



Standing Up for Student Sex Workers

This Union notes:

1. Sex work refers to [providing sexual services in exchange for money, this can include;](#) escorting, lap dancing, stripping, pole dancing, pornography, web-camming, adult modelling, phone sex, and selling sex (on and off the street).
2. [Decriminalisation does not endorse or promote sex work but acknowledges decriminalisation as the safest model for sex workers.](#)
3. Currently prostitution (the exchange of sexual services for money) is not illegal, but associated activities (soliciting in a public place, kerb crawling, operating a brothel) are. This means that whilst sex work is not illegal in the UK, sex workers who work on the street can be picked up on soliciting or anti-social behavioural order charges, and sex workers who work together indoors for safety can be charged with brothel keeping.
4. Financial reasons, and any criminal record gain due to the criminalisation of sex work, are usually cited as the main reason for staying in sex work.[1]
5. The NUS National Executive Council passed a policy to support the decriminalisation of sex work and to campaign against any attempt to introduce the Nordic Model (which criminalises the purchase of sex) into the UK.
6. In August 2015, Amnesty International voted to adopt policy to protect human rights of sex workers.[2] The resolution recommended that they develop a policy that supports the full decriminalisation of all aspects of consensual sex work. The policy will also call on states to ensure that sex workers enjoy full and equal legal protection from exploitation, trafficking and violence. In holding this position, Amnesty International join organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO), UN AIDS, the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Health, Anti-Slavery International, the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women, the International Labour Organisation, the Royal College of Nursing, and every current sex worker-led organisation in the world.

This Union believes:

1. Sex work is work - Sex work is the exchange of money for labour.
2. People should be free to choose what they do with their time, their labour and their bodies.
3. Due to the financial pressure placed on students, it is highly likely that some will do sex work alongside their studies.[3]
4. The stigmatization of sex work makes it unlikely for sex workers to seek help and support if and when they need it. The lack of institutionalised and legal protection for sex workers has driven them to create their own safety mechanisms: “National Ugly Mugs” collects reports from sex workers about violent incidents or dangerous clients and makes the data available via a paid service, while forums such as Redbook (which the authorities have since shut down) promoted the collection of similar information so sex workers could protect themselves. [4]

5. The “Nordic model” or criminalisation of sex workers’ clients has been shown to lead to further distrust of the police amongst sex workers and a willingness of sex workers to engage in more risky behaviour/safety procedures out of desperation.[5] The law increases difficulties in street work, jeopardises safety, increases violence, leads to sex workers’ child custody being revoked and being evicted from housing arbitrarily. Additionally, criminalisation of sex work means that clients are reluctant to give identifying information, ensuring that any client violence is virtually anonymous and not prosecutable. [6]
6. Decriminalisation would ensure that sex workers feel able to report unsafe clients or violence at work without the worry of criminal repercussions, work together for safety, and that those who wish to leave the sex industry are not left with criminal records as a result of their job.[7]
7. Expulsion of or disciplining student sex workers for their involvement in sex work is counterproductive to their goals, safety and wellbeing.
8. “Outing” or letting others know about a student’s status as a sex worker without their consent puts the student at great risk of harm, and is a form of harassment. “Whorephobia” is defined as the fear or hate of sex workers, and can include using slurs against sex workers, excluding sex workers from societies or events, purposefully silencing the voices of sex workers, aggressively arguing for criminalisation or for the Nordic model without inclusion of current sex workers themselves, and maliciously outing a sex worker with intent to cause discipline or harm.

This Union resolves:

1. To provide student sex workers with information about how to access support they may require.
2. To support the full decriminalisation of sex work.
3. To support and ~~be led by~~ **liaise with** sex worker-led organisations, such as the English Collective of Prostitutes and Sex Worker Open University, who work to improve the lives of sex workers across the UK.
4. To support any student sex worker being threatened with disciplinary action based solely or in part due to their status as a sex worker.
5. To support student sex workers that are being outed, targeted, faced with whorephobia or harassed in the university for their status as sex workers.

Proposer: Fez Endalaust

Secunder: Davide Bertelli

Sources:

[1]

A Review of the Literature on Sex Workers and Social Exclusion

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/303927/A_Review_of_the_Literature_on_sex_workers_and_social_exclusion.pdf

[2]

Q&A on the Policy to Protect Human Rights of Sex Workers

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/ga-policy-to-protect-the-human-rights-of-sex-workers/>

[3]

The Student Sex Work Project Research Summary

<http://www.swansea.ac.uk/media/Student%20Sex%20Work%20Report%202015.pdf>

[4]

<https://uknswp.org/um/welcome/>

[5]

Sweden's abolitionist discourse and law: Effects on the dynamics of Swedish sex work and on the lives of Sweden's sex workers

<http://crj.sagepub.com/content/early/2014/03/31/1748895814528926.full.pdf+html?hwshib2=authn%3A1446058181%3A20151027%253Aada299c6-0730-4d4a-b9a0-35c896af403e%3A0%3A0%3A0%3AWrTAU%2F%2FAf5dS0x7Uui2hvA%3D%3D>

[6]

"Sex work is not commercial sexual exploitation", briefing from SCOT-PE

http://www.scot-pep.org.uk/sites/default/files/reports/sw_is_not_cse_summary1.pdf

[7]

Report of the Prostitution Law Review Committee on the Operation of the Prostitution Reform Act 2003

<http://www.justice.govt.nz/policy/commercial-property-and-regulatory/prostitution/prostitution-law-review-committee/publications/plrc-report/report-of-the-prostitution-law-review-committee-on-the-operation-of-the-prostitution-reform-act-2003>

Further Information:

ECP Fact Sheet and Mythbusting

<http://prostitutescollective.net/2015/02/06/fact-fiction/>

Amnesty International: Draft Policy on State Obligations to Respect, Protect, and Fulfil the Human Rights of Sex Workers

<https://amnestysgprdasset.blob.core.windows.net/media/10243/draft-sw-policy-for-external-publication.pdf>

Vice: The Amnesty Sex Work Argument, Broken Down

http://www.vice.com/en_uk/read/the-amnesty-sex-work-argument-broken-down-622

Decriminalising sex work in New Zealand: its history and impact

<https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/fraser-crichton/decriminalising-sex-work-in-new-zealand-its-history-and-impact>

Full list of SCOT-PEP's briefing papers on various legal models

<http://www.scot-pep.org.uk/about-scot-pep/briefing-papers>

State Violence, Sex Trade, and the Failure of Anti-Trafficking Policies, Emi Koyama

<http://eminism.org/store/pdf-zn/complexities2.pdf>

Sex Worker Open University - For Allies, "So you want to help sex workers?"

<http://www.sexworkeropenuniversity.com/uploads/3/6/9/3/3693334/alliesleaflet.pdf>

Playing the Whore: The Work of Sex Work, Melissa Gira Grant

Decriminalise sex work for safety's sake

<http://www.pledgedecrim.com/>

Excerpt of the minutes of UEC meeting of 17th December 2015

Standing up for student sex workers

Fez Endalaust gave a speech in support of the motion;

"Today is the International Day to End Violence Against Sex Workers. Hundreds of thousands of activists around the world campaign today for the full decriminalization of sex work, acknowledging that the majority of violence against them happens in countries that criminalise sex work, either partly or in its entirety. The fight for sex worker's rights is slowly becoming more recognised as it tries to navigate the undeniably stigmatized media perceptions and myths that the public hold so dearly to their hearts.

I propose this motion as a firm believer in social justice, even more-so as an advocate for evidence-based policy, and as a student that believes our safety is paramount.

The student movement remained somewhat quiet on this issue until after the 2010 government, resulting in much tougher times for students and record-breaking levels of poverty. Desperate times call for desperate measures, and as the sex working population grew, so to did their voices on all matters relating to them. The National Union of Students passed a motion in favour of the full decriminalization of sex work, recognising the growing student participation in the industry, and acknowledging the undeniable wealth of evidence in favour for this model.

To begin with, I'll run through the resolves. The first asks for us to provide some kind of resource that signposts student sex workers to places they can get help from should they need it. This could take the form of something as simple as a document compiling some resources, numbers and links to point students in the direction of.

The second asks that we support the full decriminalization of sex work as a union.

The third asks that we don't make decisions about sex workers without consulting sex workers themselves through local or national sex worker-led organisations.

The fourth asks that we condemn university decisions to discipline sex workers. Universities should not have the right to police students' bodies this way - our bodies are our own to do what we wish with.

The fifth asks that we condemn harassment against sex workers predicated on their sex working status, also known as whorephobia. Having an explicitly defined policy against this specific kind of harassment makes reporting a much simpler process, providing students with something obviously stated to point to, removing any doubt or denial about what constitutes this kind of prejudice.

Currently under UK law, buying and selling sex is legal, but various factors around it aren't. This is confusingly known as legalisation. The illegal aspects include street work, where the worker is fined, forcing them to continue doing sex work to pay off the fine, or else facing a criminal record

which ensures they won't get any other job and brothel-keeping which is not only defined as owning and managing a brothel, but as two workers working together for safety from the same premises, even if they do so on different days. Finally, it is illegal to overtly financially help a sex worker move house, or out of or into the country, on the grounds that this is defined as trafficking. This extremely loose definition contributes to the grossly overstated estimates of trafficking victims in the country. In reality, you are more likely to be trafficked into the agricultural and fishing industries than you are into sex work. Yet farmers aren't asked nearly as much if they're happy in their job.

This debate is not about if sex workers are happy. This debate is not about their empowerment. This debate is not about your opinion of what they do, or how you think the public will react. This motion asks for you to acknowledge the vast amount of evidence calling for decriminalization, the pragmatic reality behind the alternatives, and the existing situation for student sex workers, where at the drop of a hat they can be thrown out of our course for doing a job that isn't even illegal.

The NUS decisions and the supporting motions more and more universities are starting to pass come at a time when this debate is starting to become less obscure. The UK government acknowledge that the current system is not working, wrongly criminalising people that don't deserve it, vastly misinterpreting trafficking, and restricting access to safer methods of working.

An alternative model is starting to become more popular around Europe. It is known as the Swedish model, the Nordic model or End Demand. This model legalises the selling of sex, but criminalises the purchase of it, with the reasoning that if we do this, people won't want to buy sex anymore and we therefore end demand. This model was first introduced in Sweden in 1999, so we have plenty of time and evidence establishing what the resulting situation has been. Sex workers report a sharp increase in stigma and an exponential increase in violence and fear. Police officers will make fake bookings with sex workers to obtain their address, and then park their cars outside of their homes or work flats, waiting for clients to appear to be arrested. Kindly wrecking the sex worker's business, cutting their income, and outing them to their entire neighborhood.

To alleviate this, sex workers have started to be more lenient about where they meet clients, removing any control over their working premises or conditions, and leading to often having to conduct business in much more dangerous locations. On top of this, if clients are criminalised, they stop handing over identifying details. Screening them becomes impossible. In the UK, we have websites we can use to check details against various registers and make sure the client hasn't been reported before. In Sweden, these methods are rendered impossible.

Decriminalization was introduced in New Zealand in 2003. Unlike what was feared, prostitution did not actually increase at any rate of significance, but instead became much safer, less stigmatized, and the working relationship between sex workers and the police improved dramatically. Today, it is not uncommon for street workers to have easy access to police lines for quick response, and brothel workers to report any mistreatment by operators, the same as we can report our bosses in any other job.

Roughly every six months for the past few years, there have been attempts to pass the Nordic model under various policies and bills. It has been repeatedly voted down again and again in

parliament, but often only just. The reasons given by MPs, beyond the obvious implication that many of them are clients themselves, are that it doesn't make sense to criminalise one half and legalise another half of an industry, that the evidence in favour of the Nordic model is weak, and a tiny minority that report that sex workers themselves don't want this.

Eventually, MPs asked the English Collective of Prostitutes to host an evidence-gathering event on the 3rd November, inviting academics from all around the world to speak about the models in their countries, and the evidence for decrim. The event was a moderate success in terms of attendance, and an undeniable victory in terms of the research presented. The research base is so strong that in August 2015, in the face of wide controversy and criticism from the misinformed, Amnesty International put forward a draft policy in favour of the decriminalization of sex work, and recommended the model worldwide. They join the United Nations, the Global Alliance Against Trafficking in Women, the International Labour Organisation, Human Rights Watch, the Global Commission of HIV and the Law, Anti-Slavery International, People and Planet, the Open Society Foundations and my personal favourite, every current sex worker-led organisation in the world.

Following an extensive analysis of the areas that have decriminalised sex work, a study published in the Lancet Medical Journal put forward the idea that under global decrim HIV could be reduced by up to 45%. Following this, health organisations including WHO themselves, as well as local ones like the Royal College of Nursing, started to come out in swathes in support of decriminalization, calling on governments to make what is undeniably a positive decision about public health.

Globally, it's looking good. The evidence base is undeniably in decrim's favour. The health sector backs it. Sex workers are united in what they want - no worker's rights movement has ever been so clear and unanimous about their goal. But nationally, the UK is very much in a precarious position. We know the current model doesn't work, and we know they'll change their minds soon. We just don't know which way the balance will fall.

This is why at this pivotal point in sex worker's history, we need to call on movements to back us. As small a decision as it may seem, our SU backing decrim contributes to a wider student movement sending the government an important message of solidarity.

Certain populations are more affected than others. The vast majority of sex workers are LGBT, due to this group's larger likelihood to fall into homelessness and poverty. The same is true of migrants and ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities who, following increasing cuts to disability benefits, are forced to work and can often perceive this kind as a more flexible and viable alternative to mainstream work. Yes, sex working populations often consist of vulnerable people. Yes, a lot of the time they pursue this work out of financial coercion and even desperation. No, that is not an argument against decriminalization. It is an argument against austerity. Criminalising sex workers or their clients does not stop this industry from existing, it does not stop this work from being a better option for many people.

This motion doesn't ask for much. It is a basic rationale behind sensible human rights for a much hated and demonized population. It asks for sex workers to have a place to go to, to not be removed from education, and to be placed in a better position to report anything against them.

Whether you stand for social justice and marginalised groups, or you have a liking for evidence-based policy, whether you're a health professional that values sexual health particularly, or you just see sex workers as humans - they may not be a big population, even at this university, but they exist and they deserve better. This is what solidarity looks like."

The Chair of UEC thanked Fez for putting so much work into the motion and for hosting the information workshop prior to UEC. The Chair asked all non-members to leave except for those specifically attending to discuss the motion.

Gareth Parker – Mature Students Forum Chair gave apologies as he had to leave and requested that he be able to vote on the motion before he left. UEC voted whether to allow Gareth to vote on this motion as he would be absent when the main vote is called.

For: 14

Against: 1

Abstentions: 0

Gareth gave his vote via secret ballot before leaving the meeting.

Matt Dark – VP Sport referred to Union notes point 1

1. Sex work refers to escorting, lap dancing, stripping, pole dancing, pornography, web-camming, adult modelling, phone sex, and selling sex (on and off the street).

He noted that the Pole Dancing club have worked hard to get rid of the stigma of pole dancing and sex and that pole dancing is a sport for many. He feels that to refer to pole dancing in this way is a backwards step and proposed an amendment to remove pole dancing from union notes point 1.

Fez felt that the proposed amendment dismissed a large part of the sex workers industry, the point of the motion is regarding paid work.

Matt suggested that the motion be amended to make reference to the exchange of money. Fez amended the text to the following

1. Sex work refers to providing sexual services in exchange for money, this can include; escorting, lap dancing, stripping, pole dancing, pornography, web-camming, adult modelling, phone sex, and selling sex (on and off the street).

Alan Willetts – VP Welfare expressed concern that Union resolves point 2;

2. To support the full decriminalisation of sex work,

Could be misconstrued as the union/university promoting sex work as a way to fund studies.

Fez noted that this by no means the intention of the motion, hopefully people will also be aware of the entirety of the motion. The aim of this motion is to support sex workers and to address the confusion, should we not oppose that stigma and educate people.

Rachel Harvey – Post grad Forum chair suggested that the motions be amended as to avoid misinterpretation.

Fez added the following to Union notes;

2. Decriminalisation does not endorse or promote sex work but acknowledges decriminalisation as the safest model for sex workers.

Ruth Titmuss – President referred to union resolves point 4;

4. To support any student sex worker being threatened with disciplinary action based solely or in part due to their status as a sex worker.

Ruth noted that the UPSU Advice Centre supports all students equally; this includes support for students facing disciplinary action.

Fez explained that the motion is calling for UPSU to explicitly state that they support sex workers.

Ruth added that she doesn't think that the motion adequately recognises the difference between the choice and the need to undertake sex work. All students have course and living costs to meet and if students are being forced into sex work rather than choosing it as a way to support themselves, then that is a very different issue.

Harry Barrat – Environment and Sustainability Forum Chair asked how the union will show support, what will this support consist of?

Fez explained that the Advice Centre can be provided with information and details of specialist sex worker support services.

James Stoner -VP Activities referred to union resolves point 3;

To support and be led by sex worker-led organisations, such as the English Collective of Prostitutes and Sex Worker Open University, who work to improve the lives of sex workers across the UK.

The students' union is led by students, should the union not be working with them rather than led by external agencies. James proposed an amendment to change 'led-by' to 'liaise with'.

Fez rejected the amendment, the motion deliberately says that the students' union supports the rights of sex workers but by proposing this it is rejecting what the motion is asking for, that their rights are respected.

As the proposer of the motion rejected the amendment UEC move to a vote

For: 6

Against: 3

Abstention: 5

The amendment is passed

Steph Wearne – VP Education noted that the change to resolves point 3 reflects the need to consider the needs of student sex workers on campus. Fez noted that this will always be difficult as most sex workers would not want to out themselves. The motion does the address sex workers movement as whole and not just students; if the students' union really wants to support them then they should be allowed to lead their own support services.

UEC voted by secret ballot

For: 8

Against: 4

Abstentions: 3

The motion was passed with the aforementioned amendments