

## GATS: The Threat to Higher Education.

This Union will inform students about the possible dangers of GATS and take appropriate action.

### This Union Notes:

1. The World Trade Organisation (WTO) oversees the rules governing international trade in goods and services. The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is one of the WTO's international trade agreements.
2. GATS is currently being renegotiated and expanded, and is due to be completed by the end of 2004.
3. GATS seeks to liberalise and deregulate trade in services, including public services such as Healthcare Provision, Water Supply and Higher Education. This means opening them up to competition from foreign companies.
4. GATS is described as "first and foremost an instrument for the benefit of business," by the European Commission.

### The Union Further Notes:

1. Several countries are targeting the UK Higher Education (UKHE) sector for inclusion in the expanded GATS.
2. This could mean foreign, profit motivated HE providers being able to compete for public funds alongside UK public universities, resulting in the public funding available to UKHE being either reduced or eliminated altogether.
3. This could introduce a dynamic towards higher, deregulated tuition fees, commercially "unprofitable," courses and departments being closed down, and constraints on academic freedom.
4. Negotiations aiming to expand GATS are proceeding with little public awareness or political debate, despite their dramatic implications for UKHE. There has been no official impact assessment of the implication of GATS.
5. GATS rules, once agreed, are effectively irreversible.
6. People and Planet have produced a major report, called "Trading it Away: how GATS threatens UK Higher Education," which sets out in detail the many threats to UKHE posed by GATS.

### This Union Believes.

1. Education is a right – not a commercial service to be bought or sold.
2. GATS threatens the financial viability, quality, ideals and character of UK Higher Education.

This Union Resolves.

1. To pledge support to the work of people and planet to raise awareness amongst students of the dangers GATS poses to higher education.
2. To send a submission to Margaret Hodge, Minister for Higher Education expressing our concerns and requesting an independent assessment of GATS and its impact on higher education.
3. To lobby the vice-chancellor to write to Margaret Hodge, Minister for Higher Education, expressing concern about GATS.
4. To work with the NUS executive to resist the inclusion of Higher Education in GATS through awareness raising, press work and lobbying the government.

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