

Policy at National Conference

Guide to writing policy

National Conference is the sovereign policy-making body of NUS. Each year, nearly 1000 delegates meet to discuss and debate motions which set out NUS' political stance for the year ahead.

National Conference is a really exciting event and all Constituent Members should be able to participate in the debate. So whether you've submitted lots of motions to National Conference before or are doing it for the first time, here are our top tips for submitting motions.

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What is a motion?

A motion is a proposed policy. It states what we believe about an issue, and the action we will take. An Amendment is a proposed edit to a motion – it could add text, delete text or replace text. Any students' union that is affiliated to NUS can submit a motion or amendment to National Conference.

Policy:

- Guides the actions of NUS Leadership
- Acts as a 'contract' between the membership at conference and the Full Time Officers
- Guides Campaigns and Projects that unions can run
- Gives longevity and strategy to the work of NUS
- Explains what NUS and the student movement believes about an issue

Motions are discussed and debated at National Conference and then voted on.

If more than half of delegates at National Conference vote for a motion or amendment it will become policy.

Zone Proposals

Inside NUS, there are policy zones covering main broad areas of issues affecting students: Priority; Welfare; Further Education (FE); Higher Education (HE); Union Development; and Society and Citizenship.

Zone Proposals are produced by the National President working with NEC and Zone Vice-presidents working with their Zone Committees. They outline what the zone will work on for the next year.

[Priority Zone Proposal](#)

[Further Education Zone Proposal](#)

[Higher Education Zone Proposal](#)

[Society and Citizenship Zone Proposal](#)

[Union Development Zone Proposal](#)

[Welfare Zone Proposal](#)

Students' unions have a chance to submit **an amendment** that either adds to, deletes or replaces text in a Zone Proposal or discusses a new idea in **a motion**.

Checklist – Before you start writing

- Read the Zone Proposals. Do you want to submit any amendments?
- If you have a new idea, is National Conference the best place for your motion? Would it be more relevant at a liberation conference, a sections conference or a nations conference?
- Talk to other unions. If you want to submit policy on something and know that another union has also been working in that area, get in touch and see if you can collaborate on the text you're sending. Motions that cover the same area become one motion.

Each union has 1,400 words with which to amend the Zone proposals or write new

motions. Amendments to Zone proposals must be 300 words or less. Motions must be 600 words or less.

You will need to think about how you are going to use your word count.

Writing an amendment

Amendments can suggest three actions

Add: Add some text to the motion, for example if you can think of a great way to campaign on an issue you can add this to the resolves of a Zone Proposal.

Replace: Replace some of the text in the motion. For example, if the motion states that there are 200 Colleges in the UK, and you know that there are 370 Colleges, you can replace this line.

Delete: You can't delete the whole motion! But you can write an amendment to remove specific lines if you'd like to.

In an Amendment you need to identify which lines you are amending, for example:

'Replace Believes 2 with: There are 370 colleges in the UK'

Live Policy

NUS has a very high volume of policy - over 1000 pieces!

Your idea has probably been debated at a previous conference. Policy Passed at National Conference lasts for three years so you must [read the live policy](#) of NUS before you write your motion and not submit anything that duplicates Live Policy.

Think about what policy we might be missing, and if there are any student issues that haven't been debated recently and need to be looked at again.

Policy Lapse

Policy passed at National Conference remains live for three years. Policy passed at National Conference 2014 is due to lapse this year unless it is resubmitted by a Union. Read the [Policy Lapse 2017](#). If you wish to resubmit a piece of policy this should be included in your 1400 word submission to National Conference.

Writing a motion

The motion should fit into one of six zones: Priority, Society and Citizenship, Welfare, Education, Union Development or the AGM, which is used for changes to NUS' Rules.

Further Education: Matters directly affecting the educational experience on campus. FE Institutional Funding, FE Student Funding, Courses & Curriculum, FE work based learning, 14-19 Agenda, FE Learner Voice, Marking & Assessment, Qualifications Framework and relationships with FE sector agencies (e.g. AoC, LSC, LSIS) in conjunction with the National President.

Higher Education: Matters directly affecting the educational experience on campus. HE Institutional Funding, HE Student Funding, Courses & Curriculum, Postgraduates, Part Time Students, Plagiarism, Student Contracts, Marking & Assessment, Admissions, RAE, Qualifications and relationships with HE sector agencies (e.g. QAA, HEFCE, OIA) in conjunction with the National President.

Society & Citizenship: Students are citizens in the global context, their values, judgements and decisions impact upon wider society, and wider society impacts upon them. Global Conflict, Environmentalism, Students in the community (not housing), Student Voting, Volunteering, World Poverty, Political Issues in the Community, Votes at 16,

General political participation, Minimum Wage.

Union Development: Issues affecting and about Students' Unions Campaigning capacity, Building an Activist Culture, Organising, Students' Union funding, NUS Structures, NUS Reform, Students' Union Democracy, Participation, Involvement, Student Activities, Governance, Training, Student Media, Student Sport.

Welfare: Issues for students as students but outside of the classroom. Institutional Housing, Private Housing, Students at Work, Diversity and Discrimination on campus, Council Tax, Advice, Sexual Health, Benefits, Crime, Student Health issues.

What does a motion look like?

The first thing a motion should do is describe a situation or set out the issues. This is titled "Conference believes"

For example, using this motion submitted to Union Development Zone, Conference Believes sets out the following context:

Motion: For a Living Wage in our institutions

Conference Believes:

1. *The highest pay in the HE sector averages £248,292 per year.*
2. *Many workers in universities are paid the National Minimum Wage, and workers across the sector have had their pay cut by 13% since 2008.*
3. *Many Universities and Colleges still employ large numbers of staff for less than the Living Wage, and often on highly casualised contracts.*

This sets out the context of the situation and provides facts for the discussion. Some Constituent Members choose to add some extra information by using "Conference further believes"

Using the same motion as an example, Conference further believes sets out the principles behind our approach to the situation. The beliefs that we hold are as important as the actions we commit to. It sets out the position:

Conference further believes:

1. All workers should be paid at least the Living Wage

Once you've set out the issue and what you feel about it, your motion should plan how to enact that position. Ask someone to do something – this could be asking NUS to do something, or asking an officer to lobby an external organisation. This doesn't have to be extremely detailed, as officers can work on how to achieve the aims of the motion.

Conference resolves:

*1. To support SUs campaigning for the Living Wage, and publicise how workers at University of London and elsewhere have won it through industrial action.
2. To call for all students unions to lead by example in paying all workers, including student staff, the Living Wage.*

Think through the wording of your motion. Is there any way you could be misinterpreted? What clarifications can you provide at this point to stop this from happening?

Motions and Legal Risk

Some legal risk is attached to the publication, debate and resolution of motions mentioning individuals and companies. Students should be free in our structures to debate issues and it's important to protect this. We also have a duty to protect NUS from legal challenge.

Any motion submitted to a democratic body must include robust evidence, contain verifiable quotes and is not defamatory if it:

- makes a judgment about or includes a view on an individual, or
- makes a judgment about or includes a view on an external organisation or company.

What you need to do:

- Submit text that is accurate and verified, based on reliable evidence from multiple sources
- Provide sources in your motion: a good motion should always have references, especially if you're quoting somebody or making a claim about them. The word limit for a motion does not apply to the references
- When advised that text can't be published by NUS due to high libelous risk make reasonable changes to the text to reduce the risk within the deadline set by NUS

Policy that could be considered as defamatory will be returned to you for references to be provided. We will clearly identify the part of the text that needs to be altered and/or reasonably evidenced.

The proposers shall be asked to immediately alter the text and/or supply reasonable evidence and given 1 working day to resubmit the amended text. Where the policy approvers need further council it is understood that this may take a longer period of time to resolve. If the motion issues can't be satisfactorily resolved within a day the motions document shall be circulated without the motion/amendment that is of high libelous risk.

Where the proposer is willing to work with NUS to ensure the text isn't at high risk a further 2 working days shall be granted to resubmit the text which can then be added to the motions document and recirculated once complete. Where the proposer isn't willing to work with NUS to ensure the text isn't at high risk the

Democratic procedures committee (by delegated authority from the NUS UK Board) will be asked make a ruling on whether the text shall be circulated or ruled out of order. Their ruling shall be final.

Passing your motion through your union

Once you've written your motion, you need to make sure that it's been submitted in accordance with your students' union's constitution. All policy submitted to National Conference must go through a democratic structure within your union. NUS' Democratic Procedures Committee will not accept motions that have not been approved by the student body. This can be done in a number of ways:

- By Referendum
- By general meeting
- By a meeting of Executive Officers
- By a meeting of student council

Submitting your motion to NUS

Once you've got your motion signed off, you will need to submit it online on [the NUS National Conference hub](#). We will need your secure code that is kept by your chief executive or lead officer. We will also need the contact details for two people at the union. Late submissions will not be accepted.

The deadline for submitting amendments and motions is Tuesday 28 February 2017 at 5pm

Emergency Motions

An emergency motion is one whose substance concerns events occurring after the latest date for the submission of ordinary motions for discussion by the forthcoming meeting of the National Conference. No motion is an

emergency motion unless the present work of the National Union would be severely impaired by the failure of the forthcoming meeting to discuss the issue.

Drafting

The policy process is governed by a group of students, known as the **Democratic Procedures Committee** or **DPC**, who are elected by delegates at National Conference.

When all the motions are submitted, DPC bring together these different texts into the final motions document.

DPC meet for Drafting Commission to make decisions on whether motions have been submitted into the right zone, and if any motions need to be combined, as the same topic cannot be debated twice. In most cases DPC will bring text together where it is consensual or even identical to allow the debate to flow.

In some circumstances they will contact unions over email to resolve differences over the text. They will send out a compromise to be agreed. However, if unions disagree, we will arrange a compositing meeting for them to discuss the motion face to face.

Compositing

Compositing is the process of combining those motions that cover the same topics. Unions will be informed if they need to attend the meeting on **19th March**. After this process takes place, National Conference Motions will be published on **27th March**.

The Priority Ballot

If you're submitting policy or if there's something that you particularly want to discuss, make sure you take part in the priority ballot.

The Priority Ballot is the vote which we ask all confirmed delegates to participate in which determines the order the zones are debated in

and the order which the motions are discussed in each zone. You can vote on the order of every zone apart from the Priority Zone which is debated first, and the AGM which has a set time.

Conference aims to get through as many motions as possible but there is not always enough time to get through all the motions in each Zone, which is why the priority ballot is important.

If your delegation want to take part in the Priority Ballot they all need to be registered for National Conference before **10th March**. We need an accurate email address for the delegate (not a union staff member) so that we can send out the ballot. Anyone registered after this date will not be able to take part in the Priority Ballot.

The Priority Ballot opens on **31 March** and closes **7th April**.

The Agenda for the conference is written based on the results of the priority ballot.

Making Policy at Conference

Delegates will be provided with a copy of the motions document and the order paper. All other conference documents will be available online. If you require the document printing on coloured paper or larger print please fill this requirement in on the 'access requirements' section of your registration.

Delegates will be provided with a voting card and wristband to hold up during the debates. These are known as your 'credentials' and are necessary for taking part in voting. If this is lost then report it immediately to the information point. Credentials will not be replaced for 4 conference hours.

At the start of the Conference, the chair of DPC will present the Agenda (also known as Order Paper). Any challenges to this agenda must be

submitted before the start of debate in the first zone.

Each zone will have a set amount of time to debate the policy recommendations, amendments and ordinary motions submitted within it. Times can be extended for a specific area, but this will cut time to debate other zones.

The Democratic Procedures Committee manage this debate and they are available on stage left (audience right). You can approach DPC to request procedural motions, parts etc. You can also go to speak to them if you don't understand what is happening in the debate or want advice on procedures.

Preparing for Conference Debate:

- Some unions will mandate their delegation to vote in a certain way on some or all policy debates – check if your union does this
- Read our [guide to Conference terminology](#)
- watch our [webinar on Public Speaking and Preparation](#) for some tips on speaking and preparing a speech
- Delegates should gather opinion on the motions, discuss the different sides of the debate and discuss how they might vote at the conference in a way that represents the students of the union. [More Information on Consulting students before and after conference](#)

On Conference Floor:

For each motion you'll hear some speeches, some in favour and some opposed

After these speeches you'll be asked to vote by raising your delegate card at the appropriate time. You can vote:

FOR if you want the motion to become policy

AGAINST if you don't want the motion to become policy

ABSTAIN if you don't understand the issue or don't believe NUS should have a stance on it

Amendments

Some motions will have amendments to them. Conference will hear speeches and be asked to vote on amendments in the same way as the motion.

Amendments then become part of the main motion. If you vote for the motion you're also voting for the amendment.

For Example:

At National Conference 2011 the first motion was called 'Education Funding' which called for a specific type of funding system and resolves to do specific things.

It had a number of amendments.

Conference voted for amendment (a) then the motion became a mix of the original AND the text of amendment (a).

Conference voted for the motion as a whole and NUS' policy became both the main motion and the amendment

Motions in the AGM section that changes the Articles or Rules of NUS will need a 2/3 Majority to pass

Healthy and Positive Debate

Diversity and difference of opinion is crucial and makes our movement interesting. Respect and cherish that different people will have different values, beliefs and views – and that's healthy.

If you disagree with someone's views or politics, challenge their views and argument through active purposeful debate – don't attack the individual.

Remember that social media is an active part of the conference environment. If you wouldn't say something on conference floor don't say it on Twitter. The Conference is also streamed on the Internet and a high-profile media event.

Take responsibility for your wellbeing and putting the decisions of conference into a balanced perspective – take breaks and time out from conference floor when you can but

remember to make a note of when the votes/elections are being taken.

Use this opportunity to hold your elected leaders to account but also be positive about and take time to celebrate some of the incredible work that our student movement does to make education, society and our world better.

Policy Adoption

Each Liberation Campaign, Student Section and Nation has its own conference, where policy relating to the students in those campaigns is debated and agreed. The process of passing policy at each conference differs between campaigns.

Every year the policy of each liberation, student section and nation and NEC is presented to National Conference for adoption. Delegates to National Conference are not permitted to propose amendments. Once adopted, the policy of each of these campaigns becomes the policy of National Union of Students.

Policy that isn't passed at Conference

Policy that we don't get time to discuss at Conference is debated and voted on at the next NEC meeting in the calendar. This will be in June 2017. Any Motions that passed will become policy of NUS.

Key Articles and Rules

Articles:

32-35 National Conference: Role and Powers

36 Composition of the National Conference

37-40 Proceedings of the National Conference

Rules:

300-500 National Conference