

Student Stop AIDS National Gathering an inspiring start to Access to Medicines Week

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Hundreds of students attended the Student Stop AIDS National Gathering on 1 November. (Photo courtesy of Saoirse Fitzpatrick.)

Exciting, refreshing, stimulating and innovative. This describes the Student Stop AIDS annual general meeting on 1-2 November at the University of Manchester. The two-day event was a great opportunity for students involved in the United Kingdom (UK) network to gather and share their interests, expertise and ideas to promote access to needed medicines.

Organised by Saoirse Fitzpatrick (Restless Development) and Diarmaid McDonald (StopsAIDS UK), the programme addressed several topics via educational activities and workshops, such as how to: be a creative campaigner, use social media in campaigning, effectively use the media in campaigning, and lobby a Member of Parliament (lobbying tips). Students also shared the actions that they commonly undertake throughout the country.



Group shot of students at the Student Stop AIDS National Gathering in Manchester. (Photo courtesy of Saoirse Fitzpatrick.)

I had the great privilege of giving a comprehensive presentation, on behalf of HAI, on the evolution of the European Union's (EU) trade policy and its impact on access to medicines. I focused on two specific free trade agreements (FTAs) that HAI is currently working on: the EU-Thailand FTA and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP). The session was followed by a Q and A session where most students raised questions on the potential impact of TTIP and possible actions to be performed.

We also had the pleasure to hear from Lucy Bannister, the previous president of the Manchester Student Stop AIDS Campaign Society, about her motivations for running as a Greens Member of Parliament in Manchester. In addition, we increased our knowledge of activism by watching a documentary about the history of ACT UP, then played a quiz game in teams. All of this occurred in a fun, relaxed and productive atmosphere.

This Student Stop AIDS national gathering was an excellent opportunity to meet and learn about others' activities and interests, and to more firmly establish closer working relationships for the future.