

2180: Defending and Supporting Direct Action

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Union notes:

1. There are many activist groups and societies which use grassroots direct action as an integral part of achieving political and social change on campus. Fighting for change is a core principal of the Student Union.
2. Activism takes a diverse range of forms, be it industrial action, civil disobedience, boycotts, occupations, marches, petitions or direct action.
3. The history of UEA SU activism has set it apart from other groups, organisations and student unions.
4. Direct action on campus has had vast impacts on the Union and University. In the last few years there have been direct actions in opposition to the Teaching Excellence Framework, the Universities investment in fossil fuels, and against course closures.
5. Direct action has resulted in direct wins for students – last year's 'Prayer in the Square' was central to the University not closing Muslim prayer spaces on campus and has brought the University's religious discrimination on to the agenda.
6. Direct action in support of women's+ rights for example the Carry that Weight marches and Reclaim the Night have forced the university to take sexual violence and violence against women+ seriously and as a result have launched a collaborative Changing the Culture taskforce to address the pressing issue of sexual harassment on campus.
7. Many women+ students report feeling disempowered and shut out of 'traditional' forms of protest, as masculinist modes of protest dominate and women+ students are undermined and written out of protest histories and organising spaces.
8. There has been a longstanding tradition of attending national demonstrations for free education and standing in support with local organisations and groups facing injustice in the community
9. In recent years, the levels of grassroots activity and direct action happening on campuses has somewhat decreased
10. That nevertheless, activists and groups on campus continue to ask for support and advice for carrying out direct action and campaigning for change on campus.

Union believes:

1. That direct action will never not be relevant, useful and important and should always be a tool that is available when students are fighting for change. The campaign for free, democratic and accessible education will only be won when we fight using direct action along with every other tactic available.
2. That a commitment to direct action will guarantee continued successes and wins for the student movement

3. That in the fight against this government's plans to marketise higher education, direct action on both local and national levels is essential, and thus we need activists and SU officers across the country to be equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to plan and carry out direct action.
4. That as well as practical knowledge, it's important that activists have access to strong political and historical arguments as to why direct action is powerful and necessary.
5. We have a significant number of activists with first-hand experience and knowledge when it comes to direct action, who can be called upon to share that expertise with fellow members and/or with activist groups if requested. This knowledge should be utilised by the Student Union and Union officers to offer skills sharing opportunities.
6. That whilst it's important to recognise the ways in which the student movement is shifting and changing, and to adapt our political strategies accordingly, we must ensure that we do not lose all connection with direct action and that it remains a core aspect of our broad strategy in pushing for change.
7. Due to little guidance from the University and Students Union activists are uncertain about what direct actions are allowed and not allowed and what punishments students who participate may be subject to.
8. There needs to be clearer lines and guidance about how to partake in direct action on campus and the rules surrounding this.
9. We are facing increased attacks on our right to protest during a time of unprecedented austerity measures. These include the routine use of kettling, indiscriminate batoning by police, excessive charging of protesters and sentencing in courts, as well as educational institutions collaborating with the Police and Government to shut down our democratic rights.
10. Women+ students and other liberation groups have been at the front of tackling misogyny in our own movements, providing much needed solidarity and challenging our own organisations to take women's+ political voices seriously. If the Union wants to support liberation campaigns it should show help and encourage liberation causes and committees to politically organise.
11. There is no one right way to protest. As a Union, we must champion and offer a diversity of tactics and methods, bringing our communities together to make change.

Union resolves:

1. That as part of the updated version of the uea.su website, there should be a 'direct action' hub which will contain: key political arguments on why direct action is effective and necessary, a brief history of direct action in the student movement and, links to resources about how you can do direct action on campus.
2. To mandate the Campaigns & Democracy Officer to lead workshops led by direct action groups at the start of the year to help students organise and learn how to hold demonstrations. The groups invited should be proposed and voted on by the Student Officer Committee of that academic year.
3. To actively reach out to liberation groups within the union, explicitly providing liberation subcommittees, campaigns, associations and caucuses

with relevant contacts and resources necessary to conduct autonomous direct actions.

4. Any student planning direct action should be able to access advice on potential consequences of engaging in activism from the Advice Centre. The Union should actively signpost students to the Advice Centre for information regarding their rights when engaging in activism.
 5. That, where appropriate, UEA SU will actively seek to collaborate with other grassroots organisations to coordinate direct action around educational issues.
 6. That the Student Union should provide a fully stocked hub of resources and materials for all student campaigns in line with Union policy so they are not paying out of their own pockets. This hub of resources should include; free printing, banner-making materials, megaphone, and access to the union's communications team. Any other materials should be requested at the discretion of the Student Officer Committee.
 7. To reintroduce an Activist Fair over the Welcome Week period. This should be a full day event in the LCR where local community groups and activist organisations are invited to host a stall so students can engage with wider action in Norwich as well as on campus (for example, Norwich People's Assembly, Norwich Soup Kitchen, Norwich Pride etc.).
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