

Please note the following trigger warnings and/or content warnings for this document before reading it: living wage, financial issues, UCU Strike Action, postgraduate research experience, divestment/fossil free, careers/jobs, equal pay, workers' rights

This document contains full details for the following idea submissions for All Student Meeting 1:

- 1- Living Wage Motion
- 2- The Guild Should Support The University and College Union's (UCU's) Postgraduate Research (PGR) Manifesto To Recognise PGRs As Staff
- 3- The Guild Should Stand For Fossil Free Careers
- 4- The Guild Should Support Workers Demanding Equal Pay From Birmingham City Council.

1- Living Wage Motion

The Guild Should implement a plan to pay our Student Staff The Real Living Wage, and seek Real Living Wage Foundation accreditation, within the next 5 years.

The Guild currently hires student staff at a rate of pay just above the minimum wage in the UK, for both under 21, and 21+ year olds. This is out of line with both other Student's Unions, and below the level of remuneration paid by the University's casual work agency.

Many student staff rely on their employment with the Guild to pay their rent and bills while at university, and the cost of living crisis has only accentuated the trend of full-time students taking up jobs during their studies to subsidise ever devalued maintenance loans.

As a union that exists to support its members, it is essential for The Guild to work towards implementing the living wage for student staff, to live up to its aims and values. Student staff are the bedrock of the Guild, that the organisation could not function without.

The Guild should ask the Finance Team to draw up plans for the Living Wage to be implemented by the start of the 2027/28 academic year, and sooner if possible. This plan should include yearly progressively higher targets, and it should be reported to the Trustee Board each year how close the organisation is to that year's target.

2 - The Guild Should Support the University and College Union's (UCU's) Postgraduate Research (PGR) Manifesto to Recognise PGRs as Staff

What is the issue you want to change?

[All the information can be found here.](https://www.ucu.org.uk/PGRs-as-staff)

(URL: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/PGRs-as-staff>)

Postgraduate researchers (PGRs) are the backbone of the higher education sector. We are its present and its future. We work on world-changing research that can make a real difference to people's lives. We contribute knowledge and expertise, fresh insights and perspectives, and we do the hard work necessary to bring research ideas to fruition.

We teach and train students. We take ideas out of the university and into the wider world. We are not valued. We do the same work as university staff, but we are not afforded the same recognition, rights, protections, or pay as staff, because we are considered 'students'. Many of us pay universities to produce data and outputs which we do not own. We put our lives on hold, without access to funded child care entitlements, parental and adoption leave, state benefits, pensions or housing stability. We are infantilised and not taken seriously. Our work is minimised, undervalued or ignored. We are overworked, under-supported and significantly more at risk of mental ill health. We are isolated, and unprotected from toxic research cultures. We need to be staff. We are worthy of rights, protections and pay. All of us deserve security and a good quality of life without struggle.

We must be staff. We must be sufficiently paid in a currency that is not experience. We must be given reasonable workloads. We must not pay to work. We must have access to state benefits, childcare, parental and adoption leave, and long term sick leave.

We must break down racist, ableist, classist and other oppressive barriers in the higher education sector which exist for current and future researchers. Research is labour. PGRs work as staff. PGRs must be staff.

What solutions or actions do you have?

[The Guild to support Postgraduate Research students and the principles for the employment of Graduate Teaching Assistants \(GTAs\) outlined in the manifesto here.](#)

URL for manifesto: [https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11623/Postgraduate-researchers-as-staff-manifesto-2021/pdf/UCU-PGRs as staff manifesto Jun21.pdf](https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/11623/Postgraduate-researchers-as-staff-manifesto-2021/pdf/UCU-PGRs_as_staff_manifesto_Jun21.pdf)

How will you know your idea is a success?

PGRs are contracted as full-time employees of the University of Birmingham.

3 - The Guild Should Stand For Fossil Free Careers

What is the issue you want to change?

The Guild should note that:

- The operations of the oil and gas industries cause immense environmental harm, by accelerating the climate and ecological crisis, polluting the water and permanently destroying landscapes. These extractive operations also cause direct social harm, by displacing people from their homes and lands, destroying livelihoods, demolishing sacred indigenous sites, and leaving workers and communities with severe health problems.
- Graduates are increasingly turning away from the oil and gas sector. A 2017 study showed the number of graduates taking jobs in the industry had dropped by 60% in four years. Young people see oil and gas as the most unappealing sector to work in, and associate it with responsibility for the climate crisis, and believe there is no future for jobs in the industry.
- The University Careers Service does not have a publicly accessible policy that excludes the promotion of careers in the oil and gas industry through its website, careers fairs, emails to the student body and other recruitment events. Birkbeck, University of London was the first in the UK to exclude the oil and gas industry from all recruitment activity in September 2022. In addition, 20% of UK universities have similar exclusions for other industries, including the tobacco, sex, and gambling industries.
- The Guild has made a public ethical and sustainability commitment declaring a climate emergency in 2020. This includes lobbying for ethical investments and divestment from fossil fuels within the university portfolio. The University also declared a climate emergency in 2021 and committed to working with organisations that enable them to influence change.
- When fossil fuel companies are allowed onto campus to give recruitment talks, they focus on their green investments to greenwash students, and convince them that they will offer a long career focusing on the energy transition, rather than the reality of continual investment in oil and gas extraction. This is exemplified by the recent recruitment event this year for ExxonMobil at the University where ExxonMobil spoke at length about the \$15 billion over 6 years they have committed to invest in clean energy, but neglected to mention the \$20-25 billion a year they have also committed to exploration and the finding of new fossil fuel sources.

- Inviting oil and gas companies to advertise with the university adds legitimacy to the idea that these companies are an acceptable part of our society and our future.
- The University and its Careers Service should ensure that its recruitment activities and those of societies on campus are in line with the University's publicly stated ethical principles of sustainability, as in its declaration of a climate emergency.
- The Guild and University have a responsibility to its students to promote jobs with a future.
- Ending this university's complicity in career pipelines into the oil and gas industry is an effective method of showing solidarity with communities affected by these companies' operations.
- Lots of student groups on campus and many students nationally have campaigned against fossil fuel companies on campus. Fossil fuel companies predicted the impacts their industries would have on the planet back in the 1970s/80s, and continued to spread disinformation, lies and denial about the climate crisis, in order to continue raking in record profits. The reasons for tackling the climate crisis are best put in the Guild's own declaration of a climate emergency which states:

"At this very moment, unimaginable damage is being inflicted upon the world's ecosystems with its effects being felt by every living creature on this planet. We can no longer delay action in tackling this crisis. We must act with urgency and integrity. The United Nations (2019) have predicted that we had 10 years left to take immediate and urgent action on climate change to prevent irreversible damage. ... According to former UN General Assembly President María Fernanda Espinosa Garcés, we are the last generation that can prevent irreparable damage to our planet. Around the world, millions of students and young people are calling on our governments and institutions to act with sincerity and urgency in tackling the climate crisis. While this issue will impact every living thing on this planet, its impacts will not be felt equally. As a human rights issue, Amnesty International (2020) argues that its effects will be far more pronounced for certain groups. Those that are already vulnerable, disadvantaged and subject to discrimination will face unprecedented suffering. It would be an abject failure to the students the Guild of Students (the Guild) represents to ignore the crisis and the impact it will, and is, having on our planet. I, therefore, on behalf of the Guild, declare a state of climate and ecological emergency. The University of Birmingham has a responsibility to commit to tackling the climate emergency and commit to working with the Guild on environmental sustainability objectives. It is imperative that our institutions use their positions and power within the sector to actively fight the suffocating onset of climate change."

The Guild can go further than this statement, and can advocate for Fossil Free careers on campus that would benefit students greatly, as well as the planet.

What solutions or actions do you have?

The Guild should:

- Publicly support the Fossil Free Careers campaign, and demands that the Guild and affiliate societies explicitly refuse to enter into any relationships with oil and gas companies, as well as advising that the university careers service adopts a publicly available Ethical Careers Policy that explicitly excludes oil and gas companies from recruitment opportunities at any university controlled space.
- To mandate the relevant full-time and part-time officer(s) to actively work with the Fossil Free Careers campaign group and People & Planet to ensure that Union work is linked up with grassroots campaigners.
- To mandate the relevant full-time and part-time officer(s) to help set up meetings relating to the Fossil Free Careers campaign with relevant university staff, and include student campaigners where relevant.
- To use relevant Guild social media channels to amplify petitions, statements and other calls to action from the Fossil Free Careers campaign as far as is legally possible for the Guild of Students in relation to its other legal obligations.
- To send out a press release and website statement announcing the passing of this motion and the support of the union for this campaign.
- To never allow oil and gas companies, which are defined as those that explore for, produce or ship oil, gas and coal, access to Guild organised events, or to lend the Guild name, logo or endorsement to events which include these companies.
- To refuse the presence of oil and gas companies in any SU-controlled physical or digital space.

How will you know your idea is a success?

This campaign has already been successful at Birkbeck University in London. People and Planet have stated that banning fossil fuel companies was justified as the jobs are terrible for the planet and simply don't make sense from a student's perspective as these are industries that are going to rapidly downsize or cease to exist entirely within the working lifetime of students. The University of Birmingham has reduced its investments in fossil fuels from 10% in 2018 to less than 0.5% in 2021, so it would be hypocritical to allow those companies to recruit students.

It will enhance the student experience at recruitment events, as the space that fossil fuel companies have previously occupied at university events will be freed up for other career opportunities. Those students that want to work for oil and gas can still find the opportunities, but they will no longer be legitimised by a large presence on campus.

4 - The Guild Should Support Workers Demanding Equal Pay From Birmingham City Council.

Birmingham City Council has an equal pay issue. They themselves have admitted at a tribunal that there are serious issues with the grading of different jobs in the council, leaving roles predominately staffed by women as paid less than roles staffed by men, even though they have been graded the same. Equal pay and sex discrimination has been an ongoing issue within Birmingham City Council and seems to keep occurring despite assurances to workers and unions that there will be changes. This fundamentally leaves women earning less and not receiving equal pay to their male counterparts. Women are paid 36% less an hour than men on the same job grade. This covers council employees such as teaching assistants and carers. This affects students. Many may seek employment at the council during their studies or after. We are all affected and in contact with Birmingham City Council and their staff while we live in Birmingham, from refuse collectors to councillors.

What solutions or actions do you have?

The Guild should take an explicit stance supporting equal pay within the council, and we should support council workers demanding pay justice. This is in line with previous Guild stances, which support trade unions and state that the Guild is a feminist union. A public declaration of support puts pressure on the council, especially as we are such a large organisation within Birmingham. A solid vocal stance will also bring awareness to the issue, offering solidarity to council workers being underpaid in the midst of a cost of living crisis.

How will you know your idea is a success?

The idea will be a success upon confirmation of our solidarity. Hopefully, it will help push council bosses into negotiations and structural change. As students graduate and seek employment, they deserve not to face pay discrimination. The Guild support will help facilitate that by exerting external pressure on Birmingham City Council and bringing students to the issue so they can self-advocate.