

Students to vote on drug policy for YUSU

By [Neil Johnston](#) and [Gary Holland](#)

Monday 19 November 2012



Photo Credit: Liberal Democrats

A motion calling for YUSU to back an evidence based drugs policy is to go to referendum. The University of York Liberal Democrats have proposed the motion which is one of four YUSU referenda to be voted on later this term.

If students vote in favour of the referendum then YUSU will have to call for the government to introduce a panel to review the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, and reinvest any resources released into effective education, treatment and rehabilitation programmes.

YUSU would also have to lobby for high-quality, evidence-based medical, psychological and social services for those affected by drugs problems, including widespread availability of heroin maintenance clinics.

Controversially this type of drugs policy could mean some substances are decriminalised.

The aim of the motion is to send a statement from the student body that will help “invigorate a sensible debate” on drug laws and show Parliament there is support for reform, according to the Liberal Democrats.

The motion comes at a time when there is a review of drugs policy being carried out by the Home Affairs Select Committee, and is also part of a long-standing campaign run by Liberal Youth. It also follows policy passed by Liberal Democrat Party members at their Conference in Birmingham in Autumn 2011 which made similar calls.

The motion will be discussed at the Referendum debate on the 27th November, and will be voted on in weeks eight and nine.

Those in favour believe that YUSU should call for government policy on drugs to be decided on the basis of “real scientific evidence and not on public perception.”

They argue a scientifically grounded appraisal of the “genuine degrees” of harmfulness between narcotics is needed, and serious consideration of the case for decriminalisation of certain substances following this.

Madeleine Spink, Chair of the University of York Liberal Democrats, commented on her party's motion: "The debate on drug legislation has been going on for a long time, and the arguments against this country's current 'war on drugs' are already being won by scientists and parliamentarians, such as Julian Huppert, Liberal Democrat MP for Cambridge."

She added: "As the government are currently looking at reforming drugs policy, it's important that we use every forum possible to send a strong message that the current blanket prohibition causes problems by criminalising individuals."

Cadan ap Tomos, UYLD's Press and Publicity Officer, added: "It is important that this debate focuses on recognising that drugs are an issue of health, not morality. There are many drugs currently classified as illegal that scientific research shows aren't nearly as dangerous as alcohol. It's about time government policy was based on solid scientific evidence, not taken from the headlines of British tabloids."

However some members of other York political parties have said they are going to fight for a No vote on the motion. Tom Morgan, Treasurer of the University of York Labour Party said: "The current drugs policy is by no means perfect but this recommendation is flawed. It is too big a risk to have a policy that might lead to the legislation of some substances. The fact is the legalisation of illegal narcotics would lead to an unsustainable NHS which is the best thing that has ever happened to this country, and that is not fair on our hard working doctors and nurses."

Other motions to be voted on will be "Should YUSU replace the position of Entertainments Officer with a College Events Coordinator?" and "Should YUSU improve its faith representation?" The subject of portering has come up yet again with the motion "Should YUSU lobby for 24 hour portering in every college?"

Motions are up for amendment until Tuesday before the campaigns begin.



10 comments

Matt Sharp

19 Nov '12 at 9:37 pm

I've been involved with the Labour club for the past couple of years, and it's safe to say that I completely disagree with Tom Morgan's position on this. The previous Labour government's policies on drugs were shambolic and inconsistent (which followed decades of shambolic and inconsistent drug legislation), significantly being led by the tabloids rather than science.

At the very least, drug Classes should be internally consistent. Currently, they are not. LSD, ecstasy and mushrooms are Class A. Are we to take this to mean each of them is as harmful as heroin? Because, frankly, they're not. Thousands of people already take ecstasy every year without harming the sustainability of the NHS.

Legalisation or decriminalisation of drugs would mean the police and prisons having to spend fewer resources on locking people away for choosing what to put in their own body. It would mean reduced crime by those who become addicted to certain drugs and need to steal to afford the high costs of drugs; high costs which are caused by prohibition. It would mean lower risk of harmful impurities being included alongside the drug, as they are at present.

It would mean drugs could even be taxed; perhaps even providing more income to the NHS than their use costs it.

Latin American countries are starting to follow Portugal's lead of liberalisation, along with a number of US states which two weeks ago voted to legalise cannabis. It's time the UK got on board, too.

<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/17/iberoamerica-summit-drugs-idUSL5E8MG4W020121117>

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Derren Brown

19 Nov '12 at 11:04 pm

I vote we put a motion before YUSU in which commenting on Vision and Nouse articles is renamed "Matt Sharping".

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Derren Brown

19 Nov '12 at 11:13 pm

The Labour club comment is beyond hilarious though.

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Matt Sharp

19 Nov '12 at 11:46 pm

Hah...I'll take that as a compliment.

(and don't forget The Yorker...)

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Lalila

20 Nov '12 at 12:03 pm

This is not an issue that affects the majority of students and YUSU ought to expend their energy dealing with more important and relevant issues.

This issue is in the same category as campaigning fir gender neutral toilets...

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Michael Phelps

20 Nov '12 at 3:28 pm

This is NOT a labour club comment, it is merely a member of the labour club putting forward his OWN view, not the view of the club as a whole.

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Eric the Eel

20 Nov '12 at 3:34 pm

@Lalila You are so right, I would vote for you as some sort of government official.

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Adam

22 Nov '12 at 12:42 am

"this is not an issue that affects the majority of students"?..

Most students take drugs Laila. Alcohol and tobbaoco are drugs and there is plenty of evidence to show that a more sensible policy on drugs would reduce the consumption of drugs, just look at Portugal for example. I certainly know that some people who use alcohol for example would prefer to use cannabis were it legal but don't, and therefore use alcohol instead and expose themselves to the myriad of harms associated with alcohol such as liver, heart disease and cancer.

Let's have a rational debate about this but let's not kid ourselves that the majority of students don't use drugs.

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Andrew K

23 Nov '12 at 4:27 pm

Agree with the Liberal Democrat society here. Have been following the whole drugs thing for years now and it's very clear that the current "war on drugs" has failed & has just created gangs and crime across the world whilst doing very little to stem the flow and choice of illegal drugs.

If you look to the scientific literature it soon becomes clear the current 'classes' of drugs are almost completely useless and don't at all reflect their real danger. You'd be extremely surprised at how bad alcohol and nicotine are rated compared to some illegal drugs- some drugs such as E, magic mushrooms and LCD are arguably less bad for you (and society) than alcohol and tobacco.

Unfortunately any politician who suggested a major reform of drugs policy- let alone legalisation- would be castrated by the media, they'd have to hold themselves back from sensationalising during a drugs policy review.

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gren

11 Apr '13 at 9:41 pm

DAVE AGREES

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