

Collaborative Doctoral Awards Studentship Competition (Project-led)



Arts and
Humanities
Research Council

Project Title:	The National Union of Students (NUS) and its Internationalisms, 1922-2022
Project Summary:	This project sheds light on the history of British student activism by exploring the transnational bonds and international commitments of the National Union of Students (NUS). From an early stage, the NUS promoted international contacts and exchanges, working with international organisations and national students' unions from other countries. The project examines such activities and highlights the controversies surrounding different political manifestations of internationalism, including solidarity campaigns and peace movements. In doing so, the thesis not only reassesses the organisation's history at its centenary but also offers insights into the wider history of social and political activism in and beyond Britain.
Institution:	Northumbria University
Partner Organisation:	National Union of Students (NUS)
Primary AHRC Subject Area:	History
Creative Practice Component:	None

For further information and to submit an expression of interest, please contact:			
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EXPRESSIONS OF INTEREST MUST BE RECEIVED NO LATER THAN:			6 January 2020

Project Description:
<p>From its very foundation in 1922, the National Union of Students (NUS) expressed a strong commitment to international cooperation. In its early years, it developed links with national unions of students and organised international exchanges. In subsequent decades, antifascist activism and growing Cold War tensions shaped debates within the organisation. And, especially from the 1970s onwards, solidarity campaigns were a prominent feature of NUS action, as reflected in support for anti-apartheid and for the victims of Pinochet's dictatorship in Chile.</p> <p>The NUS's international activities often attracted controversy. For example, in the late 1940s and 1950s, communist and non-communist factions within the NUS argued over its relations with the International Union of Students, a Soviet-dominated body. Moreover, NUS involvement in another organisation, the International Student Conference, became a source of embarrassment when its dependence on CIA funding was revealed in 1967. More generally, there was a tension between principles of international solidarity on the one hand and the insistence of some student leaders that their organisation should be 'apolitical' and exclusively concerned with student matters on the other. In an age of radical protest, the NUS embraced more overtly political positions from 1969 onwards. Its subsequent participation in solidarity campaigns – notably its stance on the Israel–Palestine conflict – received critical media coverage.</p>

This project explores the inter- and transnational dimensions of the NUS's work. In doing so, it addresses several important research questions:

- How did activists tackle the tensions between conceptions of 'apolitical' voluntary action and international solidarity? And to what extent does the NUS's history reveal changing principles, patterns and priorities in British student activism?
- How did international developments and geopolitical shifts affect activism at British universities? And in what ways does this relationship highlight the role of transnational factors in effecting local change?
- What did the NUS – both as an organisation and through individual efforts – contribute to wider international campaigns? And does its role require us to reassess the making of particular causes and coalitions?

This project speaks to several entwined research contexts. Firstly, the focus on Britain is significant because British student activism has traditionally received less attention than its European and North American counterparts. Recent monographs by Caroline Hoefflerle on the 1960s (2012) and Georgina Brewis on student volunteering (2014) as well as a volume edited by Jodi Burkett (2018) have shaped a field that is still emerging. The project will make an original contribution to the latter because, while the NUS features in these publications, it is not their principal focus. Indeed, to this day, there has not been a scholarly monograph on the history of the NUS, despite its centrality to the British student movement.

Secondly, the project's time frame is wider than much of the literature on international student activism. The existing historiography is dominated by the student radicals of 1968. While the 1960s were significant, the adoption of a broader chronological perspective has the advantage of highlighting generational shifts as well as institutional continuities. Moreover, tracing student activism across a larger time span is timely because of the NUS's forthcoming centenary and ongoing debates about its future.

Thirdly, the project offers a fresh perspective on the wider history of social and political activism. The thesis will highlight transnational dimensions by considering institutional contacts, wider contexts such as decolonisation or Anglo-American relations, but also personal trajectories. In the latter respect, it adds to a growing literature on transnational activists (Stefan Berger and Sean Scalmer, 2018). Moreover, the project resonates with work that emphasises the transnational agency of youth, even beyond political campaigns. For instance, Richard Ivan Jobs (2017) has demonstrated the political meanings of youth travel – a point that is relevant as the NUS organised international tours and visits.

The NUS archives (mostly based at the Modern Records Centre, Warwick University) and the records of international student organisations at the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam will constitute a major source base for this project, to be complemented by material from individual university archives and other sources. The candidate will seek ethics approval to gather oral testimony through the 'Friends of NUS network', using semi-structured interviews as a method that will help to complement institutional perspectives. Given its scale, the project will be built around case studies of specific activities or controversies. Insights from social movement theory will provide a wider conceptual framework. Taken together, the adopted methods will help to place individual examples within a wider context, producing a rich and diverse account of the NUS and its internationalisms.

SUPERVISION AND EXTERNAL ADVISORS

First Supervisor:	Daniel Laqua	School/Department:	Department of Humanities, Northumbria University
Second Supervisor:	Brian Ward	School/Department:	Department of Humanities, Northumbria University
Additional Advisor:	David Malcolm	Organisation/Institution:	National Union of Students (NUS)
Additional Advisor:	Mike Day	Organisation/Institution:	Friends of NUS

The supervisory team brings together wide-ranging expertise on the subject matter, covering the different dimensions of this project.

Daniel Laqua (First Supervisor; Associate Professor) has published extensively on the histories of transnational activism and internationalism, which are key themes of this project. Laqua's current work traces the history of international student activism across four decades. Findings from this research have appeared in *The English Historical Review* (2017). Moreover, his work on the founding generation of the NUS features in a co-authored forthcoming article for *History: The Journal of the Historical Association* (2020). His research on students has attracted funding from the Society for Educational Studies and an AHRC World War One Engagement Centre. It has generated collaborative projects with the NUS and the Workers' Educational Education as well as extensive cooperation with other historians in the field.

Brian Ward (Second Supervisor; Professor) is a major authority on the history of African American activism, with ten books and a wide range of chapters and articles to his name. He has been chosen as second supervisor both because of his experience in working with oral testimony and because questions of race and British students' perspectives on African American civil rights will feature in this project. Ward's 2017 monograph (*Martin Luther King in Newcastle: The African American Freedom Struggle and Race Relations in the North East of England*) directly connects with the British and transatlantic dimensions of the research project.

Both Laqua and Ward have a track record of successful supervision, having supervised 5 (Laqua) and 21 (Ward) students to completion. They have supported their supervisees in placing their work in academic journals and securing permanent academic jobs. They have also created substantial training opportunities for postgraduates as founder of the 'Histories of Activism' research group (Laqua) and as Chair of the British Association for American Studies (Ward).

David Malcolm (CDA Advisor) is the NUS Head of Policy and Campaigns, extending to the organisation's stance on international matters. In this capacity, he will help the candidate to link the historical research to contemporary issues. Moreover, Malcolm holds an MA in Higher and Professional Education, for which he conducted research on student activism in the 1970s, and he has published on the history of NUS campaigning in the journal *History of Education*.

Mike Day (CDA Advisor) is the custodian of the NUS archives and a driving force behind preparations for the NUS centenary. He has written extensively on the history of the NUS, having produced a 110-page commemorative volume on its history (2012) as well as a range of papers on this subject. He can also share his experience in policy transfer, for instance having analysed past NUS initiatives in a policy paper that he co-authored for the Higher Education Policy Institute. As former NUS Director for Devolved Nations and Internationalism, he developed the organisation's international links, including its cooperation with national unions of students in other countries. Through his role in the 'Friends of NUS' network, he can facilitate access to former activists.

RESEARCH ENVIRONMENT

The candidate will join a vibrant research environment. History has 35 staff members and came 18th for outputs in REF 2014. Northumbria's 23 PhD students form an active community, organising the History Lab North East and a longstanding speaker series at Newcastle's Lit and Phil / Mining Institute. They have placed their research in journals whilst studying (e.g. *History & Memory*; *Contemporary British History*), secured funding on top of their scholarships (e.g. Economic History Society) and successfully transitioned 5 into academic careers (e.g. full-time lectureships at Liverpool John Moores, Portsmouth and Sunderland). A special training programme organised by the Department of Humanities complements the well-established processes and training provided by Northumbria's Graduate School.

PhD students are based in the Glenamara Centre, located in the same building as the PhD supervisors and with access to fully equipped workspaces. Further resources are provided at the library's new Research Commons. The university has made major investments in digital collections that are of direct value to the project. Examples includes an extensive range of newspaper collections from Britain and America as well as specialist resources by providers such as Adam Matthew Digital ('The Sixties') and Alexander Street ('Popular Culture in Britain and America').

Northumbria's 'Histories of Activism' research group provides an ideal home for the candidate. Since 2011, it has hosted major events, for instance the Social History Society's annual conference. PhD members are core members of the group and have attracted funding from the AHRC and Royal Historical Society for workshops and training initiatives. Moreover, as the project deals with international questions and connections, the candidate will benefit from being integrated into a second research group, 'Global and Transnational History'. Since 2018, the latter has been hosting a seminar series as part

of a network with other universities in the North East; recently, it has also launched a reading group with historians from the University of Oxford.

The project's supervisor Daniel Laqua runs two projects with Georgina Brewis, the leading expert on the history of British student volunteering. Brewis is based at the UCL Institute of Education, home of the UK's principal centre for historical research into education. Laqua and Brewis will connect the candidate to the 'History of Students in Twentieth-Century Europe' network and scholarly associations which they are involved in, including the Society of Educational Studies, the History of Education Society, the International Standing Conference in the History of Education and the Association transdisciplinaire pour les recherches historiques sur l'éducation (whose 2019 conference featured Laqua as a keynote speaker).

As the NUS prepares for its 100th anniversary (2022), the organisation offers a supportive setting and audience for research on its history. On archival matters, NUS maintains relations with another AHRC-funded consortium (CHASE). One of the CDA advisors, Mike Day, serves as the NUS's archival custodian. The 'Friends of NUS' network is intrinsically committed to student movement history and can provide potential interviewees. Moreover, the candidate will work with the organisation's policy and campaigning teams through CDA advisor David Malcolm.