



# Student Support Strategy 2012 update

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By Zain Sardar, Member Support Officer

# Student Support Strategy

## 1.Introduction

Universities involved include:

*Cardiff, Durham, Liverpool, London School of Economics, Nottingham, Oxford Brookes, Reading, Royal Holloway, Sussex, University College London, University of East Anglia, Warwick, York*

Student Surveys received in total: 14

## September 2012 Introduction

The initial student support strategy was put together in the summer of 2010 and updated in 2011. This, now 2012 version, contains all the points and recommendations of the original; however two years on we can take a much more reflective viewpoint and make substantive judgments on where we have succeeded and where we need to improve. The last two years has seen my role change slightly, from being an officer solely focusing on supporting YG students and societies to looking at the much wider remit of our membership as a whole.

Despite this, supporting our YG societies and students is one of the key focuses of my role and one which will indubitably take up most of the time of the person who succeeds me, as the role not doubt changes again.

Overall, I have found myself remarking to colleagues on more than one occasion that I think I have done as much work this year on the YG committee as I did in my first year yet overall we seemed to achieved much more in this last year. I strongly believe that this is a sign that a lot of the foundations of our student support strategy are now firmly in place and this has enabled much smoother channels of communications from societies to the committee and vice versa. We are starting to see much more coordination between societies, although this still has a way to go.

This year was the first time we ran NUS National Executive Councillor (NEC) candidates, and we even got one elected. We have had a better organised presence at NUS conference than ever before and now have a strong campaign (the Fair Pay Campus Campaign) that can unite YG societies from across England and Wales. This has been a year of firsts for YGs in many respects; I hope we can continue to build on this as Liberal Youth collapse and we take their place as one of the leading youth and student groups in the country.

To the original 2010 text I have helpfully added annotations (in red) to the long term and short term strategies sections to provide an update on the recommendations we have thus far achieved or fulfilled. I hope you will find these useful and stimulating. I look forward to your continued scrutiny, ideas and constructive comments.

I'd like to take this opportunity to wish you all the best for this academic year; I hope your YGs society goes from strength to strength. It has been an absolute pleasure working with

YG societies over the last two years and I wish my successor all the best in what is an extremely fulfilling and challenging role.

**Fraternal Greetings,**

**Zain Sardar, YGs Member Support Officer (2010-12)**

## Methodology:

Participants were asked to answer 14 questions, which varied from topics concerning their perception of support received from the national Young Greens (YG) committee to individual societies' involvement in NUS democracy. Most participants represented their student society at University, although some were alumni or local party activists interested in setting one up. 13 University societies in total were surveyed, and an additional participant was interested in setting one up at an FE college.

## Strategy/Plan:

The immediate implementation of a student support plan or strategy starting after a consultation period to be fully implemented within 3 years. At the end of year 3, we aim to have doubled the number of YG groups on campuses, to have elected members of YGs on Student Union (SU) executives and on the National Union of Students (NUS) and to have growing numbers of students joining the Green Party through interactions with their YG groups on University campuses.

The short term plan includes devising training sessions outside of YGs convention to introduce members to campaigns, to run sessions on how members can engage with their SUs and the NUS. Furthermore, guidance on starting up local YG groups on campuses and taking part in democratic structures of their local SUs and NUS will be issued. The aim is to achieve the above by September 2011; this will enable current YG groups to recruit members more effectively and to be proactively involved in student politics.

The long term plan can be seen as the monitoring of the above and the provision of ongoing support to current YG groups, as well as the setting up of new ones. It also looks into the election of Young Greens in their local SUs and the NUS, the empowerment of YGs through strong local parties and involvement in national campaign formation.

## 2. Generic findings and statistics/ information

### 2.1. Members:

University	Region	No. of Paid Members
1. Cardiff	Wales	34
2. Durham	NE	16
3. Liverpool	NW	N/A*
4. London School of Economics (LSE)	London	21
5. Nottingham	East Midlands	22
6. Oxford Brookes	SE	7
7. Reading	SE	10* (Estimate)
8. Royal Holloway	SE	N/A*

9. Sussex	SE	Unknown
10. University of East Anglia	Eastern	<b>8</b>
11. University College London (UCL)	London	N/A*
12. Warwick	West Midlands	<b>3**</b>
13. York	Yorkshire & Humberside	<b>5*</b>
* Denotes a society that has either only just been set up or is in the process of being set up		
** In the process of being set up but the number used denotes past paid membership		

## General Points

**Total members across universities according to above figures (roughly):** 127 paid members

**Average number of paid members at established societies (roughly):** 14

**6 out of 12 societies listed above are NEW**, or are at an embryonic stage with huge potential for development

There are almost as many Universities with Green Societies surveyed in either the **South East (4) or London (2)** as there are in the **North West (1), North East (1), Yorkshire and Humberside (1), East Midlands (1), West Midlands (1), Wales (1), Eastern (1) and the South West (0)**. Although statistically, there are more HEIs in **London (29)** and the **SE (20)**, the other regions still make up 66 % of HEIs. However, there seems to be a society or potential society in almost every region except the South West

## 2.2 Opportunities for outreach:

**Portsmouth:** Current sabbaticals have expressed an interest in setting up a Green Party Society and may well have joined Young Greens.

**Brighton:** Close to Sussex and near Brighton Pavilion (Caroline Lucas' Constituency), it seems a logical next geographical step.

**Kent:** Currently there is a vacuum on the left of Labour Students, and some Young Greens were involved in recent radical activity in its four week occupation.

**Cambridge:** A current Young Green councillor (as well as other Green councillors) in Cambridge should inspire others to join Young Greens and become active in politics.

**Exmouth community college:** A member has highlighted Exmouth as a good place to start getting FE students involved in Young Greens.

**Leeds:** as one of NUS' 'top Student Unions' over the last few years, it would be a major breakthrough if a Young Greens Society could emerge in what is traditionally a major Labour Students stronghold.

## 2.3 Funding

University	Funding (from Student Union)
1. Nottingham	£105 (total= £198, used= £58)
2. Cardiff	£30-40
3. LSE	£15-20 (total=£31, used= £10-15)
4. Oxford Brookes	£24
5. UEA	Funded but unknown
6. York	Funded but unknown
7. Sussex	Funded but unknown
8. Durham	No funding (pending ratification)
9. Reading	No funding (free membership)
10. UCL	N/A
11. Warwick	N/A
12. Royal Holloway	N/A
13. Liverpool	N/A

### General Points

1. The funding accessible to each Young Green Society **varies depending on the financial processes** and procedures of each Student Union.
2. There are some SUs where political societies are given a budget according to the **estimated money** that they expect to spend in that academic year and therefore have more than they require.
3. There are some SUs where there is a **membership threshold** before funding can be allocated (Durham) or where political societies are **not funded** as a matter of SU policy (LSE).

2.4. Executives	Local Parties		Democracy	NUS	YGs
University	Fully functioning Executive	Support from Local Party	Involvement in S.U. Democracy	Involvement with NUS	Awareness and interaction with Y.Gs
<i>Cardiff</i>	✓	✓	✓✓	✓	✓✓
<i>Durham</i>	×	✓	✓	–	✓
<i>Liverpool</i>	–	✓	–	–	–
<i>LSE</i>	✓	×	×	×	✓

<i>Nottingh.</i>	√	×	√√	×	×
<i>Oxford Br.</i>	×	√	×	×	–
<i>Reading</i>	√	√√	√√	×	×
<i>Royal Hol.</i>	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Sussex</i>	√	√√	×	×	×
<i>UEA</i>	√	√√	√	×	√
<i>UCL</i>	√	√	×	×	√
<i>Warwick</i>	×	–	–	–	√
<i>York</i>	√	√√	×	×	√
<b>Key:</b>	√ = Present	√√ = Highly Present		× = Absent	– = N/A

## General points

- 8 out of the 12 existing or potential societies listed have a **fully functioning committee**.
- **Local party support** for societies is variable but generally good, especially in areas where there are elected representatives (i.e. Sussex/ Brighton, Norwich).
- Participation in **democratic structures** was low, but to be expected as many societies are newly formed.
- Not a lot of awareness concerning the **NUS**.
- Many societies knew of the **National Young Greens** and had some contact with them but thought they could do much more to keep in regular contact with societies.
- Although most of the societies surveyed were University or student based ones, integrated provision and training must be provided for **non-student groups**.

## 3. Short term plan

### *Findings:-*

1. Societies felt they wanted **more training** from National Young Greens, specifically to do with committee positions, event ideas and advice on how to develop the society.
2. The biggest concern for societies and where they need the most help is in **recruiting and keeping members engaged** in order to retain them.
3. Many societies wanted more topical **leaflets or PDFs/ templates** of them which could be printed out. *[We have so provided a PDF HE/ FE leaflet to societies for the start of the academic year. We will continue to produce more topical leaflets as events arise.]*
4. Societies wanted **better access to speakers**.
5. Some societies expressed an interest in obtaining **funding** from YGs (especially for those that can't get any at all and have to use their individual money).
6. More advice and guidance on **specific campaigns** the National YGs are running and the progress YG are making on their national priorities.
7. Societies felt there was **not enough regular contact** between the national YGs and societies.
8. Members of societies have little understanding or awareness of the **NUS**.
9. Societies felt they could benefit from more **coordinated campaigning and cooperation between university societies**, as well as examples of best practice in running societies. Societies also felt it would be beneficial to share ideas more.
10. Representatives of societies felt the **discussion list was inadequate**, and that a more user-friendly forum type medium would be preferable.



11. Societies wanted more opportunities to **meet each other more regularly** than currently is the case.

**Recommendations:-**

1. Set up a new societies **discussion and announcement forum/ list** in which YGs can more easily and specifically contact society representatives/ members, share ideas and plan events (using society contacts). *[This was set up in 2010 and been exceedingly beneficial in delivering resources and materials to YG societies.]*

2. Have a regular **e-newsletter** to complement the above, to highlight the good work societies are doing across the country, and e-resources stockpile that societies can access online (in which PDFs and templates can be placed). *[Unfortunately, I have not managed to do this but I am still convinced of the need for this to help coordination between societies and sharing good practice]*

3. **Speakers** need to be arranged centrally in a more comprehensive and organised manner (positive signs on this already with the funded speaking tour for next year) *[The national YGs have managed to arrange an elected representatives speakers tour at start of the 2011 academic year. The idea was to coordinate this centrally but this only lead to adding another layer of bureaucracy. Some societies didn't get an elected speaker. On the plus side, the Member Support Officer toured some YG societies in February to help build links with the committee]*

4. Issue more detailed information and actions to do with the **national campaigns** that the national young greens are running and coordinated actions during important times such as 'Go-Green Week'. *[An 'Ideas for Campaigns' document has been produced for YG societies to consider. One of the campaign ideas is now our flagship campaign 'Fair Pay Campus Campaign.']*

5. Host **training sessions** directed towards campaigning, and society skills (recruitment, best practice etc. for students and non-students) **outside of YGs Convention**. *[The money for this was forthcoming from GPex in the form of a grant however due to lack of time we would be running these sessions outside of convention THIS YEAR. Hopefully, we will be able to in the following years]*

6. Incorporate an **introduction to the NUS** and the **understanding of its democratic procedures into training sessions**. Encourage YG students to stand in elected positions in their **local student unions** and other representative structures. *[A document ('Why it is important to get involved with Student Union Democracy') has been produced to encourage engagement in internal SU politics. This year has seen a bumper year of YGs standing for positions in their SU: for example in Cardiff, LSE, UCL, Bristol, Manchester. More YGs have told us they are standing for positions and more societies have informed us of those that have been elected as communication channels have improved]*

7. Write up a document, coming up to **NUS conference**, for distribution detailing what the NUS does and its importance from a **YGs viewpoint**. This should encourage members to stand for NUS delegate positions *[YGs held a fringe meeting at the 2011 and 2012 National NUS conference and have started the process of talking to different factions within the NUS. This year we had a stall and ran two NUS NEC candidates, of which one was elected. Negotiations with factions occurred before, during and our*

*continuing after the conference. We have strong ties with SBL, and cordially and warm relations with NCAFC, SS and the AWL]*

8. Engage YGs further by setting up a **working group** (this can take many forms, including Skype, email, physical feedback sessions) to detail **organised coordinated ideas** between societies, regarding **recruitment and retention**, for year ahead *[A loose working group exists as an email list but not in any substantial way.]*

9. That we explore the possibility of ring-fencing some National YGs **funding** to devolve down to regional groups (London YGs) or developing societies (if there is a good reason/ explanation to why this money is needed).

10. That we also need to explore expanding YGs to encompass **FE colleges and sixth forms**. *[This is still a difficult nut to crack but there has been tentative progress as our NUS NEC member, Matt Stanley, is the president of MidKent College. So things can only get better on this front.]*

## 4. Long term plan

### *Findings:-*

1. Unsurprisingly a large number of the YG societies are either **newly formed** or at an **embryonic stage** of development.

2. That societies in places in the **South**, such as in Brighton, Norwich or London generally get more support from National YGs and the GP than those in the **Midlands or the North**.

3. That many societies are not as yet involved in **democratic structures or NUS** as of yet, but that there is a lot of room for development.

4. That there is very **little specific training** targeting YG societies outside YGs convention (Labour Students have their 'political weekends' away).

5. That **local parties** are much more supportive of YGs societies than may be first thought.

### *Recommendations:-*

1. That an annual **societies specific training day** be organised, for training, coordinating and integrating societies into the national Young Greens outside convention and that this also needs to be inclusive to **non-students** who want more organisational based training. *[This will probably take place in convention this year but hopefully in the coming years be a separate event]*

2. That, as well as providing more support for all YG societies, **we target specific universities** where a YGs presence would be useful (Liverpool, Manchester, Leeds etc.) and can be easily developed.

3. That we give ourselves an **ambitious but realistic target** of how many established and establishing societies we want in the next 2 years. The recommendation is that out of 120 HEIs we want to double our count from **12 to 24**. *[We currently have around 14-15 fully functioning societies (20 in the societies database but some of these never got off the ground) but our core has been consolidated. During the 2012 freshers fayre we*

*should have more requests from students in Universities without a society. Hopefully, some of these will be converted into functioning societies to get our total up to the 20 mark.]*

4. That we continue to build new YGs societies through the help of **strong local parties**, which need to be encouraged to help campaign at their local universities. This should include sending them resources and targeting local parties we want to work closer with their local universities. *[We are currently running our internal initiative 'Adopt a Uni' which pairs local GPs with their local HEI and encourages them to either support existing societies or facilitate the creation of a new one. The initiative needs further development.]*

5. To consider **political opportunities** within the student movement/politics on the election of YGs on various **positions within the NUS**. This may be YGs NUS delegates' bloc voting for various candidates in NUS and the achievement of electoral successes within it. *[We have increased our number of NUS delegates this year and hence our core vote. We ran two candidates, of which the FE candidate (joint with SBL) got elected. Our HE candidate got a reasonable 12 votes, which we can build and improve on for the next conference. We should be looking to double these first preferences to around 24 with more campaigning for the candidate. For more info please see NUS conference Report 2012.]*

6. That members of societies who are also GP members are much more involved through their **local and regional groups**, and **national GP through conference**, and are more **empowered** to contribute ideas and energy to **national campaigns and during elections**. *[There is still more that needs to be done on the regional and local aspect, however it is worth mentioning the much improved contact between YG societies and the National YGs committee at GP conferences.]*

## 5. Conclusion

Thanks to all those who have contributed to this fulfilment of the strategy's recommendations. Please feel free to ask questions and suggest any more. We have managed to do an awful lot over the last year which shows what a little bit of organisation can achieve. We need to continue the good work in the next few years to ensure that we reap the benefits of our growing presence on University campuses. We must continue to support societies which will be one of our main recruiting bodies for future members. We are only as good as our membership.