

Policy Proposal: Supporting Students in Sex Work

What would you like the Union to do?

Re-introducing an amended version of the lapsed policy, so that it would read:

What you need to know

Sex work refers (but not limited) to escorting, lap dancing, stripping, pole dancing, pornography, webcams, adult modelling, phone sex, and selling sex

The current regime of austerity, and cuts to services and support have disproportionately affect women, migrants, disabled people, and people of colour.

Whilst sex work is not illegal in the UK it is still criminalised, sex workers who work on the street can be picked up on soliciting or anti-social behavioural order charges, and sex workers who work together indoors for safety can be charged with brothel keeping.

The rise in living costs, debt, the increase in tuition fees, and the slashing of benefits for disabled people, it is highly likely that some students do sex work alongside their studies in order to get from month to month.

Regardless of the reasons for entering into sex work, sex workers of all backgrounds deserve to have their rights protected.

The Student Sex Worker Project shows us that at least one in twenty students have engaged in sex work.

Transgender Europe's recent report declares that 88% of murdered trans people in Europe are sex workers.

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.

What Union council think about this

The pushes for legislation which would criminalise the purchase of sex (and introduce what is known as the 'Nordic Model') are often spearheaded by anti-choice, anti-trans, right-wing fundamentalists and radical exclusionary feminists.

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.

What the Union should do about it

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?

The previous policy has lapsed and it is critical that the SU restates its commitment to supporting student sex workers.

As explained in the previous policy, the pushes for legislation which would criminalise the purchase of sex (and introduce what is known as the 'Nordic Model') are often spearheaded by anti-choice, anti-trans, right-wing fundamentalists and radical exclusionary feminists.

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.

All of these points apply equally to student sex workers. This policy proposal is supported by the SU Women's Officer, Aarushi Menon.

How will this affect students?

The Student Sex Worker Project shows us that at least one in twenty students have engaged in sex work. Rising living costs and tuition fees are only increasing dependency by students on sex work. This situation is likely to worsen given the economic hardship caused by the pandemic.

The introduction of a commitment to offering support resources to student sex workers would

strengthen the ability of UCL to support student sex workers.

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.