

Motion Name: Our Voices Matter: Initiating Systematic Measures to Promote Student Voter Registration

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Background:

1. There will be two major elections held in Bristol in 2024: **The Bristol City Council Election and the General Election**. Both upcoming elections this year are extremely important and competitive.
2. Considering that the number of UoB students and Staff accounted for nearly 10% of the overall population in Bristol (1), theoretically our opinions should be reflected in election results. However, the sad fact is **there is a very low registration rate and turnout rate among student voters in Bristol**. Our voices are not being heard.
3. The following data explains the situation. It is estimated that the voter registration rate in Bristol is around 69%. However, the most updated statistics show that the **student registration rate is only around 30-40%** (2), and this includes registered electors who are no longer studying at the university. Central Bristol has recorded a decrease of 8978 voters since 2021, most of them are students who moved out (3). At the same time, **new voter registration rate is very low**. Less than 10% (581 out of 8806) students staying in university accommodations are currently registered as voters (4). This resulted in wards with huge students populations but an incredible low voter registration rate (5).
4. This could be due to the following reasons:
 - i) Students **are not informed of the registration process**, or refuse to register as they believe that their vote carries minimal impact.
 - ii) Students **are not informed that they can register to vote at multiple addresses, both in their hometown and in Bristol**;
 - iii) Some overseas students, such as EU citizens, Commonwealth citizens, students with special visas (e.g the BN(O) Visa from Hong Kong) and ethnic minorities are not aware that they are eligible to register as a voter.
5. **The University has taken limited actions in relation to voting-related issues**, especially when compared to other universities. For example, in University of Sheffield, students have the option to provide their personal details to the university to register as a new voter (6). These details are then securely transmitted to the City Council, which, upon verifying their eligibility, automatically adds the individual to the electoral register. This streamlined process ensures that students are conveniently and efficiently registered to vote.

Purpose:

1. As one of the largest communities in Bristol, **student voices should not be neglected in political practice**. It is crucial to encourage candidates to attend to local issues that affect students' livelihood, such as rental crisis, transportation and safety issues. Besides, it is also an extremely effective way to voice our concerns in nationwide issues such as climate change, LGBTQ+ rights, cost-of-living crisis and more.
2. **Voting is a good practice to maintain** in a democratic country. Both the University and Student Union should work together and **reduce the barriers** for students to participate in socio-political issues.
3. **Voting rights among overseas students should also be promoted**. As a part of the community, their opinions should not be neglected.
4. As the City Council Election will take place in May 2024, time is running short. It would be ideal to launch promotional campaigns beforehand to effectively obtain the largest impact.

Actions:

1. The SU to **lobby the university to establish an online opt-in enrolment system** that allows university students to register as voters or modify their living address conveniently (7), **and promote student voter registration in suitable platforms**, such as in the accommodation portal or in welcoming letters.
2. The SU to officially endorse campaigns that promote and support voter registration.
3. The officer team to **continue to develop inclusivity in voter registration campaigns** and promote importance of voting before local and General Elections
4. The SU to actively **approach various international student groups** or societies that are willing to promote or are currently promoting voter registration among overseas students, such as students from EU nationals and students with a British National (Overseas) passport, to assist new voter registration in a uniform and systemized approach.

5. The SU to actively **approach the Junior Common Room (JCR) committee** to launch collaborative campaigns targeting students who are living in university accommodations to register to vote.
6. The SU **to work with Student representatives** (e.g. Course Reps and Faculty Reps) to keep students updated on voting-related campaigns and relevant information.

Sources and References

- (1) According to [Bristol Key Facts Report 2023](#), there are approximately 43,700 full-time students aged 18 and over living in City of Bristol, making up 9.2% of the total population.
- (2) According statistics from Bristol City Council, up till 11th January 2024, there are 9677 registered electors are classified as students voters in Bristol. 4616 students living in Halls of Residence, while 5,061 living in private student properties. These figures include students from UWE, students who moved out or graduated but without updating their voter registration address. Therefore, considering 30%-40% of them are international students, the expected voter registration rate in Bristol is not more than 27-36%.
- (3) We had compared the data from voter statistics on [2021](#) May and 2023 December.
- (4) The Electoral Data is conducted on 2023 December, where 163, 210 and 208 voters registered in student accommodation in North, West and East village respectively. These data does not include voters registered in Hillside Woodside, Campus Houses and Marlborough House.
- (5) For example, according to [2021 Census](#), it is estimated that there are 18390 people living in Central Ward, in which at least one-third are students population, but there is only 8396 voters in 2023 Dec will registration rate of 45.6%. Other wards with much student population, such as Hotwells and Harbourside (60.86%), Cotham (64.07%), Clifton Down (63.73%) also recorded a voter registration rate lower than average.
- (6) [Register to vote in Sheffield](#)
- (7) For Instance, the [Register Student To Vote](#) guide provides very practical guide on helping students to register to vote without much obstacles