

NATIONAL UNION OF STUDENTS (NUS) 2014 NATIONAL CONFERENCE

UWA Delegate Report

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1. OVERVIEW

The National Union of Students (NUS) is the peak representative body for tertiary students in Australia. NUS campaigns and organizes around different issues that affect students, to ensure that students' voices are heard by the government, media and the public. Constitutionally, NUS is run by student Office Bearers and the National Executive to ensure that the union operates in the interests of students, is accountable for its actions, and operates in a way that maximises student involvement and is inclusive of all types of students.

The National Conference of the NUS sets the policy platform the coming year, elects the National Office Bearers who are to carry out these campaigns, the National Executive who keeps the Office Bearers accountable and the State Office Bearers who are responsible for implementing National policy at a state/territory level, and ensuring that National Office Bearers both engage with their state and run campaigns for their students. NUS NatCon was held from December 8th - 11th at Monash University, Victoria, with each affiliated campus electing a set amount of delegates holding multiple votes, based on the number of students their campus organisation represents.

FACTIONS

National Conference is highly factional, meaning elected delegates often choose to sit with an organised group. Four large factional blocks make up the majority of the NUS National Conference delegates, with the remainder filled by two smaller factions and a small number of unaligned independents. The four large factions are: Student Unity (Labor Right), National Labor Students (Labor Left), The Socialist Alternative and the National Independents. The two smaller factions are the Grassroots Left and the Australian Liberal Students Federation (ALSF). The National Independents are the only non-binding faction at NUS, with other factions votes being decided in binding caucuses or by factional leaders. Although individuals may be able to express their personal views in their factional caucus, the caucus may bind against them, as opposed to each of the individual delegates exercising their vote themselves. Thus, the members of these factions have a very limited ability to assert their values, opinions and campus ideals on how their votes are being administered on major or contentious issues. In some cases, delegates will be allowed a conscience vote e.g. Unity delegates in the Women's policy session.

2. UWA DELEGATES

The number of votes each delegate holds is determined by the order in which they are elected, and is specified in the NUS Accreditation Report. For UWA, 82 votes are allocated among 7 delegates (determined by the number of EFTSUs (Equivalent Full Time Student Units) represented by the UWA

Student Guild divided by 250), in descending order of election, until all votes are exhausted, resulting in the delegates who were elected first holding a larger number of votes (Table 1). The number of votes a delegate holds for each motion moved on conference floor is equivalent to the number of ballot forms they are allocated for each elected position.

Table 1: Number of votes held at NUS National Conference 2014 by UWA delegates.

Delegate	Number of votes
Lizzy O'Shea	12
Aiden Depiazzi	12
Rebecca Lawrence	12
Emma Boogaardt	12
Honny Palayukan	12
Emma Norton	11
Alex Bennet	11

Of the UWA NUS Delegates, only Lizzy O'Shea, Honny Palayukan, Emma Boogaardt, Emma Norton and Alex Bennet attended the conference. Registration for the conference was advertised publicly and each delegate was required to register themselves. Of those that attended, Lizzy O'Shea, Emma Boogaardt, Honny Palayukan and Alex Bennet "sat with" the National Independents while Emma Norton "sat with" the Socialist Alternative.

A primary focus of the National Independents is to improve transparency and accountability measures of the national body and its office bearers, with accountability seen as the core function of the National Independents, even by other factions. The National Independents are not a binding faction, but a group of independent delegates working together to achieve tangible outcomes for their students, with WA delegates making up the majority of the National Independents. The UWA delegates played a large role in coordinating and enacting this focus through heavy involvement in the running of the National Independents and negotiating with the other factions to get the most qualified and well suited candidates into National Office Bearer positions as well as quality policy motions moved and passed. Examples of this include Lizzy O'Shea and Alex Bennet acting as lead liaisons with other factions.

Tables 2 outlines the number of policies that UWA Delegates were involved in (Moved or Seconded) as well as the number of policy motions moved (not seconded) by the two factions that UWA

delegates sat with. If two UWA delegates were involved with the same motion then it is attributed to the mover's tally. These numbers have been collected from the NUS 2014 National Conference Policy Booklet.

Table 2: Number of policies moved or seconded by UWA delegates at NUS National Conference 2013

Delegate	No. of policies moved or seconded
Lizzy O'Shea	13
Aiden Depiazzi	0
Rebecca Lawrence	0
Emma Boogaardt	1
Honny Palyukan	0
Emma Norton	4
Alex Bennet	6

3. CONFERENCE PROCEEDINGS

The 2014 NUS National Conference ran from Monday the 8th December until Friday the 12th December at Monash University, Clayton Campus, in Melbourne. The conference proceedings are outlined in the following sections.

MONDAY AND TUESDAY

On Monday, delegates were picked up from the NUS offices at Trades Hall in the Melbourne CBD and taken to Monash University Clayton Campus. Upon arrival, delegates waited for registration and sign-in to occur. Once delegates had been given access to their accommodation and formally registered, a lunch was provided before the first session of conference. In place of a Welcome to Country there was an Acknowledgement of Language Group, as the land that the conference was held on is currently disputed. Unlike the year before, policy debate began on the first day and ran consistently for the first three days of conference. This was a highlight in comparison to previous years as it allowed for all of the policy chapters to be discussed, providing binding policies to all National Office Bearers for 2015. Specific policy areas and their outcomes are discussed later in this report.

WEDNESDAY

The sessions of conference on Wednesday were originally allocated as time to discuss the constitutional amendments proposed by delegates and office bearers. Given the highly controversial nature of some constitutional amendments, delegates were given extra time to consider and discuss the changes with other delegates. This eventually led to the conference sitting in the afternoon and once these amendments had been considered, conference continued as normal. The sessions that followed went late into the night and early morning as the last areas of the policy book were wrapped up, National Office Bearers gave their reports and candidates for the following day's election gave their speeches.

THURSDAY (BALLOT DAY)

The last full day of conference is known as "ballot day" as this day is solely devoted to distributing, receiving and counting delegates' votes for the national and state office bearing positions and the National Executive. Each delegate receives the same number of physical ballot papers as votes that they hold, thus there are thousands of ballot papers that need to be carefully, counted, recounted, stamped, distributed and filled in. Thus, this process essentially takes the entire day. The binding factions organise for proxies to collect their member delegates' votes and deliver them to their faction leaders. These faction leaders then fill in stacks of ballot papers or hand them to other factions as part of pre-negotiated deals.

The National Independents, however, encourage all delegates to collect their own ballots and fill them out as they wish. Member delegates are also given the option to hand their votes to a table of other Independents to fill in as a block. This is especially useful when voting for positions like the National Executive as their outcome tends to represent the relative sizes of the factions and specific voting techniques may be required. Any delegate associated with the National Independents has the option to collect and fill out their own votes, assist the group in filling out ballots for each other, or leave their ballots with the group with a direction as to how they would like to vote.

It was also on this day that a number of UWA delegates were involved in particularly shameful activities. Foremost among these was Emma Norton, who willingly took part in stealing the votes of a first time, unaligned delegate from Swinburne University through a fraudulent proxy form. This was evidenced by Emma sitting at the Socialist Alternative voting table and, along with three others at the table, refusing to give that delegate the votes that were rightfully theirs. Furthermore, it was on this day that Aiden Depiazzi and Rebecca Lawrence's ballots for the position of National Executive were picked up by Isabelle Kingshott, the convenor of Student Unity. This came after multiple days of conversation between Alex Bennet, Aiden and Rebecca about the positions of National Women's Officer and National Environment Officer, two positions where the outcome was expected to be especially close, and who they might consider proxying their votes to for these positions. Instead of using these votes to potentially determine the outcome of major national office bearers, both of which were contested by an independent and a member of socialist alternative, Aiden and Rebecca decided to waste their votes, throwing them away and declining to even vote and represent UWA students who had elected them to do so. While the resulting margin for one of these positions (National Women's) was too large for the combined actions of Emma, Aiden and Rebecca to influence

the outcome of, the results of National Environment was not. Thus, if Emma and the other members of Socialist Alternative hadn't illegally stolen votes from a delegate and if Aiden and Rebecca had used their votes then the outcome of this election would have been reversed and an independent, who was formally endorsed by the Australian Students for the Environment Network, would now hold the National Environment Office. Given the history of a Socialist Alternative member occupying this role in 2014, this outcome is particularly disappointing.

Furthermore, the actions of the Labor groups, NLS and Unity, in the hours after the ballot boxes shut were particularly disgusting. Chants filled the central quadrangle of Mannix College with verses that singled out and threatened individual students, death threats were issued to entire groups of students and made a large number of people feel very unsafe, causing some to leave the conference a night early. Evidently, this is not behaviour becoming of student leaders, nor is it behaviour that we should condone or tolerate as a member student body.

4. ELECTION RESULTS

The following is the list of National Office Bearers and National Executive members for 2015:

NATIONAL OFFICE BEARERS

- President: Rose Steele (NLS)
- General Secretary: Tom Nock (Student Unity)
- Education Officer: Hannah Smith (NLS)
- Welfare Officer: Dean D'Angelo (Student Unity)
- Women's Officer: Jess McLeod (Socialist Alternative)
- Queer Officers (2): Isaac Foster (NLS) and Danica Cheesley (Socialist Alternative)
- Environment Officer: Carl Jackson (Socialist Alternative)
- Disabilities Officer: Alison Taylor (NLS)
- Ethnocultural Officer: Michael Bezuidenhout (Student Unity)
- International Officer: Yang Liu (Student Unity)
- ATSI Officer: Bridget Cama (Student Unity)
- Small & Regional Officer: Rosemary Gosper (National Independents)

NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

1. Brendan Spackman-Williams (National Independents)
2. Maja Sieckzo (National Independents)
3. Laura Wey (National Independents)
4. Jasmine Ingram (NLS)
5. Billy Bruffey (NLS)
6. Ezgi Bridger (Student Unity)
7. Gemma Paech (Student Unity)
8. Shagufta Suhalia Ali (Student Unity)
9. Joshua Boughey (Student Unity)
10. Michael Murdocca (Student Unity)

11. Alisha Aitken-Radburn (Student Unity)
12. Siobhan Armson-Graham (Student Unity)

STATE BRANCH PRESIDENTS

- ACT: Joshua Orchard (Student Unity)
- New South Wales: Chloe Smith (NLS)
- South Australia: Sam Davis (NLS)
- Tasmania: Ariel Wells (NLS)
- Victoria: Cameron Petrie (Student Unity)
- Western Australia: Jake Wittey (National Independents)
- NB: Queensland State Branch positions were not elected as no campus from Queensland accredited to the National Union of Students in 2014, and as such no ballots for these positions could be issued or cast.

Table 4: National Executive Breakdown by Faction for 2015 NUS National Executive.

Faction	State Branch Presidents	National Executive Members	Total
NLS	3	2	5
NI	1	3	4
SU	2	7	9
Total	6	12	18

5. POLICY

The NUS National Conference policy booklet consists of policy chapters covering all of the areas represented by National Office Bearers. The policy chapters are listed below:

- Constitution
- Administration
- Unionism
- Education
- Welfare
- Women's
- Queer
- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Students
- Disabilities
- International Students
- Ethno-Cultural Students

- Environment
- Small & Regional
- Miscellaneous

The policy book is made up of motions submitted by delegates and members of National Executive/National Office Bearers (including State Presidents), that can be discussed at National Conference. If these policy motions are passed then they are binding on the corresponding national and state office bearers for the duration of their term. Thus, the policy motions discussed at the National Conference define the organisation's direction for the year ahead, and the ongoing projects of the organisation.

The full policy document outlines all policy available for discussion, but a Business Committee will determine the agenda for each policy session. The policy book is large and there would never be enough time to discuss everything, so generally a policy will only be heard if at least 2 factions want to discuss it - it is unlikely that a policy that very few people on conference floor actually support will be discussed. Please see the attached list of policy motions passed at the National Conference and the corresponding National Conference policy booklet.

The generation of department specific policy is critical in not only directing the actions of the National Office Bearers for the duration of their term, but ensuring that there is a policy to which the office bearer is accountable. If a policy has been passed, National Executive can hold OBs to account when they fail to carry it out. For the first time in as long as anyone currently involved with the organisation can remember, all policy chapters were discussed at the 2014 National Conference. This is a huge step forward for accountability with office bearers as all National Office Bearers will now have policy passed by the majority of democratically elected delegates to enact, and to be held accountable for. The following summarises policy discussed at National Conference 2014.

CONSTITUTION

In 2014, the National Executive had made it a priority to have amendments to the NUS Constitution discussed. A Constitutional Reform Committee was developed as a subset of the National Executive, to prepare amendments that the NUS leadership team would like to see moved on Conference Floor, which were developed with legal advice. Because of this, 2014 saw debate not only on the policy of NUS for 2015, but on the organisation's constitution. Constitutional amendments require a 75% majority to pass. The major changes to the NUS Constitution which passed are as follows:

- State Conferences cannot elect delegates
- Removing pay for the National Indigenous Officer, the National International Student Officer, and the National Disabilities Officer (original proposed amendment sought to remove pay to National Women's and National Queer Officers as well)
- Only being able to successfully nominate for one NOB or SOB position
- NOBs and State Presidents will cease to hold office if they fail to submit a report, or attend three consecutive National Executive meetings, without adequate apology

There were also a number of administrative changes to the Constitution, such as removing references to floppy disks. There was significant, heated debate over many of the Constitutional changes. The original change to pay of NOBS was to also remove the pay for National Women's Officer and the National Queer Officer, but many delegates felt that this was unfair, and the National Independents negotiated to try and prevent pay cuts to the autonomous positions, eventually compromising with NLS and Student Unity to 'save' the pay of the National Women's Officer and the National Queer Officer. The other significant proposed change to the Constitution was the removal of State Branches, to be replaced with representatives from each campus and the State President. This proposal failed as there was complete opposition from Socialist Alternative, and sufficient delegates opposed in the National Independents and Grassroots Left for the motion to fail. Delegates opposing this felt that, as State Branches do not have a budget, with the exception of Western Australia, and perform an important way of promoting more localised cross-campus collaboration cutting them would produce bad outcomes for students.

ADMINISTRATION

The administration policy passed at National Conference concerns the internal operations of NUS, particularly with respect to accountability, financial procedures and governance. Most of the policies passed at 2014 NatCon were the work of 2015 General Secretary Tom Nock. They sought to improve the organisation's finances through investigating alternative revenue streams, develop a three year strategic plan for NUS and improve the everyday administration of the union. The sentiment of many of Tom's policies were also moved in policies by Independents, particularly Lizzy O'Shea and Alex Bennet. It is encouraging to see that the elected General Secretary for 2015 was active in pushing for an accountable union, however much of this policy was the same as what was moved at the 2013 National Conference. With the same policy being moved every year, it is sometimes hard to know if anything will ever change. Many delegates had submitted more detailed policy on the same issues and this was not heard on conference floor, which is a shame. Nonetheless, the fact that policy that will improve the function of the Union (if upheld) is a good thing, and policy relating to the administration of conference may help to alleviate some of the issues surrounding NUS NatCon and Education Conference for 2015.

UNIONISM

The Unionism policy debate was characterised by a desire to have NUS embrace its status as a union, rather than shying away from it. This included solidarity motions with other unions, including the NTEU, and a call for NUS to collaborate with other unions on campaigns and protests. The most controversial motion was a condolence motion for Gough Whitlam, which was supported by both Labor factions, opposed by SAlt, and received mixed support from the National Independents and Grassroots Left. There was also a heated debate on how to best approach SSAF - whether NUS should be assisting campuses get the most out of their SSAF, or should use it's resources instead to lobby for USU. Within this section there was also a call for a campus count on the amendment moved to remove NUS having the obligation to "defend disciplined activists", in the context of action at the University of Melbourne. This amendment eventually passed, narrowly, as many delegates felt that this could create a slippery slope where NUS has to defend any and all students who engage in any form of protest or action in its name. Overall the debate on this chapter sent a strong message that it

is unacceptable for universities to withhold SSAF funds, and that the totality of SSAF revenue should be going to student unions.

EDUCATION

The Education policy section is arguably one of the most important as all students are affected by its campaigns and direction, and education is why we're all at University. This chapter will typically outline the key campaigns to oppose stances taken by state and federal governments as well as policies that stand against more specific student issues on a campus level, or call for state and/or federal governments to take a certain stance in support of students.

Two large education campaigns for 2015 were discussed and passed as policy by conference. The first was a continuation of the 2014 campaign entitled "Abbott and Pyne: Get Your Hands Off Our Education", while the second was a new endeavour named "Demand a Better Future: Fight for Fair, Funded Education". The first campaign condemns the higher education reforms package introduced in the 2014 federal budget under the coalition government. The first campaign will involve a number of rallies and National Days of Action (NDA) to oppose the cuts and deregulation in the public sphere. The second campaign will develop a year-long political and lobbying strategy, dividing its efforts between government and university administrations.

Other motions that were carried at NatCon include policies about supporting lecture capture (not at the expense of staff or classes), establishing and building relationships with ally organisations and unions and training education activists on a grassroots level, among others. Alex Bennet moved two policies in this section. The first was a policy on the use of Turnitin across Australia, outlining some of the issues of the system and calling for campus presidents to lobby for university policies on the use of Turnitin to ensure students are not disadvantaged by its use. The second called to establish a national student consultative committee attended by NUS office bearers and leaders from national discipline based organisations like AMSA, ALSA, SONA, etc. Both of these policies gained cross-factional support and were subsequently passed.

WELFARE

National Conference discussed and passed many policies addressing many of the welfare issues that negatively impact students throughout Australia. There were a great deal of policies considered, all of which aimed to improve students' understanding of their rights in their working, educational and living environments. There was a strong focus on policies relating to disadvantaged or otherwise vulnerable groups with a great deal of pressure resulting from the budget cuts to ensure that these students aren't left further disadvantaged.

Policies and motions discussed focused on the following topical issues:

- Continue campaigning against Student Homelessness
- Continue campaigning towards changes to Youth financial support- call for Youth Allowance to be increased above the Poverty Line.
- Continue national campaigns that strongly oppose Government Budget cuts including \$7 co-payment/Medicare attacks, Newstart attacks, Deregulation of University fees

- Raising awareness of student rights at work including opposition to unpaid internships
- Ensure that students have access to adequate health services on campus including easily accessible bulk billing services whilst opposing for-profit pharmacies. There was also a push to have free mental health services across campuses with a continued focus on reaching out to students ensure they are aware of the support available to them.
- Provide emergency housing and finance support to students
- Lobby to improve public transport and concessions
- NUS to provide Equity and Diversity training for Uni Games and other cross campus events

Overall, there was a common understanding that students are mostly unaware of the welfare services available to them. It was suggested that National Office Bearers were to collaborate with campus reps and work towards bettering their outreach to make all students are better informed of the support their student unions could provide to them.

WOMEN'S

There were a large number of motions in the Women's Chapter, with most of them being discussed, and ultimately passed. It was fantastic to see women from all backgrounds, campuses, and factions uniting in their passion to end gender discrimination. The major policies and issues arising out of this section included:

- A number of motions affirming the union's support for women students' right to access safe and legal abortions.
- Numerous policies about Bluestockings Week, and how to ensure campaigns and events are intersectional.
- The issue of campus security, with policy passed on running safety policy audits on campuses and re-running the highly successful Talk About It campaign and survey.
- A number of the policies passed referred to what campaigns the 2015 National Women's Officer is to carry out during her term. This includes campaigns on:
 - the effect of deregulation on women students
 - affordable childcare for university students
 - supporting a woman's right to choose
 - equal pay campaigns
 - rejecting sexist 'Men's Rights Activist' movements, and;
 - eating disorders.
- One of the highlights of the debate was a motion from the floor from a woman delegate, affirming support for women engaged in sex work and the importance of services for those women.
- UWA delegates Lizzy O'Shea and Emma Boogaerdt passed a policy to establish a National Progressive Women's Network, which would create a national discussion group on women's issues, promote cross-campus collaboration, and provide an easier platform for communication between National, State and campus Women's Officers.

QUEER

The Queer policy session saw a large number of important policies passed from a number of different

factions, with all receiving what appeared to be unanimous support from all factions and delegates. Policies discussed and passed looked to address the following:

- Lobby for the inclusion of diverse gender and sexuality in the secondary school curriculum.
- Support cross-campus queer networks
- Ensure student organisations have a wider and more effective representation of queer students. Policy passed also looked specifically at students who identify as asexual - NUS will support and advocate for them and ensure they are not excluded from NUS campaigns or queer movements in general.
- Work with and support campaigns against stigma and discrimination concerning HIV and engage with community stakeholders in doing so.
- Ensure that EdCon and Queer Collaborations do not clash in 2015 - these conferences have historically clashed with each other (and NOWSA) which excludes many queer identifying students from either conference, as they have to choose which circle of activism they would like to be involved in.
- Seek to engage more students through queer youth organisations.
- Establish a national queer safety and services survey.
- Take a stand against queer homelessness
- Campaign against queerphobia, particularly in relation to bathrooms and other similar facilities - continue to run the hugely successful “We all need to pee” campaign.
- Establish an essential resources document for queer students, to be distributed by NUS.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students policy chapter was discussed, and policy was passed with reference to the following:

- To campaign for increased access to specific support services and increased welfare payments for students.
- To campaign against the Northern Territory Intervention and to support the setting up of Indigenous departments at all University campuses.
- To campaign, both broadly and specifically, for the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in education.
- Denounce any stance that praises achievements of Western Civilisation or downplays the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and support taking action against those involved in the creation of the National Curriculum Review.

These 4 policies were moved en bloc, but some delegates felt that this limited their speaking time and silenced their views, opinions and criticisms. Kyol Blakeney (University of Sydney Student Representative Council Delegate and 2015 President) took great issue with this and spoke to conference floor not only about these policies but about the silencing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in student associations and the National Union of Students. The result of this, and the subsequent removal of the pay for the officer position, has been the formation of Blacademy, an autonomous national network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

DISABILITIES

It was great to see the Disabilities portfolio discussed this year, and given the UWA Student Guild does not currently have representation of students with disabilities in our structures, this was a discussion that we can learn a lot from. There is so much more that can be done for these students both nationally and in campus organisations, and NUS will hopefully make great ground this year in being more inclusive in its operations and campaigns/actions as the result of these policies. Passed policy looked to address the following:

- Lobby Universities to introduce more equity scholarships, to include anxiety and depression in special consideration requests, for more accessible note-taking and tutoring services, increased counselling services and reformed foods policies.
- Lobby Universities and student organisations/associations to have more provisions for carers and to be included in policies, as well as in special consideration provisions.
- Establish and maintain cross-campus disability networks, and ensure all NUS campaigns are accessible, including banning violent/aggressive imagery and actions that inherently exclude students while also looking at a diversity of campaign tactics that will increase inclusivity.
- Campaign on Mental Health Awareness/Stress Less, working with other organisations and running a student survey while campaigning against stigma and ensuring that Universities and student organisations/associations have access to appropriate resources and facilities.
- Lobby to uncap mental-health related visits under Medicare, and get Universities to have uncapped and confidential mental health related visits to support services.

The discussion about the accessibility of NUS campaigns became heated, with members of Socialist Alternative not agreeing that NUS needed to be considerate of students with disabilities in structuring their actions and protests. The motion for increased inclusivity in protests/rallies was passed, which will hopefully send a strong message that NUS does not stand for rallies and protests that exclude students, and that different students have a different capacity for involvement in these kinds of activities, and that this is OK.

INTERNATIONAL

There were, disappointingly, only two policies moved in the International chapter. This is perhaps an indication that NUS could increase its engagement with International students, although the existence of CISA (Council of International Students Australia) may mean that International students are more likely to engage with CISA than NUS as their relevant representative organisation.

The two policies discussed and passed concerned lobbying for HECS to be expanded to include permanent residents and New Zealand students, and supporting international students' rights at work.

ETHNOCULTURAL

It was a huge win to see Ethnocultural policies being discussed on conference floor, which in the past was often ignored. There was a great deal of engagement from delegates and respective factions with a result of having all motions discussed being successfully passed. UWA Student Guild currently does not have an Ethnocultural Officer, however the following policies can be taken into consideration by Sub-councils that engage with the existing cultural clubs and societies on campus with the potential of

forming a strong collaborative space to celebrate and support diversity at UWA.

Policies discussed and passed looked to address the following:

- Provide further support to existing Ethnocultural Collectives and groups between campuses and work towards expanding collectives especially on campuses that currently lack Ethnocultural officers.
- Encourage the recognition of cultural days and practises throughout universities, official university and NUS calendars.
- Stronger focus on collaborative work between National Ethnocultural and ATSI Officers
- Understand that ethnocultural students are more adversely effected by deregulation and the importance of focusing on these issues in future Education and Advocacy campaigns.
- Support National Anti Racism campaigns and encourage campuses to develop anti racism policies.

It is also particularly interesting to note that the election of a white male as the 2015 National Ethnocultural Officer sparked an overwhelmingly hostile response from conference floor with individuals standing up to turn their backs to the podium as he spoke. Negotiations between factions saw individual students feel alienated from the Ethnocultural portfolio as the results did not adequately provide an officer who was appropriate for the role. The grievance committee were involved with facilitating discussion between delegates who felt disheartened by the election results.

ENVIRONMENT

The Environment policy chapter is often neglected, with some wondering why NUS even has an Environment Officer - nonetheless the policy passed will ensure that the National Office Bearer is able to be held to account, unlike in 2014, and will see a number of campaigns run and different types of support offered to campus organisations. Policy passed focused on the following:

- That the National Environment Officer will attend the Global Environment Summit, to be held at Murdoch University in 2015.
- That they will assist member organisations in developing sustainability plans (moved Lizzy O'Shea and based on the UWA Student Guild Sustainability Plan model).
- Supporting a carbon tax and assisting student organisations that want to run divestment campaigns.
- Opposing the East West Link, dredging in the Great Barrier Reef and cuts to Fire Services, and supporting the conservation of the Tarkine Forest.

SMALL AND REGIONAL

The Small and Regional policy chapter is rarely discussed or prioritised at NatCon by any of the major factions. After the impact of having this policy chapter discussed in 2013 (after a stance taken by the National Independents), the policy chapter was again heard in 2014. Policy was passed to ensure that National Office Bearers properly engage with regional campuses and to increase the accessibility of NUS campaign components for regional campuses and students, and we once again saw policy passed to establish/maintain a Small and Regional Campus Communication Network, linking up students representatives and promoting collaboration and conversation between representatives across the

country. This network is very important in skill-share and support for student representatives from campuses facing similar issues and environments, while also ensuring they have good communication networks with their NUS counterparts. Policy was also passed to look at incentives and affiliation discounts for small and regional campuses, to ensure that NUS remains appealing and a viable option financially for these organisations that are often not well funded or have a history of engaging with NUS.

These networks and policies will be of relevant to UWA when considering our Albany campus and the students who study there. The National Small and Regional Officer Rosemary Gosper (National Independents) has already begun to support UWA in engaging our Albany students further both in the Guild and with NUS.

6. WESTERN AUSTRALIA

POLICY AND MOTIONS

The following is a list of motions moved and/or seconded by UWA students that were included in the policy book. This is important in showing our active participation in the conference, and how we addressed UWA's specific situation and needs.

1. Constitution - 1.2
2. Administration - 2.3, 2.12, 2.13, 2.22, 2.24, 2.25, 2.26, 2.27, 2.28
4. Education- 4.27, 4.28, 4.30, 4.36
5. Welfare - 5.9
6. Women's - 6.28, 6.32
12. Environment - 12.1, 12.5

ACHIEVEMENTS

The main goals of the National Independents which we supported and achieved included:

- Ensuring that the best office-bearers were elected, including at least one strong independent candidate (*Rosemary Gosper from Newcastle University was elected National Small and Regional Officer*)
- Ensuring a strong independent presence from Western Australia on NUS National Executive (Jake Whittey from the National Independents was successfully elected onto National Executive as WA State Branch President)
- Moving and passing innovative and independent minded policy into the National Platform (achieved).
- Supported good policy written by delegates from other member organisations and factions - actively prioritised the discussion of motions moved by members from other states and groups that would benefit UWA students.
- Ensuring that all policy chapters were discussed by putting pressure on leaders within the organisation that accountability and transparency were a priority, and ensuring that no group felt it was acceptable to pull quorum in place of discussing policy chapters.

We are confident that we succeeded in achieving these goals. For a second year the National Independents were able to ensure an Independent was elected into National Office, while we came close to securing National Womens for an Independent from UNSW, and National Environment Officer for the ASEN endorsed candidate from UMSU. We were also successful in ensuring, through strategic negotiation, that no single faction held a majority on National Executive. We were crucial in ensuring that Student Unity did not achieve the final spot on National Executive that they would have needed to achieve a majority, which is critical in ensuring that for 2015 the NUS National Office Bearer team is held accountable by the National Executive, and that a Labor faction cannot control all aspects of NUS without question or account. Most importantly, we passed lots of good policy which will inform a strong union which stands up for nearly a million students in 2014.

WA STATE BRANCH

Each state and the ACT have a state branch to carry out national policy on a local level and ensure that all affiliated campuses are being involved in the NUS throughout the year, while allowing NUS to engage with campuses on a grassroots level. The state branches are made up of a state office bearer team with each position mirroring a national office bearer role. Each state branch president also has a vote on the National Executive, giving a governing voice to the individual states.

The state office bearers are elected at the National Conference by optional preferential ballot of all delegates from that state and only students from that state may nominate. The 2014 State Branch as elected at the National Conference are:

- President: Jake Wittey (Curtin)
- Gen Sec: Lewis Whittaker (Curtin)
- Education: Gavin Scolard (Murdoch)
- Welfare: Aleks Miller (UWA)
- International: Carlo Guaia (UWA)
- Ethnocultural: Rareif Ismail
- Women's: Ngaire Powell (ECU)
- Queer: Sam Franz (Curtin)
- ATSI: Sharlech Ramirez (Curtin)
- Small and Regional: *Vacant*
- Environment: Guy McDonald (Murdoch)
- Disabilities: Natalia Moorin (ECU)

This year we hope to see a State Branch that engages across all policy platforms and works to establish cross-campus networks in multiple portfolios. The WA State Branch is arguable the only functioning State Branch, and we hope that NUS continues to provide a small honorarium for the President and budget for the Branch, to help support this state-based aspect of NUS. Both Labor factions had indicated they did not want State Branches to exist anymore, moving constitutional amendments to remove them, but State Branches provide a crucial service to campus organisations, particularly in WA, and don't actually cost NUS very much at all. They operate best when passionate and dedicated students get involved, and the structure itself is not the issue.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NUS WEST (WA STATE BRANCH) IN 2015:

- Continue to encourage UWA delegates to be involved in the key office bearer positions, and continue to look more broadly in the UWA student community for passionate students to engage in State Branch positions. In particular look for students who are involved in collectives and student groups who do not already hold representative positions already, as this may ensure that State OBs have the capacity to do their job, without having to juggle campus positions as well.
- Encourage the improvement of the operations of the state branch through continued involvement, in particular encourage the development of state based policy portfolios and individual goal setting.
- Move or support policy at the National Conference that allows state branches greater communication and involvement with the National Body, e.g. the state forums, and continue to support the ongoing existence of the State Branch, something that Student Unity and NLS did not support at National Conference in 2014.
- Lobby to maintain the budget for the WA State Branch and State Branch President's honorarium in order to ensure that WA students actually receive something from NUS.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NUS NATIONAL CONFERENCE IN 2015:

- That an agenda for policy discussion continue to be established prior to National Conference sitting, and that this is formalised with broad consultation and established in constitutional reform to be moved at the National Conference in 2015. This will continue to ensure maximum policy discussion and that all policy chapters are heard.
- That all delegates and observers have lanyards for identification in case of an emergency, and that security continues to ensure that any delegates behaving inappropriately are identified and removed. In 2014 security were able to exclude a delegate who had been continually warned and advised they would be removed, which helped to control the behaviour of some delegates and made others feel more safe.
- That there be an opportunity at the very beginning of Ballot Day where individual delegates can pick up their own votes personally, with no proxies being able to be collected. This will ensure that delegates who are worried someone may fraudulently collect their votes are able to do so without question or concern. If this had been the case in 2014, Socialist Alternative delegates would not have been able to fraudulently collect a Swinburne Delegate's votes after she had withdrawn her consent, with a forged proxy form.
- Continue to improve the minuting process for the conference, and ensure that these minutes and **the policy book** are collated and circulated to all member organisations in a reasonable time.

7. DELEGATE REPORTS

LIZZY O'SHEA *(see attached)*

EMMA BOOGAERDT *(see attached)*

HONNY PALAYUKAN *(see attached)*

ALEX BENNET *(see attached)*

NUS NATIONAL CONFERENCE DELEGATE REPORT

Lizzy O'Shea

PERSONAL REFLECTION

My experience of NUS National Conference 2014 was largely unpleasant, though my experience with the organisation throughout the year in its general operations was largely positive. This was my third NatCon and I have always been critical of the organisation of the conference and some of the characters involved, but I have always believed that the inherent worth of the organisation itself is undermined, but not discounted, by this conference. I believe that there is a huge worth to NUS and that it needs to exist, but have begun to question if it can, and should, exist in its current form.

The major issues that I had with NUS National Conference concern the way that delegates were treated. I have never been treated with such a lack of respect as I was by various student leaders at this conference. This behaviour is simply unacceptable. I was happy to take the worst of it so that others were sheltered from the majority of the abuse, but I would not send delegates back to NUS National Conference with a clear conscience if it remained in its current form, regardless of how much I value the Union.

The student leaders within the factions and political groups at NUS need to step up. As a negotiator for the National Independents I was able to help ensure that all policy chapters were discussed and that conference floor sat for the majority of the time that we were at conference. This came at a huge cost to my mental health and wellbeing. Negotiations surrounding Constitutional amendments that looked to remove pay for a number of office bearer positions, all autonomous, and remove State Branches were heated. Negotiations can get and always will be intense, but the way that some 2014 National Office Bearers held themselves through these conversations was disgusting. If that is the leadership of NUS then we have a huge problem.

National Conference is not the organisation, but it reflects on the leadership and the membership. I believe in the organisation itself (its aims and role) but if National Conference is how the organisation engages student groups and democratically elected representatives then something needs to change. I believe what needs to change is the attitude of the students who are involved, which is something that I think we need to be involved in to change. The behaviour of student leaders at National Conference in 2014 is what the younger and upcoming student leaders see and seek to emulate.

I am in discussions with the 2015 National Office Bearers about leading by example and ensuring that delegates at the next National Conference are treated with respect. I have long agreed that the actions of NUS (campaigns, policy, etc) for the year can be separated from National Conference itself to some degree, in that NUS could have a really great year and still have a terrible National Conference, but if withholding our affiliation until we see a commitment to improving National Conference is what it takes to see change, then I believe we may have to do that. The behaviour at NUS NatCon has become so extreme that it undermines the existence and worth of the entire organisation. People need a reality check that this kind of behaviour is simply not acceptable, and students should not have to go through such a horrific experience in order to democratically

determine policy platforms and elect office bearers.

While I have a huge amount of criticisms of the conference in 2014, I do believe that 2014 was a good year for NUS as an organisation with regards to campaigns and lobbying. There were a number of stand-out office bearers who did do a really good job, and while I take great issue with the way National GenSec Isabelle Kingshot treated me, she did a better job as GenSec than any recent student in that role. The honest and critical reflection on NUS' finances at NatCon was a clear indicator that she was doing a better, more transparent, job than any other GenSec in recent years. There were a few stand-out office bearers, including Bec Thompson, a Western Australian and Independent who was successfully elected at National Conference 2013 (see report to Council for NatCon 2013).

National Conference was not all doom and gloom. The fact that all policy chapters were discussed for the first time in as long as anyone can remember is something that, if anything, delegates and organisers can be proud of. This will ensure that OBs can be held accountable for their actions and campaigns throughout the year, which is something that from my experience as a member of National Executive will be hugely important not just in ensuring the OBs actually do what delegates wanted them to, but having something binding to which they can be held to account. In 2014 the lack of discussion of Ethnocultural and Environment policy meant that the National Executive weren't able to actually hold those office bearers to any form of account, and they could effectively just do what they wanted. The Ethnocultural portfolio sought to discuss and enact the policies that were submitted to the policy book, while the Environment portfolio basically did whatever they wanted. Ensuring that conference ran smoothly enough for all chapters to be discussed is a huge step forward.

I personally had a terrible time at National Conference, largely because of my role as lead negotiator, and I know a lot of student groups have felt incredibly alienated by the process. In the fallout from the conference we have seen the development of an autonomous network for students with disabilities and Blacademy, which describes itself as "a national collective for non-aligned Indigenous students". These groups show that many students no longer feel that NUS represents them, and that they do not want to be involved. I would like to see NUS attempt to remedy this situation and rebuild these connections, so that they can be truly representative. I want to see a functioning NUS and have hope in the fact that the office bearer team has already proven to be willing to engage with UWA and have started running their campaigns, but they need to acknowledge that National Conference is stopping students engaging in their processes and undermining the existence of the Union. While some will argue that NUS shouldn't exist because they are anti-Union, I argue that NUS needs to change in order to be a Union that is genuinely representative and actually functions. If calling for reform makes me a 'scab' or people think I am 'blackmailing NUS with affiliation' then so be it - something needs to change.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That the UWA Student Guild does not pay its accreditation fee until semester two, after which it can be better determined if the organisation has improved in its ongoing function, and either addressed or committed to addressing the concerns raised by UWA Delegates and campus presidents nationally.

- That NUS engage with Blacademy, ASEN and the national network of students with disabilities, to address why those students no longer feel that NUS represents them. That NUS also seek out those campus Presidents and Office Bearers who are People of Colour and felt disengaged from NUS structures, and seek to address this.
- That NUS continues to have a Constitutional Reform Committee and National Conference Reform Committee as subsets of the National Executive, and that the NatCon Reform Committee calls for submissions from campus organizations for consideration.

NUS NATIONAL CONFERENCE DELEGATE REPORT

Emma Boogaardt

PERSONAL REFLECTION

The National Union of Students National Conference was a highly intense, emotional experience with a tough learning curve. I am pleased to say that the 2014 conference was overall a productive event, with some interesting and nuanced policy debate. This conference was able to successfully get through all policy chapters, something rarely achieved, which was a massive win for areas such as ethno-cultural, environment, and disabilities, which often get overlooked. In this respect I found the conference to be enjoyable, with some outstanding moments during debate. One in particular being when the ANU Disabilities Officer, Laura Campbell, gave an impressive and inspiring speech about the importance of accessibility at NUS events, which received a standing ovation from the conference.

The biggest low for me was the behaviour of some delegates from other universities. It is simply unacceptable for delegates to use slurs, chant threats to other groups, interrupt and yell while a delegate is speaking, or act in anyway to make another person feel threatened or unsafe. I'm sorry to say that this sort of behaviour occurred more than just once throughout the duration of the conference, and it was even more disappointing to see that campus and faction leaders were the ones egging this on, creating a bad impression on newer and younger delegates. At numerous times during the conference I felt concerned that the way I voted on different motions would lead to me getting yelled at by other factions, as was the case when a campus count was called and members of Socialist Alternative followed around the counters and harassed delegates if they didn't vote in the same way as themselves. Being yelled at or called a "scab" for representing my own views, and those of UWA students, and voting in the way which I thought was the best for NUS and students was certainly a low point of the conference.

I believe that NUS, and the National Conference, is significantly hindered by the extreme partisanship and factionalism. Unions function best when they represent the views of their membership and engage that membership as much as possible. By having all decisions and elections essentially controlled by the two Labor factions it reduces the transparency of the union, and the engagement of other groups. This means that, rather than being elected by a popular vote for being the best candidate, National Office Bearers are decided in back room deals. Because this NOBs are guaranteed pay and security by their factions there is little checks and balances in place to ensure that they fulfil the requirements of their role and carry out the policy passed at conference. That's not to say that there aren't some excellent leaders elected to the union, but it has been a mixed bag, and there have been many NOBs who have systematically failed to submit reports or achieve anything substantial during their term.

Thankfully at National Conference there was some significant policy changes, including introducing the ability to kick people off National Executive or their NOB positions if they fail to submit reports, and ensuring members of National Executive have director's liability insurance. While these changes

are important, I don't think they go far enough. In order for the union to function productively there needs to be systematic change in the way that it operates. That goes from ensuring that there are greater checks and balances in place for NOBs, to consulting autonomous groups when selecting candidates for those positions. I don't believe that the attempted 'quick fix' to save money of cutting the pay to autonomous groups, while leaving that of the 'Big Four' untouched, is a feasible long-term strategy or respectful to the importance of autonomous representation. Unfortunately much of the administrative policy, especially that proposed by delegates aligned with the National Independents, when un-discussed due to factional tension. The best thing NUS can do is ensure all NOBs are working to their full capacity and that their achievements, or lack thereof, are circulated, improving the transparency of the organisation. This would be the best way to incentivise campuses to increase their affiliation fees. Campuses are not currently decreasing or cutting affiliation because they are "scabs" or don't care about the union, but because at the moment it isn't serving it's members in the most productive way possible and there is a strong argument to be made that the money is better spent on campus. In principle I believe that national representation and collectivisation of students is important, but NUS in it's current form is not achieving as much as it should. Over the next few years I would like to see the union reform, with an improvement in the behaviour of delegates, and a dedication to achieving the ends of the union, rather than just those of a faction. I have hope that the newly elected NOB team will be able to achieve this, and I would recommend that UWA holds off on paying its affiliation in order to gauge the progress of the union and whether affiliation needs to be increased, decreased, or maintained accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **National Union of Students**

- Investigate alternative revenue streams.
 - With the possibility of a move back to VSU always around the corner I think it's essential for the NUS to ensure that they have a source of funding beyond campus affiliations.
- Publicise National Office Bearer reports.
 - This would allow students, campus representatives, and members of the public to stay updated on the activities of NOBs, and also provide an additional check and balance.
- Compile all policy passed at the National Conference into a list for each NOB.
 - With so much policy being passed this would create an easy way for each NOB to ensure that they are fulfilling what's required of them, and a structure for reporting on progress.
- Hold regular meetings between NOBs, SOBs, and campus representatives.
 - Having regular meetings of each portfolio will be beneficial in ensuring that all campuses are up-to-date on what NOBs are doing, and will also promote collaboration and ideas-sharing between campuses.
- Circulate a regular newsletter to all members.
 - By circulating a bi-weekly or monthly newsletter to all NUS members it will provide an excellent opportunity to keep everyone informed of the activities

of NUS, including upcoming events/campaigns, and also any news or government action that could impact students.

- **Conference**

- Minutes from the conference should be circulated to all delegates, and made public on the NUS website.
 - This would improve transparency and provide an avenue for people to better understand what happens at the conference.
- Voting on National and State positions should be conducted in a secret ballot.
 - This would reduce the control that different factions have over who gains positions and would help to ensure that those elected are the best for the job, and not just the result of a factional deal.
- National Conference Organisers to be selected by National Executive.
 - By having an open and transparent application process it would better ensure that the position of Conference Organiser goes to the best candidate and isn't perceived as a "job for the boys".
- The agenda for policy discussion should be established prior to the conference.
 - Having set times established for the debate on each policy area would ensure that all policy areas get discussed, and would make the conference run more smoothly as delegates would have a clearer understanding of what is happening during each day.
- Improving the way that grievances are handled.
 - Debate can often be passionate and some delegates certainly take their political differences too far, both on and off conference floor. There needs to be a better system for dealing with grievances and a clearly, more fair, system of punishment for those who misbehave.

- **UWA Delegates**

- I would recommend that all UWA elected delegates attend.
 - Those elected to attend NUS have a duty to fulfil their obligation as a delegate by attending the conference, or at the very least, writing policy and/or proxying their vote to another UWA delegate.
- All UWA delegates work together to develop policy specific to our university.
 - Being far away from most other universities and having a unique course structure puts UWA at a disadvantage in terms of lobbying, but writing policy on issues that specifically affect UWA and debating them at National Conference is a good opportunity to bring these issues to the attention of NUS and campuses across the country.

NUS NATIONAL CONFERENCE DELEGATE REPORT

Honny Palayukan

PERSONAL REFLECTION

Attending National Conference (Natcon) for the first time was an intense learning experience. My time at Natcon was challenging but overall positive, and it was particularly inspiring to see the level of influence that UWA delegates such as Lizzy O'Shea, Alex Bennet and Emma Boogaardt brought to the floor. I believe NUS holds a great deal of worth to all students in advocating for their rights. If ever one doubted the influence this organisation had, you'd only have to look back to recent protests and negotiations carried out between NUS Office Bearers and key political figures on the Government in reassessing their budget cuts following the strong opposition demonstrated and coordinated by NUS officers across the country.

I understand that students are particularly passionate about voicing their opinions, but my major concerns with the conference (and at times, NUS as an organisation) was the lack of decorum demonstrated by key figures from politicised factions. Volunteering to be a grievance officer meant that I had the opportunity to sit down and address the concerns of delegates who found themselves feeling disheartened by the intense yelling, chanting and heckling demonstrated by many on conference floor. Most complaints were resolved, but future organisers and attendees need to understand just how quickly the conference can become highly unproductive when delegates and observers become over excited and inappropriate during/between debates.

However, it was fantastic to see the smaller, independent groups maintain a sense of professionalism throughout the week. We were certainly outnumbered, which meant we often copped the heckling and slurs when individuals chose to vote independently, even when it was contrary to popular vote. I strongly believe that UWA delegates should attend and continue to vote independently and avoid sitting with politicised groups. Our influence was very clear on the running of the conference. The Independents were key in seeing all portfolios being discussed and debated, which to my knowledge had not happened for a substantial amount of time.

It was a particularly interesting to have the lead Grievance Officer turn to me personally for my help and advice in resolving grievances. I think it's very important that when considering grievance officers, that we should aim to include individuals who represent the different collectives and minority groups. For example, being the only woman of colour within the committee, I was the only officer approached to tackle a complaint made by Indigenous students who felt they were silenced during the discussion of ATSI policies. This was also the case following the election of the white South African male Ethnocultural Officer for the 2015 NUS Executive (interestingly enough, was a member of Unity who held the same position in 2014 with a white Macedonian male). Dealing with the intense amount of disappointment was hard, but I was fortunate to be able to turn to my experience in dealing with grievances at UWA and that I was familiar with the thorough procedures we have in place within the UWA Guild. I hope to see NUS adopt a formal grievance guideline to ensure that future attendees of Natcon can participate more fully without fear of confrontation.

Some of the more positive experiences came as a result of mingling with other Student Reps and sharing advice and encouragement in the work we were doing. Witnessing fellow delegates address common student issues and demonstrate the level of passion and drive to find resolutions for their campuses was inspiring.

I was particularly impressed with delegates such as ANU Disabilities Officer, Laura Campbell who stood firmly against students aligned with Socialist Alternative who opposed policies that demanded a more proactive approach to assisting students with disabilities in participating in rallies and campaigns. Her response was well received by the rest of conference floor.

I also particularly enjoyed sitting on the Business Committee table (representatives from major factions that ensured that conference floor ran smoothly by voting on which motions were to be discussed) as I felt the Independents had a great deal of influence in ensuring other populist, partisan based groups weren't dominating speaking time on the floor. Declan Waddell, Maja Sieckzo and Brandon Spackman-Williams proved to be a great mentors and partners throughout the Business Committee table proceedings. It's also worth noting that The Independents always ensured that at least one out of two of our Business Committee reps was a woman.

There were many other students from diverse backgrounds that also provided stimulating discussions and perspective on resolving many of the issues students from their campuses experienced. This kind of communication is vital in ensuring that the UWA Student Guild continue to remain critical on our own practises, and that we are learning from other campuses whilst also sharing our own wisdom.

In summary, I'd like our recommendations to be taken on board by the conference organisers. Being a first time attendee, my views aren't limited to past prejudices and disagreements with politically binding factions, and I strongly believe that NUS as an organisation needs to work much harder to becoming far more professional in its practices so that members of the union can have more confidence in the way policies and campaigns are carried out. It was an incredibly exhausting experience, but I believe that it is vital for ALL UWA delegates to attend, not only so that we may lead by example and help see through proposed improvements, but to also be held accountable to the thousands of students that vote us in as delegates.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- A clear Grievances Guideline/Formal Procedure to be developed and voted upon to ensure all future Grievance Officers are well equipped in dealing with a range of grievances that may come up.
- The Speaker display more control of the conference floor, and to take more action in applying sanctions to individuals who disregard formal warnings.
- All elected UWA delegates attend conference and fully participate in policy discussion and conference proceedings.
- Circulate a daily account of conference proceedings inclusive of detailed minutes, list individuals who have been formally named for inappropriate behaviour with sanctions outlined and a summary/guide to policies discussed and the correlating motions

put to vote.

- Improve access to policy breakdown and agenda packs prior to Conference week.

NUS NATIONAL CONFERENCE DELEGATE REPORT

Alex Bennet

PERSONAL REFLECTION

The 2014 NUS National Conference, while logistically superior to the 2013 conference, was equally disappointing. Given that all policy areas were discussed, it might seem strange to compare these two conferences, yet despite how “productive” the most recent NatCon was, the petty factionalism and behaviour of student leaders resulted in a number of deplorable events, undermining the policy and electoral aspects of the conference. It is because of these actions, the seemingly irreparable state of the Union and the ongoing venality inherent in binding factions that I believe that the UWA Guild Council should critically review the affiliation and relationship that it has with the NUS.

There is no hiding the fact that NUS is overwhelmingly factional and that this factional nature is detrimental to its image, operations and elections. Despite these issues, the NUS and its key office bearers almost seem to celebrate this factionalism and propagate its existence. Given that the two largest factions are entirely based in young Labor, it is obvious that there is an inherent benefit to these groups in maintaining this entrenched factionalism. NLS and Student Unity have consistently felt the safety and assurance of the President and General Secretary positions since the birth of NUS, by literally swapping ballots with each other to ensure that their Labor factions together maintain control. This cycle was only broken once, when NLS and Student Unity fell just short of a majority and every vote on conference floor that wasn't under Labor control, voted for a previous UWA Guild President for the position of General Secretary. Since then the cycle has continued. These two Labor factions often take other important roles, such as the Education and Welfare Officer positions, while sometimes throwing scraps to other factions for what is often a ridiculous “price” (often in exchange for giving them more control on National Executive) and yet those factions make those deals out of fear of being completely locked out of the union. NLS and Student Unity are acutely aware of this and so the cycle continues.

This process is unfair and undemocratic – it shows a complete disregard for accountability and stifles the growth of the Union. This factionalism turns large portions of eastern states State Branches into do-nothing organisations with placeholder office bearers with little interest in achieving outcomes for students and more of a focus on their own titles. . This factionalism also says to members of the National Executive from NLS and Student Unity that you don't need to question anything that your factional leaders are doing, especially when they haven't done anything. In essence it's a form of corruption that people have been battling with for too long. It seems that for years we have been talking about how we can make the NUS better by acting as an accountability measure and providing and improving transparency, and yet over the two years that I have been involved I have seen it get worse.

The behaviour of student “leaders” at the conference is another drastic issue. Never before have I seen bullying and lack of respect on such a scale. Individual students on conference floor were singled out by speakers and shouted down by entire factions. Entire factions bullied and harassed individual students walking between rooms. There were chants from the Labor factions calling for the death of

all independents. There was harassment and threatening behaviour towards student leaders during negotiations. All of this led to delegates feeling unsafe on conference floor, in common areas and in negotiations. How is this behaviour becoming of human beings to others, let alone the Union leadership towards its members? This behaviour is unacceptable in any forum, and the NUS is barely a union at all if this is the behaviour it tolerates; merely a collection of factions trying to get the best result for themselves.

The NUS should be working collaboratively and graciously with its members. Policy and strategy should be defined by cooperation and consensus, not blind ideology, yet NUS manages to consistently fail at managing its primary stakeholders and most valuable allies; students. Thanks to this, we've seen independent Guilds and campus based student unions around the country substantially reduce their affiliation fees out of dissatisfaction to the point where, I believe, the union is probably irreparable. Most of us would have seen the allegations that NUS General Secretaries have been hiding consistent and considerable losses over the last few budgets and with such dire finances, significant drops in their only major income (affiliation fees) will spell disaster for the organisation. Additionally, I think any increases in affiliation fees will only delay this inevitable collapse, not prevent it.

That's not to say that I disagree with the primary tenets of the NUS. Comprehensive national student representation, advocacy and political engagement are crucial to the wellbeing and accessibility of higher education, and so too is the requirement for a united students voice. It is because of the worth of the organisation and its aims that the shortfalls of NUS are so concerning. The people who seem to be running the show have shown an inability to set aside their factionalism and to do what is best for students everywhere. While good policies continue to be passed by the National Conference, we consistently see office bearers who do nothing to carry them out. If this does not change in 2015, this does not bode well for the future of student representation.

If the NUS were to crumble, something needs to replace it to ensure that students do not lose their voice. Watching NUS die and making no efforts to replace it would be the worst possible outcome for all students, not just those at UWA. It's not my place to speak for other campuses, however some of our closest neighbours at universities in WA have also indicated their distaste for the way in which NUS is being run. I think that it is crucial to collaborate with other WA universities in the next steps taken in relation to NUS affiliation.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Critically review the Guild's affiliation to the NUS
 - The performance of the NUS in 2015 should be closely monitored.
 - Guild Council should have the chance to view the executive summary of the NUS structural audit completed in 2014 and an emphasis should be placed on enacting the recommendations of the report.
 - If steps are taken to disaccredit or disaffiliate from NUS, the resources originally budgeted for affiliation to the NUS should be reallocated to another pool for national representation and campaigning. Efforts should be made to collaborate with the other

WA university guilds to ensure that a coherent and united voice is heard from WA students.

NUS National Conference 2014 Report

Rebecca Lawrence and Aiden Depiazzi

UWA Delegates to the National Union of Students

PREPARATION AND COMMUNICATION

We perceive two broad problems with the preparation for the 2014 NUS National Conference. The first is the NUS National Office Bearers' disorganisation, and the second is the failure of the leadership of the UWA Student Guild.

In 2014, as in previous years, delegates did not receive information about registration, dates, accommodation or anything else from the National Union of Students' National Office Bearers or the convenors of the event. This in itself is completely unacceptable and serves as an indicator of the organisation's failure to prioritise the representation of students, as they do not assist democratically elected delegates in registering for National Conference. It also speaks to a deliberate attempt by NUS leadership to discourage participation in the Conference by delegates outside of the dominant Labor-allegiant and other left-wing factions. At an absolute minimum, responsibility should lie with NUS leadership to directly contact all democratically elected delegates within an appropriate timeframe with all necessary information pertaining to the Conference.

By convention and as a result of this appalling mismanagement by NUS leadership, Conference registration for UWA delegates is overseen by the President of the UWA Student Guild. This year, however, the President chose to ensure that only five of the seven elected UWA delegates attended the Conference. Neither of us received adequate information to register for National Conference. This is especially disappointing given that we reported on similar failings in the lead-up to the 2013 National Conference, and an undertaking was given in the February meeting of the 101st Council by both the 100th and 101st Guild Presidents to improve this procedure in 2014. Such an improvement did not eventuate.

The absence of communication continued throughout the Conference. It is our view that even delegates who are unable to attend the Conference should receive basic information about proceedings, including an agenda and an update of the status of motions at the conclusion of every day. This is important so that delegates can arrange proxy votes and report back to their student body about the Conference. This did not occur in 2014.

Save for external and anecdotal knowledge gleaned from delegates from other universities, it was exceptionally difficult for us to know that the Conference was even taking place. This fact seriously undermines the principle of fair representation, as two of seven democratically elected delegates were not given equal opportunity to participate in the Conference.

EXPECTATIONS OF THE ORGANISATION

The National Union of Students claims to be the peak representative body for "all Australian university and higher education students". This implies that the Union would work to represent the needs of all students, with a particular focus on legislation that relates

exclusively to students – that is, it is implied that the NUS has a mandate to provide advocacy on issues that are not covered by non-student groups. Furthermore, during the 2014 UWA Student Guild Elections, multiple tickets claimed that the NUS is an “independent” organisation, one that provides important and effective policy advocacy on student issues. Cited examples of the organisation’s activities included the campaign against cuts to student welfare allowance and the current campaign to oppose the deregulation of university fees and introduction of competitive pricing into the university sector.

It is therefore disappointing to see that the reality of the NUS does not match this description at all. While the NUS has failed to provide all delegates with a comprehensive list of motions discussed at Conference (a serious breach of the principle of transparency), unofficial reports reflected worrying content in a series of motions that were discussed and passed at the National Conference. These are discussed in more detail below. Data collected at the 2014 National Conference also revealed that, of Australia’s 39 universities, students groups from only 20 paid the NUS affiliation fee in 2014. This is concerning as it reveals that NUS is not “national” at all, and shows that half of Australia’s university student unions are successfully operating independently to the NUS – an option which is not given adequate consideration at UWA.

In particular, successive UWA Student Guild Council majorities have refused to permit a referendum to be put to all students on the issue, so as to allow those whose fees are being used to pay NUS office bearers and finance student political junkets to vote on whether or not they think the practice is a good one. Such refusals from Council majorities are indicative of a frighteningly low level of importance attributed to fair and transparent democratic processes and the inherent rights of all students to have a say on how their compulsorily-acquired SSAF contributions are spent.

One successful motion at this conference was to “condemn neoliberalism”. As it is undisputed that many university students would (formally or informally) identify as neoliberals, it is unclear how the NUS is successfully representing these students by condemning their very belief system. It is also difficult to see why condemning a belief system is a priority for an organisation tasked with campaigning on universal student issues. Other motions were reportedly passed to continue “Abbott and Pyne: Hands Off Our Education” campaigns, and to “endorse anti-Abbott rallies”. Motions with reference to specific individuals, not policies, also appear to be counter-productive for an organisation attempting to provide independent and non-partisan advocacy. Motions like these undermine the NUS’ reputation as a legitimate representative organisation because they reflect a clear anti-Liberal bias in within the organisation. Coupled with the overtly nepotistic and inward-focused attitude with which Labor-allegiant and other radical left-wing factions maintain control over the NUS, it is difficult to see how the organisation can continue to claim to represent “all students”.

The successful motions opposing unpaid student internships also contradict claims that the National Union of Students represents the best interests of students. Thousands of Australian students willingly undertake internships every year. The vast majority of organisations who provide this opportunity cannot afford to pay students as interns, and as a result would cease to provide internship opportunities if the NUS was successful in eliminating unpaid internships. It is worrying that the NUS would publicly support the idea of abolishing unpaid internships that provide a huge benefit to the development opportunities and employment prospects of many willing undergraduate students. This should be of particular concern to UWA students, many of whom experience a working environment for the first time as an unpaid intern. Again, evident in this nonsensical policy approach is a

distinct lack of understanding of the average student experience by NUS leadership, the vast majority of whom are or have been employed as staff members to Labor members of parliament or as organisers for other militant unions.

A motion to “oppose the federal budget” was also passed. This broad claim appears to be far outside the realms of any mandate the NUS can claim to have. It is difficult to imagine how condemning every income and expenditure measure by the Australian government can be a legitimate and necessary action to advocate for the interests of Australian students. It appears to demonstrate a lack of understanding on the part of some factions of what exactly the Commonwealth Budget is, and that “opposing” it implies that the preferable alternative is to cease all revenue-raising efforts, and all spending mechanisms, resulting in the cessation of government. A more specific motion was passed in “opposition to Medicare attacks”, and another to “oppose the \$7 co-payment”. This is clearly outside the mandate of the NUS to campaign on student issues, and definitely cannot be claimed to represent the views of all Australian students. We are also of the opinion that such motions are unwise as the government’s policy is yet to be announced, and this needlessly politicised statement was extremely premature.

Perhaps the most alarming thing that can be drawn from the 2014 National Conference is the fact that the NUS appears to continue to support policies which are actively detrimental to student welfare. Most notably, the NUS supports the government’s policy to continue to levy a tax on students through the Student Services and Amenities Fee. This tax is as high as \$287 per year, per student. It is particularly alarming that an organisation that claims to represent the best interests of students would support legislation which is so obviously unfair and detrimental to students. In light of such concerning facts, it is our recommendation that the UWA Student Guild ceases to champion the NUS as a student advocacy body as they are clearly in support of measures to undermine student welfare.

Even more concerning is the fact that the 2014 National Conference endorsed a motion to introduce “Universal Student Unionism”, which claimed that “the SSAF was not enough”. This would mean that every student was automatically a member of their student union, which seriously undermines the principle of freedom of association, as it removes the ability of a student to disassociate themselves from their local student union. It also removes the accountability measures for students to “vote with their feet” and leave the union, as all students would be forced to remain members of their union despite not agreeing with the actions of the organisation’s leadership. Furthermore, this policy contradicts current UWA Student Guild policy of “opt-in” student membership and as such should be immediately condemned by the UWA Student Guild. This is another example of evidence that the NUS is misrepresented as an “independent” organisation that exists to serve ordinary Australian students.

Whilst we were robbed of the opportunity to attend or send proxies to this Conference and thus missed much of the policy debate, we express our concern at the nature of many motions moved, discussed and passed at the 2015 National Conference. As UWA students, we are also alarmed at the disparity between the nature of the National Union of Students that is advertised at UWA and the reality of the organisation which was displayed at the National Conference. Furthermore, in light of the evidently partisan and counterproductive motives of the organisation as displayed through the policy motions passed at the 2014 National Conference, we feel it is harmful to continue to tie the name of the University of Western Australia to this organisation.

EXPECTATIONS OF UWA DELEGATES

As NUS delegates and UWA students, we were concerned at how UWA was represented at the NUS National Conference.

The first major disappointment was the failure of the UWA Student Guild President and sitting NUS National Executive Member, Lizzy O'Shea, to communicate necessary information about the conference to us as delegates. Not only did we fail to receive necessary registration information, we were not kept updated about policy discussions, agendas or opportunities to submit motions. This failure seriously undermined the representation of UWA at this conference.

Further cause for concern can be found in the disregard for the policies of the UWA Student Guild in favour of delegates' personal political opinions. It is UWA Student Guild policy, as passed by the 100th Guild Council, to support the abolition of parallel import restrictions on textbooks. The same issue was debated in policy debate at the 2014 NUS National Conference. Given these facts, it is alarming that the UWA Student Guild leadership neglected to brief delegates of their duty to uphold UWA Student Guild policy at the National Conference. It is even more worrying that at least one UWA NUS delegate actually voted against a motion to support the abolition of parallel import restrictions on textbooks. Not only did this delegate vote for a policy which actively harms the financial welfare of students by keeping textbook prices artificially high, they also neglected their duty to represent UWA by voting in contravention to UWA Student Guild policy.

It is also expected that UWA delegates attend the conference with the aim of contributing positively to debate and always acting with unselfish concern for the interests of all UWA students. It was therefore concerning to see that UWA delegates appeared to be acting in the interests of an organised national faction and displaying little regard for the policy discussed at the conference. Attachments 1.1, 1.2, 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show two UWA delegates contacting us about factional deals for "cogging" motions moved by interstate factional allies and canvassing for votes for interstate candidates for National Office Bearer positions. Attachment 2.2 shows a delegate admitting that "a lot of the deals surround positions, not policy" and that position deals had taken priority at the conference, but that his main concern was the electoral success of two non-UWA candidates.

This serves as proof that UWA's engagement with the National Union of Students, and particularly the participation of UWA delegates in the National Conference event, is not "independent", nor is it "non-partisan", and it certainly is not motivated by any desire to advocate for students. The main concern of the UWA attendees was purely to organise votes for factional allies, and not to represent the advocacy needs of UWA students.

AFTERMATH OF THE CONFERENCE

One main concern of ours is the budget situation of the NUS. Despite the NUS failing to provide delegates with any kind of budget information, we understand that the NUS ran a deficit of \$95,000 over the last 12 months, and a total deficit of \$366,600 over the last three years. We are concerned about this, and about the failure of the NUS to have addressed this issue at the 2014 National Conference. We can perceive serious issues with an organisation running with an unsustainable funding model (it is almost solely reliant on campus affiliation fees) and also running huge deficits every year.

A further threat to the continued existence of the NUS in its current state is the emergence of several competing national organisations which have been set up to address the areas of student advocacy which the NUS has neglected. The newest organisation is a national group called “The Blacademy”, which exists to represent Australia’s Indigenous students, and was formed after the NUS voted to cut the stipend for the ATSI Officer at National Conference in 2014. It is concerning to us as delegates that UWA continues to invest so much time and money into the NUS when the aftermath of the 2014 National Conference has revealed clear indicators that the organisation is failing.

Further consequences of the dismal 2014 National Conference can be seen in the actions of other affiliated organisations. The University of Melbourne’s Student Union has recently cut the 2015 budgetary allowance for NUS affiliation fees from \$106,000 to \$55,000, indicating an intention to pay a smaller affiliation fee in the coming year. It is possible to observe a general trend in student unions across the country to reduce or remove the funding allocated to NUS affiliation in favour of competing organisations or other priorities, which indicates that NUS is struggling to stay relevant as a representative body.

It is also worth reiterating that only 20 of Australia’s 39 universities affiliated to the NUS in 2014. This indicates that NUS affiliation is no longer a norm, and that many universities are prioritising on-campus expenditure over affiliating to a national body.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In line with the substantive content of our report, we recommend the following to Council:

1. That Council pass a motion to call a referendum of all students, coinciding with the 2015 Guild Elections as per regulations, on the issue of the Guild’s affiliation to the NUS;
2. That Council pass a motion to cease funding for NUS affiliation fees and NUS conferences, meetings, and related junkets; and
3. That Council pass a motion opposing NUS’ stance on “universal student unionism”, including a commitment to students’ rights to freedom of association.

Rebecca Lawrence and Aiden Depiazzi

18 February 2015

Attachment 1.1



Lizzy O'Shea

01/12/2014

hey bec, just saw your email - was wanting to check, is this so someone can pick up your votes? because if so they can do that without you registering 😊

like I'm not going to go and be all "YOU'RE PROXYING OMG" haha so if you just need people to pick them up that'll be fine

Attachment 1.2



Lizzy O'Shea

04/12/2014

Would also be interested in having a chat about support on floor for you guys worth cogging / speaking time like what came up last year if someone is going to be speaking / moving things for you

*with

Attachment 2.1



Alex Bennet

07/12/2014 05:16

Hey guys, hope your trips are going well. Just wanted to get in touch with some stuff that has been evolving for natcon over this weekend. unity have given women's and enviro, meaning Ridah Hassan will be getting women's and another of their high up trots will be getting enviro, both of whom have been really hectic with the violent protests this year. Essentially we are trying to get every other vote on floor to vote for people who aren't salt for enviro and women's and we should be able to just get over the 50%. If you guys don't collect your votes it will essentially give them these positions straight up - if possible, how would feel about proxying these ballots to us to make sure this doesn't happen?



Aiden Depiazzi

07/12/2014 05:52

Hi Alex, a few quick questions:

Who is "we"? Who exactly is trying to stop these trots from getting the positions?

To whom do you intend to give them instead?



Alex Bennet

07/12/2014 05:58

Hey mate, essentially it's Lizzy, myself and a few other indies from NSW and Melbourne.

Attachment 2.2

... enough.



Rebecca Lawrence

📍 07/12/2014 06:05

I'm concerned that, as we weren't registered on time by UWA, we can't send people in our place to NatCon. I can't send someone I trust to make a judgement call on my behalf and, for reasons you just highlighted, I don't trust a binding National Independent factional leader to make those choices for me.



Alex Bennet

📍 07/12/2014 06:13

Understandable, but a few things to clarify:

- The National Independents don't bind and I would act under the direction of the proxy, as required by the regulations.
- Proxies can include conditions, e.g. That I only vote under your direction for x positions with your ballots for a certain period of time.

So, if you would consider helping to ensure that members of socialist alternative aren't in a full time paid or the environment officer position, you would direct the proxy only to work for those ballots.



Aiden Depiazzi

📍 07/12/2014 06:20

Obviously we're opposed to the idea of having SAIt reps in paid and/or other senior positions - that's why we don't support the Guild paying many tens of thousands of dollars of UWA students' money into the NUS coffers to finance socialist salaries.

Attachment 2.3

...



Rebecca Lawrence

📍 07/12/2014 07:16

My main concern is that all the pre-conference talk seems to revolve around who from which faction gets elected to which position and gets to sit in an office in Melbourne for the year. What action has been taken on policy that will realistically benefit UWA students?



Alex Bennet

📍 07/12/2014 07:47

Yeh it's annoying that a lot of the deals surround positions, not policy, but that being said we have been discussing some of the constitutional reforms being put up by the gensec and president. One of the best things happening is that, due to some of the OBs this year, there is a huge policy push to reduce spending and improve efficiency (something that the trot OBs will hinder not help). These are the kinds of discussions we've been having so far, while the policy discussion will normally be on conference floor in the allocated debate time or between sessions.