

For our Future: revitalising our national union

Steering note

If reform passes:

- *An implementation plan should be published within 2 months outlining timescales for each proposal; a development of rules for each nation that includes a consultation with SUs on the membership structure; and progress updates to members*
- *This implementation plan should include member engagement and consultation to develop an approach to 4 nations collective working*

What's the issue and why is it important?

1. We're living in a period of rapid change in our society – politically, economically and technologically. We are only just beginning to understand how this will transform our education, our students' unions and our lives.
2. In the face of undeniable change NUS UK cannot stand still and watch from the sidelines, it is on us to respond to the evolving needs of our movement. We must constantly adapt, improve and reinvent our national union to make sure it is fit to fight for students in the decades to come.
3. To futureproof NUS UK we need structures and governance that enable us to move quickly, maximise the potential for members to shape NUS' work across the year, whilst testing and adopting different methods for our work to be directly influenced by the 7 million students we represent.
4. There have been consistent calls from our members for each Nation to have greater autonomy and for NUS to adopt more decentralised ways of working that enable wider and deeper engagement from across the movement.
5. Across our democratic conferences over the past couple of years members have voted to transform the way that NUS works.
6. We have heard loud and clear that both students and sabbs want a more direct link to their national union. For NUS to continue to be a powerful and credible national student voice it's vital that we strengthen our connections with both.
7. Our collective power is our greatest strength. Securing political autonomy of nations and liberation groups should in no way weaken our commitment to collectivism.
8. In its 102nd year of existence, this is our chance to deliver a national union that fully engages and empowers all of its members.

What do we further believe?

9. Through policy passed at National, Liberation, Scotland and Wales Conferences NUS has a clear mandate for reform.
10. Extensive consultation on draft proposals published in 2023 demonstrate widespread support for these reforms across members in all four nations, in further and higher education.
11. The principles of financial sustainability from the last set of reforms in 2019 should be retained so that NUS' core expenditure does not increase;
 - The affiliation fee should not increase for SUs
 - The number of staff to support FTOs should not drop to below 3.8:1
 - NUS UK should continue to make £175k surplus annually to rebuild reserves

12. In NUS, as is in wider British society, 'UK' and 'England' are conflated in terms of policy, campaigns, elected leadership, and communications.
13. Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are 'devolved nations' with devolved elected leaders, governments, powers and activities. The majority of matters that NUS campaigns on are devolved, including education, housing, health and transport.
14. England makes up 80% of NUS membership. As a result, NUS UK's campaigns and structures are often England-centred. For all four nations to be able to determine and campaign effectively on their own priorities, UK and England must be separated in NUS' structures. NUS England will include a democratic space for SUs in England, elected officers, policy making, and campaigns capacity.

What changes are we proposing?

15. A Package of reform should be adopted by NUS which includes:
 - a. A proposed new set of Articles of Association to be proposed to a General Meeting of NUS' members.
 - b. The development of new sets of Rules to sit under these Articles of Association which will be based on the principles set in this policy proposal, to be proposed to the next meeting of each Conference / democratic space
 - c. Instruction to the NUS UK Board to take this work forward and deliver in line with this policy proposal.
16. The elected officer roles representing England should include an England President to align with the other nations, plus a Vice President Higher Education and Vice President Further Education to represent the two constituencies within our membership.
17. The Vice President Liberation and Equality role will be retained as a UK role to reflect the scope of the Liberation Collective.
18. UK representation should continue through the Officer Executive comprising 7 officers from four nations; and UK wide campaigning will happen when nations choose to work together on shared priorities.
19. Corporate governance and organisational infrastructure will continue to be provided at a UK level.
20. UK wide working will also happen through the Liberation Collective, a new liberation structure featuring an individual membership model for any student or sabb that defines into a liberation group.
21. Member unions should form an integral part of NUS' work in three key ways; by feeding in ideas and views; being part of delivering campaigns; and providing support and scrutiny.
22. Each nation operates at a different scale and within a unique context. Reforms should introduce new powers for nations to determine the membership engagement structures that work best them, so long as they deliver on the three key requirements above.
23. National Scrutiny Council will therefore be replaced by a scrutiny function in each nation involving representatives from SUs.
24. Anti-Racism Anti-Fascism Committee (ARAF) is an important body in NUS and currently sits within National Scrutiny Council. With the removal of National Scrutiny Council, ARAF will therefore become responsibility of the NUS UK Board.
25. A Single Democratic Procedures Committee should be established made up of members elected from each Nation and the Liberation Collective, a representative of the Executive and any non-voting co-opted members charged with oversight of NUS' democracy.

26. National changemaking should continue to be NUS' purpose. In England this should include a programme of regional activity to facilitate deeper and more regular member engagement, reducing costs for SUs to participate.
27. SUs should be able to shape NUS' work across the year not just at annual conferences. Those elected to represent SUs nationally should therefore be renamed 'representatives' engaged in an annual programme of national changemaking, rather than 'Delegates' participating in a single event.
28. NUS needs to reduce the burden on SUs to elect their NUS representatives by removing the general requirements for a cross campus ballot for NUS Rep positions. This will allow SUs to elect Reps based on local context and build it into any of their own elected positions.
29. The continued under-representation of FE in our national union cannot continue. NUS should undertake cross sector work to publish a plan that decisively delivers a stronger FE voice in our national union.
30. Further Education is under-represented in our democratic spaces. In order to increase participation, NUS will introduce a 2 Rep minimum entitlement for FE members.
31. New modes of learning mean our membership is changing. NUS will introduce new methods for setting the number of NUS Reps in circumstances where the standard calculation of tying to student numbers at an institution cannot be applied. The method is detailed in the full *Reform Proposal* and final numbers must be approved by Democratic Procedures Committee.
32. NUS should also make it easier for students to directly engage in their national union. We should introduce student insight via polling and ideas submissions to help inform democratic decision making, and enable any student from an affiliated SU to get directly involved in national campaigns.
33. The Trilateral Agreement is a unique agreement between NUS UK, NUS-USI and Union of Students in Ireland to jointly organise in Northern Ireland. It should be updated to reference NUS Rules & Articles of Association and updated governance structures.
34. The corporate governance of NUS UK should solely be the responsibility of members via company meetings, and democratic governance should be the responsibility of Reps in England, Wales, Scotland, NUS-USI and the Liberation Collective. Our processes should be simplified to enable the political autonomy of each.
35. Our national spaces should better represent and respond to the needs of international students. NUS will establish the International Student Voice Project, working with partners to drive international student-led policy and influencing work.
36. The Project will also develop a leadership programme, aimed at strengthening international student voice at a national level.
37. The Liberation Collective is a new politically autonomous space for student liberation work and any student defining into a liberation group should be able to shape the Collective's work. NUS should set up an individual membership model to enable this.
38. While the Collective is being developed it should be provided with some democratic rights member in the interim, so that Liberation Collective members can participate in policy making spaces across all nations
39. Students that define into each of the five liberation groups (women, disabled, LGBT+, trans, Black) should be supported to build communities in each nation. NUS should expand

Caucuses i.e. closed spaces for each liberation group to meet to be standard practice across all events.

40. The political autonomy of the Liberation Collective should include the right for Caucuses to determine their own names. NUS will adopt the outcome of "What's in a name?" engagement project with racialised students to rename the Black students caucus.

The UK Conference resolves that:

1. It approves the proposed changes to the Articles of Association of National Union of Students (United Kingdom) ("NUS UK"), relating to "Student Voice" activity, as presented to the meeting, subject to paragraph (2) below.
2. The Directors of NUS UK are to finalise the proposed changes, having regard to (i) the views expressed by the UK Conference per the vote and any minutes / notes of discussion and (ii) their duty to promote the purposes of NUS UK set out in its Articles of Association, before submitting them for adoption by the company law members of NUS UK at a general (company law) meeting.
3. The Directors of NUS UK are charged with developing interim Rules for NUS UK, having regard to the feedback at the 2024 Conferences (and their workshops), to be adopted on a transitional basis pursuant to the revised Articles of Association, with a view to those Rules then being presented to the relevant democratic spaces for adoption.