

Best Publication – Unified

LINK: <http://unified.org.uk/>

Only launching back in 2017, Unified has grown from a small university news site, to an online news hub that the whole county of Kent visit for trust-worthy news. Awarded ‘Best Newcomer’ back in SPANC 2018, this year, Unified has blown our own expectations. Our views back in 2018 were averaging a humble 12,000 a month – but since our 2019 editorial team took over, led by editor-in-chief Claisse Ofulencia, Unified’s average monthly views have risen to 21,000. We broke the record for highest views in a day by a month of taking over. Unified received four awards at the SPARC (South East) this year, winning the title of Best Publication, Best News Story, Best Reporter and Best Community Focus.

Unified exclusive that made it into nationals

During the past seven months, Unified have published stories that have made the national headlines. Firstly, our editor-in-chief’s undercover investigation looking into Canterbury landlords offering free rent in exchange for rent (<https://unified.org.uk/2018/09/uncovered-canterbury-landlords-offering-free-rent-for-sex/>). This story made top story on BBC South East’s evening news, covered by Daily Mail, The Sun and The Mirror. Our editor-in-chief was also interviewed live on BBC Radio Kent to speak about her investigation’s findings.

A Unified exclusive also made it into the Telegraph’s weekend paper and online. Our editor-in-chief’s exclusive investigation on essay mills made it into the education section of the paper. Here’s the online version of the story: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2018/10/27/unscrupulous-essay-mill-companies-using-social-media-tempt-students/>. It was first published on Unified (<https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/essay-cheat-sites-using-social-media-to-lure-students/>). This is alongside another Unified exclusive which also made the Telegraph’s online and printed publications: a story about transgender students’ battle against an alleged homophobic security guard: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/2018/12/21/transgender-students-win-apology-told-use-gender-neutral-toilets/>.

Unified’s role at the university

Unified stands as the main student media body at Canterbury Christ Church University. Many students have dubbed Unified as their ‘pro-active student union’, describing the news site as ‘a place where students’ voices are really heard’. We ensured that student stories are given a special place at Unified, that students understand that Unified are on their side, and we work tirelessly to hold the university accountable for their mistakes or shortcomings. Students often approach Unified if they have any issues with the students’ union or the university – understanding that they will receive the attention and publicity that their university experiences deserve.

Unified made a strong focus on holding the university accountable for their lack of acceptable student housing. The university responded to the Unified articles and made active changes to their services in a matter of days to student complaints published on Unified., links to articles:

<https://unified.org.uk/2018/09/students-furious-at-unannounced-flat-visits-by-cccu-accommodation-staff/>
<https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/cccu-releases-further-statement-regarding-unannounced-flat-visits/>

Here’s our housing report, feature shocking pictures of university accommodation:

<https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/faulty-student-accommodation-cccu-canterbury/>

An exclusive story about awful student experience:

<https://unified.org.uk/2019/01/student-faeces-infected-water-accommodation/>

Our vice chancellor even took the time to address the issue after a student cited Unified articles on his question & answer event:

<https://unified.org.uk/2018/11/accommodation-services-vice-chancellor/>

Stories we have published holding the university accountable:

University dropping in the league table: <https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/cccu-drops-again-in-national-league-tables/>. CCCU breaching data protection rules and releasing private information about students:

<https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/unitemps-data-information-breach/>. The university’s inability to manage the rising number of students cheating at their university: <https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/cheating-on-the-rise-at-cccu/>.

Local relevance

We have also published numerous stories holding local powers to account. For example, highlighting a local business’ wrongdoings: <https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/students-nearly-suffocated-after-forced-to-stay-inside-canterbury-club/>. Unified aimed to enlighten the public about stories involving the decisions of our local authorities, ensuring that our

readers stay updated on the most important issues surrounding Canterbury. Here's a story about poor housing offered to the vulnerable in Kent:

<https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/canterbury-council-places-man-in-shocking-housing-conditions/>. Here's a story about how black people are 14 times more likely to be stopped by a police in Kent: <https://unified.org.uk/2018/12/kent-police-stop-search/>. Unified also informed the public about the rising salaries of our local NHS bosses: <https://unified.org.uk/2018/08/explained-the-quarter-of-a-million-salaries-of-your-local-nhs-bosses/>

Stories we have published with strong student focus, highlighting important issues around the student community:

We published a devastating story about a CCCU student who became a widow weeks after their wedding, this story also made it into the local newspapers: <https://unified.org.uk/2018/11/meet-the-21-year-old-student-widow/>. We ensured that Unified was a platform for students to share their stories, no matter how big or small. Especially stories that have strong relevance to the community and university culture: <https://unified.org.uk/2018/09/8-canterbury-sexual-harassment-survivors-share-their-stories/>.

At the start of the academic year, Unified pledged to share stories that matter. To be the sort of journalists that make a difference – we have covered important issues from LGBT+ rights (<https://unified.org.uk/2018/10/the-archbishop-the-lgbt-community-transsexuality-is-not-a-sin/>) to sexism in politics (<https://unified.org.uk/2019/02/interns-reveal-sexist-abuse-kent-woman-mp-receives/>). This year, Unified also took the time to focus on a particular problem happening in their district: child sexual exploitation. We published a 3-part article exploring the issue of child sexual exploitation and gangs in Kent. The stories had a massive impact in the community groups, sparking debates about child safety and raising awareness about the exploitation that is currently happening in their home time. Here are the articles: <https://unified.org.uk/2018/11/child-sexual-exploitation-reports-in-kent-quadruple-in-recent-years/>, <https://unified.org.uk/2019/01/children-as-young-as-10-treated-for-stds-in-kent/>, <https://unified.org.uk/2019/01/revealed-kent-districts-with-the-most-reported-child-sexual-exploitation-cases/>.

News stories weren't the only success of Unified this year. UnifiedFem (<http://unified.org.uk/>) – our sassy category focusing on women's issues, continued to grow attracting 25+ student writers. Our sports category thrived all throughout the year, we covered weekly BUCS sports fixtures round up articles and a weekly feature of 'sports team of the week' (<https://unified.org.uk/category/sport/>). Unified were the sole reporters of Canterbury Varsity 2019, covering every game with live blogs and live streaming. During the 9 day varsity week, we published over 20 articles covering every day from start till finish. Canterbury Varsity organisers always linked Unified into their social media posts, highlighting that Unified have the most up to date and trustworthy content on Canterbury Varsity (<https://unified.org.uk/category/canterbury-varsity-live-coverage/>).

With regards to features, you only need to take a look into our features category to see that we have published a wide range of features from interviews with a child refugee (<https://unified.org.uk/2018/09/the-journey-of-an-unaccompanied-child-refugee/>), to light-hearted content about the use of menstrual cups! (<https://unified.org.uk/2018/12/menstrual-cup-week-what-happened-unifiedfem/>). This year, Unified also created a weekly feature where stylish students appear on 'Fashion Friday' – giving some of our studious fashionistas a time to shine! (<https://unified.org.uk/category/fashion/>).

Overall, Unified has been a huge success this year. Especially that it is independently run by multimedia journalism students with no guidance from the students' union or the university at all. Unified have established themselves as a news website with integrity and special care for community focused stories. A humble editorial team of 11 students, Unified has outperformed other student publications in the South East and have been categorised in the same level of local newspapers like Kent Live and Kent Online.

