Guild Summit Agenda
Tuesday 22nd November 2016 at 5pm

Elizabeth Gidney Room 1
Liverpool Guild of Students

Thank you for agreeing to take part in Guild Summit. In this document you will find an explanation of the meeting and how decisions you make here are fed into the Guild, as well as the list of Ideas to be discussed at the meeting.

The agenda for this meeting is set out below:

1. What is Guild Summit?

2. Idea for discussion:
   A. Boycott National Student Survey
   B. NUS National Ballot

3. Additional Information
   A. From the University
   B. From The Guild

What is Guild Summit?

Guild Summit is made up of 50 students, randomly selected by a computer system based on gender, mode of study (UG, PGT or PGR), level of study, ethnicity and mature students. This makes sure the students attend reflect the makeup of the student body at the University of Liverpool. Students at Summit are required to come to a consensus on what to do with each idea that has been proposed.

What is consensus decision making?

Consensus decision making is a way of reaching agreement between all members of a group. Through listening closely to each other, the group aims to come up with proposals that work for everyone. Consensus is neither compromise nor unanimity - it aims to go further by weaving together everyone’s best ideas and key concerns - a process that often results in surprising and creative solutions, inspiring both the individual and the group as a whole.

Why is it important?

Consensus decision making removes the issue found in traditional decision making where the loudest voice is heard the most. We believe that all voices, whether they are of the majority or the minority, should be heard. Consensus decision making ensures that all participants feel they have ownership over the decision they make, or at least feel they can live with the decision and so should feel they have arrived at the best decision possible.
What decisions can we make?

There are two options open to students in this summit when deciding what to do with an idea:

1. Come to a consensus on whether the Guild should take the idea forward. This is then referred to Board of Trustees for final approval.
2. Come to a consensus that the idea is not right for the Guild and therefore shouldn't be progressed any further.
3. If the group cannot come to a consensus after discussion, the idea is put to a Preferendum (student vote).

What is a Preferendum?

If the Guild Summit can’t come to consensus on an idea, a number of options may be put to Preferendum, through which students can vote on what their preferred option would be via a campus ballot.

This is different from a traditional “referendum” where students just vote for one option, as it allows students to get their 2nd or 3rd choice and therefore ensures that most students are happy with the outcome that is proposed. The results of the student vote will be passed onto Board of Trustees for final approval.

What is the Board of Trustees?

All policy must be passed by the Board of Trustees for it to become active. Board of Trustees is made of 12 individuals: 4 Student Officers, 4 Student Trustees, and 4 External Trustees who have an expertise that is useful to making decisions. The trustees’ main concern is to ensure that any decisions made are legal and financially responsible. They are also required to ensure that any policy that is passed is applicable to the Guild’s charitable objects.

The Guild’s charitable objects are the advancement of education of Students at the University of Liverpool for the public benefit by:-

3.1 providing opportunities for the expression of Student opinion and actively representing, supporting and advising Students;
3.2 acting as the recognised representative channel of communication between Students and the University of Liverpool and other external bodies;
3.3 promoting the interests and welfare of Students at the University of Liverpool;
3.4 facilitating social, cultural, sporting and recreational activities and forums for discussions and debate for the personal development of its Students, and providing services and support for its Students and;
3.5 promoting the interests and welfare of Students at the University of Liverpool.

Any ideas that pass at Guild Summit will go to Board of Trustees.
Idea for discussion

A. Boycott the National Student Survey

This information has been by provided by the student who submitted the Idea.

In 2016 the Government put forward their key ideas for reforming university and college education. This was in the higher education ‘White Paper’ and this included a flagship reform called the ‘Teaching Excellence Framework’.

It has now been confirmed that tuition fees are going to increase, starting in 2017/18, and whether a university can increase their fees is partially dependent on how they score on the Teaching Excellence Framework. A key component of the Teaching Excelling Framework is how well a university scores in the National Student Survey. The National Student Survey is for final year students to review their course and their time at university. It is used by both the Guild and the university to improve standards. Williams and Mindano (2016), in their overarching report on the National Student Survey, however, find that it is not a good measure of overall student satisfaction throughout three years at university, it has not as of yet markedly improved overall teaching quality and it has been found to place staff in Higher Education under unnecessary pressure.

Government reforms since 2010 are turning UK higher education into a market. We are now at a crossroads. This latest round of reforms are the final piece of the puzzle: raising fees further and relaxing rules on private companies that want to provide university education, in an attempt to force competition in higher education. But competition will drive up fees whilst driving down overall quality and working conditions for academics will arguably get worse (UCU, 2016).

The National Student Survey is a key mechanism: it informs league tables, is used to monitor staff, and will be a key metric in the government’s proposed Teaching Excellence Framework. So even before it is used in the Teaching Excellence Framework, it relies on students participating, which gives us power. If we choose not to participate – if we choose to boycott– we exercise our power. Universities all around the country are choosing to boycott the NSS in 2017, so let’s join them and stop these reforms negatively impacting on our university experience.

Our proposals for action for Liverpool Guild of Students

(a) For Liverpool Guild of Students to campaign to prevent the university from using the National Student Survey alongside the Teaching Excellence Framework to raise tuition fees.
(b) If action (a) is unsuccessful then for the Guild (in conjunction with ‘Free Education Liverpool’ society) to organize a boycott of the National Student Survey.

These are based on current NUS policy, if you have any questions feel free to email us: freeeducationliverpool@gmail.com

References


Idea for discussion

B. NUS National Ballot

This information relates to an action that must be taken by The Guild, as a member of the National Union of Students (NUS).

National Conference is the sovereign policy-making body of NUS and brings together nearly a thousand delegates from students' unions across the country to discuss, debate and vote on motions and elect the political leadership of the organisation for the year ahead. National Conference 2016 resolved that NUS should “mobilise students to sabotage or boycott the Spring 2017 NSS” by passing Motion 201 “Divorce our courses from market forces”.

The call for a National Ballot is in relation to this activity and asks the question:

Should NUS conduct and publish a risk assessment and equality impact assessment before finalising the NSS boycott / sabotage action?

As a Guild we are affiliated with NUS and therefore get to submit one vote which represents the position of the majority view of our members. The vote should be based on a decision made by our usual decision making process, which is the Guild Summit meeting.

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/shape-our-work/articles/chief-returning-officer-opens-national-ballot
**What is the National Student Survey (NSS)?**

The National Student Survey (NSS) is an independently run survey which has been carried out across the UK each year since 2005.

The survey invites undergraduate students in their final year of study to reflect on their time at university and to share their honest opinions about key issues relating to student experience. The questionnaire covers: teaching quality, academic support, assessment & feedback, organisation & management, learning resources and personal development. This year, following consultation with students and other stakeholders, a number of new question areas have been added to the core questions. New sections for 2017 include: learning opportunities, learning community and student voice.

The NSS allows universities to benchmark against other higher education providers and also to monitor and respond to trends over time. Typically the survey is run in conjunction with the Guild of Students, with decisions about the survey being made in partnership and the results being jointly owned by both parties. This not only provides greater transparency, but also ensures that we work together to effectively implement changes which really matter to our students.

The results of the survey are made available to prospective students and their advisers via the Unistats website, allowing them to compare programmes and universities nationally and helping to inform university choice. This is an information source which we expect many of our current students will have used during their own decision making; 93%¹ of this year’s applicants told us that student satisfaction scores were important to their decision.

**What do we do with your feedback?**

Results of the survey are analysed and reported in a number of ways, and are considered alongside other student feedback such as module evaluation, ad hoc surveys and feedback via the Staff Student Liaison Committees (SSLC). Quantitative scores are monitored year-on-year to better understand whether the experience in certain areas is improving or getting worse and to measure whether changes we have implemented are having the desired effect. Scores are also compared to other universities to give us a better sense of where we can learn from good practice elsewhere.

The survey produces extremely valuable qualitative feedback via the free text comments that students make. Each of the comments received (usually c.4000 comments) is read by the Student Opinion Team, the department to which they relate and the Senior Management Team. This gives colleagues a strong sense of student views on key issues and how we can work to improve the experience we offer at the University.

Since 2015, each academic department has been required to respond to student feedback by producing an Enhancement Plan in partnership with students. The Plans aim to set out achievable and measurable initiatives to

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¹ UoL UG Applicant Survey 2016.
address the issues raised in feedback. The NSS is an important impetus for this activity and provides key evidence to highlight areas for improvement.

Why does the NSS matter to the University?

The NSS is an objective and well-established survey which attracts high levels of engagement from both students and staff. Whilst not perfect, it is our most consistent and comprehensive measure of student satisfaction. It is our best chance of understanding the representative views of all of our students and what we can do to make their experience better.

In 2016 we achieved our highest response rate to date with 76% of eligible students completing the survey. This level of engagement means that we can be confident in the accuracy of the data which we receive; using a standard calculation of data confidence we can be 99% sure that if everybody had completed the survey, the results would be the same +/-1%. It would be extremely difficult to achieve this level of robust data with other more local student surveys.

The survey has been shown to help drive improvements, both across the sector and at the University. Assessment and Feedback was recognised as an area of weakness across the sector following the results of the NSS in 2006. The attention given to this area in response has resulted in a 13% improvement in scores across the sector and 15% improvement at the University of Liverpool and we are confident we can continue to build on this improvement.

The NSS gives students across the sector a platform to share their views and enables them to easily identify areas where they can expect improvement. Evidence suggests that students have appreciated the opportunity to have their voice heard in this way. Since the introduction of the new Enhancement Plan process, agreement with the statement “within my course, I feel my suggestions and ideas are valued” has improved by 6% across the University. In some areas this figure has increased by well over 10%, most notably Politics which has seen an increase of 29% since 2015.

What has changed as a result of the NSS?

There are a number of examples of improvements made directly as a result of NSS feedback. These include University-wide initiatives to more specific, departmental enhancements. Recent examples include:

Lower printing costs:

More information here: [https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2016/10/14/printing-costs-reduced-students/](https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2016/10/14/printing-costs-reduced-students/)

Lecture Capture technology:

More information here: [https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2016/05/27/lecture-capture-tool-clocks-thousands-views/](https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2016/05/27/lecture-capture-tool-clocks-thousands-views/)
[https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2015/07/03/launch-of-new-lecture-capture-tool/](https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2015/07/03/launch-of-new-lecture-capture-tool/)

Library Study Space:

More information here: [https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2016/09/15/additional-library-study-space-created/](https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2016/09/15/additional-library-study-space-created/)
[https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2016/05/17/libraryontour-eases-pressure-study-space/](https://student-news.liverpool.ac.uk/2016/05/17/libraryontour-eases-pressure-study-space/)

Improved access to reasonably priced textbooks – ‘Pass the Book’:

More information here: [https://ptbook.liverpool.ac.uk/](https://ptbook.liverpool.ac.uk/)
Departmental examples
As well as top level changes, there are numerous examples of departmental improvements which have been made in response to NSS feedback:

- Medicine students told us they wanted more teaching and more science content in the early stages of the course. As a result the number of lectures has been tripled and more basic science teaching is included at the start of the programme.

- Students in Physical Sciences wanted more information about their academic advisors. As a result Maths and Physics expanded the induction programme, putting more emphasis on academic advisors and how to contact them.

- The Management School have introduced ‘Welcome Back’ sessions in years 2 and 3 to address the need for a more effective continuing induction programme.

Why can’t we use other feedback which isn’t related to the TEF?

Whilst we can and do use other sources of student feedback to inform our Enhancement Plans, the NSS gives us the benefit of historic, trackable data, and external benchmarks which can help current students understand their experience in the context of the sector. The survey is administered by an independent company, providing consistency and transparency across the sector. There are also strict rules in place (i.e. neutral promotion rules) to ensure that survey responses cannot be coerced or manipulated. The externality also allows prospective students to compare the student experience across a number of universities and make informed decisions about where to study.

We have found, as detailed above, that the NSS has been an effective agent for change and has resulted in enhancements which have been well-received by both staff and students. We value the student voice and want to ensure that we capitalise on every opportunity to gather your feedback.

We also believe that the process works best when the University works in partnership with the Guild of Students and its members to ensure that we take the right steps to address feedback and that plans are implemented in the best way to benefit our students. We hope that we can continue to work together to measure and improve the student experience.

Alex Widdeson, Head of Market Intelligence and Customer Insight

Gavin Brown, Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education

Additional Information

B. From The Guild

This is compiled by the Guild, supplementing the information already provided, to help you to make a decision.

Why is it being suggested students boycott the NSS?

The government are planning various changes to higher education, one of the plans is to introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) to assess teaching quality. How an institution scores in TEF, could affect tuition fees as it is suggested that Institutions that score highly, will be allowed to charge higher fees.
Delegates at this year's National Union of Students (NUS) National Conference voted for the NUS to find the most effective strategy for challenging the government's higher education reforms, by either boycotting or sabotaging the National Student Survey. The NSS is being targeted because the government will use the results as a measure in their new Teaching Excellence Framework, which in turn will affect tuition fees for home undergraduate students.

The NUS have consulted with their members and have launched a campaign to sever link between tuition fees and TEF. NUS will support Students’ Unions (SU’s) like the Guild, to take action against the TEF. This will involve helping SUs to get their vice chancellors on board and lobbying parliament to cut the link between the TEF and fees.

If this is unsuccessful, NUS will support SUs that decide to encourage their students not to fill in the NSS.

http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/boycott-or-sabotage-nss-consultation-meetings-set-for-30-and-31-august
http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/nus-launches-campaign-to-sever-link-between-tuition-fees-and-tef

What is the position of other institutions on this?

Below is the position of a number of other institutions on this issue. This is by no means an exhaustive list but a sample of institutions you Officers were able to contact to give you an idea of opinion nationally.

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http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/