



5.7 Passing a Students Union (SU) motion

What is a Students Union motion?

The student executive committee (made up of sabbatical officers) at your university student's union is there to represent the interests of all your university's students. So getting the backing of your union can be a powerful thing. An SU motion is the democratic tool students can use to set their SU's policy.

Why pass a motion?

- ★ To raise awareness of an important issue with students
- ★ To compel your SU to take action on your campaign. For example, writing to the Vice-Chancellor or posting info about the campaign on the union website
- ★ To add weight to your demands. Letters sent on behalf of the SU may carry more weight, plus they may have valuable contacts or access to decision makers.
- ★ To gain access to those at the top of your university. SU Presidents have regular meetings with their Vice Chancellors (VCs). Other SU Sabbatical Officers will have contact with Pro-Vice Chancellors, Deans and other senior University staff. This relationship means that Sabbaticals are in a good position to lobby the University.

How do I do it?

The procedures will vary by university, so contact your SU to find out exactly what you need to do. Each student union will have a student representative body. This may be called Union Council or Union Executive. These representative bodies meet regularly to discuss business. Some will have one meeting each term, others every week – find out from your SU. Anyone can attend these meetings and put forward motions, but voting is restricted to the elected members.

You need to get the motion on the agenda:

- ★ **Write a motion.** The STAR national team has template motions you can use, so get in touch.
- ★ **Submit your motion.** There will be a deadline for submitting a motion, often several weeks before the meeting.
- ★ **Find a proposer.** You will need 2 students; one to act as 'proposer' & one to be 'seconder'. Some SU's may require you to find a specified number of people to support your motion (e.g. 30 student signatures) before it can be put forward.

Once on the agenda, you need to:

- ★ **Raise awareness of your motion before the vote.** Get an article in your student paper, hand out leaflets, put posters up, or hold a debate to generate interest. Get as many supporters there as you can!
- ★ **Every vote will count.** Find out who can vote and ensure those people who are supportive will attend the meeting to vote for your motion.

★ **Prepare a speech and your arguments.** You will likely need to make a short speech or presentation to explain and give reasons why the meeting should support your motion. Be prepared for an opposing speech against your motion and be ready to answer questions about it too.

Success! If your motion is passed then make sure it is implemented! Talk to union staff & sabbaticals. Now celebrate and get some publicity! Tell your student paper and STAR national.

Try passing a motion at the NUS Annual General Meeting (AGM)

Union societies, with the official support of their SU can have a big influence over NUS policies and in the past specific activities of societies such as STAR and People and Planet have been officially supported by NUS at AGM

Each Union delegation must be voted for by your campus. Therefore, if you are really serious about getting your campaign debated at NUS AGM then you should consider standing as a delegate yourself, or lobbying those who have been elected. Speak to your union executive committee about when NUS AGM delegation elections will be happening.

Win the support of lecturers and university staff trade unions

Getting the support of a trade union behind you could take your campaign to a national and much broader audience and, being university students, you have a natural affinity with those unions representing teaching and university staff. They represent a good starting point in getting your message out beyond the university or local community.

Get in touch with union representatives in your area. For example, the Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) has a representative (who will be a member of staff) at almost every university across the country. The local union rep would be your first point of contact. You can find out how to contact them via the UCU website: www.ucu.org.uk and click on 'Contacts'.