

Beliefs and Commitments

Renewal Date – 13th November 2021

1. Overcrowding

The Guild believes that the overcrowding of students on our campus puts pressure on many aspects of the academic and learning experience. This includes but is not limited to high student staff ratios, pressure on facilities such as the sports centre, services such as counselling, study space and lecture theatres; all of which have a direct negative impact on the quality of education and university experience.

In line with the Guild's 'University Recruitment and Resources' Policy, the Guild will lobby the University to recruit a manageable number of students and to invest in their infrastructure and facilities as student numbers increase.

2. Hidden Course Costs

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

3. European Union

Following the decision for the UK to leave European Union as a result of the referendum on 23rd June 2016, the Guild of Students believes that the negotiated Brexit deal should be in the interest of students and will lobby where possible to ensure that this is the case.

4. Self-Defence

The Guild believes that self-defence classes should be offered for free at the University of Birmingham. These should be offered by the University and, failing that, should be offered by relevant societies with the support from the Guild to make these are successful and accessible. These should be available throughout the year, and should aim to cater for as many students as possible. The Guild believes that students should feel safe and supported, in line with our Zero Tolerance Policy.

5. Climate Change

Climate change is a significant threat to the planet, and as such a threat to the long-term sustainability of the University of Birmingham and the welfare of its students, past, present and future. The Guild accepts the consensus of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) that climate change is caused by human destruction of the environment, and believes all organisations/individuals have a responsibility to reduce their carbon footprint and practice environmental responsibility.

The Guild commits to actively support students seeking to take action, both on and off campus, on climate change and develop a strong network of students involved in environmental activism, volunteering and university sustainability projects.

6. Funding

The Guild opposes cuts to higher education funding, believing that they damage the education of students, job security of university staff and diminish the UK's global standing in higher education. The Guild will work at both a local and a national level to oppose them. The Guild believes that funding is a huge barrier to Higher Education for all students, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds. Often these students have the least access to guidance about university life, applying to university, and funding available to them and are among the most debt averse. The Guild opposes the scrapping of maintenance grants, as this now means the most disadvantaged students will accrue the largest debts, putting them off from attending university.

7. Societies

The Guild believes that student groups are important for gaining skills outside of your degree, making a student's university experience more enjoyable and enhancing their employability. Where there are barriers to joining a student group, the Guild will commit to removing these barriers to make sure that groups are accessible to all. Groups should also be run democratically to ensure fairness.

The Guild believes that student groups should be given as many opportunities as possible by both the Guild and University to develop and present what they are set up to do. Where a Student Group could offer a service, for example media coverage or a performance, student groups should be the first considered provider.

8. Consultation with students

The Guild believes that any major changes require consultation with the wider student body, not just the Guild Officers. This includes, but is not limited to, changes to the student experience, courses and degree awards.

9. Living Wage

The Guild supports the Living Wage Campaign, and will make every practical effort to support its implementation, including its implementation across campus.

10. Balloons

The Guild notes the damage to wildlife and the depletion of the global helium reserves that is caused by the use of helium balloons and balloon releases.

The Guild commits that no Guild activities or student groups will make use of helium balloons or release helium without the ability to recover the gas. The Guild will not release helium balloons, or non-helium balloons, for fear of threatening wildlife. The Guild or student groups will not finance or support such activities for fear of damaging the atmosphere or wildlife.

11. The Guild is a pro-choice institution

The Guild should be an inherently pro-choice union, by offering free, confidential and non-judgmental advice services for all students. It should aim to protect a student's fundamental right to choose abortion as a form of healthcare, and recognise that a pro-choice stance allows students to make informed decisions regarding their bodies. The Guild should also acknowledge the threat of anti-choice protests, and the distress and intimidation they can cause students.

Renewal Date 24th January 2022

12. Feminism

The Guild is a feminist union and believes it is essential that we create a society in which all people are treated equally regardless of gender identity.

13. Zero Tolerance to Sexual Harassment

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

14. Gender Neutral Toilets

The Guild believes that all students have the right to live without fear of discrimination or judgement, and as such shall ensure the Guild is an inclusive, safe space, by ensuring gender-neutral toilets are available on campus. It will work to ensure that these are practical and accessible and contain sanitary product disposal units.

15. Political Engagement

The Guild believes that students should be encouraged and supported to get involved in local and national democracy. The Guild where possible, will run events such as voter registration campaigns and will lobby for the automatic voter registration of students.

16. Anti-Racism; Anti-Fascism

The Guild believes in an active opposition to fascism, racism, anti-Semitism and Islamophobia and so should use its resources to build a strong anti-racism/fascism campaign on campus and in the wider community.

17. Student Access to Healthcare

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

18. Discrimination

The Guild believes that Racism, Sexism, Homophobia, Transphobia, Biphobia and Ableism in all and any forms are totally unacceptable on campus or in wider student life (it is noted that this is a non-exhaustive list).

The Guild of Students is committed to combating all such instances of bigotry and discrimination on campus and respecting the diversity of its membership. It shall work with the University and its commercial partners to ensure that their facilities and services are accessible to all students and that no student suffers discrimination from them or their staff. The Guild commits to deal with any instances of inappropriate behaviour in line with its Zero Tolerance Policy.

19. Jobs and Employability

The Guild believes that Full-Time students should normally work no more than sixteen hours a week, or no more than is allowed under Tier 4 Student Visa restrictions, but that when regulating the part-time work of students both the Guild and the University need to be

flexible and properly recognise that many students can or need to work longer hours. The Guild is committed to working with the University to make it as simple as possible for students to apply for temporary jobs on campus.

20. Housing

The Guild believes that students should live in good quality, affordable and safe accommodation and shouldn't be extorted by landlords or letting agencies.

The Guild is committed to providing advice and guidance to students about accommodation processes and issues, and will work with all relevant stakeholders, where required, to ensure that this is the case.

The Guild notes that the current state of housing in Bournbrook is unsustainable, with a large number of student houses having 5/6+ bedrooms and Landlords continuing to develop denser housing, raising concerns about student welfare and infrastructure. Simultaneously limits imposed by the Council through Article 4 provisions cause market pressures on student housing, reducing supply and artificially raising prices.

The Guild commits to work with and lobby local councillors, the city council and landlords to develop housing sustainably for the continued existence of a local, thriving community.

The Guild of Students recognises the importance of blood drives, and will, where possible support students to give blood, platelets or other tissue.

21. The Guild's response to Anti-semitism

The Guild should work with relevant organisations to adopt the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance's working definition for anti-Semitism in full and with all its examples. The Guild should work with relevant authorities, both within the Jewish community and otherwise, to create a more effective and efficient disciplinary process for perpetrators of anti-Semitism and other hate crimes so that the Guild does not show a lack of care to Jewish and other minority students.

Renewal Date 9th May 2022

Giving Blood

NHS Blood and Transplant currently prevents men who have sex with other men from donating blood unless they have had no sexual contact with another person for 3 months or more.

The Guild believes that this policy is unfair, and it will retain the right to use such blood drives or other events to highlight this issue.

22. The Student Movement

The Guild is part of the wider national student movement, with which comes a collective responsibility to represent the interests of all students. We recognise that we are stronger in such a movement and that our campaigns, lobbying and representation are stronger too.

The Guild believes it has the duty to back NUS supported demonstrations and protests, if they are in line with Guild Policy, and are in the interests of students.

23. Israeli/Palestinian Conflict

The Guild supports a peaceful settlement of the Israel/Palestine conflict in line with NUS policy and does not support either side of the conflict. The Guild shall avoid investing in companies identified by NUS as impacting negatively on attempts to foster a peaceful settlement in the region, and will lobby the University to allow the contracts to expire and be reassessed with emphasis on not renewing the contract. It will lobby the University to seek to end these contracts before expiration where possible.

24. Mental Health

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

25. Prevent

The Guild of Students opposes the "Prevent" strategy and believes it reinforces crude stereotypes of Muslims that will only feed prejudice and discrimination, leading to isolation and stigmatisation which will only prevent their continued engagement and contribution.

Whilst the Guild does not believe "radicalisation" to be a widespread problem it recognises that it may take place on some occasions, and that it has a responsibility to ensure the safety of all students. Universities are places where extremist views can be challenged effectively through dialogue, open forums and debates and this is the most appropriate way to combat these problems. The Guild opposes spying on any students and will not pass on information about members' religious or political opinions or society members' lists to the police, university authorities or any other third party.

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26. Community

The Guild believes that the University is more than just a collection of buildings where students pay to receive a degree. The University is a community which unites both students and staff in a partnership, making the University what it is.

The Guild believes living independently in the community is an important part of students' university experience and that students should feel safe and be valued as an integral part of the local community.

The Guild of Students is committed to improving community cohesion between students and local residents, so that the significant positive influence that students provide in the local and wider community is recognised.

The Guild believes that a positive and influential relationship with Birmingham City Council should be maintained and that we should work with the Council to ensure their policies are set with the benefits of students in mind.

The Guild is committed to providing advice and support to students. It will seek to lobby the University and local police so that students both feel, and are safe, in the community, working in partnership where appropriate.

27. Stereotyping

The Guild actively discourages any form of stereotyping comments/behaviour towards students based on their membership to a particular Sports Club, Student Group or Association. The Guild of Students does not tolerate any form of discrimination and harassment based on the protected characteristics (age, disability, gender identity, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion and belief, sex and sexual orientation), in line with the Zero Tolerance Policy.

28. Postgraduates who teach

The Guild believes that giving postgraduates the opportunity to take on teaching responsibilities can be good for their personal and professional development as well as diversifying the academic teaching community.

However, the Guild fundamentally opposes the University taking advantage of postgraduates who teach and believe that these students should be afforded the basic rights of, among other things; a contract, fair pay (which increases with the line of inflation), pay for preparation and marking time and appropriate training and support. The Guild believes that postgraduates who teach may face severe job insecurity and economic hardship which has a detrimental impact on wellbeing of postgraduates themselves and the quality of the classes they teach. Where this is found to not take place the Guild will campaign to ensure that these basic rights are afforded.

The Guild encourages the unionisation of postgraduates who teach and will work with teaching unions for their interests where appropriate.

29. Activism

The Guild supports peaceful direct action and protest, within the law of the land and in line with Guild policy. The Guild of Students believes in individuals' rights to carry out peaceful direct action. The Guild will not distance itself from legal non-violent protest, although it may not in all cases explicitly condone it.

The Guild will do all it can to protect students engaged in activism from being subjected to violence and intimidation, and provide guidance to them about their rights in protest situations and how to diffuse potentially violent situations.

30. No Platform

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

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

Hizb ut-Tahrir
English Defence League
British National Policy
Al-Muhajiroun
National Action
Muslim Public Affairs Committee

32. Immigration

The Guild opposes racism and xenophobia and believes that immigration enriches our society both culturally and financially and that we should be supportive of it. The Guild believes that pandering to anti-immigrant arguments does not undermine racism, but instead normalises it, helping fuel the growth of right-wing political forces and far-right organisations.

31. Teaching Excellence Framework

The Guild believes that universities should strive to continually improve teaching and anything that ensures this happens, without significant negative impact on staff and students, is a good thing. However, we believe that the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), in its current form, does not achieve this. Most of the metrics of the TEF are not based on teaching, and therefore it is not a good way of ensuring improvements to teaching in universities.

The Guild is completely opposed to the marketisation of Higher Education, and as such opposes any link between TEF and tuition fees.

32. Academic Representation

The Guild believes in academic representation for students in education and that students have the right to choose who their representatives shall be. Students must be empowered to make changes and to be partners in their education and the Guild will provide strategies to enable this.

33. Facilities

The Guild believes it has a responsibility to continually improve its infrastructure, reduce the carbon footprint of its building and activities, and as much as possible use renewable energy. The Guild believes that the University has a responsibility to ensure future campus developments and new buildings are built as sustainably as possible, and will work with university to actively encourage this.

The Guild commits to aim for on-going carbon footprint reduction in its own facilities, to make reasonable adjustments to planned development and services to minimise environmental impact, and procure energy efficient equipment where possible.

34. National Campaigns

The Guild will support (but not exclusively), the following national campaigns:

Black History Month
Women's History Month
LGBTQ History Month
Disability History Month
Fossil Free UK
Reclaim the Night
Holocaust Memorial Day
Go Green Week

The Guild believes in student-led campaigning and commits to support student-led campaigns with training, support and funding.

35. Healthy Lifestyle

The Guild believes that sports and societies are a vital part of the university experience. It is important members of the Guild of Student are fully aware of the advantages to their health and wellbeing of consuming a balanced diet and taking part in the recommended weekly levels of exercise (when able to do so). Therefore, the Guild of Students should always, where possible, seek to make students generally aware of issues relating to their diet and the physical/mental benefits of exercise, promote events that help this, and encourage participation in sport.

We believe that we should promote an active campus, as well as making sports equal and accessible to all. The Guild will lobby the University to Keep Wednesday Afternoons free for all students, including postgraduates.

36. Education for Sustainable Development

The Guild believes that it has a duty to educate and inform students about sustainability, the impact their decisions/lifestyles can have on the natural world, and way that they can live more environmentally friendly lives, both at university and in the future. The Guild of Students recognises the importance of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) and the UN Sustainability Goals.

The Guild commits to work with university academic services, college committees and student experience officers to embed ESD into the universities formal curriculum and to support student representatives to lobby for more environmental education on courses and the use of sustainability as a topic of learning and assessment. The Guild commits to educating Student Group committees, elected student representatives and Guild/University staff on ESD, the UN sustainability goals and the importance of sustainability throughout the Guild's activities.

37. Postgraduate Experience

The Guild believes that access to postgraduate study should not be limited by a student's ability to pay for the course. It is committed to exposing the access problems within postgraduate study and how this inaccessibility is due to the system relying on private financing and governmental loans which do not cover the real costs of postgraduate degrees.

The Guild will work with the University to ensure that postgraduate courses offer value to students and push nationally for increased scope of governmental loans and a cap on fees to reduce the financial barriers to postgraduate study.

The Guild believes in equal opportunities for postgraduates and undergraduates and that benefits and rights afforded to undergraduates should also be given to postgraduates. This includes access to free language courses, keeping Wednesday afternoons free and application of regulations concerning consumer protection.

Renewal date – 21st February 2023

38. Trade Unions

The Guild endeavours to maintain strong and reciprocal, supportive relationships with campus unions and believes that the mistreatment of staff or students by university management is unacceptable.

The Guild believes that any failure by the University to maintain good industrial relations with its academic or support staff is deleterious to the academic experience and overall interests

of students. The Guild believes that University staff deserve to be employed on secure contracts that guarantee dignity in retirement and a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. The Guild further believes that its members should be encouraged to join an appropriate trade union.

In the event of legitimate industrial action taken by campus trade unions, the Guild commits to support such action, unless instructed otherwise by the result of a referendum held in accordance with the Guild's By-laws. The Guild will publicise such action, educate its members as to the reasons for and effects of such action, encourage its members to join staff on picket lines, and lobby University management to engage in negotiations with campus trade unions. The Guild will provide free of charge use of its premises for alternative educational provision and provide refreshment facilities to campus trade unions for the duration of any such action."