

Policy Proposal: Supporting Students in Sex Work

What would you like the Union to do?

Renew the recently lapsed policy, Supporting Students in Sex Work

(<https://studentsunionucl.org/policy/up2008/supporting-students-in-sex-w...>). This includes:

- To support and campaign for the full decriminalisation of sex work in order to better protect student sex workers.
- To support sex worker led organisations, such as the English Collective of Prostitutes, SWARM, Sex Workers Alliance Ireland, and SCOT-PEP, who work to improve the lives of student sex workers across the UK and beyond.
- If there was an attempt to introduce the Nordic Model, to raise awareness of the impact on student sex workers.
- To support student sex workers being threatened with disciplinary action based solely or in part due to their status as a sex worker.
- To support student sex workers that are being outed, targeted, faced with prejudice and discrimination or harassed in the university for their status as sex workers
- To have resources available for student sex workers seeking report, such as the Student Sex Work Toolkit for Staff in Higher Education developed by the Sex Work Research Hub

Why would you like to do this?

I think that restating the union's commitment to supporting students in sex work is incredibly important. With one in twenty students working in sex work, often to support increasing costs of living, offering support to a student group that is already at high-risk is the least that the union could do. Additionally, pushes for legislation to criminalise the purchase of sex, for example through the introduction of a "Nordic Model", are often led by anti-choice, anti-trans, right-wing fundamentalists and radical exclusionary feminists, who act against the values of diversity and inclusivity that the union stands by.

Often, legislation of this kind is brought forward in the name of anti-trafficking programmes, when in reality they are laws which aim to control what people can and can't do with their own bodies, combined with dangerous anti-immigration initiatives. Criminalising the purchase of sex puts sex workers, especially those who work on the street, in danger. Decriminalisation reduces police abuse, harassment and violence against sex workers. Organisations that support the decriminalisation of sex work include the World Health Organisation, UN Women, Amnesty International, the Global Commission on HIV and the Law, Human Rights Watch, and NUS. Decriminalisation would ensure that sex workers feel able to report unsafe clients or violence at work without the worry of criminal repercussions, and that those who wish to leave the sex industry are not left with criminal records as a result of their job.

How will this affect students?

The Student Sex Worker Project shows us that at least one in twenty students have engaged in sex work. During a cost of living crisis, more students will be dependent on sex work during their time at university. By passing this policy, the union, and hopefully, the university, will be better able to support students in sex work.

As stated in the previous policy, expulsion of or disciplining student sex workers for their involvement in sex work is counterproductive to their goals, safety and wellbeing. “Outing” or letting others know about a student’s status as a sex worker without their consent puts the student at great risk of harm, and is a form of harassment. Prejudice and discrimination against sex workers can include using slurs against sex workers, excluding sex workers from societies or events, purposefully silencing the voices of sex workers, aggressively arguing for criminalisation or for the Nordic model without inclusion of current sex workers themselves, and maliciously outing a sex worker with intent to cause discipline or harm.