



Council

NUS Motions: An Attempt to Explain What is Going On!

Jacob Head
CUSU Education Officer

CUSU Council, Michaelmas IV

Introduction

Michaelmas IV is traditionally the CUSU Council meeting at which motions about the National Union of Students are brought. The NUS is often seen as a bewildering organisation to those on the outside and so the CUSU Executive decided that a short guide might be helpful to Council Members.

What are NUS Motions?

The NUS Motions which are being brought this evening are ultimately aimed at being passed at the *NUS National Conference*, a three-day event which takes place in Blackpool in late March or early April. The National Conference is the sovereign body of the NUS where delegates from each affiliated union (called '*Constituent Member*' or '*CM*') vote and discuss policy, much like CUSU Council. Each CM sends a number of delegates proportionate to its size. Currently, CUSU sends 13 delegates who are elected during main Lent ballot.

The 'Zones'

In order to better organise the Conference, motions are divided into '*zones*' or '*baskets*', depending on topic. There are currently four zones:

1. Education
2. Society and Citizenship
3. Strong and Active Unions
4. Welfare and Students' Rights

and CUSU is allowed to send one motion in each zone. If we pass more than one motion in each zone, CUSU Council then votes on which one to send. Each motion must have fewer than 400 words and is divided into 'Believes', 'Further Believes' and 'Resolves' sections (which are approximately equivalent to the 'Notes', 'Believes' and 'Resolves' sections of CUSU Council Motions). The motions must be submitted to the NUS' *Steering Committee* (a committee which ensures the smooth running of the conference) by early December.

Amendments and Priority Ballot

The raw motions are then published by the Steering Committee and CUSU can submit up to four amendments (one for each zone) to any of the motions in the document (although, in practice, they can introduce new text, as occurred in 2005 when the full motions were not submitted and so they had to be shortened and submitted as amendments). Amendments have to be shorter than 240 words and have to be submitted by late February. They are usually discussed at the Lent I Council. At the same time a *Priority Ballot* is sent to each Union which allows the Union to vote for which order the zones are discussed at the Conference. Which zone is last is usually most important as frequently there is little time for these motions to be debated and therefore less chance of them becoming policy.

Composting

The next process is the most complex. It aims to reduce the large number of motions and amendments (279 in 2005-6) to a more manageable number which can then be made into a smaller agenda that can be debated by the Conference. In past years, this process was idiosyncratic in the extreme but much work has been undertaken to reform it. What now occurs is that the Steering Committee meets and decides which motions are similar in content and which ones "stand alone". Then, on the next day, the *Drafting Commissions* take (often known as '*composting*' (and contrary to what you will hear, the middle 'o' in '*composite*' is pronounced as the second 'o' in '*composition*' rather than the 'ow' in '*glow*')) place with the aim of producing composite motions for the Conference. Each Union sends a delegate for each of its motions. He or she is then expected to combine the text of his or her motion with those which the Steering Committee have agreed are similar. The CUSU delegates are usually decided at the Michaelmas IV Council. If two motions have been brought on the same topic but differing in their view (e.g. one calling for a company to be boycotted whilst one calling for the same company to be supported), then one bland general motion is produced with amendments for each of the differing views.

Agenda Order and Speeches

Finally, the drafting commissions decide the order in which the motions will be discussed within the zone (again, the final ones are less likely to be discussed) and also which Unions should make the principle speeches in favour and against the motions. The agenda is now ready for the Conference where the motions might even make it into policy!