

HOW TO WORK WITH STUDENTS' UNIONS



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STUDENTS' UNIONS ARE THERE JUST FOR YOU!

Most colleges and universities have a students' union which is there to represent you. As a student, you are automatically a full member of your students' union and this means that you have the opportunity to utilise their campaign knowledge and resources. They're amazing places which look after the needs of all students – so you can ask them to support Votes at 16 and campaign on yours and others behalf.

HOW DO STUDENTS' UNIONS WORK AT UNIVERSITY?

Higher Education Students' Unions are independent organisations from the University, this means that everything the Union does is determined by students for students through a democratic process. Each year a number of students are elected into officer positions and these positions can be voluntary, part-time or full-time. The aim of the role is to provide representation for all the students at your university and, in turn, to campaign on issues that are relevant to students.

As well as the elected officers, most students' unions are responsible for overseeing the student rep programme. The student rep, or in some cases this can be called class rep, is a student that is elected by their class mates to represent the views of the class at university meetings. Student reps work with elected officers in running campaigns and feeding the views of students into the union.

Most unions have a Student Council which is one of the most important of these parts - only the Annual General Meeting (normally held once a year) or a cross-campus referendum, hold more authority.

Whilst the democratic processes can seem confusing at first, they have been designed to provide students with a number of different opportunities to feed in to the union. The officers are generally responsible for ensuring the effectiveness of these processes, which means that they are extremely interested to hear from you about your concerns or ideas.

THE DIFFERENT ELEMENTS OF A STUDENT UNION

Student Council

Student Council, or Union Council, is a regular meeting where most major decisions and policy are made about the way that the Union is run. It is often made up of the elected full-time officers, part-time officers, student representatives and representatives from halls, societies and academic faculties. Student Council also appoints members to sub-committees which address a variety of issues from creating policy to holding the full-time officers to account.

AGM (Annual General Meeting)

Held usually once a year, this is the highest decision making body in the union democratic structures. AGM is the easiest and best way to get involved at university. This is an open meeting, which means any student can attend to have their views heard. There are run differently in every union, but they generally allow opportunities to discuss what campaigns the union should be focussing on.

Referenda

A referendum is where a particular issue that usually can't be agreed on by members of the Student Council, is put out to the student body for a simple yes or no vote. Referendums have to be conducted in accordance to the union's regulations, which means there usually has to be a minimum number of votes for the decision to be passed. A referendum held across campus is the highest possible means of determining Union policy. Often a referendum can be called by the President or Student Council at any time, or any full member can hand a petition of at least 300 full members' signatures to the President or Chair of Student Council.

TAKING YOUR CAMPAIGN TO THE STUDENTS' UNION

Get in Touch with Your Students' Union

Your students' unions can be powerful allies for you and your campaign. They often have financial and physical resources and can provide you with support, advice, and solidarity.

Make contact with your students' union and find out more about how they work and how you can get involved. You can often find contact details via their website. Most unions have on campus offices so, if you have time, you can drop by and speak to available officers.

Tell them about your campaign and discuss how they could support it (see the How to hold a successful meeting guide).

Things you could ask include:

- The students' union to become an official supporter of your campaign.
- To make available meeting spaces for planning meetings and public debates.
- To provide support and guidance on planning an effective campaign and recruiting supporters.
- To provide support for writing and printing leaflets and other material.
- To provide you guidance and support when lobbying local councillors and your MP.
- To point you in the direction of local community campaign groups that may be relevant.
- How to submit motions to create policy for the union to support the campaign.
- To increase the profile of the Votes at 16 campaign amongst their students.

SUBMITTING POLICY TO YOUR STUDENT COUNCIL OR AGM

Below is an example motion that you could use in order to gain the support of students and your students' union. You can find out from your union officers how to submit motions, as every union will have a slightly different procedure.

Motion: Support of the Votes at 16 Campaign

<Insert name of organisation> notes;

- 1** That currently 1.5 million 16 and 17 year olds are denied the vote in public elections in the UK.
- 2** That the campaign to lower the voting age is supported by thousands of young people across the UK and that the Votes at 16 Coalition consists of a wide range of youth and democracy organisations.

This union branch believes;

- 1** 16 and 17 year olds are knowledgeable and passionate about the world in which they live and are as capable of engaging in the democratic system as any other citizen;
- 2** Lowering the voting age to 16, combined with strong citizenship education, would empower young people to better engage in society and influence decisions that will define their future;
- 3** People who can consent to medical treatment, work full-time, pay taxes, get married or enter a civil partnership and join the armed forces should also have the right to vote.

This union branch believes;

- 1** To join the Votes at 16 Coalition;
- 2** To write to the Leader of the Council, local MPs and the local media to inform them of this decision and ask them to support the campaign;
- 3** To promote this policy through its communications;
- 4** To run activities to raise awareness of and support for Votes at 16 in the local area.

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For more information about Students' Unions, visit the National Union of Students' website [here](#).

For information about the NUS' campaign for Votes at 16, visit this webpage: [here](#).

