

Profile: Should the LSESU adopt an official policy in favour of the decriminalisation of sex work and lobby LSE to provide more support for student sex workers?

What is the issue you are trying to solve?

Even pre-pandemic, 1/5 of students had considered doing sex work ^[1] and estimates are that up to 200,000 students are currently involved in sex work [2]

This number is rising due to the ongoing cost of living crisis. Students are engaged in sex work mainly to cover their cost of living and study. That means student sex workers are a demographic that need tailored support by the Students' Union and support by the university more broadly.

While sex work is not technically illegal in the UK, working with others indoors (even if for safety purposes) is criminalised as “brothel keeping” and street-based sex workers are regularly charged with loitering and soliciting. Those involved in online sex work are constantly at risk of being outed or having their data misused by large online platforms. All the negative effects of criminalisation are compounded by stigma, prevalent in the university context too, both among students and staff. This means that student sex workers are less able to speak about their experience, advocate for their needs, and access support services. In addition to being discriminated against under ‘morality’ clauses in accommodation and ‘fit to practice’ policies on university courses, sex working students experience breaches of confidentiality where staff disclose their sex working status without their consent when approached for support.

What is the solution?

1. An acknowledgement by LSESU that some students at LSE are already engaging in sex work to cover their cost of living and study, and an explicit commitment to their safety and wellbeing.
2. LSESU to take an official stance in support of decriminalisation.

Unions at UCL and Goldsmiths^[3] have done so and students have reported *“feeling more able to talk to university staff if I need support and speaking up about what I need - it just feels like the institution is no longer actively trying to harm me by directly criminalizing me, or at the very least being complicit in the criminalisation of the work I do in order to study and live in the first place”*.

Having an official stance in favour of decriminalization reduces stigma, which means student sex workers can access better support without judgment.

An explicit policy should be modelled on policies drafted by sex worker led organisations – an example, drafted by students organising with the sex worker led English Collective of Prostitutes is here:

- This union commits to supporting the full decriminalization of sex work in order to better protect student sex workers from discrimination, stigma and violence.
- A policy that prohibits non-voluntary disclosures by staff when approached by students about their sex working status. Training for staff on this issue.
- Look into providing accessible hardship funds for people engaged in sex work or other informal sector survival work, so they can leave (or reduce) the amount of sex work they must do.
- Add information about sex work and the support that is available to sex working students to existing SU Consent.ed Training.
- Comprehensive review of policies and guidelines (including discriminatory ‘morality’ clauses and ‘fit to practice’ policies).

3. Lobbying the LSE to implement these same commitments to student sex worker safety and wellbeing.

[1]

<https://students.leeds.ac.uk/info/1000112/healthy-relationships-with-yourself-and-others/1780/students-engaged-in-sex-work>

[2]

<https://thetab.com/uk/2021/09/20/thousands-of-students-are-sex-workers-universities-need-to-do-more-to-protect-them-222364>

[3]

<https://www.goldsmithssu.org/pageassets/activism/democracy/policies/active/2014-15-Supporting-student-sex-workers.pdf>

<https://studentsunionucl.org/advice-and-support/advice/student-sex-workers>