

Reports from the NUS Reps on National Changemaking

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Summary	Summary of the report submitted by our two NUS reps who attended the NUS England Conference in November 2025.
Action for meeting	To note – if this is for information only
Appendices	none

1. Introduction

We have elected 3 NUS reps for the academic year 2026-27. 2 of 3 reps have attended the NUS England conference in November 2025. The conference organised by NUS England brought together student officers from across the country to explore themes of liberation, empowerment, student rights, and activism. Although the programme did not centre around a single declared theme, the sessions and discussions largely addressed trans liberation, international students' experiences, cost of living pressures, and broader social justice issues.

Both representatives attended a range of workshops and liberation spaces, including:

- Opening Plenary
- Trans Campaign Action Workshop / Trans Liberation Space
- International Students Workshop
- Cost-of-Living Workshop
- Women's Liberation Space
- Disabled Students Liberation Space
- Palestine Solidarity Workshop
- Ask Me Anything (Q&A) Session
- Trans Rights Vigil

The conference brought together a diverse group of elected student leaders but also generated tension due to perceived limitations on student voice and concerns around accessibility, sustainability, and organisational issues.

2. Conference overview

2.1 Insights from Speakers and Sessions

- Dr Husam Zomlot's opening speech was impactful and motivating, offering strong support for student activism. However, the handling of questions during the opening plenary raised concerns; for example, when a student leader attempted to ask a question, NUS staff shut down the interaction, walked out, and played loud music which set a negative tone for how student voices were treated throughout the event.

2.2 Suppression of Student Voice

- Opportunities to ask questions felt heavily restricted.
- “Ask Me Anything” sessions were consolidated into a single room, reducing the number of possible questions and limiting meaningful dialogue.
- Attempts to record sessions were met with inconsistent and unclear guidance, leading to confusion and frustration.
- Evidence of NUS staff secretly filming the Q&A from a balcony was deleted without comment when raised in the official WhatsApp chat.
- Comments from NUS officers such as *“If you don’t like us, wait for the upcoming elections and vote for someone else”* felt dismissive.

2.3 Campaign & Activism takeaways

- Effective activism allows for creativity - campaigns that draw attention are often the most successful
- Free Palestine chants led by students demonstrated strong grassroots solidarity even though NUS staff did not participate.

2.4 Sustainability gaps

- No sustainability considerations were built into the conference despite sustainability’s connection to many liberation issues.
- Lack of recycling, excessive plastic use, and limited dietary accommodations highlighted poor environmental practice.

3. Networking & external connections

Despite challenges with structure and facilitation, networking emerged as one of the strongest benefits of the conference.

3.1 People & groups connected

- Officers from universities including Nottingham, Birmingham, Liverpool, King’s College, Leeds, Manchester, ARU (renters rights campaign), and others.
- Creation/entry into a national Pro-Palestine Student Officers group chat.
- New connections on LinkedIn and Instagram.

3.2 Collaborative opportunities identified

- Support for Leeds Beckett in campaigning for a Night Bus.
- Exploring procurement options such as Hey Girls free period products.
- Interest from multiple SUs in sustainability campaigning.

- Idea to form a National Student Sustainability Collective.

3.3 Overall value of networking

Chanel and Jaz agreed that networking was one of the most positive and productive aspects of attending the conference, offering future pathways for collaboration and mutual support across institutions.

4. Personal experience and reflections

4.1 Experience of conference environment

- Many sessions felt like spaces where attendees agreed with each other without meaningful output.
- Moments of tension—such as walkouts during the Palestine Solidarity workshop—were more impactful than many structured sessions.
- Both representatives felt that NUS's actions did not reflect or support genuine student voice, freedom of speech, or democratic engagement.

4.2 Challenges

- Food and dietary accessibility: inadequate vegan/vegetarian/allergy-safe options despite prior notification.
- Sustainability failures: all waste sent to landfill; unnecessary plastic use; no visible sustainability policy.
- Poor communication:
 - Contradictory emails about pick-up points.
 - Lack of clear directions resulted in multiple groups arriving at the wrong place.
- Organisation and accessibility:
 - Confusion around filming guidelines.
 - Liberation spaces and workshops felt disconnected from the wider conference structure.

4.3 Personal reflections

- Concerns about performative solidarity.
- Feeling that NUS claimed credit for student-led wins without recognising contributors.
- A sense of disconnect between NUS priorities and the realities faced by students represented by UEASU.

5. Feedback and suggestion for improvement

5.1 Recommendations for NUS

- Genuinely listen to students and engage them in co-designing workshops and structures.
- Introduce multiple, meaningful opportunities for questions, not limited or controlled environments.
- Improve organisation, communication, and accessibility (including dietary accommodations).

- Ensure sustainability provisions are embedded across the event (recycling, waste separation, reduced plastic, sustainable catering).
- Build trust through transparency rather than dismissive comments.
- Provide funding support so more students can attend.
- Reduce scripted elements and introduce more team-building activities to foster authentic connection.

5.2 Should uea(su) recommend this conference?

- Yes – for networking, which was widely beneficial.
- No – for national campaigning, as the event structure did not support meaningful democratic engagement or strong representation of student voices.

6. Conclusion

The NUS England Conference in November 2025 offered valuable networking opportunities and moments of student-led solidarity, but was overshadowed by concerns regarding transparency, suppression of student voice, poor organisation, and a lack of sustainability.

Both representatives gained new connections, insights into activism, and ideas for future campaigns at UEASU. However, they also identified significant areas where NUS must improve to deliver conferences that genuinely reflect liberation, empowerment, and student-led change.