



YUSU NUS REFERENDUM REPORT, 2016

A referendum on NUS affiliation was due to take place in the 2016/17 Academic year, following a historic decision from the YUSU Trustee Board to delegate decisions about affiliation to the student body. The referendum was however accelerated to take place in this (2015/16) Academic Year instead after a motion from a student campaign group was passed through the Policy & Review Group.

Background;

After the 2016 NUS National Conference, several on-campus groups came together to form the 'No2NUS' campaign - [as was widely reported in student media](#).

At the YUSU AGM on Monday 25th April, the group raised their concerns with the Sabbatical Officers and indicated their desire to see a referendum on YUSU's ongoing affiliation with the NUS, citing concerns about the 'political direction' of the NUS and 'resistance to democratic reform'. They were informed that the best route to go down to trigger a debate would be to use YUSU's Policy Process (which is currently undergoing a review).

An Idea for YUSU to Disaffiliate from the NUS was received on 1st May, with meetings and discussions with No2NUS group regarding their motion and the best way to progress it under the current system taking place across the next couple of weeks.

The student led Policy and Review Group met on the 13th May to look over the proposal and determine next steps given the time available in the term. [They came to the conclusion that a campus-wide referendum would be the the best route to take](#).

James Humpish, the Policy Coordinator, explained:

“We have decided to move ahead with this for a number of reasons. Firstly, we have noted that affiliation with the NUS affects every member of YUSU and continuing membership has become a contentious issue within campus with some voices for and against having been expressed earlier in the term. Having said this, a referendum provides the opportunity for every student to express their opinion on continued membership and by proposing this two weeks in advance, there is a healthy timeframe for both a 'Stay' and 'Leave' campaign to



develop and effectively coordinate themselves so as to share their arguments for and against continued affiliation with the NUS. It was further noted that question of NUS membership has been raised in multiple universities across the country with some unions having decided to stay in the NUS and others deciding to leave. Holding a referendum provides capacity for students in York to demonstrate democratically where our university stands on the issue.”

The referendum question was agreed to be **“Should YUSU remain affiliated with the NUS?”**.

The Campaign Leaders were Chris Wall (Yes Campaign) and Robin Brabham (No Campaign).

Paul Chapman the Director of Student Support & Involvement at the University of Manchester Students’ Union appointed as the External Returning Officer¹. Michael Hewitson, YUSU Democracy & Campaigns Co-ordinator, was appointed Deputy Returning Officer.

Publicity and Engagement;

The referendum was officially announced in [a blog on the YUSU website on 23rd May](#). The timeframe ensured that a robust Referendum site could be built for students to access information about both campaigns. Both campaign sides were in agreement that it was extremely important to be able to have an informed debate, backed up by a strong communications and engagement plan from YUSU.

The Referendum site contained;

- A. The question - ‘Should YUSU remain affiliated with the NUS?’
- B. Key dates
- C. Contact details for the Returning Officer
- D. Official campaign rules
- E. Official complaints form
- F. A ‘Yes’ campaign page
- G. A ‘No’ campaign page

¹ Typically, YUSU would use a member of staff from the NUS as External Returning Officer - for obvious reasons that was deemed inappropriate in this referendum.



In addition, YUSU produced neutral publicity materials to promote the referendum - putting them out on social media, the plasma screens around campus, the Weekly Newsletter and in two tailored emails sent to every individual student's inbox informing them that the referendum would be taking place and encouraging them to vote.

The campus papers, *Vision* and *Nouse*, as well as non-ratified media like *The Yorker* and *The Tab*, also produced articles and comment pieces surrounding the referendum which engaged the student body in the decision making process.

Campaigning & Voting

Online campaigning opened alongside the launch of the Referendum Site on Monday 23rd May. Both Campaign Leaders were briefed on the rules over the course of the week. Each campaign team was given a budget of £80, with £60 of that reimbursable - though this was later upped to £100, with £80 reimbursable (detailed in 'Complaints' below).

A referendum debate was held on Tuesday 31st May, at 5.30pm in P/T/006l. It was chaired by James Humpish the Policy Coordinator - in the region of 60 students attended.

Physical campaigning opened on the same day as the debate. YUSU By-laws and the Referendum Rules state that only members of YUSU are able to campaign in YUSU Referenda - effectively excluding third parties from campaigning on campus. Elected Officers were able to campaign in their roles.

Voting was held entirely online at yusu.org/vote, opening at 10am on Wednesday 1st June (the morning after the Referendum Debate). Voting was due to close at 5pm on Wednesday 8th June, [but was extended by 24 hours to 5pm on Thursday 9th June, at the request of the No campaign, and the agreement of the both the Yes campaign and the External Returning Officer](#) after the publication of updated financial figures regarding YUSU's NUS affiliation.



Voting & Turnout (Number Crunching)

See Appendix for fuller breakdowns of voting figures.

Students were asked to vote on the following question:

“Should YUSU remain affiliated with the NUS?”

And were given the options; Yes, No and Abstain. The full result statement is available online at www.yusu.org.

Voter Turnout;

Total Votes Cast	Turnout (%)	Total ‘Yes’ Votes	Total ‘No’ Votes	Total Abstentions
2741	15.7	1461 ²	1233 ³	46 (+1 Spoilt)

For a referendum result to be binding, the constitution requires it must reach a turnout quoracy of 5% of the (17,431 strong) student body - which equates to **872 votes**. This was reached early on the second day of voting.

National Comparison;

The NUS Referendum turnout at York is down on the turnout for our own Officer Elections, which is to be expected, but compares favourably to other Students’ Unions that have held referenda on the same issue in this term. In addition it compares well to the previous referendum on this issue, in 2014 7.65% of students (1259) turned out to vote.

Students’ Union	Total Votes Cast	Turnout (%)	Votes to Remain	Votes to Disaffiliate	Abstentions
Exeter Guild	5,334	30.8	2,690	2,546	98
Hull	1,306	9.5	476	811	19
Lincoln	1,734	12.6	804	881	49

² One student on a Leave of Absence was allowed to cast a vote after the deadline as they had been told they would not be able to (which is not the case). As the single vote would not have affected the outcome the Deputy Returning Officer allowed the vote to be cast.

³ One student emailed the Deputy Returning Officer informing them that they would like their vote to be changed from ‘Yes’ to ‘No’ after the release of the updated NUS Benefits Statement. That change is reflected in these figures.



Newcastle	1,475	5.9	486	989	-
Oxford	5,975	27.7	3,409	2,430	136

Complaints

The Deputy Returning Officer (DRO) received the following complaints to returningofficer@yusu.org

3x Complaints re: NUS Extra Emails

A handful of complaints were received regarding the NUS email to NUS Extra Card holders asking them to vote 'Yes' in the referendum. The DRO confirmed that the communication from the NUS was not as a result of activity approved or requested by the Yes Campaigners here on campus - Yes and No campaign groups were in agreement that third-party campaigning on campus was not acceptable (as per the Election Rules).

The DRO's role is to examine alleged breaches of the Election Rules by the Yes/No Campaign Groups. In advance of campaigning he held discussions with both Yes and No teams outlining that there would be very little that could be done in such a scenario.

1x Complaint re: Adding 'Vote Confirmation' button to page ('Are You Sure?')

One complaint was received stating that there was no 'Are You Sure?' or similar pop-up when a student registered their vote. The vote page was amended and a pop-up was included from midday on the first day of voting.

3x Complaints re: Removal of Campaign signs, comprised of;

1x Complaint re: Removal of No Campaign Placards from Heslington East Campus

1x Complaint re: Removal of Yes Campaign Placards from various locations

1x Complaint re: Removal of signs from both campaigns by Goodricke JCRC

This is a regular complaint during any election or campaign period and unfortunately unless there is clear evidence of the offence being perpetrated there is very little that can be done or sanctions that can be made. Both campaign sides were affected, and both reminded of the rules (and to remind their campaign teams as well). The DRO sought CCTV footage of the specific incident on Hes East but none was available.



Goodricke JCRC removed both Yes and No placards during their Goodfest event and informed both sides, stating that they would be given back to them once the event was over. Unfortunately, the materials were then thrown away in the clear-up. The DRO offered both campaign teams an extra £20 in budget to make up for the loss in materials, and agreed that missing signs needn't be accounted for in campaign expenditure records.

1x Complaint re: Yes Campaign Leader conduct on social media

A complaint was received stating that the Yes Campaign, in particular the Campaign Leader, was not amending figures (after the release of new figures) on their digital signage - mainly their Facebook page cover. The DRO contacted the Campaign leader with a deadline to have amended the materials by and this was complied with.

2x Complaint re: Extension of Voting Deadline

Two complaints were received about the decision to extend the voting deadline by 24 hours. As the decision was made in agreement with both Campaign teams and the external Returning Officer there was little that the DRO could do other than relay that information to the complainants.

1x Desire to amend original vote from 'Yes' to 'No'

One student emailed the DRO to confirm that the new financial figures would have meant that they would have voted 'No' rather than 'Yes', as per the offer set out in the statement with the new figures. Their vote was changed accordingly.

Recommendations

- Ensure that the whole of the student body have opportunities to engage with YUSU's policy review. At the outset of the referendum discussion there was a perception from students that a policy discussion and vote would have to be 'forced'; suggesting a lack of clarity on how existing processes work.
- The current policy cycle means that affiliations, such as the NUS affiliation, are considered on a tri-annual basis. In the interim period more regular reporting should be undertaken to set out the benefits (financial and otherwise) of YUSU's NUS affiliation, over and above the opportunity for discussion that is currently included in the AGM agenda.
- Work on increasing participation in NUS Delegate elections - held alongside College Elections - both in turnout and candidates.



- Work on a procedural checklist template for referenda with shorter turnaround, setting out key logistical considerations and tasks.
-

Comment from the External Returning Officer

“I am happy to support the report of the referendum of affiliation to NUS by The University of York Students’ Union dated the 10th of June 2016 and I am of the opinion the process and result is fair and in accordance to the values of such a procedure. I am confident in the handling of the complaints raised and see no areas of concerns as to the validity of the result.”

“I have been kept in constant communication and with regards to progress and interventions made due to circumstances which may have impacted on the voting of individuals.”

“As the Returning Officer I am satisfied that the election has been free, fair and democratic.”

Paul Chapman
Director of Student Support and Involvement
Manchester University Students’ Union

Michael Hewitson
Deputy Returning Officer, YUSU Democracy & Campaigns Co-ordinator
10 June 2016



APPENDIX ONE

Fig. 1, Votes By Hour

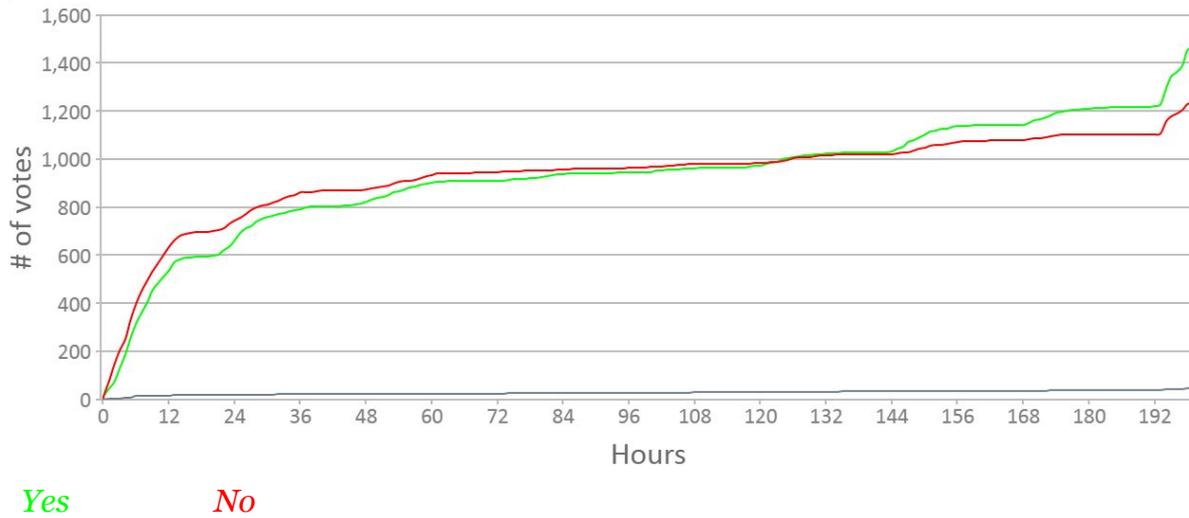


Fig. 2, Daily Voting Figures (Recorded at 5pm);

Wednesday			Thursday			Friday		
Yes	362		Yes	763		Yes	876	
No	453	(+91)	No	819	(+56)	No	910	(+34)

Saturday			Sunday			Monday		
Yes	924		Yes	956		Yes	1,013	(+6)
No	952	(+28)	No	972	(+16)	No	1,007	

Tuesday			Wednesday			Election Close⁴		
Yes	1,115	(+60)	Yes	1,197	(+94)	Yes	1,461	(+229)
No	1,055		No	1,103		No	1,233	

⁴ Includes amendments outlined in footnotes 2 and 3



Fig. 3, Voting By Department

Department	Yes	No	Abstain	Spoilt
<i>Archeology</i>	39	31	0	0
<i>Biology</i>	111	80	3	0
<i>Centre for Lifelong Learning</i>	7	1	0	0
<i>Centre for Medieval Studies</i>	5	3	0	0
<i>Centre for Womens Studies</i>	5	0	0	0
<i>Chemistry</i>	78	82	5	0
<i>Computer Science</i>	54	82	6	1
<i>Economics</i>	36	65	3	0
<i>Educational Studies</i>	32	21	0	0
<i>Electronics</i>	53	42	3	0
<i>English & Related Literature</i>	140	80	5	0
<i>Environment Department</i>	30	29	0	0
<i>Health Sciences</i>	34	12	0	0
<i>History</i>	129	157	5	0
<i>History of Art</i>	16	3	0	0
<i>Hull York Medical School</i>	24	10	0	0
<i>Language & Linguistic Science</i>	61	32	1	0
<i>Mathematics</i>	77	58	5	0
<i>Music</i>	24	15	0	0
<i>Natural Sciences</i>	4	3	0	0
<i>Philosophy</i>	29	24	0	0
<i>Physics</i>	53	63	1	0
<i>Politics</i>	65	87	3	0
<i>Politics, Economics & Philosophy</i>	43	60	3	0
<i>Post War Reconstruction & Development</i>	1	0	0	0
<i>Psychology</i>	85	29	0	0
<i>School of Social & Political Sciences</i>	18	13	0	0
<i>Social Policy & Social Work</i>	21	12	0	0
<i>Sociology</i>	56	23	0	0
<i>Theatre, Film & Television</i>	49	16	1	0
<i>York Law School</i>	49	60	2	0
<i>York Management School</i>	33	40	0	0
Total:	1461	1233	46	1



Fig. 4, Voting By Year of Study

Year of Study	Yes	No	Abstain	Spoilt
<i>0</i>	25	9	0	0
<i>1</i>	562	459	14	0
<i>2</i>	503	346	19	0
<i>3</i>	312	358	11	1
<i>4</i>	51	54	2	0
<i>5</i>	8	7	0	0
Total:	1461	1233	46	1

Fig. 5, Voting By Mode of Study

Mode of Study	Yes	No	Abstain	Spoilt
<i>Undergraduate</i>	1282	1105	41	1
<i>Postgraduate</i>	179	128	5	0
Total:	1461	1233	46	1

Fig. 6, Voting By College

College	Yes	No	Abstain	Spoilt
<i>Alcuin</i>	176	147	3	0
<i>Constantine</i>	82	110	2	0
<i>Derwent</i>	201	176	6	0
<i>Goodricke</i>	156	119	5	0
<i>Halifax</i>	205	184	12	0
<i>James</i>	189	148	2	0
<i>Langwith</i>	148	103	4	1
<i>Vanbrugh</i>	222	191	10	0
<i>Wentworth</i>	82	55	2	0
Total:	1461	1233	46	1



Fig. 7, Voting By Gender⁵;

Gender	Yes	No	Abstain	Spoilt
Male	590	887	11	1
Female	871	346	35	0
Total:	1461	1233	46	1

⁵ Gender as recorded by the University database