burden of participation by removing committees, NEC, and other bodies, to instead support our student leaders to do what they are elected to do, deliver powerful campaigns and representation for students.
26. The work in building a more powerful student voice should be mirrored in NUS' students' unions support offer. Members want NUS to sit shoulder-to-shoulder with an organisation that delivers excellent and focused support to students' unions to aid their development and performance.
27. This period calls for exceptional leadership to save NUS from a financial crisis and a crisis of credibility for our movement. We have the information, the data, and the direction. National Conference now has the opportunity to radically reimagine our national union.

Conference Resolves

1. That the Articles of Association attached are adopted as the Articles of Association of the National Union of Students (United Kingdom), to the exclusion of all other Articles of Association and pursuant rules.
2. That with effect from the revised Articles coming into effect, the attached Rules are adopted as the Rules of the National Union of Students (United Kingdom), to the exclusion of all other Rules.