

Keep Wednesday Afternoons Free

Students' Union action

Across the country students' unions have campaigned to Keep Wednesday Afternoons Free (KWAF) for their students. This report summarises their campaigning activities.



What is the campaign about?

Sport, societies, volunteering and other co-curricular activity are central to the university experience for students across the country.

Work from both NUS' Prove Me Wrong campaign and BUCS' Graduate Employability research, as well as many other sector bodies has shown the positive 'double benefit'¹ impact that student opportunities have on both individual students in their educational environment as well as wider society.

While many students have Wednesday afternoons free to take part in co-curricular activity, a significant number of institutions do not and for others, it is under threat.

At National Conference in April 2016, policy was passed (proposed by Middlesex SU) for NUS to support students' unions in running Keep Wednesday Afternoon Free (KWAF) campaigns on their campuses.

In December 2016, NUS, BUCS, and Student Minds worked together with Middlesex Students' Union to host a campaign planning day for students' unions to come together and discuss how we can Keep Wednesday

Afternoons Free. The planning day focused on building strong and convincing arguments, including the considerable benefit of physical activity on students' mental health.

This campaign came from students' unions to National Conference, and has been led by students' unions throughout. BUCS and NUS actively championed it and have supported with specific requests from SUs, as well as talking about the work on a national level with influencers and decision-makers.

In Spring 2017 we spoke to students' unions to find out how KWAF campaigning has progressed across the 2016/17 academic year, getting them to feedback on what has worked, and asking them to generate ideas for the future. This document summarises the findings of our research.

Of the 48 SUs we spoke to, 54% already had an institutional KWAF policy but many had problems with this; there were exceptions for certain students (mostly postgraduates and science students), the timings were limiting (particularly for away BUCS fixtures), and in some the policy was due to lapse.

¹ The 'double benefit' of social action is a term created by the #iwill campaign. More can be found out about that at www.iwill.org.uk

Of these 48 SUs, 27% of them have actively run a KWAF campaign this year.

Some examples of these are:

- [Manchester Metropolitan University SU 'Worthwhile Wednesdays' campaign](#)
- [Teesside SU 'Wednesday Watch' campaign](#)

Within these 48 SUs, we've seen an increase of 2% and now, 56% of their institutions have a KWAF policy. Despite a seemingly small percentage increase, the feedback from the campaign is very positive as there have been a number of improvements made. Many have found that their campaign has increased the amount of time that is reserved on Wednesday afternoons, and most have seen improved institutional buy-in.

Success stories

- [Goldsmiths University pass KWAF policy](#) (Independent article)
- [University of Westminster SU report](#) on their KWAF campaign
- Northumbria SU have created an authorized absence form for students to leave teaching to play sport
- [Durham SU passed policy at Student Assembly](#)
- [ARUSU pledge and policy](#)
- Many SUs have had success through meeting with and negotiating with the different parts of the institution that are able to make this happen, using evidence from students to demonstrate why it is important.

Problems SUs have faced

- The institution have agreed that KWAF is important, but can't find space due to timetabling or capacity issues.
- There is a perception that this is only about sport, but KWAF is in fact about ensuring access to all Student Opportunities.
- This is a long-term campaign that may take a number of years to have success with. If a series of sabbatical officers don't keep driving the campaign, advocacy may lose momentum.

- Generating evidence to prove the impact and value of student opportunities is essential and difficult.

Evidence

Some students' unions have focused their KWAF work around building evidence.

Here's some examples of this:

- [Kingston SU have been collecting data from their students](#)
- [Sunderland annual report](#) about putting opportunities at the heart of university experience
- NUS and Universities UK wrote a report about the [barriers to participation](#), that may be useful for KWAF campaigners

Next steps for the KWAF campaign

Students' Unions fed back about their KWAF campaigns so far, and their ideas for the future of the campaign are:

- Encourage people to consider this campaign for all Student Opportunities, not just for sport
- SUs to research how much extra time students need to get to away games
- Case studies of where institutions are successfully keeping Wednesday afternoons free
- Consider how to encourage students to get involved in different ways, as Wednesday afternoons is limiting for Small and Specialist Institutions
- NUS to create compelling evidence about the benefit of student involvement in opportunities (EG. retention and attainment) so that SUs can use this to demonstrate impact
- Work with BUCS to analyse whether Wednesday is the right day for fixtures. It probably is, but being able to show institutions that we've thought it through would be useful
- Work with BUCS to ensure fixtures are scheduled as practically as possible to avoid long travel times

- Create a national brand for the campaign so that students can buy in
- Consider how to frame this campaign for FE, as Wednesday afternoons for activities is traditionally an HE culture
- Get NGB (National Governing Body) support for KWAf campaign
- “Keep going and keep up the good work”

“The power of this campaign, is that from the very beginning it has been led by students’ unions, based on their students needs and supported by NUS. Since National Conference passed KWAf policy in 2016, we’ve been able to support dozens of SUs individually in their campaigns to deliver free Wednesday afternoons, with a number of success stories. This is NUS and SUs at their best – based in students’ needs, led by SUs”.

Richard Brooks, NUS Vice President Union Development

“Working with NUS to drive forward the Keep Wednesday Afternoons Free campaign this year, we have seen a step change in how students’ unions have collaborated across the sector to ensure a breadth of opportunities are accessible to their students. Sport and physical activity is an invaluable tool to support students’ academic study and mental wellbeing, and keeping Wednesday afternoons free from academic study will ensure student opportunities remain at the heart of students’ university experience.”

Vince Mayne, BUCS Chief Executive

Contact us

Here’s how you can keep in touch, seek support and offer help to other KWAf campaigners.

- You may also find help on the [BUCS Facebook group](#)
- Any other questions? Email campaigns@nus.org.uk

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