

# **NUS Conference 2016 - Our Thoughts**

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The National Union of Students (NUS) held its annual conference in Brighton last week, and here are some of the key highlights from the perspective of Surrey Union's delegation.

## **1. Malia Bouattia was elected NUS President.**

The conference elected a new President, Malia Bouattia, who stood against existing President Megan Dunn. This came as a shock to many who expected Megan to walk away with another year in office. Malia's election has sparked off debate at Students' Unions around the UK, who have questioned her views on several key issues, and believe that statements she made prior to her election have caused division within the NUS. These issues have been widely reported by the press in recent days, and you can read about the different sides of the debate below:

[BBC](#)

[The Guardian](#)

[The Independent](#)

[The Huffington Post](#)

You can read Malia's response to the article [here](#).

*'The NUS President is the national face for students all around the UK, and Malia will be responsible for influencing the government on decisions that affect all students, from student fees to accommodation and living costs. Malia enters this role at a time when the NUS are clearly divided along political lines – she will now need to focus on the difficult job of uniting the student movement.'* -**Mustie Smith, President.**

## **2. Your VP Voice ran for NUS VP Welfare, and we all joined the Munya Movement.**

Munya, the current VP Voice at Surrey, stood as NUS Vice President Welfare, and encouraged everyone at conference to join him in his campaign. He was running against the current VP, Shelly Asquith, who has taken on the role for the past year. In what became a very tight contest, Munya received 320 votes to Shelly's 370.

*'I'm obviously disappointed not to have become Surrey's first sabbatical officer to win a national role at the NUS, but I'm pleased I ran and made it a real competition. We have to*

*make sure democracy is at the heart of Student Unions and no role should go uncontested. I got the opportunity to address the whole conference on the issues I believe matter most to students, including mental health and access to quality housing. I just want to thank everyone at Surrey for their support while I was campaigning; hopefully I did you all proud.'*

**- Munya Mudarikiri, VP Voice.**

### **3. The conference decided to boycott the National Student Survey.**

Before the conference began, we highlighted this as a particularly significant policy that was due to be voted on at the conference. This policy was brought to the conference by Students' Unions who believe that the National Student Survey (the NSS) should not be used as a tool to measure the quality of education at Universities. This is because the government's higher education green paper lists the NSS as a key measure in their new 'teaching excellent framework', which could allow Universities that score highly in the NSS to raise their fees. The policy was passed by a majority vote.

*'I voted against this policy on behalf of Surrey students because I believe that the National Student Survey is an important mechanism that we use at Surrey to work with the University on improving the student experience. Although the survey is by no means perfect, it's the only large scale way of measuring what final year students think about their experiences. I'm disappointed that the NUS will be actively encouraging students not to fill in the NSS.'*

**-Alex Mackenzie Smith, VP Activity.**

### **4. Surrey's motion 'safe social elections' passed into NUS policy.**

Surrey Union put forward a motion to the conference to say that the NUS should be working with social media channels such as Yik Yak in order to ensure that students who stand for election are protected from abuse and harassment, particularly from anonymous troll accounts and through apps which are anonymous in their nature.

*'It's being reported in the press that this means the NUS are going to be banning Yik Yak. This isn't true, it just means that the NUS are going to be opening a dialogue with social media channels to make sure that we can better protect students who put themselves forward for election from online abuse. As Union Chair it's my role to make sure that people feel able to stand for election in Surrey Decides, and part of this means protecting our candidates from online abuse, and recognising the impact it can have.'*

**-Becky Ibbotson, Union Chair.**

The Union's [Annual Members' Meeting](#) (AMM) will take place on the 12<sup>th</sup> May at 6pm in 03MS01.

This is the Union's AGM, which is open to all students to attend, and is the first item on the agenda of committee training for newly elected club and society committee members.

At the AMM each year, you have the opportunity to vote on the Union's affiliations, including our affiliation to the NUS. Come along to the AMM to take part and have your say.