

Guild of Students' Beliefs and Commitments

1. Statement of Purpose

The University of Birmingham Guild of Students is a democratic organisation in which our members set policy regarding the overall beliefs and commitments of the Guild. This document outlines the beliefs and general commitments of the Guild of Students based on policy passed at Guild Council and through referenda. Through the presentation of this document, it is the aim of the Guild to ensure that all members are able to locate and examine information on policy, as passed by Guild Council, in a simple and effective format.

2. Affiliations and Endorsements

The Guild of Students is affiliated to the following organisations:

- National Union of Students
- Stop Climate Chaos
- Workers Rights Consortium

The Guild of Students endorses the following national campaigns:

- Black History Month
- Buy Right Pledge
- Enough Project's Conflict Free Pledge
- Fair Trade Fortnight
- NUS' campaign against the Higher Education Cuts and Fees
- NUS campaign on Postgraduate Funding
- NUS Sound Ethical Choice Affiliation
- NUS Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment Accreditation
- STAR's Equal Access to Higher Education Campaign

3. Environmental Activism

The Guild of Students has a duty to facilitate and enable students to take action on environmental issues such as climate change.

4. Ethical Business Practices

The Guild of Students' believes that it and the University have an important part to play in promoting the importance of ethical behaviour amongst external organisations, and that both organisations can do this by where appropriate only working with organisations that do not have a negative impact on society.

The Guild shall where possible avoid investing in or doing business with the following types of companies:

- Those that trade in works with products meant for a military purpose
- Those that mistreat and deny union rights to their workers
- Those that damage the environment
- Those that exploit their suppliers

- Those that market their products irresponsibly
- Those that cause students financial hardship by misleading selling their products
- Those that are guilty of human rights abuses
- Venues in which staff or security discriminate against students on grounds of ethnicity, sexuality or gender
- Carnage UK, Enigma, Super Enigma, StudentNightTickets.com or any other company involved in the misappropriation of Guild of Students or student group branding

The Guild shall, where possible, invest or do business with the following types of companies:

- Those that support the Fair Trade Foundation
- Those that support the Rainforest Alliance
- Those that support the Marine Stewardship Council
- Those that support the Forest Stewardship Council

The Guild shall where possible avoid having any interaction with the following types of products:

- Those that have been tested on animals
- Electronics produced using minerals from war-torn countries

The Guild shall where possible choose to use the following products due to their being produced in a more ethically sound way.

- Fair Trade Products
- One Water and One Condoms
- Those accredited by the NUS Sound Ethical Choice reward scheme

The Guild of Students shall where appropriate encourage the University, relevant commercial partners and students to follow its lead on the companies that they should or should not do business with and the products they should or should not buy.

The Guild shall not ban any company from advertising employment opportunities to students due to ethical concerns about their business practices as it is committed to respecting the ability of students to make their own decisions regarding their choice of career.

5. Equality & Diversity

The Guild of Students believes that racism, sexism and homophobia in all and any forms are totally unacceptable on campus or in wider student life. The Guild of Students is committed

to combating all such instances of bigotry and discrimination on campus and respecting the diversity of its membership. It shall work with the University and its commercial partners to ensure that its and their facilities and services are accessible to all students and that no student suffers discrimination from them or their staff

6. Guild of Students' Communications

The Guild of Students should promote to students the roles and work of all Guild Officers. Guild Officers shall remain accountable to students through regular communication with them and scrutiny from their elected representatives.

The Guild of Students should ensure that it effectively communicates with all Birmingham students, including those that study away from the main Edgbaston campus.

The Guild of Students should ensure that all its electronic communications are freely available to students by not using document formats that require students to purchase software rather than use freeware.

7. Guild of Students' Neutrality on Israel-Palestine

The Guild of Students believes that it would harm campus relations and detract time from other issues that more directly affect the majority of students on campus for it to side with either Israel or Palestine. Therefore it shall remain neutral by having no policy on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

8. Hidden Course Costs

The Guild of Students believes that students are faced with many hidden course costs as a result of University policies forcing students to pay for facilities and materials integral to their student experience. Such hidden courses costs place an additional financial burden on students and often that burden is aggravated by students being caught unawares. The Guild urges the University to keep course costs for students as low as possible, to not use course costs to generate revenue and at all times ensure that prospective students fully understand the true cost of studying at Birmingham.

9. Higher Education Funding

The Guild of Students opposes cuts to higher education funding, believing that they will damage the education of students and the job security of university staff and diminish the UK's global standing in higher education. The Guild will work at both a local and a national level to oppose them.

While the Guild supports the principle of graduates making a direct contribution to the cost of the undergraduate education they receive, it opposes the Government's funding model due to the likelihood it will lead to the creation of a market in higher education. The Guild believes that the creation of such a market is against the interests of students and would damage higher education provision in the UK. Instead the Guild of Students supports the NUS' proposed alternative funding model of a graduate tax links graduate contributions directly to graduate earnings.

10. Mental Health

The Guild of Students is committed to working with the University and other stakeholders to support the mental health of students. It shall work to improve and promote the services on offer to those who suffer from mental health problems.

11. No Platform

The Guild of Students has a moral responsibility to ensure that all its members are able to use its services and be involved in its activities free from the fear of attack, discrimination or threats due to their ethnicity, sexuality, disability or any other factor. Because of this duty, it shall provide no platform to groups that pose a threat to the Guild of Students being a safe space for all students. This shall include barring such groups from using the Guild's services and engaging in its activities, and also barring Guild Officers, Student Groups and Guild Committees from sharing a platform with such groups in their official Guild capacity.

In addition, the Guild will give no platform to the following groups:

- British National Party
- Hizb ut-Tahrir
- National Front
- English Defence League

12. Opposing Balloon Releases

The Guild should not be used as the launching ground for deliberate release of balloons, nor should it finance or support such activities for fear of damaging the atmosphere or wildlife, and so as to reduce the amount of unnecessary pollution we cause.

13. Postgraduate Education

The Guild of Students believes that access to postgraduate education should be based on the ability to attend, rather the ability to pay for the course. It is committed to exposing the access problems within postgraduate education and how this inaccessibility is due to the system relying on private financing.

It will work with the University to ensure that Postgraduate courses offer value to students and urges the Government to ensure that all regulations concerning the dissemination of course information to prospective students apply equally to undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

14. Student Access To Healthcare

The Guild of Students believes that all students, at Birmingham and beyond, have the right to free, accessible and local health services. This healthcare should be provided in a way that is fully accessible to any student, regardless of background.

Students Accommodation

The Guild of Students believes that students should live in good quality, affordable and safe accommodation and will work with all relevant stakeholders to ensure that this is the case. The Guild is committed to providing advice and guidance to students about accommodation issues.

15. Students as Active Participants in Democracy

The Guild of Students believes that as many students as possible should be involved in the democratic process and is committed to encouraging its members to take part in all national elections and referendums.

Students in the Community

The Guild of Students believes that for many students living independently in the community is an important part of their university experience and that students have a significant positive influence in the local community, and in the city and region as a whole.

16. Student Protests

The Guild of Students supports students' right to peaceful protest, providing such protests are compliant with the law of the land, University legislation and Guild policies. The Guild shall do all it can to protect its activists from being subjected to violence and intimidation, and provide guidance to them about their rights in protest situations and how to diffuse potentially violent situations.

17. Supporting Students Giving Blood

The Guild of Students believes that the National Blood Service's ban on gay and bisexual men giving blood is homophobic and discriminatory. It shall, however, still encourage and facilitate students who can give blood. Therefore it shall the National Blood Service to use Guild facilities for its donation drives although the Guild shall use such occasions to highlight its campaign for the National Blood Service to drop its homophobic policies.

18. Supporting Students Living Sustainably

The Guild shall encourage and where possible support students to live in a way that is environmentally sustainable and so benefits themselves, their community and the environment.

19. Students Working Part-Time

The Guild of Students believes that students should normally work no more than sixteen hours but that when regulating the part time work of students both it and the University need to be flexible and properly recognise that many students can or need to work longer hours. The Guild of Students is committed to working with the University to make it as simple as possible for students to apply for temporary jobs on campus.

20. The Student Movement

The Guild of Students recognises that it is part of a national students' movement comprised of students and their students' unions and similar organisations from all across the country. The Guild commits itself to be fully involved in this national movement and where appropriate shall provide political support to any students' unions that are in difficulty. The Guild shall take a lead in encouraging student organisations in Birmingham to work together on issues of common interest.

21. University Industrial Relations

The Guild of Students believes that the University has a responsibility to maintain good industrial relations on campus and ensure that the education of students is not negatively affected by strike action. Where it cannot meet this responsibility the University should compensate students accordingly.

22. University Services and Facilities

The Guild of Students' believes that the University has a responsibility to provide the services that students have paid for and that it's important that the University of Birmingham has high-quality facilities and services which are accessible to all students. The Guild of Students' is committed to lobbying the University to improve any facility or service that students are dissatisfied with.

23. Widening Participation In Higher Education

The Guild of Students believes that higher education should be accessible to anybody who has the ability to attend University and that widening participation in Higher Education is vital in securing social justice and increase the UK's economic competitiveness. The Guild of Students is committed to making it easier for students from non-traditional backgrounds to attend university and shall work with the University and the NUS to ensure that widening participation is at the top of both organisations' agenda.

24. Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment

The Guild of Students is committed to ensuring that its members are able to attend any of its events and engage in our activities without the risk or fear of being subjected to any form of sexual harassment or sexually violent behaviour.